

*Borne the Battle*

*Episode # 229*

Air Force Veteran Jackson Henderson, Electrical Maintenance Technician

<https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/84665/borne-battle-229-air-force-veteran-jackson-henderson-electrical-maintenance-technician/>

(Text Transcript Follows)

[00:00:00] Music

### **[00:00:05] Opening Monologue:**

**Tanner Iskra (TI):**

Oh, let's get it. Monday, February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Borne the Battle brought to you by the Department of Veteran Affairs, the podcast that focuses on inspiring veteran stories and puts a highlight on important resources, offices, and benefits for our veterans. I am your host, Marine Corps veteran, Tanner Iskra. Hope you had a great week outside of podcast land. It is the day after Valentine's Day. I hope you got something good for your significant other. Think I did. It's also President's Day, so some of you may have the day off. Enjoy that. I might. I don't know if I have the day off today or not. I don't know. This is a prerecording. I don't really plan more than two days ahead of time anyways. By the way it is official. The eleventh secretary of Veterans Affairs is Denis McDonough. It's Denis with one n, by the way. He was sworn in recently. I got his "Hello. This is me," video in my inbox. He also has a message posted on blogs.va.gov [Link: <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/>] which talks about his priorities with his employment. If you don't go to blogs.va.gov very much, check it out. In addition to that, there is a lot of vaccine articles, how to get the vaccine at the VA, as well as how can your designated caregiver can also get the vaccine at the VA. In addition, I saw a pretty cool article on veterans using bee keeping as an alternative therapy. Tons of great stuff on there. I digress. Again, I look forward to putting that full court press on Secretary McDunan to get him here on the show as soon as possible. If there's anything—. Now, I know—. I don't know if I should be asking this—. I'm going to do it anyways. If there is anything in general, overarching questions about a program or a policy, if you have a question for the secretary that you want me to ask when I eventually get him on the podcast, feel free to send me that question. Email it to me at [podcast@va.gov](mailto:podcast@va.gov) Couple of ratings, however, no new reviews on Apple Podcast this week. However, we did crack the top twenty-five in our category, so definitely appreciate you listening and helping us punch up there so we're more searchable for more

veterans. If you like what we're doing here, feel free to shoot a rating and or review over there at Apple Podcast. And please tell a friend or two what we're doing out here on the pod.

We got three news release this week. First one says, for immediate release: The Department of Veteran Affairs administered 1 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine in 90 days to veterans and VA health care workers. As of February 2<sup>nd</sup>, so a couple of weeks ago, VA has dispensed at least one dose of either the Pfizer and BioNTech or the Moderna vaccine to more than 582,000 veterans and has fully vaccinate over 44,000, totally more than 626,000 doses. This is in addition to administering more than 401,000 doses to VA employees and more than 1,200 vaccine doses to federal partners, other people in other agencies. VA is currently providing vaccines at more than 215 sites nationally with plans to expand to additional sites as vaccine supplies increase. As with states distributing vaccines, VA is currently in the limited supply phase anticipating an increase in weekly vaccine doses in March. Until VA receives an increase in vaccines, many facilities may temporarily run out of vaccines for short periods of time. VA will continue to follow current CDC guidelines and the VA COVID-19 vaccine distribution plan until new CDC guidance is available. The distribution plan lays out the VA's overarching intent. The federal government will continue to work with states and the private sector to effectively execute an aggressive vaccination strategy, focusing on the immediate actions necessary to convert vaccines into vaccinations. Currently, VA is reaching out to veterans who are eligible for vaccination. Veterans who would like additional information can visit the VA COVID-19 vaccine webpage, and you can do that by going to va.gov [Link: <https://www.va.gov/>]. It's a link that's right up top right under coronavirus information. Or you can visit your local facilities website or contact their care team directly through phone or email.

Okay. The next one says, for immediate release: The Department of Veteran Affairs recently launched a new genomic research tool designed to help VA researchers learn more about how conditions—such as cancer, diabetes, and heart disease—affect veterans from minority backgrounds. Debuting in January, the laboratory tool known as the Ethnic Focus Genotyping Array or DNA chip will test more than 750,000 genetic variants. Including 300,000 that are common – that are more common in minority populations. The tool was custom built for VA's Million Veteran Program which studies how genes affect health. A genotyping chip is a piece of glass about the size of a postage stamp. So, it's a chip. Interesting. So, it's about the size of a postage stamp containing hundreds of tiny bits of synthetic DNA. Theses DNA

probes allow researchers to identify genetic variants in the DNA of research volunteers. Woah. The probes also associate certain health traits like increased risk for a disease or unfavorable reactions to a drug with specific genetic patterns. This could lead to new treatment approaches for patients with those gene profiles. That's some heavy stuff. With more than 830,000 veteran volunteers currently enrolled, MVP is one the largest health and genetic databases in the world and is has generated dozens of influential scientific publications. Million Veteran Program is also one of the world's most diverse genomic databases with about a quarter of the enrollees belonging to minority groups. MVP has been successful in engaging veterans from minority communities in part thanks to VA's Center for Minority Veterans. The two plan to collaborate this year and beyond to further boost involvement of black, Hispanic and other minority veterans in the landmark genomic research program. To learn more about the Million Veteran Program, go to [www.mvp.va.gov](http://www.mvp.va.gov) Some next level stuff there.

