

Nick O'Kelly - Episode 837

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SPEAKERS

James Geering, Nick O'Kelly



James Geering 00:00

This episode is sponsored by NuCalm. And as many of you know, I only bring sponsors onto the show whose products I truly swear by. Now we are an overworked and underslept population, especially those of us that wear a uniform for a living, and trying to reclaim some of the lost rest and recovery is imperative. Now the application of this product is as simple as putting on headphones and asleep mask. As you listen to music on each of the programs there is neuro acoustic software Beneath that is tapping into the actual frequencies of your brain, whether to up regulate your nervous system, or downregulate. Now for most of us that come off shift we are a exhausted and B do not want to bring what we've had to see and do back home to our loved ones. So one powerful application is using the program power nap, a 20 minute session that will not only feel like you've had two hours of sleep, but also downregulate from a hyper vigilant state, back into the role of mother or father, husband or wife. Now there are so many other applications and benefits from the software. So I urge you to go and listen to episode 806 with CEO Jim Paul, then download NuCalm and you see a LM from your app store and sign up for the seven day free trial. Not only will you have an understanding of the origin story and the four decades this science has spanned, but also see for yourself the incredible health impact of this life changing software. And you can find even more information on new comm.com This episode is sponsored by yet another great company that I use and endorse and that is Bubs Naturals. Now they are offering you guys a discount on your first purchase with them. And I will get to that in a moment. But I really want to tell you the history of Bob's Bob's was a call sign of Glen Doherty, one of the courageous navy seals that died in Benghazi and his best friend Sean Lake co founded Bubs naturals not only to bring wellness solutions to the community, but to take 10% of the profits and donate to charities in Glenn's name. So I first came across their collagen through Jeff Nichols and have no preconceived notions or biases. But I started to witness him myself. My nails grow faster and my hair gets thicker and longer. My skin I've got very dry skin and it usually cracks in the winter. That has not happened this year. My joints the aching the kind of inflammation has definitely subsided. And then what really blew me away was actually my gut health. I saw that improve and when you think about the gut is 80% of your immune system that is incredibly pertinent. They have the apple cider vinegar gummies I also take those and then the MCT oil in a powder form has allowed me to put creamer back in my coffee after swearing off dairy for years. But when I have this creamer is adding energy is adding mental focus to yet it's another supplement. Now as far as efficacy, they're the only

collagen that is 100% NSF for sport certified and whole 30 approved. So as I mentioned the discount code they are offering you 20% of a one time purchase by using the code shield at bubs naturals.com. And if you want to hear the full story behind Bubs naturals and the courage of Glen Doherty. Listen to my interview with Glenn's best friend and Bob's co founder Sean lake on episode 558 of the behind the shield podcast. Welcome to the behind the shield podcast. As always, my name is James Geering. And this week, it is my absolute honor to welcome on the show, former Special Forces soldier and aviator Nick Kelley. So in this conversation, we discuss a host of topics especially on his unique journey within the military, from his path into the army, entering Special Forces selection, deciding to transition into the aviation side, ultimately flying his special forces brothers, his own very powerful mental health story, the tools he's used for post traumatic growth and so much more. Now, before we get to this incredibly powerful and important conversation, as I say, every week, please just take a moment, go to whichever app you listen to this on, subscribe to the show, leave feedback and leave a rating. Every single five star rating truly does elevate this podcast therefore making it easier for others to find. And this is a free library of well over 800 episodes now. So all I ask in return is that you help share these incredible men and women's stories so I can get them to every single person on planet earth who needs to hear them. So with that being said, I introduce to you Nick Kelley. Enjoy Well, Nick, I want to start by saying, firstly, thank you to Kagan Gill for connecting us another incredible human being that I got to share a plane with for several days as we circumnavigated the globe. And secondly, I want to say welcome to the behind the shield podcast today.

N

Nick O'Kelly 05:33

Awesome. Well, thanks for having me, James. And yeah, Kagan story is incredible. I think they need to make a movie about that. I'll be the first one to watch that. But yeah, again, thanks for having me. I'm pleased to be here for sure.

J

James Geering 05:48

Beautiful. So where on planet earth we finally you this afternoon.

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05:52

So I just relocated to Charlotte, North Carolina with my family. It's a beautiful city we so actually just got out of the army in May. So we're still kind of finding our home here and finding our our place, but we love it so far with the growing city gotten up and demographic. Yeah,

J

James Geering 06:12

I got to NC the Operation Enduring warrior Gala. And they're an amazing organization that take wounded warriors, whether it's in the military side, or the first responder side, through Spartan Races, skydiving, archery, just an amazing group of people. And their gala was actually in North Carolina in Charlotte. So I got to see the city a little bit. And then even the airport is absolutely beautiful. There



06:37

it is. They do such a good job of keeping it clean and like just updated and everything seems new interaction. No trash everywhere. So hopefully I can keep it that way. But yeah, it's been a great experience so far here.



James Geering 06:50

Brilliant. Well, I would like to start at the very beginning of your career and a timeline. Should I say because obviously, you just transitioned out just a few short months ago. So tell me where you were born. And tell me a little bit about your family dynamic. what your parents did? And how many siblings?



07:05

Okay, yeah, so born in 1989. In Everett, Washington, it's about 30 minutes north of Seattle. And I lived in Everett until I was in fifth grade going into fifth grade. Looking back, it's funny to think about it when when I was young, like before the upgrade in Everett, we lived in a quad Plex, in like, basically the ghetto of Everett, Washington. Like when I go back to visit now, I can't believe we even live there. Because when you're a kid, you don't think about that stuff. But um, so we in fifth grade, we moved to a town called Marysville Washington, which is just north of Everett. And that's really where I call home. And really where I grew up. I went to public school until 10th grade, which is when I went to private school, private Christian school. I am the second oldest of four. So I have older sister, younger brother, and then my youngest sister actually has Down syndrome. So that's kind of created a unique perspective to see the world through as well. And then a unique upbringing, I guess, if you will, we always had very, very high expectations of us as kids. So our parents were, I don't want to say overbearing, but they had very high standards. So it was straight A's, or, you know, something went wrong. And you had to kind of answer for that. So yeah, I mean, we had a great childhood overall, I just, there are definitely aspects of it looking back that you don't think of when you're in it. And so you look back and reflect on it when you're older.



James Geering 08:49

Well, we're obviously going to get into your mental health journey. And a real aha moment for me early in this podcast was the impact of childhood trauma. So you have you know, us we put the uniform on, we take the oath, and then we progress through and maybe see and do some things that definitely compound it. But there are elements of our formative years that really already described disgust in a lot of people's kind of journey to try and find healing. Some of these are very, very acute, you know, sexual abuse and things that actually happen way more frequently than I realized. So I started hearing these stories, others a little bit more subtle, but still can definitely contribute, whether it's, you know, you're the middle child, he felt unloved, or, no matter how hard you worked, and I saw this with my dad on occasion, you know, you'd get five A's and a B, and he'd be like, why'd you get a B? So just kind of talk to me again, you know, it's not about trauma comparison, or, you know, thinking well, that was it and I curled into a bowl because my parents wanted A's however, not feeling good enough. Is a crippling emotion to a young boy or girl.



09:58

Yeah, and it's kind of interesting because Like I said, That's not one of the things that you like, think of or reflect back on. But to go a little more into my childhood, like, I had a great core group of friends. I was fortunate to grow up from fifth grade to graduating high school in Marysville. So, core group of friends from fifth grade on all the way through high school, and then even obviously, through college, too. So graduated college, I went to her sorry, graduated high school, went to a private college in eastern Washington called Whitworth, it was a great experience, but I was there for the wrong reasons. 100% I literally just went to college to get the right thing to do. And that's what you know, society expects you to do. So I went from being a four 4.0, basically high school student to being big, I got a 1.7 GPA my freshman year, I went, I went to class just to just to survive again, I didn't even I wouldn't even say to. I wasn't there for the right reasons, I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life. And so to kind of compress that story, I lasted two years in college, and then my dad basically said to me, I'm like, I'm not going to pay for this, if you're not going to even go to class. You know, rightfully so. So I dropped out of college after two years, and then went back home, and worked for my dad, one day, Carbonite magazine. So I worked for him just going around taking pictures of car dealerships of cars and things like that. And I mean, I had a blast, I was partying, having a good time, but I kind of came to the realization that I needed to do something with my life. And that's when that's kind of when it brought me to the army. So while I was in college, I did ROTC. So I was planning on being an officer in the army, until my motivations that otherwise by getting terrible grades. And then so that was my first exposure to the military, though, and I love the, like, competitiveness, I love the fact that if you're physically fit, that you can succeed pretty easily, you know, that's like a big differential differentiator that way going into the military. Physical Fitness is obviously quite technical. And I was in good shape when I was in my, you know, 1819 20 around that time. So, so yeah, I went to the recruiters office, I originally was going to join the Marine. And then they kind of told me, like, you didn't really have 100%, say, of what your job was going to be. So I went down the road to the army recruiter, and he told me, I could be special forces, you know, and the Marines that I didn't have a guaranteed, you know, job of where I've gone. So I was like, Okay, I'll definitely, definitely take special forces over being a cook in the Marines or whatever ended up being so yeah, that's, that's what led me to an army. And I also my older sister, enlisted as well. So she was in the army as well, she was a medic.