Alright, and the last one, really good one if you are a veteran non-profit looking to support disabled veterans. Says, for immediate release: The Department of Veterans Affairs is accepting applications from community organizations through March 31st for up to \$16 million in grant funding to provide adaptive sports and therapeutic recreational opportunities for disabled veterans and members of the armed forces. VA is awarding grants to qualifying organizations to plan, develop, manage, and implement a variety of sports and activities for veterans including cycling, kayaking, archery and skiing. To be eligible for a grant, an organization must be a non-federal entity with significant experience in managing a large-scale adaptive sports program. In physical year 2020, VA awarded nearly \$15 million in adaptive sports grants to 160 organizations headquartered in thirty-seven states, District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Programs funded through these grants are estimated to serve more than 13 thousand veterans and service members across the country. Of the total awarded, \$1.5 million dollars was used to assist organizations that offer e-cline assisted therapy to support mental health. Applications must be submitted online by March 31<sup>st</sup> at 3pm eastern standard time. VA will announce award decisions this fall based on a competitive selection. Details of the novice funding opportunity including frequently asked questions and additional information can be viewed under the grant programs tab online on [blogs.va.gov/nvspse/grant-program](http://blogs.va.gov/nvspse/grant-program) [Link: <https://www.blogs.va.gov/nvspse/grant-program/>]. There homepage is on [blogs.va.gov](http://blogs.va.gov), another reason for you to check it out.

Alright, so this week's guest sent me an email out of the blue to [podcast@va.gov](mailto:podcast@va.gov) a couple of months ago. And he wrote me a story about how he recently—and I'm talking recently—got out. And he became what is called and Instrumentation on Automation Controls Technician and how he went through a program to make that happen. Again, I know nothing about this. And he didn't ask to come on, but I invited him on because I could feel that by the way he wrote the email he just wanted others to know about the opportunities that he was afforded through Rockwell Automation Academy of Advanced Manufacturing. Now, this isn't a pitch to use your GI Bill or anything like that because, as you will hear, Rockwell didn't even ask for any GI Bill money. They just wanted a body trained in this specific industry. And when I looked up this program, on a brochure, they touted an 80 percent placement into career advancing roles with starting salaries ranging from \$50 thousand to \$80 thousand dollars. The program coupled with the video that he sent me and the words in the email, our guest intrigued me so much I just asked him to come on. So, without further a due, here is Air Force veteran, Jackson Henderson. Enjoy.

[00:09:39] Music

## [00:09:44] Interview

- (TI): Really appreciate you reaching out to talk about your journey here on Borne the Battle.
- (JH): Yeah. Thank you. I just came across it, and I was like, "Oh. It would be nice to help other people do what I did." So, yeah. I figured I'd reach out and just tell you all, you know, to do some research and learn about that program. And then you were like, "Hey. Come on our podcast." And I was like, "Oh. Okay." [Laughter]
- (TI): [Laughter] Well the way you wrote your email, there was a lot of passion behind it. I could tell. And it sounds like you're like, "Hey. This helped me." Well, that's what Borne the Battle is all about. Hey. What helped you transition? Hey. We're going to talk about it.
- (JH): Okay.
- (TI): First thing that we're going to ask you that we ask every guest here on Borne the Battle is when did you know—? Stepping back, when did you know that the Air Force was going to be the next journey in your life?

(JH): So, I actually had a friend who joined the Air Force. This was back in, I think, around 2013 or 2014. And, you know, he goes in, and I'm like, "Man. The Air Force. Weird." And then, you know, he's in. He's loving life or whatever, and I'm like, "Alright. I guess it's my turn." And then I had another friend that went in as well. He went in as CCT. So, my first friend, his name is Jesse Amundsen, he's Security Forces. And then my other friend, Austin Snyder, he tried to go in as CCT. And then like 90% of other people, he ended up failing out. I think he tried to go TACP, but now he's like a registered EMT in the Air Force. So, they just, you know. They reclass you. So, that's what he does now. But, you know, it was just that. It wasn't peer pressure, but it was more like an influence. It was like, "Hey. I'm doing something that I really enjoy that is life changing. You want to give it a shot as well?" So, that's—. It was about 2015 is when I just fully decided, "Yeah. I'm doing this."

(TI): Oh. So, you've recently got out?

(JH): Yes.

(TI): I mean—. Wow. Yeah. No, I—. My brother was the same influence on me as well. He joined the Army, but then he joined the Air force. He got married to a girl in the Air Force up in Alaska—

(JH): Okay.

(TI): when he was at Fort Richardson. I think she was at Elmendorf. And they brought me down when I was 17 to the Travis Air Force base in the early 2000s. I was like, "Man. This is—. This ain't bad."

(JH): [Laughter]

(TI): So, what did I do? I turned around and joined the Marine Corps, you know? [Laughter]

(JH): [Laughter]

(TI): But no—. I was—. Everyone's got their story about when they were going to join the service. So, I got a story when I was going to join the Air Force. I had too many speeding tickets, and a recruiter wouldn't send me the MEPS. He was like, "No. Not until you—."

(JH): Oh. Wow.