James Geering 13:16

When when you were in college, when your GPA dropped by 50% was an element of partying and that too, or was it just a lack of motivation to go to the classes?



13:26

Oh, no, it was it was 100%, partying, partying, and then sleeping until noon, or 1pm, the next day, and then, you know, my lips, I guess I missed class. And I compounded to the point where it had been like, over two, three weeks, before I even went to one of the classes, it's barrel. By that point, I was like, Well, I'm a lot, I'm just gonna be so far behind them, I will not get a snowball effect of that. And ironically, the only grades that I got A's in so the only reason I had

a GPA was because of the ROTC classes, because those were, in my mind non negotiable, because it was a military, you know, because that structure of the RPP program, ironically, like made me succeed in that aspect. But yeah,

J James Geering 14:14

well, I know you spent time in Japan, I lived in Japan for 15 months, and one of the observations of the Japanese culture which I love, and it was amazing how many similarities there were between Japanese and British culture with manners and, you know, not routines, the traditions and those kinds of things. And I'm missing the word now, but was they their culture viewed questioning things as very disrespectful. So there was a lot of obedience and I mean that in a positive way, not derogatory way. So what I saw is, that was a lot of pent up emotion. And so when after work, a lot of times they would drink, they would fucking drink, you know, and it was like this kind of bow pull back and then let go. You have a sense Sounds like you had a kind of stricter childhood to was there an element of that freedom for you?

i 15:05

Yeah, that's funny you say that? Because? Yeah, for sure, my mom. So this is a funny story, and she's gonna laugh when she hears this, but she was the mom that, like I said before, if I got to be, it was what happened. And I'm gonna go talk to your teacher, and your teachers gonna send me a weekly email on your progress for the next semester, until you get an A. So. So yeah, long story short, duper. I was almost born to get good grades in high school. It wasn't even even though I was capable of it. It wasn't, I would say, as much my choice, you know, I didn't have the freedom to even fail. So when I got to college, and had the freedom to fail, definitely look for full advantage of that.

J James Geering 15:57

So you mentioned about being fit. What were you playing and doing as far as sports and exercise in the school age?

i 16:04

Yeah, so I grew up playing baseball. So baseball was like my get into sport. And then I once I got into college, I really got into running. And it was just kind of my then like, my place to go. And I just, I got really into it. And I got pretty good at it. By the time I was like, I'm I enlisted in the Army. I was running, like 11 minute, two miles and just flying. So yeah, that was, that was my passion, I guess, if you will, going into the army. And but yeah, baseball was my was my go to sport growing

J James Geering 16:37

up. Now prior to this kind of come to Jesus moment that led you to the military, was there another career that you're dreaming of when you were younger?

 16:46

I mean, I had the aspirations of a professional baseball player, normal kid, right? I wasn't even close to that. So. But other than that, honestly, I didn't, I, I went to college to be an engineer. So that was like my declared major. But that was also along the lines of it sounds like a good career. And I didn't really have any desire to do that. It was more just, I have to pay something. So I'm gonna pay that and declare that and are good at math. So naturally just led me to that. But yeah, it's amazing

 James Geering 17:21

how many people on the show that became incredibly high performers in uniform, said they wanted to be a pro basketball, football, baseball. And it makes me think maybe recruiters should go to those selection processes in college and just set up outside the door. So when they don't make it, they just walk in and sign the paper and miss that kind of middle bid.

 17:41

That's so funny, because the side joined when I joined, it was called the A, it's called 18x Ray programs that's like their Special Forces recruit program. And when you go to basic training, at least for me, our whole basic training platoon was full of 18x rays. So guys wanted to be at that guys. And a kid, you know, I'd ever probably, I would say 50% of them were either like college athletes or college graduates or you know, played, played like competitive sports, and we're good at sports. It's just very what you're saying they bought on like, there's so many former athletes that go into the Special Operations world.


 James Geering 18:24

What another, I think, misnomer or myth to the civilian population, myself included early on, is that a special operations soldier, Special Forces soldier, is this kind of Uber athlete, you know, the behemoth or behemoth Excuse me. And then you actually speak to the men and women that were, you know, playing that role? And yes, there's some of them are larger, but usually, the physicality was less important than the mindset and that's what they said over and over and over again, you were a baseball player, you were a runner, as you progress through selection, what was it that allowed you to continue when some of your peers rang the bell?

 19:01

I think I think one of the biggest things is being having great like cardio fitness is obviously a huge game changer, because almost all of it is just how long you can go you know, without quitting and just how much can you take before you quit? So having that mentality of running and pushing myself as like a runner, if you want to call me that was very, very beneficial for me like having that good cardio, core stamina was huge. But I will also say, I was a like, this is extremely like a do or die type of mentality in my mind. Like, I was not going to let myself bail


and be subject to wherever the army wanted to send me like this was this was going to your path. And then on that now, I think some people I don't know if there's merit to this or not, but I think some people are just hire differently to not quit and just grunt things out. And we'll get into that later, too, as my story kind of proves that. And then, ironically, about a month ago, I actually got random IOSYS doing CrossFit here in Charlotte. And I think that I mean, that kind of proves the point right there. Like, I don't know when to quit, and I just push my body until it makes me stop. I guess. So. I think I think that just that characteristic, some people just have it.

 James Geering 20:30

I had a really hard workout. I mean, it's been a few years ago now and started pee and blood. But I thought, but I forgot that I'd made beet juice earlier in a day. And that's all it was. Okay, myself. It wasn't wrapped, though. It was just that I'm a fucking idiot. That's

 20:45

so terrifying. Anytime you're any different colors, freak out?

 James Geering 20:51

Exactly. Well, with with the running, it's interesting baseball, you're relying on a team. And I always talk to people about this, you have team sports, which has value on one Spirit, one area, but then you have individual sports. And I did martial arts for a long time, and I fought you know, so I would fight for a team sometimes, but just me and the opponent are on the mat. But even then, when you've got someone trying to punch and kick you in the face, there's still an extrinsic motivator when it comes to running. And my son is a cross country and track runner at the moment in his high school. That's a different kind of mindset, because there's a little voice in your head telling you to stop, but there's not someone in front of you trying to score a goal or choke you out. So talk to me about how you develop that your dye don't quit mentality.

 21:38

Yeah, that's again. Good point. So actually, when I was I went through like a chubby phase in high school. So I was like, I think I was 16, or 17, whatever. And I got into like this chubby kid. And that's when I was like, Alright, I need to do something I'm going to run. And that's when I really like started getting into running. But I had this, I don't even remember back then how I timed my run, it was probably an analog watch. But I just would constantly just try to be my last base time no matter what like that was my goal. For every single one round was just to get better and better. And I mean, that was enough for me, honestly, just keep pushing and keep going. And it just felt so good to just continually improve and get better and better.

 James Geering 22:27

So which kind of specialty Did you find yourself in once you made the Green Berets?

 22:34

I was I was 18. Charlie, so engineer demo construction. If you want to call it construction, it was more like, here's to two by fours. Let's see if we can nail them together and make some more out of it. But now's a good time, I think. Thinking back like I wouldn't have it any other way. I initially wanted to be an 18 Delta and be a medic. And I'm glad that didn't work out honestly. Because being an 18. Charlie was awesome. You kind of you kind of get to have your hands going a little bit everything you get to work with the like weapons guys, but 18 Bravo has and help them with range stuff. And then yes, if the cool like versatile job on an ODA, I loved it.

 James Geering 23:16

Now, when people think about Green Berets, they immediately again, think about Afghanistan, Iraq in more recent conflicts, and you found yourself in a different arena. So kind of talk to me about how the Green Berets are separated globally. And then where you found yourself.

 23:31

Yeah, so I. So once I graduated the qualification course, to dive into wall, I went to Okinawa, Japan. So that was my first duty station. Actually, my only duty station would. And I was in first time out there first group, which is for deployed obviously, in Japan. So our area of operations was Asia. So I got to went to the Philippines a lot. Thailand, Nepal, Australia, got to kind of see that area of the world. It was really cool, really great experience we actually got to go to when we were in Nepal, we had a two week, two week, like whitespace, which is like nothing planned on the schedule. So we built in time to go do Everest base camp. And there was classified as high altitude training so the army paid for it. So pretty awesome experience to be able to literally be on the clock and going to base camp of Mount Everest. But I think one of the coolest things about being in Special Forces is like and traveling the world is just getting to see all the different cultures and third world countries and just how concerned people are with what little they have. You know, they remind me of a story when we saw when we were doing Everest, their base camp I don't want to call it ever has to come This sounds way cooler than it is. But we were doing base camp we were. We were at one of the overnight stops or whatever. And this mom was giving this probably two year old girl, a bath. And the water was just ice cold like glacier cold water. And the girl was just screaming, screaming, and we're, we're just like, oh my gosh, is this happening? But that's like, a normal thing for them. Right? And like, if we did that on a Parkins, there'd be you know, people would be calling Child Services. It's just funny to see the different cultures and how people react to different things, I guess.

 James Geering 25:36

I wonder what the Filipino or that that culture thinks about the Westerners now jumping in an ice bath for two minutes. Like my two year old gets in that bath. What are you talking about?

 25:46

Yeah, exactly. I no big deal. I know. We like complain when it's lukewarm.

J James Geering 25:51

Yeah. Well, the Philippines come up a lot when it's people in talking about the Asian side, my wife is actually half Filipino herself. And I know from you know, from just watching the news for years and years and years that there are incredible people, but there's definitely an element of extremism, you know, extreme terrorism within that that country or that acapella. What we have you don't have to be specific. But what were your observations of the average Philippine, you know, families, and then talk to me about that the threats to those people and what you were seeing there, I'm assuming being part of the solution for

 26:27

Yeah, so fortunately, I was, most of my time in the Philippines was just training with their military, like training their special operations forces. But it's very interesting how westernized the Filipino culture is, like a lot of them. They really do like admire American or culture. There's like the biggest NBA fans in the world. Like, you would never think that but you go over there. And like, they know more about the NBA than any anybody on my team did. And it's just wild to see that. But yeah, there's definitely real threat from the Philippines, especially down south and like the southern island. But you should see like how badass the Filipino special operations guys are, like, they, they are just relentless. And even though they don't have the resources or the training that we are privileged to have, like they get after it, and they have no fear. It's pretty, it's pretty amazing. The result that they have, I think, I don't quote me on this, but I know they. They had one mission or their one of their pipelines. So I think it's the Ranger pipeline. Before the students can even graduate, the training, they have to go to combat and see real combat, like and get in a gunfight. That's like a requirement for them to even graduate their training pipeline, not even not just to be operational. Like, it's pretty mind blowing. If there's no way we do. It's pretty, it's pretty crazy what they put there, what they put their soldiers.

J James Geering 28:05

Yeah, though, I mean, I guess you could argue that you could just take an American soldier to various communities in America, and you're probably going to find yourself in a gunfight anyways. We could do it if we wanted to.

 28:15

That's true. Yeah, t shirt. No, I loved my time in Asia, it was the coolest experience in the world, like being able to travel around there and experience all the different cultures.

J James Geering 28:27

Well, you talked about the sense of kind of gratitude and contentment in some of these cultures that comparably, if you look at it in a bank balance are very poor compared to us in

the US. Talk to me about that contrast, what were you seeing, because we have, I believe in the most affluent, you know, country on the planet, but when you look at a lot of these, these films and videos, whether it's National Geographic, whatever, it is an Africa or some parts of Asia, there's a lot of smiling, there's a lot of dancing and you know, all that kind of thing. And even Okinawa is known to be very, very playful, the elderly people there. And then you look at the US, and it's, I'm touring with the same brush, but a lot of us just look fucking miserable. And yet, we have it better off than 90, whatever percent of the world. So what was your perspective of than?



29:18

Yeah, I mean, you nailed it. That's exactly right. It seems, it seems like the more that we indulge over here, the wet content we are with what we have and like, it's that keeping up with the Joneses type of attitude that everybody kind of has that it's always looking to the next milestone instead of looking at where you're at and saying, Okay, I'm happy and I don't know if that's a factor of maybe over there or in other third world countries and things like that. People just are accepting that their life maybe. I don't know if that's the reality. Maybe they're just, you know, okay, this my wife is no my parents lives but I'm gonna live and I'm going to be happy With it, we're here, we're just talking about living the rat race, and trying to find the next painting, trying to find the next thing trying to kind of elevate ourselves and push ourselves into that next tax bracket, you know, and make ourselves that much better. Wherever they're, they're, you know, they're living their lives, like they're living in the president of constantly striving for something else. That might be way off. But that's kind of my perspective on it.



James Geering 30:26

Yeah, I mean, I haven't I haven't spent a lot of time in, in very, very poor areas of the world. But I've traveled a lot. And obviously, there is a spectrum. And I agree, it seems like just the simpler lives. And even if you just look at rural areas, you know, the states of the UK, it's not like they're doing cartwheels through the fields, but they're not worrying about their social media account, or, you know, their latest disposable outfit they're going to wear that weekend, you know, it's a lot more growing the food and being in nature and being exposed to sunlight. And, you know, that sense of community in a smaller town. So I just feel like we've kind of gone away from that. What about nutrition and movement? Open hours? No. And I think is it the blue zone, I think some of the most, I forget the term now, censored, censored generic, I've got that right. But the most per capita, people that live 100 or older, in the whole world, and when you look at the documentaries about it, the way they move, the playfulness, their diet is obviously a huge factor. What have you seen, not just Japan, kind of in Asia, as far as, again, the contrast between our process food and drive throughs and activity here, and the simpler lives that you saw in some of those areas?



31:41

Yeah, that's, so they're very, I would say, I'll conscious, but that's just how they live. It's not like they're striving to buy the organic things. Like that's how they live. That's just what they're used to. So we're here, you know, most people are living off profit foods all the time. That's just not part of their culture there as much. I mean, they still have McDonald's and all that stuff.

Don't get me wrong. But even there, McDonald's, there's cleaner than it is here. You go to McDonald's there. And I'm sure you've heard that like, and I'm sure you've experienced that it's higher quality food, which is weird to think because it's, you know, the trash is you can eat for your body. And then I don't know if you knew this, they don't Okinawa, they work. They basically work until they die. Like there's, they don't retire there. I mean, maybe one reason to do but part of their culture is they just keep working. And I don't know if that I'm sure that attributes to them staying healthy, longer and staying active longer. I'm sure it's just all works together.

 James Geering 32:48

I shared a video of a Haitian man a few months ago now. And this guy could have be on the front cover of any Muscle and Fitness magazine, but he was Haitian, I think he was a farmer. And he was basically saying, well, it was 83 a thing. I could have retired a long time ago, because I guess they do have that philosophy there. He said, but I didn't want to be a burden to my kids. And so this guy looked amazing, absolutely amazing. 83 years old, but this is the thing, he woke up with a purpose. He was outside, he was moving. I'm assuming, you know, being a small island that he still was eating fish and a lot of the healthier foods. And I thought this is this is the problem is that in my profession, for example, people enter with a burning desire to serve. Sometimes there's a muddling and towards the end of their career. They're focusing on pensions and drop schemes and all these things. And then you come out the other end, and you've served and you're, you know, arguably broken. So what is that thing for you to get up and get excited about every day. And I think the military kind of deals with this too, if you lose that purpose. You know, if you're doing a job you hate, you probably don't want to do it to 100. But if you can find something that still motivates you to get up, that has to be one of the keys to longevity.

 34:02

Yeah, I 100% agree. Especially. I mean, I even remember thinking in my military career, when I took like, extended leave, like a 30 day leave or something. Toward the end of it. I'm just like, Man, I need to I need to do something like I need to go back and do something because I'm losing my mind right now. So I think there's a lot of value to that. And you hear a lot of retirees and people transitioning from the military, like you're so used to just go go go and then when you retire, you lose that. I guess identity and, and yeah, like you said sense of purpose, because you're so used to your body, so indoctrinated to just showing up to work every day and getting the job done and doing things that when you stop doing things, I think it's I think it's dangerous. And also when people retire to they lose. You've spoken about that. They lose their tribe, they lose their community, and they become detached And I'm sure that attributes sort of, well, that can't, that can't be good for anybody.

 James Geering 35:06

Now, we need, you know, obviously groups of all kinds of special operations and regular military, in all our strategic locations, because we never know when the next thing is gonna kick off your center Asia, most of the activity is obviously in the Middle East at that point, what

was that like for you and your team? Was there, you know, a sense of FOMO to use a young person's term?

 35:30

Yes, definitely. And now is like, that was very, it's still kind of bugs me a little bit to be honest. Because if you talk to any SF guy, Bill, and they hear like, You're in first Italian, they'll just think you're in the party group. And you didn't, you didn't really contribute, you know, which, which I mean, to be fair, I didn't go to Afghanistan, Iraq as a big array like that came later when I went to flight school. So I mean, I guess there's merit to that I never, I never was the guy that like, you know, got blown out or saw friends get blown up, which is a blessing, obviously. But there's also still that like, man, yeah, and I did not take combat as Greenbrae. So there is that FOMO aspect of that, that side of it? Definitely. Yeah, I'm not, I'm not ashamed to admit it. I, I wish I would have gotten some, but probably it was a blessing.

 James Geering 36:24

But it exists in the fire service, too. I mean, we have what we call the war years in New York, for example, the 70s 80s, where they were responding to a huge amount of fire. No matter what people try and tell other people on Instagram, the modern day Fire Service does not run on a huge amount of fires. And so the chance of us actually making an entry on a fire, and finding a person and pulling them out alive, is extremely slim. But every single one of us takes that same risk when we respond to each and every fire and we take it seriously. But you know, you can't only one person or one team can be the one that killed Bin Laden, you know, only one group of firefighters can be the ones that responded to Grenfell in London. But everyone else is still part of the of the overall machine. So it's a weird thing. And I think it's really the ego, isn't it? I mean, of course, you want to be part of the solution. But it's, it's really your ego that struggles that you weren't the guy that pulled that person out.

 37:20

Yeah, there was a lot of ego that goes into all of this. Being in special operations, I think you're just constantly surrounded by the Stasi drone. And you guys and you know, I mean, you want to be the best because I think it's just ingrained in your head that you want to, you want to be the coolest guy in the room, you know, there's definitely you got to be every aspect of it for sure. But as firefighters you guys, I think my my cousin is a firefighter and he was telling me some of his stories. And I'm just like, man, like your guys's normal day on the job is somebody else's, probably worst day of their life. Almost almost every day. You think about it from that dialect perspective. Pretty wild to think about that.