(TI): Yeah. So, the Marine Corps Recruiter, to show the brotherhood of the Marine Corps, he said, "Well. I can pay those. Not a problem." So, you know, much like the mob. That's how I joined the Marine Corps. What did you do in the Air Force? And I think I heard in the Rockwell video that you were an aircraft armament tech. It sounds like you are already – you already played in a technical engineering type of world while you were in.

(JH): So, yeah. I did Aircraft Armament Systems. Basically, I was in charge of all the weaponry of the B-52. When you get into tech school, they basically classify you. Well actually, it really starts in basic training. They go through your background and decide who is able to do what, and they're like, "Hey, you're really boring. You haven't done any crime, so congratulations.

(TI): [Laughter]

(JH): You have a Top Secret clearance, and we're going to send you to Minot, North Dakota to load nukes." So, I'm like, "Alright. Cool." Because the people who have, like, done stuff, they can't send them to get a Top Secret security clearance. So, they don't even make it.

(TI): Yeah.

(JH): They have to go—. All those people are like fighter jet.

(TI): So, they told you, "Why not Minot?"

(JH): That is correct.

(TI): [Laughter]

(JH): [Laughter]

(TI): While you were in, give me either a best friend or your greatest mentor.

(JH): Oh, man. There's so many. [Laughter]

(TI): Yeah.

(JH): Let's see. So, I spent a lot of time with this guy, Dalton Montana, and—

(TI): His name is Dalton Montana?

(JH): Yeah. [Laughter]

(TI): It's not like an actor name or wrestler name?

(JH): No. [Laughter]

(TI): Outstanding. Dalton Montana. Love it.

(JH): Yeah. So, we—. We were like a class next to each other in tech school. And so, we had very similar people that we knew and stuff like that. So, it was one those things where like, "Hey. I know you and you know me. Let's hang out." So, we spent a lot of time together, you know, we're getting to know what to do and all that kind of stuff, so it's nice to cling to somebody and have somebody like that. Let's see. There's a guy. Reyes—. Shoot. His first name is slipping my mind—. Emile. But he stayed in. Dalton stayed in and there was a good bit of other people. I got a guy named—. I called him Leak, but his name is Mali Cardi, but we ended up meeting, and we do music. And he lives in Tennessee. I live in Tennessee, but we live on opposite sides of the state. I'm in Memphis, and he is in like Knoxville area, Oak Ridge. I've even driven to go see him ever since I've been out. We've hung out. So, it's—. As I said, there's as many of people I've tried to – try to keep up with.

(TI): That's important. That's important. Especially when you go through a transition like this. So, you had a pretty tight group that you all kept each other out of trouble.

(JH): Absolutely. I think that was a key thing while you're in. Is just—. Especially when you're in Minot. There's a lot of stuff to do.

(TI): [Laughter]

(JH): So, you want to find people who are interesting to preoccupy your time. And we would take trips. There's – there was actually a guy that I hung out with who was from South Dakota, and his name is Kyle Nickerson. And he was from South Dakota which was Rapid City, South Dakota which was like six hours from Minot. So, he was like, "Hey, man. You want to come to my place? My parents' house?" And I was like, "Yeah. Sure." So, we just, you know, stayed the night with his

parents. And he drove me around Rapid City. That's where Mount Rushmore is and whatnot. So, that was that was really fun.

(TI): So, did you spend your entire enlistment in Minot?

(JH): I did. Yeah.

(TI): Wow. Bro.

(JH): From basic training in San Antonio to tech school in Wichita Falls. And then, that was about six months, those two together. And then after that, straight to Minot.

(TI): Man. So, but you got out. So, you got out last year?

(JH): I actually got in 2018, I think. It was a medical.

(TI): Okay. Yeah.

(JH): So, I messed up my back while I was in. So, that's why I got out. But yeah. So, it was like three years, six months I was in.

(TI): Talk to me about your transition.

(JH): So, when I got—

(TI): The first day you got out, what was that day like?

(JH): Joy. [Laughter]

(TI): [Laughter]

(JH): It was just a long process of the medical—

(TI): Yeah.

(JH): getting out of medical. I actually tried to stay in. I asked them to allow me to cross-train, and they were like—because I, you know, being an aircraft maintenance, you're constantly running around picking up stuff, bending over. And I was like, "It's not good for my back. Give me something that I could do that's not going to torture me." And they



were like, “Nope. We’re just going to make the discharge.” I was like, “Alright. Cool.” So, I got out—

(TI): So, at what— Go ahead.

(JH): Go ahead. [Laughter]

(TI): No. I was going to say, did that – did that—? So, at what point and was there a point where joy turn to “Alright. Now what?”

(JH): Yeah. Absolutely. So, me and my wife, we actually traveled a good bit. She’s from Ohio, so we actually had to drive separately from Minot to Alabama. So, we did that like 26 hours straight.

(TI): [Laughter]

(JH): And then we drove to her parent’s house and hung out there and then just drove the coast—the East Coast and just, you know, vacationed. Just traveled and enjoyed ourselves. And then after that, it was like, all right, back to reality. We need jobs, so.

(TI): [Laughter] Yeah.