 James Geering 38:06

Yeah, well, I think it's a lot of the trauma that we accumulate usually isn't in fire. I've got some fire related trauma that I wrote about in the book that was pretty fucking horrific. And all my there's a there's a elements of that story that was crazy from almost like a spiritual side as well. But it's the, you know, the gang violence, the the traffic accidents, you know, the

domestic violence, that kind of thing that that racks up, and that's not so heroic, you know, to film, but these are the things you know, some of us are at the acute events, a lot of us, it's, as you said that day in day out kind of death by 1000 cuts versus, you know, one one decapitation slice,

 38:46

right, and you're literally seeing the worst of society, you know, like be exposed? Where do I go to a normal person? You don't even know that's happening? You know, you guys are there on the scene. So yeah, I'm sure that that's got to be difficult to deal with.

 James Geering 39:03

Yeah, absolutely. And it's, it can become a strength if it's addressed. And this is, you know, obviously, what we're going to talk about today is so many people that come on here with so many different backgrounds from Kagan, you know, being a incredible pilot to British shs and all the other people, you know, we're trying to reframe this idea that talking about mental health as weakness, you know, and we know it's not now but we need enough of these voices to kind of dispel this myth. So, you spend four years in Asia, what makes you decide to reevaluate your role within the military?

 39:39

Yeah, so my son was born in 2014. So I was I that was after three years on a team and my wife was also active duty so she was an officer in the army. And I was gone so much in in group I loved it, but it wasn't conducive to the Being a father, in my opinion, I know a lot of guys make it and do well and succeed as a parent, or a dad as a guide, but I kind of saw the writing on the wall that I was gonna be, I was gonna have to prioritize the army over my family if I wanted to excel in that role. So I went back to the drawing board. And actually, before I even enlisted in the army, I tried to drop a Warrant Officer packet to go to flight school. But the process was taking forever. So that's when I reevaluated and started to go in at an x ray contract and unless, so that was always kind of in the back of my head. Though, I wanted to go to flight school, I heard aviation was, you know, really, a really chill like atmosphere and a really good community. So, so that's what I did. I dropped my flight packet, and then got into flight school and went to Fort Rucker into 15 and started flight school.

 James Geering 41:04

So when you say fly school, which kind of airframe so you end up working with?

 41:09

Yeah, sorry. So in the army, it's helicopters. So it was a rotary wing aircraft, they do have a little fixed army. But that's like, you have to be really lucky to get one of those spots. The selection process is interesting in Army Aviation is basically like, whatever the army has

available for aircraft. That's what your class gets to select from. So you can be an all star and not even get your top choice, because the army didn't have that available when you go to your selection, though.

 James Geering 41:42

So you went through a very physical selection for SF, how did that contrast when it came to the aviation side?

 41:50

Yeah, it was night and day. It was, it was actually frustrating, to be honest, because you go, I went from being this established Staff Sergeant in federal court, like, finally kind of found myself on the team and felt like I had a rhythm and you know, had pretty good control and pretty good continuity with my team and what I was doing, and then you get, I went to Fort Rucker, and I thought I was going to be this badass Greenbrae, you know, come in there, and everybody was gonna, like, bow down to me and stuff. And I get there and I get this W actually only gonna get a warrant officer one rank, when you first get there, you get this like, walks candidate rank, it's just a web app on your chat. For everybody on board, Rucker knows that you're at the bottom of the totem pole, because everybody there is an aviator and a warrant officer. So I basically went from being a cool effect to being a basically a private on port rocker. It was, it was an interesting transition, for sure. And then the first course that you do, before you even go to flight school, you have to go to warrant officer candidate school to become a warrant officer. And that's just it was for five weeks. And it's it was a joke, like, the the the CADRE there are, like CW threes, who some of them are like cooks, and they yell at you and act like you know, they're super tough. And you're just, you know, in the back of your mind, you're just like, okay, like, let's just get this over with. But it was breathtaking. Because, yeah, you go from being a bad at it being treated like shit again.

 James Geering 43:43

Yeah, I moved fire departments four times. And you know, the first one, obviously, I was completely green. The second one, I've only been the one before 10 months, and then I went so still completely green. But then I come out east and now I've got it not a huge amount of time. But I've got like five years and two very, very busy departments east coast and west coast. And then go the next one. And that's when I start seeing the shout in the chest beating and then you see people actually perform on the fire ground and you're like, you're not as good as you think you are a you know, and then fast forward another five years I go to my last one, I've got 10 years on the job. And again, you know, people peacocking around some of them are the humble ones. You know, usually the good ones are peacocks, usually the ones that are dogshit and, you know bites by the fourth time the calluses on your tongue start building up from biting it so much, but you're the new guy and you play the game and you you know, keep yourself to yourself, but you can see plain as day. who's walking the walk, and who's just fucking full of shit.

 44:44

Oh, yeah, absolutely. And it's funny too, because you we had this one cadre who was like a former aviator foreign pilot. And he thought it was exactly what you said he was peacocking everywhere. I thought he was It's like hot shit. And then once you finally like, get further in the pipeline and realize, like you start hearing about his reputation and like, you know how he got in trouble. And that's what I did to Katherine. Or like, you know, the terrible pilot, or I don't remember what it was exactly. But yeah, exactly like he is just, you know, thinks he's super tough because he's in charge of all these candidates. And, you know, the reality is he washed out of somewhere. And that's the only reason he has the job.

 James Geering 45:29

Yeah, we have him in the fire service, too. Well, my memory serves me right, because I know we talked a few weeks ago now, you found yourself flying initially in the regular army. So talk to me about that experience.

 45:42

Yeah, so yeah, so after flight school, went to graduated, and went to Savannah, Georgia, and went to third cab, so third Combat Aviation Brigade. And that was my first, obviously, trying to have fights both on the brand new w one, like I don't remember 100 hours at Applied score. And it was interesting, because it was almost the same experience that I had at Fort Rucker when I showed up as a brand new candidate, like your bottom of the end of the totem pole. And even though you're worn officer, you still get treated like a private ironically. So all the enlisted guys in aviation are maintainers. So they're in charge of doing maintenance on their aircraft and make keeping the aircraft liable. So it's an interesting dynamic, because they don't have a lot of time to do like all the details that a normal unit has private to do, typically. So that fell on the warrant officers. But typically, the brand new warrant officers don't remember one day in advance, it was like, I remember it gets super hot in the thumbnail, it was like 100 degrees and heat index was probably one panel and 15 and fire extinguishers exploded, and these conics is outside. And it was me and my buddies job to go out there and clean out these complexes that were just full of foam. And we had cracker walkins out there. And we were sweating our app off for I don't remember how long it took. But yeah, we were both just like, what are we doing? Like, what? What did we sign up for? We thought we were going to be cool pilots. And now we're here cleaning out con X's and doing stuff that, you know, we never imagined doing as a pilot, you know? So it's kind of funny to think back on that.

 James Geering 47:38

Well, I know I don't know if it's the same phone but our a triple F form that we have, which we'll use for Class B fires. Now they realize that they have forever chemicals and so they're carcinogenic. So that's always fun. When you think back of all the time you were covered from head to toe, and then you're like, oh, okay, I was just smothering myself and cancer basically.

 47:55


Yeah, shocker that no he asbestos in every army building that exists?

 James Geering 48:01

Yeah. Now there's I'm sure there's many a fascination with mold from top to toe as well.

 48:05


Oh, yeah, for sure. Yeah, that's the plastic army. Right there. Anybody in the army will tell you that. Every building has his best.

 James Geering 48:15

Yeah, my friend will be the you went to school with in England, he became a he's a parachute instructor. And he does the carpet, they call it Oh, my God, I'm blanking, you would be the perfect person to ask what's the name of the training, you do seer, the seer training. So he did both of those. But he told some stories where like Barris didn't even have hot water or whatnot that you would need at Europe, you know, but this is supposed to be where the luxuries are. But they weren't, you know, and broken windows and all this stuff. So the British people think that our military have been taken care of, and there's, you know, a lot of areas or bases that you know, most, most British people wouldn't really want to stay the night and so it was kind of interesting hearing his perspective of the British army to

 49:00

Yeah, that's funny. And yeah, same with like the American army. It's the same thing. There's all trash, and maybe not all there's new ones that are nice. But yeah, you're supposed to be performing like the top of your game. And you're expected to do all these, you know, intense political things and your environments to crap, but whatever, you get the right part of the experience. Well, where

 James Geering 49:23

I hear, you know, they do get the best tools, the best training, etc is a special operations Special Forces community. So walk me through your flying and regular army at the moment. What was that journey like back to the Special Special Forces community as an aviator?