(JH): I searched around and applied for everything. I thought about becoming a police officer, and I even went through, like, their physical test and passed that. And then it was like, I had to do the background check, and while they were in the process of doing that, I got a phone call from a guy. This is actually another opportunity for Veterans. But I got a phone call from a guy, he said, “Hey. I’m a retired—” What was he? I think he was like a retired Colonel in the Air Force, and he started a program. Shoot. I can’t think of the name of it right now, but it was basically training military veterans on how to do things with, like, cell phone communications on the towers, you know, like the cell phone towers.

(TI): Yeah.

(JH): And basically, it was training people how to do that. It was in Massachusetts, and he was like, “You know, we’ll pay for it. All you have to do is pay for your meals for a certain amount of days, and we’ll give you some money for that. And—. But yeah, we’ll pay for your hotel. And all you have to do is just come here and train for two

weeks, and you should be able to have a job right after that.” And I was like alright, well, I’m actually not too fond of heights, but—

(TI): [Laughter]

(JH): I was like, I need a job that pays well. So, went up for two weeks in Massachusetts. Never been to Massachusetts before, and it was a very fun experience. And I ended up getting a job immediately. A company called me from Georgia, and I worked for them for maybe a little over a month. And then I got another phone call for the AAM program. So, it was just, you know. I did a lot of legwork to find jobs, but these companies found me through, you know. I guess certain services or just me just putting my name out there through websites and just looking for jobs.

(TI): I was wondering how they found you. Do you know directly how they found you? Like which site?

(JH): So, I know for sure AAM found me through clearancejobs.com because I have a—. Because I had the Top Secret, I went on clearancejobs.com and they—. That website is specifically for people who have, like, either like a Secret clearance or Top Secret or—. It’s got different levels. So, they know you have just Secret, then you can get these jobs, or if you have Top Secret, then you can get these jobs. So, they basically filter out what you have and then like, “Hey. These jobs have opened up because you have this clearance.”

(TI): Did either one of these or did both of these use your GI Bill?

(JH): Neither one of them did actually.

(TI): Did it cost any money out of pocket from either one of these?

(JH): Just for, like, meals and stuff like that.

(TI): Really?

(JH): Yeah. The travel I had to. When I traveled to Massachusetts, I had to just pay for my own way up there and pay for my own way back. Some people flew, but I drove. I was like, screw it. I’ll drive.

(TI): But so, for the course, the cell phone, basically, tower course, and for the Rockwell’s Automation Academy of Advanced Manufacturing,

there was no like, tuition that you had to pay through like a GI Bill, right?

(JH): No cost to me whatsoever.

(TI): Interesting.

(JH): And they said that training at the AAM program was probably worth maybe 40,000 to 50,000.

(TI): Interesting. So, now you're an electrical technician out of Memphis, Tennessee. Home of good barbecue.

(JH): [Laughter]

(TI): Two Kings: Elvis and Jerry. Jerry, "The King" Lawler.

(JH): Yes, sir.

(TI): And home of former Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, Sergeant Major Kent. How did you find your way to the career that you have? Did you have these—? I mean, was it—? Do you—? Would you credit—? Would you accredit it all to the Rockwell Academy or were some of these skills that you learned in service?

(JH): Yeah. I mean, I got a little bit of electrical experience and mechanical experience when I was in the Air Force, and that's what allowed me to press through in the AAM program. You had to like, take tests before you even got there. It was truly an academy. They called you and it's like, "Hey. We want you to do this, but we need you take a test to be able to even come here because we don't want to waste your time. We don't want to waste our time and also money." They gave us two tests to take before we even got there. And they said, "Hey. You've passed the test. We'd like to officially invite you to come down here." So, once I made it there—. It's very rigorous, the program itself. As far as the amount of time we spent, it was like a full-time job. Eight hours a day, five days a week, we're learning, you know, full-time learning. So, it was a mixture of my past experience as well as all the experience we got in the program.

(TI): Tracking. Rockwell Automation Academy of Advanced Manufacturing. Not a traditional university. It's not a Penn State. It's not a state university or anything like that. Talk to me about working in the

manufacturing sector of America because you always hear that: “You need to go to university. You need to go to university. You need to go to university,” but, you know, as Mike Rowe says, “Trades aren’t dead either.” And some folks should look at trade school.

(JH): Absolutely. Another thing, before I went to that program, Alabama’s doing something to where they’re trying to get more people to do trade. I want to say it’s free education. Basically, you have to go and learn and then companies basically get first dibs on you. So, I was really learning about this whole trade thing. And I was like, “Man. That seems like that’s the move for people to do is to learn a trade.” And so, when I got to manufacturing, I didn’t—you know, I didn’t really know what manufacturing was. I was just like hoping they give the best explanation they could. So, when I—. After I get out of the program and I’m actually on-site—. So, I work at Owens Corning, the shingle manufacturer. I’m there, and I’m like, “Oh. This is what this is.” I even had—. I had to go on-site interviews, like, while I’m in the program, they’re like, “All right. You all have two days where you can go on-site to the companies and take an interview.” So, we have to take a flight out of Wisconsin, and we go. I went to Memphis first, and then the next day, I had to fly out to Compton, and, like, the Los Angeles area basically just tour the facilities and see how I like it. And it was really eye-opening because number one. I’d never seen anything like that being in a shingle manufacturing company. And so, I—. It was—. It wasn’t overwhelming, but it was just like eye-opening. Was like, “Oh man. This what this is. This is—. My job will be to make sure this place runs.” [Laughter]

(TI): [Laughter] So, was it more like a recruiting tour? It sounds like you’re a free agent in the NFL, and it’s like, “Hey. These companies want you. Go tour them.”

(JH): Yeah. I mean—. So, when you get there—

(TI): You’re Peyton Manning, dude.

(JH): [Laughter]

(TI): [Laughter] That’s awesome. That’s awesome to hear.

(JH): It’s cool. Because like when we’re there, they’re letting us know like, “Hey. These companies had to pay for – to be able to hire you.” Like,

they're paying thousands of dollars, tens of thousands of dollars just to hire us.

(TI): Wow.

(JH): And—. But we get to pick which ones that we want to work for. Like—. We get to pick like it's kind of like your dream sheet where you pick the places you want to go, but you're not going to get there, [laughter] but you can pick them where you want to go when you're in the military. But like, the chances of you getting your top ones are very slim. So, that's basically what happened with us is they're like, "Hey. You pick the top eight companies you want to work for." So, we picked them and then it was up to the companies to look at our resumes and think to themselves, "Okay. Do we want this person?" So, when the companies told Rockwell, "Hey. These are the only people that we would like to hire." The companies came to Rockwell and interviewed us. And then that was like the first round was like they interviewed all of us, and then they picked their top three, and then we got to go on-site. We flew out to their locations and interviewed again.

(TI): So, once you got to the top three, they kind of just match your top three with their top three and see what would be the best fit.

(JH): Correct. We got a choice to—of the companies, but then they were ultimately deciding who they really want to hire.

(TI): Sure. Sure. This seems like a fairly new concept, and Rockwell puts this on. It's a private company, but I've seen stuff like this in a previous, you know. I did a previous episode with my old CEO, Danny Chung, a Marine Corps Veteran. He's the Director of Military Affairs for Microsoft, and they do something similar like this for the digital private sector. But I don't think we got into, like, the draft portion of—. We just got into the education. First of all, I want to put this out there. Rockwell isn't paying you to be here talking with me like Microsoft paid Danny to talk about the program because he was like the Director of Education, right?

(JH): Correct. Yeah.

(TI): Like, Rockwell isn't paying you at all. You just hit me up at the podcast email because you had that much passion to share your story.

(JH): Absolutely. The program literally changed my life. Like, I'm so excited that that came across because, you know, when they're pitching it to us, they're like, "Hey. We have this program. We're training highly skilled military veterans on how to work with PLCs, computers, drives, motors—"

(TI): What's a PLC?

(JH): So, a PLC is a programmable logic controller. And so, basically what it's doing is it's just controlling a series of events. And so, I had no idea what that was before I got—[Laughter]

(TI): I got no idea. I'm thinking like Xbox. I'm probably way off base, but I'm probably thinking like a PS5 controller or an Xbox One.

(JH): It's basically just like a small module.

(TI): Tracking. How did they teach you? What was the education like? What was it? Was there prac. app. after being in class or—? Had to have been being in manufacturing, right?

(JH): Yeah. So, Rockwell did a magnificent job of creating an environment for us. So, we actually were at the Rockwell headquarters in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and they dedicated a whole floor for us. Like, they had meeting rooms up there that they would hold meetings. Even the CEO's office was on the same floor as us. But they have like a classroom area for us. So, you know, we come in, we're taking notes, we have a teacher, and then he's like, "Alright. Cool. Now that I taught you all this, let's go to the lab." So, then we go to the lab, and we'd literally be hands-on working with the stuff that we were just learning about.

(TI): Very good. So, you're an electrical technician maintenance. What other positions do folks train in? What other positions can you get out of this course?

(JH): So, when we were about to leave, we were asking that same question. We were like, "So, what can we do? Everything you just trained us on, what does it allow us to do?" And they told us our official title, which we were making jokes about this just because it's so long, but they were saying you're—

(TI): Welcome to the government.

(JH): [Laughter]

(TI): Undersecretary of the undersecretary undersecretary assistant secretary.

(JH): Yeah. So, they told us we could be an Instrumentation and Automation Controls Technician, so anything that deals with instruments.

(TI): Still have questions. I can just tell you like—still questions.

(JH): [Laughter]

(TI): Okay. Go ahead. Sorry.

(JH): So, anything that's dealing with instruments. And by instruments, I mean like a gauge or probe, something that measures things. instrumentation. Automation. So, the real truthful career field is automation. So, what those PLCs are doing is, it's like a computer and it's just telling stuff to do this, do that. So, that's automation. It's hands-off. Nobody is manually doing stuff anymore; the future is automation. Let's—. How can we get computers to do more work and humans to do less work?

(TI): Yeah. Watching the Rockwell story that you were featured in, you mentioned an *I Love Lucy* episode—

(JH): [Laughter]

(TI): when equating what you originally thought about what manufacturing was to what you're talking about now, which is automation.

(JH): Absolutely. Yeah. Like—. When they started talking about the automation and manufacturing, that's all I could think about was that *I Love Lucy* episode where she's taking the chocolates off the conveyor belt and—.

(TI): [Laughter]

(JH): Because she can't keep up! So, she just starts eating them and putting them places and whatnot.

(TI): I remember that.