 49:39

Yeah, so I got really fortunate and my brigades, the third guy was deploying a couple of months after I got there initially. So I got to deploy. already. I remember when it was, I think, October 2017. And it was a great experience because I got to build a ton of flowers. So to try out for the ones they did, which are ended up, they required you to have 500 flight hours and be a pilot in command, which usually coincide with around three to 500 hours when you actually make pilot and command. So I was fortunate because I got all those hours on that deployment, which put

me in a great position to drop my packet for the 160s while I was still deployed. And basically, once I got back from Afghanistan, hit the ground running. And I think I had a month off until I went to assessment, which, um, which worked out great because I was in deployment shape, which is, you know, nine months of just hitting the gym twice a day or whatever as much as you can and eating pretty well. So well, eating well for deployment effect me but, you know, prioritizing that. So, but my regular army experience was pretty awful. I was at the point where I was either going to make make it into 168, or I was going to get out of the Army, like I was just, I was fed up and I was done getting treated. Like a child, I guess you could say, I've done being micromanaged. And, and frankly, the mission that we're doing in the regular army is at pilots was not what I signed up to be a pilot, or to do with the pilot, like it was just going from airfield airfield dropping off supplies. And, you know, we did a couple like combat missions, but even those weren't, they weren't what I envisioned, and they weren't. It wasn't as gratifying as I thought it'd be. So I wanted to get back in the action. And then also the community Special Operations, you can't beat it, though. I knew that I knew the grass is greener, and I needed to get get back on that side of the fence.

J

James Geering 51:54

Well, this was hard. I think we talked about this before, when, for example, I was in Anaheim, California. That was the bar was set. So high. And I talked about this over and over again. And that forged such tight brotherhood and sisterhood because if you made it through the crucible that was there one year probation, you know, that's a pretty amazing feat. 25% of each class will be washed out by the time we got that year. So then when you go to somewhere, and I use my last places, the kind of extreme example that is so far from that, I found it mentally it was it was bad for my mental health. Because the whole time you're like, I know where we should be. And not only are you so far from it, there's no desire to even fucking start heading down that road to get back there. And this last one protects the biggest theme park in the world. So God forbid something happens one day, my thing was like, it's going to be absolutely horrendous. It's not going to be Oh, three people, it's going to be 300 people, 1000 people. So it really was I mean, debilitating to me trying to constantly swim upstream and be part of the solution. And don't get me wrong. There were other people in department that were trying to, but there were so many they'd already been down. It just had given up and there's a lot of people that should never have been wearing the uniform in the first place. So I understand that. You talked about the the camaraderie and the tightness in SF, mentally, what was your time on the regular side? Did they have any detriment to you?

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53:23

Yeah, so that's, yeah, I'll start getting into it right now. That's actually when everything started going downhill. So it was it was after I left at that and went to flight school at Fort Rucker, so it wasn't right away. So I went to the other 15. And everything was great. And then my daughter was born in May 2016. And then a few months after that, I just, I don't know what happened. It's like a flip just a switch just flipped in my brain. And I just started having these super intense, like depressive suicidal thoughts. And I honestly like the day cannot look back and tell you, like, what happened, whether there was an incident that happened, or what I know like reflecting back on it now that I'm sure well, I know for a fact that leaving SF had a big factor in it because, like you said, I was hurt. Like I bet I was at the top of my game. I was surrounded by literally brothers on my team. We had a really tight group. And we were just all type a go getter. And

then I leave that and for what I think is going to be a great career, or a great alternative, I guess. And I'm kind of punched in the face with Oh crap, like, what did I do? Like am I you know, am I going to be satisfied in this life like in this career And then Pair that with the fact that my daughter was a she was a rough baby. I love her to death. But she was a rough baby, she had very, very cranky and separation anxiety to iMac. And then my wife was working full time two and a job that she just liked. I think it was just a bunch of different factors that compiled and just finally my brain dead, like, Fuck you, I'm done. You need to figure something else out. Like, I'm gonna help you do that.

 James Geering 55:31

We just to jump in when you were around this time. I mean, I get the whole grieving the tribe that you had. And that's a big, big part of your story, a big part of my story. Where were the elements of sleep deprivation? Were you finding yourself flying at night? Or was that not a factor at that point?

 55:48

No. So I wouldn't say that was a factor. But I would say my daughter being up at night was probably a factor. And the ironic thing is I didn't even so when all this when this will happen, I didn't think of it as like, I left SF, and this is why I'm feeling this way. There was none of that in the moment or in the time, this is just me reflecting back on it. And now that I have clear, I can look at that. Okay, that that definitely attributed to it. It wasn't like, it wasn't like in the moment, I was like, oh, yeah, that's, you know, this sucks that this is why this is happening. I had no idea what's happening. And I was trying to get out of it desperately. So yeah, I think sleep deprivation definitely played a part in it, because my daughter was a baby, you know, crying all the time. And we're up in the middle of the night, and then waking up at 4am for flight school, you know, to catch the bus. So yeah, that definitely played a role on it for sure.

 James Geering 56:48

So you get selected for the SF side, talk to me about the the bar that was set flying in that organization, and then did that transition back into that group and the high level of demand that was required of you did that have a healing effect for the moment.

 57:10

So the biggest it did, for sure, once I got back into like special operations. So I'll backtrack a little bit. So my like, just to kind of set the stage. So this depression, I'll just summarize it real quick. And we can dive deep in deeper later, for one, two, this depression lasted throughout the deployment in Afghanistan, and then it almost lopsided and transformed into this like, intense anxiety. I didn't know that guy at the time, but it would be, I would get these like crazy, dizzy spells, and my body was just off kilter. And, like, I'd be walking and it felt like the world was tilted at 45 degrees. And I just like had to do everything in my power, just walk straight, it was to the door. So long story short, when I was when I got to the one thing that what was going on, it wasn't really the suicidal thoughts, the depression, but it was like intense anxiety. And I was

constantly on edge and constantly, almost like scared that I would fall over and more like nervous that somebody would be like, What the hell's wrong with that guy? There would be expectation the trying to maintain you know that, that posture again, I was still a new guy, but the community there was so much better, so much more mature, everybody was everybody's there for the right reason than everybody wanted to be there. From the command down, like it was just a very professional organization. And it's also a unique part of special operations. Because most of the people there have been in the army, I would say, eight to 10 years before they even go to that organization. So all the pilots are a lot more mature individuals and most of them have families and kid but not not as much like a young guy game and battle forces are like Ranger Battalion or the seals are.

 James Geering 59:15

So you deploy before obviously, you see, you know, much higher up tempo when you're actually flying into the SF community. question I always ask people and the backstory is simply through the media, especially in the US, we get a very polarized perspective of view of war, depending on which channel you choose. Either kill them all that God sort them out, or they're all baby killers. And then you have the middle where the actual men and women arguably sometimes children are sent overseas with our flag on their shoulder and they witnessed the things they actually witness. So you have a slightly different perspective because obviously you're in an aircraft but the first part is a two part question. The first part was there a moment when you realize regardless of policy sent you to where you were, that there were some horrific people that needed to be taken care of.

 1:00:07

Yeah, so I do have a unique perspective as like, as an aviator, because I wasn't the guy on the ground that was actually going out. And, you know, like, capture killing, doing whatever, whatever the mission was. So from my perspective, I didn't see that firsthand. So I'm, I'm not going to like, bullshit you and pretend, you know, I have like some crazy insight into it. So it really what I would, what I would receive was just from like Intel recording or things like that of what was going on. So it's more like a outside looking in type of thing from from a pilot's perspective. As you know, it'd be a lot different if I was on the ground actually, actually getting after it. I know that doesn't answer your question that well,

 James Geering 1:00:53

no, but it does. I mean, because that's the thing. I had Dave Grossman a couple of times, and he talks about, you know, the proximity of the kill has a different impact. And obviously, a bayonet kill is very different than a drone kill, for example, even if they're both instigated by, you know, a soldier. So conversely, maybe you have more insight on this side. Another area that is totally underreported when it comes to war is the kindness and compassion amidst this chaos on a battlefield, because we tend or the media tends to tar an entire nation with the same brush. So we're at war with Iraq or Afghanistan, and they don't really underline that there's amazing human beings that are being terrorized by terrorists in their own country. So what about that you're you're overseas, you're in the Middle East, were there any kind of moments of kindness and compassion that you remember?



1:01:42

Not firsthand, because we didn't. So I didn't interact with the like local populace too much other than like, the people who would work on the base or whatever. But they were, I mean, they were always great. They always were super friendly. But I know, just from my experience of being over there, that it is the minority, typically, that's, you know, doing the perfect things, and the majority of the population just wants to be left alone. Like, they just want to be left to their daily, daily routine and live in peace. And the really sad part is just how, how, like, beautiful that part of the world is, like you especially flying around over there in Afghanistan, like, that could be a tourist location, you know, there could be, there could be a top 10 location to go there. If you know, they could just bigger, bigger this shit out and figuring figure out all the politics and you have to figure out a way to clean it up. But firsthand, I don't have much experience with like, actually, like interacting with the local populace as much as other people wouldn't.



James Geering 1:02:49

I went on a cruise about a year ago, my wife and we went to Labadee Haiti. And it was kind of ironic, because the there was a comedian on the ship. And he goes, Oh, do you got to fake Haiti today? Because it was basically like Jurassic Park for tourists, there was literally this tall electrified fence to keep the Haitian people out of this corner of their own island where we as tourists were going, what is so sad is just like you said, Haiti, and obviously, the Dominican Republic is attached to it is one of the most beautiful places I've ever seen on on Earth. And so if there was a way of navigating the corruption over there, you know, and addressing, you know, the violence has come out of desperation, they would be an affluent island, because people would flock there, I mean, the tourism will be incredible. So just like you said, it's so sad, you know, whether it's Mexico with the ripple effect of our, you know, drug prohibition, and therefore, this massive consumer in the US is driving crime, the other side of the border. So many of these countries, if they were just able to navigate to a healthy industry, with all you know, the rising tide lifts all ships, all of us would benefit, rather than the poor people who hate you right now. It's pockets of it are literally war zones. And, you know, there's all these people that would kill to be tourists in Haiti and experience their beautiful island, but right now, you know, if you went there, the chances of getting your head cut off are pretty, pretty high. So it's such an irony that the tyranny of the few can make so much damage in you know, a city or a country or, you know, the ripple effect over entire planet.



1:04:33

Yeah, it's wild. And I mean, so far, we are on the solution for it. I don't really, I don't really know if there is one, you know, other than, like, taking over, which obviously, we're not gonna do. So. Yeah. It is interesting to see that there. I mean, there's probably, I don't know, there's countless examples of places like that blows my mind.



James Geering 1:04:56

So you talks about feeling like you're walking on a 45 degree angle If you're flying a helicopter that needs a massive degree of skill and accuracy how did you navigate one when you are

that needs a massive degree of skill and accuracy, how did you navigate one when you are battling the other?

 1:05:13

Yeah, that's a very good question. So this is such a weird and bizarre phenomenon. But I never experienced that in the aircraft. I don't, I had no explanation why, but for some reason, I don't know if it was just the adrenaline took over, or what, but when I was sitting down in that cockpit, I never had that happen. And that was, that was one of the biggest reasons that I was so hesitant to actually, like, speak up about what was going on. And it took me so long, because I could still do my job. And I was still, I was still flying well. So yeah, ironically, that never happened in the cockpit. It was only when it was just it was weird. It was random. I don't even know what triggered it initially. Later on, I kind of started identifying it. But initially, it would just it would just happen like one day, it would be all day, I would just feel off kilter. And then the next day I feel fine. And then I would have like, instant blackout type moment where my just a head over heels feeling. And I'd have to I'd catch myself, then it would weird. There was no pinpointing what was going on. I don't even know how to explain it better than that. And that's what the doctor struggled with to.

 James Geering 1:06:31

Yeah, well, this is the problem is that with anxiety, the body keeps score, the nucleus of a lot of these are psychological, but they're manifesting physically, physically. So they're testing the physical side going well, everything looks good, though. Yeah. Because the nervous system is telling it to do this thing, but there's no disease process actually evident.

 1:06:50

Yeah, exactly. It was a straight fight or flight is like the best way to explain it, you know, that feeling when like, you're about to get in a fight or something and you just your body just, you know, the hair starts picking up on your arm, it was just like that. But in normal situation, like, What the hell is going on? Why is this? You know, why am I like, freaking out right now, for no reason?

 James Geering 1:07:11

Well, I want to get to your journey. And then obviously, the transition before we do, though, you're flying now, you know, Special Forces level? What are some, I mean, I don't expect specifics, but what are some career kind of stories from that part of your your career.

 1:07:28

Um, so I don't have too many like, cool, badass stories. But I will say, flying in that unit is like, it's probably the coolest experience that I don't want to go that far. But that someone in the military in military aviation can help, let's do that. Because the training and the technicality of

flying is just on another level. It's, the capabilities are amazing. And the things that you can do in a helicopter just are mind blowing, once you get to that level. Even just landing in the dust, for example, landing with no visual references or anything, and just literally flying up a little computer screen from, you know, 4040 feet down. And landing an aircraft is just incredible things that you can do. And yeah, just the experience was awesome. I don't, I don't want to go into too much detail about what they actually do. But the technicality from the regular army go into special operation. It's like flying, it's like driving a, like Toyota Corolla and then going into a Ferrari, you know, and maxing that thing out to the women, and just dragging as hard as you can, like, I mean, that's probably the best way to explain it, that it go, you go from driving the limit to driving on the autobahn, and, you know, just seeing what you got. I think that's a good way to like sum it up some of the flying experience and ones that you

 James Geering 1:09:07

so talk to me about what made you finally decide to transition out and then kind of parallel that you've got these these, you know, unknown bouts of anxiety at the moment, you know, how do those two kind of take us through today?

 1:09:22

Okay, so I'm gonna have to go back quite a bit. So I deep dive into this. So we'll get back to why it's gone. I'm just gonna kind of go through my story and just interrupt me if I get long winded or started babbling but um, so flight school 2016 daughter's born I spoke about that. So I, I go into the depression now. And on the outside, I'm still I'm still doing really well. I'm still performing early flight school, but it's literally non stop 24 hours a day or darker when I'm sleeping. thought of just these recurring thoughts of, you know, the federal budget uncontrolled, didn't want them to be there, but they were there. And I put up with that for a while. And then I can't remember the exact timeline. But I got to the point where I was like, man, like, I am terrified of what's going on in my brain. And I'm, I don't know how to like, stop it. And I don't know how to get out. So I brought myself I drove myself to the chaplain on Fort Rucker, and this was like, this is a huge leap of faith, because you can get kicked out of Flight School in a heartbeat. If you have some like this going on. Like they don't, especially if you have to go on medication. Like that's really the kicker is if you go to medication, and you'll be grounded from buying. So this was why I was like, I had held it so long. And I had no other choice, though. In my mind, I was like, I need to do this or something perfect is going to happen. So when the chaplain told him what was going on, and he did the right thing, he drove me to behavioral health, which, again, is like the scariest place in the world for someone in the army to be because you don't even want to be in a parking lot of behavioral health unless you're like, in processing or outcropping duty station just because of the perception of what's going on. So I go in, and I do this. I kid you not, it was like a 15 minute written survey. Like questions were like, Do you have any suicide? suicidal thoughts? Yes. Get planned? Because Oh, no, you know, and no, do you want to do it now? All those all those windows? And then I went back and talked to somebody for I think it was five minutes. Not even kidding. And all he did was ask me the questions again, that I already filled out. And then at the end, she was like, Okay, well, since you don't have any plans to do it, and you don't want to do and you don't have any tension to do it. I think you're good to keep training, stay in flight school. And that was it. And I was like, Are you? Are you freaking kidding me? Like, I just took a huge risk and came to behavioral health, like to tell you that I'm having these suicidal thoughts. And I'm

scared that I'm going to, like do something. And you're just going to say I'm fine. And let me keep going. So but yeah, that that was there. And I was like, Okay, well, not going back there. Because that wasn't helpful. So then the next she's only, you know, two years. I'm just internalizing all of it and just trying to desperately find a way to get out of these, these thought patterns. And just trying to heal myself on my own. I tried journaling, self help books, meditation, tried praying, tried listening to like worship music, trying to go into religion. And I grew up Christian. So that was, like, ingrained in me. And it just, it sucked, because it just made me like pissed off at every like mental health expert out there that tells you to do all those things. Because it wasn't working. And it was just getting it was the continent rat race, just trying to try to get out of the storm that I was in. But it didn't seem possible. So my way of like, coping with it was all those things I just mentioned. And then just constantly trying to, like, do something, get myself to the next level of my career. And that was kind of, I think, looking back now I think that's all like, at the end of the day, like saved me from doing something detrimental and from getting, making that terrible decision was I constantly like so. I want to do, obviously graduate flight school. And the funny thing about this as to as I graduated flight school is the distinguished honor grad. So like any other authors, and I ended up being the top guy in flying and academics and like I'm going through all this shit, like it's, and that's a perfect example, your oldest story, the perfect soldier, the perfect, you know, the guy that had the perfect life, taking his life and you're just like, how the hell did that happen? Nobody's coming. And it because you when you're a high performer, like you're so good at just going continuing to perform and harvesting things in and just holding it in. So I don't know if that's the reason but that's what it was for me and I just had, I constantly had a goal that and that's what I think kept me going so it's graduate flight school than it was alright, when I get to my unit, everything's gonna be better to do now and then I applied school, and then I get there and nothing's better and then it's like okay, I'm Going to Afghanistan, this will be fun, I get to do my job, then I get there and it doesn't get better. And then it's alright, I'm gonna go to one fix Did you know those of constantly like, peeking the next thing and trying to heal through that, but it wasn't effective at all, it's just, they're just kicking the can down the road, which I mean, thank God for that because I'm here now, but I think the end result would have been a lot different if I got help earlier. But then at the same time, I wouldn't have this experience to share in the story to like, try to help others with you know,

J James Geering 1:15:37

just to jump in the, because I want to make sure I don't miss this point. You were doing meditation you were leaning into, you know, religion, all these things. What I've talked about the analogy is when we have the healthy mind, and you and you go to a tall building right now you stand on the roof, and you get close as that invisible hand pushing you back on what the what are you doing get back from the edge of the building. And it sounds like from I've heard from so many people that have been suicide, especially the ones that actually have made the plan have stood there, you know, holding the gun, or some of them even, you know, completed the attempt and they just survived is that hand is almost like it's behind them. Now, you're a burden to your family, you know, the world, we better off without you. And you know, it's kind of shoving them the other way. One of the things that seems to be a common denominator to getting to that point is for example, alcohol. When you look back, do you think that it was the meditation, the faith, the focusing and throwing yourself into all the skills that made you the best pilot that kept that just as an intrusive thought and not actually the completion of the thought?