(JH): That's what they're trying to eliminate in the workforce is human error, and let's get some robots to do stuff and let's get—. It's, you know. A lot of people are scared. They're truly scared to see robots take human jobs. But in reality, what it's doing is freeing us up to do more highly skilled things. I'm doing a job that's really highly skilled that I was not even—. I had no idea I would ever do something like this before. But a lot of people when they see, you know, and they hear what I do now, they're like, "Oh my god. You had some engineering degree." I'm like, "No. I just—. You know, I work hard. I learn and, you know, I'm able to do a highly skilled job." And that's what really they're trying to push for in the future is: let's get humans to do more highly skilled things. Do that stuff instead of, you know, hurting our backs by picking up stuff all day. Let's do other stuff.

(TI): So interesting. So interesting because I know nothing about it. And that's why I have you on. [Laughter]

(JH): [Laughter]

(TI): What are salaries like for positions like yours? Where can you expect to start? I think I saw on a brochure for Rockwell School \$50,000 to \$80,000 that starting out. Is that accurate?

(JH): Yeah. So, some of the companies that were there—. So, Tyson was there. I said on another podcast that Hershey was there, but it wasn't Hershey. Pretty sure it was Nestlé. Nestlé was there. Smuckers was there. Owens Corning—. So, these are all big-name companies, and some of them wanted to pay a salary and then other ones were playing us hourly. So, it's—. That fluctuation in your financial status really changes because the amount of hours we have to work. So, you know, if—. As I said, we're in charge of keeping that plant running, so if it's one o'clock in the morning and something goes down, we got to come in. And if you're salary, sorry. But if you're hourly, awesome. Because, you know, you're making a little extra money in overtime. So, yeah. I think they were paying—. I don't know. Maybe like—. I can't remember what the lowest was. It was in the—. About \$20 was like the lowest somebody was paying. And the highest I think anybody offered was hourly, was \$45. And that was the Compton Owens Corning because, you know, you're in the Los Angeles area.

(TI): Yeah. You're in LA.



- (JH): It's pricey.
- (TI): Yeah. So, you got to think about cost of living. How much a gallon of milk costs in California. And then you also have to consider you know, benefits too.
- (JH): Absolutely.
- (TI): Cost of healthcare. Cost of dental insurance. Do you have a family? What plans they offer? You go to go deep into the weeds and start doing the math because \$45 might sound great, but in Compton, like you said, cost of living is high. And then if their benefits are crummy and expensive, you're down to that \$20 again.
- (JH): Exactly.
- (TI): Now. You were in a technical field in the Air Force that many might consider similar to what you're doing now. Did you ever see any students that maybe had nothing to do with a technical job in the military, but they were training for a technical job now, one of your classmates. And if so, how did they do?
- (JH): I would actually say as far as true knowledge of what we were doing, I would say most people did have like, a good electrical background, which really helped. Mechanical wasn't really what companies were looking for because they want us to know more about, you know, the PLCs. And, you know, if you had to wire something up, they want you to have those skills. So, the mechanical aspects weren't really high and that's really what I had was more mechanical than electrical. So, I was actually on of the people who had the least experience when it came to the electrical background.
- (TI): Got you. What about like—. I mean, what do you think—? Did you see any grunts, any infantry guys? Anybody that had not even close to technical experience whatsoever in the military transfer over into something like this? Or was it mainly, "Hey. You got to have some sort of basic electrical knowledge."
- (JH): Yeah. You have to have some sort of basic electrical knowledge. There was a guy, Dustin Rogers. He was in the Marines, and he did not—. He was in the infantry, but when he got out, he was in school in California doing like, an electrical school. So, I think he was doing – like trying to

become an electrician or something, so he had that electrical background just because he did that. So, you know, if he hadn't had done that, he probably would have had the least electrical experience, but he had a good background just because he went there.

(TI): What do you think would be the best background from a military standpoint or from a personal standpoint? Like, what can a person do now to train themselves, to get themselves ready to even go to a school like this?

(JH): I would definitely brush up on electrical skills because that's really what shined out was people who knew stuff about different volts and current and knowing things about how processes work. Know how a computer works, honestly. Like, if you can just work your way around a computer and changing IP addresses, networks, those types of things. Because it's a very well-rounded course. As I said, it was such a long name—Instrumentation and Automation Controls Technician—because we – they want us to know about instruments and we have to know about computers and do networking and learn about IO and learn about IP, subnet masks—all these things. I would definitely suggest somebody brush up on networking when—. That's not communicating with other people. That's networking as in—

(TI): Communicate—. Computers communicating with each other.

(JH): Yeah. Like, Cisco and stuff like that. So, I would definitely suggest that. And also, you know, definitely know your electrical background.

(TI): Very good. Very good. What's entry-level like and are there opportunities for advancement?

(JH): So, entry-level for what I do is—. I'm the only person, actually in our plant that does specifically what I do. I do have somebody who is "over me" quote unquote. He's our tech leader, and he just has—. He's a chemical engineer by trade, but he's been working for Owens Corning for over 20 years. So, he has a very good knowledge of light PLCs and drives, motor—stuff like that because he's an engineer.

(TI): To be in the lead like that, you can come from many different fields within the company. I'm sure.