1:16:50

Um, I actually, that's a good question. I actually haven't thought about that. I think so. And I think, I think the fact that in the back of my mind, it was just always like, I never, I never gave into the thoughts and I never wanted them there. Like, it was more frustrating and terrifying at the same time. But all along, it was like, I never, I never accepted them as like, alright, like, this is me talking. It was always just like, this is gonna sound crazy. But there were the excuse me, there was a period where it was gonna sound crazy. That I literally thought like, demons were possessing me because I would I was like, and can like, it's going to be interesting. Hearing people who hear the story because people don't know me really well, when wouldn't say like, I'm like a sold out. Christian. And I know, it's terrible, say but like, I have Christian roots. So like, I would deep dive into prayer and worship and things like that. And my anxiety or depression were would just get worse. And I would go to church. And I literally felt like my body was just being attacked. And so I like in my mind, I was like, man, like, Am I like demon possessed? Like I just had, I was just searching so hard for answers that I had no idea what was going on with me. So but I think, to your point, I think the, like constant drive and the the ability to tell myself that I didn't want that is really what kept me going and what kept me what brought me here today is just knowing that those thoughts were not me again. And they were they were just happening. Like, even though I couldn't control them. It still wasn't you never got to the point where it was like, alright, like, let's just do this, you know, but it did get to the point where it was scary enough that like I had my wife take apart my gun and hide it hide the different pieces from me. So it was definitely real, but it never got to the point where where I actually like tried to do it.



James Geering 1:19:10

But that's an important perspective. Because if you think about I don't know if you've ever had this experience, but I have when I was younger drinking ending up taking a girl home who I That night I told I you know, I told how strongly my emotions to wear. And then we spend the night together and next morning I'm like fuck, and it may not be like full on sex, just even, you know, whatever it was, but I've very honorable person, normally very honest, and alcohol became a distorter of my reality. If I'd been so cold stone cold sober in a cafe at lunchtime, with this individual it never would have ended up getting physical. So you know, you lean in that way like so many people do pre suicide, and now you've been distorted enough where those demons become a reality and you you know you complete suicide. conversely, even though you feel like your prayer, your meditation, your walks, whatever it is, haven't solved the problem, understanding that maybe they're still giving you some strength on the other side to keep that realization that this isn't my mind that this is an intrusive thought. I've never really kind of vocalize this before. But it's interesting. It's a seesaw. And even though you don't feel like, Oh, this is fixed, what's going on? It's still worth doing to keep as much of the strength on your side, which opposes those intrusive thoughts becoming your reality?



1:20:39

Yeah, I think so. I think it was also just like an outlet to just even if it was myself, and I wasn't talking to anybody else, like, get it out, you know, even though it probably would have been or would have been way better. If I spoke with someone else about it. I think it was, as much as it still sucked. I think it was an outlet for me to, like, just get my thoughts out and just kind of, I

don't know, reflect on what was going on. Even though it's extremely difficult. And I it's funny, I even read a journal article or journal article journal submission that I wrote, while I was in it, I read it a couple of months ago. And the crazy thing is that even reading it today, I can tell that I was I wasn't even, I wasn't even brave enough to journal what was really going on with me. Like, you read my journal entry. And I'm just like, dude, like, why were you sugarcoating yourself in a journal entry for yourself? If it's just like, like, you can tell I was just tiptoeing around the real problems and really, like, it's almost like, I was worried somebody was gonna find my journal and read it. You know, it was that type of writing, like, oh, yeah, today, it was a rough day. It's like bullshit, man, you're, you're like, scared, you're gonna slit your throat, like, don't, don't sugarcoat it, you know. So it's just, it was interesting with that.

 James Geering 1:22:09

So you've got this, you know, this intrusive thought thing going on, you're trying all these different tools, you obviously, sadly, were kind of failed by the mental health individual that you met. And it was a lot of box checking at that point. You know, walk me through again, you said at one point, it became anxiety. So when did that shift? And then, you know, what was? What was that journey like for you?

 1:22:32

Yeah, so my whole Afghanistan deployment in the regular army, I was still very much like depressed and having these these thoughts. And then it really started to ship. Once I got back. Actually, it was toward the tail end of that deployment. I remember one night, we were walking to the chow hall, I think it was on night shift at that point. And I was just walking with my buddies, and I literally got so dizzy that I fell over. And I have no idea what happened or what like, what like led up to that or why it started happening like that, then, since then, that's when the disease started. And it didn't get to a point where I actually knew what the hell was going on until, like, probably a year and a half ago. So um, so that whole deployment at the end of it, I was having these weird, dizzy spells, and I just hold it all in. Because, you know, that's what we do. And I get back, and I go, except for the 1/6 year. And that whole assessment I was, I was struggling like it was it took everything I had just to survive the extreme but like, so I distinctly remember the band of assessment, you have to stand in front of this board of like higher ranking guys in the 160s, like super respected individuals. And you have to give them a brief basically, on this thing that you have no idea what you're doing, you're just like trying to find the best solution for it. And obviously, these guys in the room are experts. So they just say sit there and pick you apart. And then just go over your entire assessment and the entire week prior, and basically just tell you how bad you failed to your face. And you're just sitting there taking it and I remember like, Thank God I was at a so you have to sit at attention like army style, but thank God I was like bidding because my mind was like, I can't even remember what the people were saying to me, except for I remember this one DW five distinctly said to me, he said, So I first saw my friend that so on paper, I was like the perfect candidate for the 160s Like, former Special Forces guy just got made a pilot in command and got 500 hours within like a year in the regular army. So I was a superstar on paper, you know, physically fit. And then. So the CW five, asked me, he's like, Nick, so you're an honor grad to fly school gulberg another, you know, check that blog check that blog, he's, you know, a plus student. So yeah, the TW five really respected guy in the regiment looks at me and I said, Nick, what happens when you run out of steam? Like, you are such a high performer and you know, the history of being such a

high performer, like, what happens when your body reaches its limit? And I'm just like, holy shit, man, like, That guy can see through me, okay, I can read my mind. But obviously, you know, um, I'll just keep going there, you know, and like, that will happen to me. But in my head, I'm like, like yours. This is already happening to me, like, you know, but it was just ironic to think about that. So anyways, after your assessment, so I get picked up for once they see it. And then I go to my unit. And these dizzy spells are still happening. And But thankfully, like the suicidal thoughts and depression side of that kind of started fading, I wouldn't say it was gone. But it started fading. And it wasn't like incapacitating, a woman every day constantly, like scared that something like that was going to happen, which, to me was a huge win. Like, I felt so much better just because of that, but I was still struggling with the weird, unexplainable defeat goes, and I did not think was anxiety. Like, in my mind, there was no way I was like, Alright, I got through that mental health crisis. Now I found myself again in the ones because I found my identity a little bit. And now I'm just having these weird physical delete inflation. So, but still, I didn't tell anybody about that, I was still just holding it and trying to, you know, soldier on and keep going. So then 2021 I ended up getting a knee surgery because my, I just was having trouble running and decided to get it checked out and get MRI and I had like, a defect in my knee. So I needed surgery where they went and made a plug and put it in my knee. So that put me on a down flip. So I couldn't fly for nine months. And then during that time, I kind of got to the point well, really, my wife got to the point where she was like you need to go, like talk to somebody about the other stuff, too. And I was like, okay, so I did, I talked to the doc quite document that was already on a down flip phone and I was having these deadly spells. I didn't disclose any of my mental health history, because that was a big no known special operation. And I didn't want to I didn't want to jeopardize the future. Because at this point, I'm still trying to get back in the cockpit and trying to fly. So it's on there's another dizzy spell. So they did a they do the right thing they sent me to like the NTA get my ears checked out, get everything checked out. That all came back normal. They sent me to a neurologist, neurologist did all these like nerve testing and things like that? I got brain CTS and all that stuff, MRIs on my neck. And nothing major came out of it. There were like small osteophytes and stuff. But I think I think every pilot has those. So that wasn't anything out of the norm. And then I went back to the flight surgeon and I was like, hey, well, I have always kind of had trouble, like been really tired during the day throughout the day, the past couple years. And so like, what do you think about getting me a sleep study and they were a little apprehensive because same thing of the pilot, like there's a lot of limitations if you get a sleep study and you know the wrong wrong outcome comes out. But I was I needed a solution. So I kind of insisted on it. And I went into the sleep study. And this was Nana Vana. So I went to a civilian doctor first. And after the sleep study, they told me that I got diagnosed with narcolepsy, and I met the criteria for narcolepsy. I was like holy shit, like that's kind of serious, you know, but we have a pilot like, I've been flying all the time and I can't even stay awake apparently. I mean, like, to me, though, at the in the moment, I was kind of relieved because these dizzy spells had to have a reason right? And in my mind, there wasn't mental health because I had gone through mental health shit, and that wasn't happening anymore. I wasn't suicidal as much like I would still have. Every once in awhile when I lay down to go to bed. I have like, you know, thought would come in or whatever, but I was able to let it go, you know, and just get through it. wasn't, it wasn't a revolving thought patterns like it was before. So in my mind, it wasn't mental health, I was done with that. And I made it through that. So narcolepsy was actually relieved because it answered the question of identity that in my mind, it was like, Okay, I'm having these like micro naps all the time, maybe my body's just going to sleep for a second, and then waking up, you know, and interpreting that as, like being good me. So that was my vision for it. And I, I felt good about it. Ironically, like, even though this was like a Forscher, career ender as a pilot, I was still relieved to finally have like a diagnosis and, you know, kind of enhancer. So after that, the Army wanted to do a sleep study on me to confirm the diagnosis of a civilian doctor. And