(JH): Correct. Yeah. So, but if you're—. As soon as you come out of the program, some of the companies wanted to hire us as a title as

“engineer.” And, you know, in society we view—. If somebody says, “I’m an engineer,” like, they think they’re making millions of dollars and super smart—

(TI): [Laughter]

(JH): and stuff like that. But in all reality, you know, I could be called an “engineer” or just a “technician.” “Technician” and “engineer” really—I’ve learned—go hand in hand because the job titles are like, “Automation Technician” or “Controls Engineer,” “Controls Technician.” Like, the words are very interchangeable. So, I had a senior engineer in the company tell me, he’s like, “Hey man, sky’s the limit for whatever you want to do.” He said, “We actually had one guy in Houston leave the company and start working for NASA.” And I was like, “Oh my God.”

(TI): Wow. Wow. Now are all these types of jobs—? Are they union or non-union? Are they both? Can they be both? What have you seen?

(JH): So, I know our plant is a union plant, but I’m not union. Like they hired me in as not a union worker, so I would assume that yes, you can be union, but it really just depends up to the company and your position.

(TI): And what the structure is at the particular plant. Got you. Got you.

(JH): Correct.

(TI): Jackson, what’s one thing that you learned in service that you carry with you today and what you do?

(JH): I would definitely say the discipline and the start-to-finish aspect and attention to detail. That’s something that’s so huge because me dealing with programs, like, I’m looking at logic code and I see all these processes in the code, and if I make one mistake and don’t adhere to that, you know, exactly what I’m doing, then it can throw things off, and we could have troubles for hours just because I didn’t pay attention to what I was doing. Even our instructor was telling us that he was trying to do something. I forgot if he was like, uploading, download a program, or made a change, and he shut a Pepsi plant down because of a mistake he made.

(TI): Oh.

(JH): Yeah. And so, you know, that's—. We do the math and it's thousands of dollars a minute that companies lose by not putting product out of the door. So, we're in charge of doing that. And, you know, my history in the military was bomb loading, so if I'm not careful loading bombs, that's people's lives.

(TI): Yeah.

(JH): That—. I'm in—. I'm not solely responsible for, but solely responsible for it. [Laughter]

(TI): [Laughter]

(JH): So, yeah. It's that attention to detail. Have discipline to do what's right and understanding the consequences of being lazy and doing the wrong thing. And then as I said, attention to detail. Make sure that you fully understand what you're doing. Don't make a mistake just because you're guessing. Just know what you're doing and be mindful of it.

(TI): Very good. Jackson, is there a veteran non-profit or veteran whom you've worked with that you'd like to mention?

(JH): None that I can think of. I do know—. So, I have a best friend whose name is John Hill, and he's a pilot in the Navy, and his wife started a company called VirtForce. And VirtForce, what they do is: they help military spouses get jobs. And it was absolutely incredible what she's been able to do in the short amount of time. But I definitely want to give her a shoutout. Kim Hill, so that's her name. But yeah. It's something that—. I definitely support the fact that she is able—. She took it upon herself, like, "Hey. I'm a military spouse. And if I needed a job, I want somebody to help me." So, yeah. She's basically, you know, just helping people find a job virtually because if you're married to somebody in the military, you're moving wherever they're moving, and you don't know anybody. You know, you're not in this community. So, she's definitely helping people, changing their life, giving them a job to reach out to, you know, other people who are in that area. So, it's—. Or, you know, virtually, that's the whole point of the VirtForce. Can you find a job where you don't have to go in, you know, if you got kids and stuff like that.

(TI): VirtForce. Okay. I thought you said Brrrt Force like the A-10 Brrrt, you know, like “brrrt.”

(JH): Oh, no. Yeah.

(TI): [Laughter]

(JH): [Laughter]

(TI): I was like, “Catchy for an Air Force spouse.”

(JH): [Laughter]

(TI): Very good. VirtForce. Got you. Tracking. Tracking.

(JH): V-I-R-T—

(TI): Yeah.

(JH): force. Yeah.

(TI): Okay

(JH): V-I-R-T force. Yeah.

(TI): Jackson, we’ve covered a lot of ground in a relatively short amount of time. Is there anything that I didn’t ask or maybe have missed that you’d like to share?

(JH): You know, I just really stress to military veterans to research. Definitely research what you want to do. There’s tons of opportunities out there. If—. You know, a lot of people look down upon the guys that are standing in the median of the road, begging for money. They were military veterans and, you know, some people say those people are faking it. If they are real or not, it saddens me to see that there are people who could possibly be a military veteran that just don’t have a job. And they’re—. If they’re mentally sound, there’s so many opportunities out there. As I said, two companies called me that I wasn’t even looking for, and they called me. So, there’s way too many opportunities out there for military veterans to number one, not know what to do. And then number two, to not be doing anything. So, I would definitely suggest just do some research, look some stuff up.

There's plenty of government websites where you can find jobs and just be able to support yourself, support your family, and live a good life.

[00:46:55] Music

## **[00:47:00] PSA**

(Man):

I was able to use the VA Home Loan two years ago to buy our home with zero money down. I am amazed that there was so much in place to really serve the veterans, and the VA serves as a catalyst for all those resources.

(Narrator):

Choose VA today. Visit [va.gov](http://va.gov) [Link: [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)].

[00:47:16] Music

[00:47:30] A Moment of Silence

## **[00:47:41] Closing Monologue**

(TI):

I want to thank Jackson for coming on Borne the Battle. To learn more about Jackson Henderson, well, you can find him on Rockwell's video on YouTube about the Rockwell Academy of Advanced Manufacturing. You can also find him on LinkedIn. I found this week's Borne the Battle Veteran of the Week on an Instagram post. The story was incredible, so I typed in the name and it was verified everywhere, and I'm going to go with what the army.mil had written up.

Born, William Henry Johnson in Winston Salem, North Carolina in 1892, Johnson moved to New York as a teenager. He worked various jobs—as a chauffeur, as a soda mixer, laborer in a coal yard, and redcap porter in Albany's Union Station. He enlisted in the US Army, June 5, 1917, and was assigned to Company C, the 15<sup>th</sup> Colored New York Infantry Regiment—an all-black National Guard unit that would later become the 369<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. The 369<sup>th</sup> was ordered into battle in 1918. Johnson and his unit were commanded by a French army colonel in front-line combat. Johnson served one tour duty to the western edge of the Argonne Forest in France's Champagne region, from 1918 to 1919. For his battlefield valor, Johnson became

one of the first Americans to be awarded the French Croix de Guerre, France's highest award of valor. And excuse me if I am butchering that award's name. I've always seen it. Never knew how to say it. Johnson returned home from his tour and was unable to return to his pre-war porter position due to the severity of his 21 combat injuries. Johnson died in July of 1929 and is buried in Arlington National cemetery in Arlington, Virginia. Johnson was posthumously awarded the Purple Heart in 1996—in 1996—and the Distinguished Service Cross in 2002. In 2015, he was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor. Theodore Roosevelt Junior in his book "Rank in File: True Stories of the Great War" stated that Sgt. Henry Johnson is "one of the five bravest American soldiers of the Great War."

The battle narrative that I'm about to read is the write up that the official citation for the Medal of Honor was written off of. And it reads as follows: "Then private Henry Johnson served as a member of Company C 365<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 93<sup>rd</sup> Division, American Expeditionary Forces during combat operations against the enemy on the front lines of the western front in France. While on night sentry duty on May 15<sup>th</sup>, 1918, Johnson and a fellow soldier, Pvt. Needham Roberts, received a surprise attack by a German raiding party consisting of at least twelve soldiers. While under intense enemy fire and despite receiving significant wounds, Johnson mounted a brave retaliation resulting in several enemy casualties. When his fellow soldier was badly wounded, Johnson prevented him from being taken prison by German forces. Johnson exposed himself to grave danger by advancing from his position to engage an enemy soldier in hand-to-hand combat. Wielding only a knife and being seriously wounded, Johnson continued fighting and took his Bolo knife and stabbed it right through a soldier's head." And it is written just like that. "Displaying great courage, Johnson held back the enemy force until they retreated. The enemy raid's failure to secure prisoners was due unto the bravery and resistance of Johnson and his fellow comrade. The effect of their fierce fighting resulted in an increase vigilance and confidence of the 369<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment." Army Veteran Henry Johnson, we honor his service. [Link the website article dedicated to Veteran Henry Johnson: <https://www.army.mil/medalofhonor/johnson/>].

Ready. Aim. Fire. [blank rounds fired]  
Ready. Aim. Fire. [blank rounds fired]  
Ready. Aim. Fire. [blank rounds fired]  
Present Arms.

(TI): That's it for this week's episode. If you yourself would like to nominate a Borne the Battle Veteran of the Week, you can. Just send an email to [podcast@va.gov](mailto:podcast@va.gov), include a short write up, and let us know why you would like to see him or her as the Borne the Battle Veteran of The Week. And if you liked this podcast episode, hit the subscribe button. We are on iTunes, Apple Podcast, Spotify, Google Podcast, iHeart Radio. You can catch the interviews on YouTube now. Pretty much any podcatching app known to phone, computer, tablet or man. For more stories on veterans and veteran benefits, check out our website, [blogs.va.gov](http://blogs.va.gov) [Link: <https://www.blogs.va.gov/>] and follow the VA on social media. Facebook [Link to VA's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/VeteransAffairs>], Instagram [Link to VA's Instagram page: <https://www.instagram.com/deptvetaffairs/?hl=en>], Twitter [Link to VA's twitter page: [https://twitter.com/DeptVetAffairs?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwca](https://twitter.com/DeptVetAffairs?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwca)], YouTube [Link to VA's YouTube page: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCBvOzPLmbzjtpX-Htstp2vw>], RallyPoint [Link to the VA's RallyPoint: <https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/56052/questionrallypoint-great-place-start/>], LinkedIn [Link the the VA's LinkedIn <https://www.linkedin.com/company/department-of-veterans-affairs>], Deptvetaffairs, US Department of Veterans Affairs. No matter the social media, you can always find us with that blue checkmark. And as always, I'm reminded by people smarter than me to remind you that the Department of Veterans Affairs does not endorse or officially sanction any entities that may be discussed in this podcast, nor any media products or services they may provide. I say that because the song that you're hearing now is called "Machine Gunner" and it is courtesy of the non-profit Operation Song and was written by Marine Veteran Mick McElhenny, Nashville songwriter Jason Sever and Mykal Duncan. Thank you again for listening, and we'll see right here next week. Take care.

[00:53:34] Music

(Text Transcript Ends)