army has like really strict rules on sleep studies. So I went to Fort Gordon is bleep study with them. And then the results came back like a month later. And they say, I don't have narcolepsy, and I don't meet any of their criteria for narcolepsy. I was like, What the hell, man? So I'm already I'm already permanently grounded. Actually, I didn't, I didn't say that. After the first sleep study, they and I got diagnosed, they put me on a permanent down flip. So they basically said, You're not buying again, because you have this. So now my mind is like, Well, shit, like, what? What the hell am I gonna do you know, like, now I'm in this weird purgatory land of having not being able to fly, but I'm diagnosed, but I'm not diagnosed with the thing that didn't allow me to fly out in this weird spot. So I talked, went back to the flight surgeon. And at this point, I actually had started talking to a psychologist. And that started, I think, like, right before the first sleep study. So we started talking about things. And she was great. But she was also on the opinion, that it was something like biological and it wasn't mental health because of the, like, physical symptoms that I was experiencing. They were so extreme that they didn't think it was like just anxiety. Like they thought it was something underlying that was causing this.



1:32:22

So I go do they tried to give me a third sleep study to actually get me confirm or reconfirm or whatever? debunk the diagnosis, whatever the result would have been? And they wouldn't tell me when to do it. So I went to a sleep provider in Savannah and did a man, what's it called? Yeah, they told me this before when they poke needle in your back. Oh, yeah, the spinal tap. Yeah, spinal tap, it is Spinal Tap. I can, I can remember what they're testing, I tested for hypo cretin, but I can't remember spinal tap. So they're testing for hypoperfusion levels. And that that is like a telltale sign of narcolepsy if your levels are elevated. So that comes back, I don't have any, I can't be diagnosed narcolepsy. So back to the drawing board. This is beginning of 2022. And then, finally, the psychologist had sent me to the psychiatrist and was like, alright, let's, um, I don't think it's anxiety. But let's explore getting you treated for anxiety and see if that helps. So I'm down for it. Because I'm already grounded. I'm already on a down flip. So I can't fly. So I'm just going to try anything at this point. And they, so they started me on, I think Lexapro and I, it took a couple of weeks, but I started to be a little bit of improvement with DW felt. And I noticed that it became to the point where it was, there was a lot more like situational when they would happen. And I could, I could start to identify when it would happen, which was a huge, like, huge, like, shift for me. Kinda like, that's when I started to realize like, okay, maybe it is, like anxiety. Maybe it has something to do with this. But I had to go through three medications to finally get to the point where it was like, okay, like, now I'm kind of feeling good. And then in like, summer, spring, late spring of 2014, through the psychologist, once like, my symptoms actually started getting better. And I was like, I told her I was like, it's like, honestly, it's still happening, but it's night and day compared to what it was. And I find it was when I got on Effexor. And then she read the symptoms of panic disorder to me in one of our sessions and just went down the list. And I was like, Holy shit, like you just described exactly like what's been going on with me, like, how has it not been, you know, identified in the last year that we've been trying to figure this out, you know, but I mean, to her credit, like she, Jeanette, you want it to be very caught at diagnosing or something like that, because that's also like a medical board potentially, out of the army. So she didn't want to, like, do you want me to cover everything else and make sure there wasn't something underlying before she went through that, so I appreciate that. But it was filled with a long journey to get there. Yeah, so that's kind of how it ended. She, so I stayed on the factor, and I'm still on it now. And now it's just like, it's there sometimes, but it's way way better. It's like 95% better and now all I noticed when it's gonna happen like now I happens in like large crowds or like, you know, baseball stadiums, things like

that. But it's situational. And I, I know it going into, which is so much different perspective. So yeah, that's, that's what brought me here today. I'm sure I missed, like a lot of little details throughout it. But that's, that's the synopsis.

J James Geering 1:36:21

So I've heard a lot of negativity when it comes to antidepressants and medication. But I think the the kind of middle ground is for some people, it's a kind of a Gangplank between the crisis they're in and hopefully the the ultimate holistic decision. So for example, in on the medical side, you know, you get someone who has blood pressure through the roof, you know, blood pressure pills is definitely something to bring him down instead of stroke out. But my philosophy is, okay, that's fine. As long as there's a conversation about weight loss, and, you know, change the diet and exercise and an exit strategy off that medication. You finding this is working for you, which I think is very important. What about on the holistic side? Is there a conversation about not being unaffected down the road?

i 1:37:10

And that's a great question, because right now, it's still fairly fresh. So I'm still like, I'm, I wouldn't say I'm content with it. But compared to where I was when I was going through all that crap. I'm thankful for it. Yeah. Right. But that being said, I have heard of all the holistic things that are prevalent now, and I'm super intrigued and super interested. But I just got out in May. So I haven't like been able to deep dive into it. I've just been kind of like, okay, this is working. Let's roll with it for now. And then yeah, I am. I do want to seek alternative things so that I don't have to take this the rest of my life because, yeah, we all know that the negative the taking medications your whole life. So yeah, the answer the question. Yeah, I'm definitely interested in that. I just haven't opened that door yet. I

J James Geering 1:38:04

Yeah. But it's an important part of the conversation, because there are people on the show where the medication was the thing, you know, and that's, so there's not a demonization of medication at all, but it's like, okay, that's the thing. Now, you know, Where's where's the angle using this tool to navigate to the other side? My wife actually has gone through a similar thing herself recently. And she didn't have a good experience and medication but she found herself in the ER, basically, testing just like you were okay. Well, eliminate is not my heart. It's not this. It's not that. So at least then there's not the anxiety about I'm dying. I'm having a heart attack and, you know, got an aneurysm in my body, all these things that anxiety just kind of amplifies these fears. But she's leaned into breathwork and meditation, and I will be talking about new calm before the app that I just came across. Yeah,

i 1:38:58

yeah. It's awesome. I just finished the Well, I think today is my last day, the like week trial. And I mean, I don't know if it's placebo, but it's, it's pretty amazing. Like, I've been sleeping with it every night. Right? before? Yeah, it's pretty cool. Like, it's funny when I tell my tell my

colleagues about it. I'm just like, You're not gonna believe it, because it just sounds like music, but your words. When you put it on, you're like, Oh, it's just like bleep music, but it's incredible. So far, it's working for me. I think I'm gonna keep doing it.

 James Geering 1:39:35

One thing because I'm trying to trying to figure out how can you describe it? What are some things that people can can do and be like, Oh, okay, this is different than thing and every so often I'll get the full like, like your body sinking into the bed and your limbs are really heavy and all that stuff. But what I've realized and if you've had this, I'll try and think about things and my brain won't. You can think but then it it'll just disappear, like the brain won't carry on that thought process. So there's definitely something there as your downregulating. Because normally, I have intrusive thoughts. Luckily, they're not dark, but they're the 1000 Fucking things that I need to think about. And I'm stressing about and you know, and it's the monkey mind is the bingo machine. But with that, it's like, oh, I need to do that thing. And then it's gone again, you know? So that's my real observation. Because I think placebo effect is strong, when there's a kind of confirmation bias, like, Oh, this is gonna work. But I think we're this is people like us kind of sounds like bullshit to me. So I think with CBD early on was the same. Like, you know, how can this work and then they report sleeping better, etc, etc. So, that was one big thing for me. Like, when you're going through a session, try and run, let your thoughts run away, and you'll be amazed. It's like, there's someone held a pillow over the face kind of thing. You know, we're, you know, not the you're not suffocating. But but the, the thoughts just kind of just just kind of dissipate after a second or two, it's, it's bizarre to watch.

 1:41:06

That is crazy. And I actually haven't, like done the daytime stuff. So I've only done asleep. Except for I did, I tried the Ignite the other day, I was actually driving to a client meeting. And I was like, I'm gonna get pumped for this. And I put it on and it was, I'm not gonna lie, it was too much like I was like, I've got to go like, be a UFC fighter. I know. I don't need to do this go into client meetings. So it definitely works. And then my wife did. One of the rescues the other day. And she got, like, I made her put headphones on the mask and everything, and just said, Hey, just do this for 30 minutes, because she was stressed out, and she came out and she was like, I wonder if that's like what heaven would feel like, at work? I think it worked if that's what your thoughts went to.

 James Geering 1:41:57

Exactly. Like Dang,

 1:41:59

man is crazy. Yeah, it's really cool. Totally cool to see stuff like that come out.

 James Geering 1:42:05

James Geering 1:41:00

Yeah, well, this is, like I said, this, there's a lot of things that sound similar. And this is why, you know, we're trying to put this on its own pedestal and be like this, here's two hours to describe why it's different. And so you understand it. But why I think a huge value is and even with your, your community. Alison breaker has been on here, and she's the Army's kind of one of the neuroscientists and the sleep experts. And she was saying, I think it was Bragg like, after the got the cadre that was running, I think the Special Forces selection, you know, obviously, the candidates are up all night was so are the instructors for hours and hours and hours. And they were having a lot of issues where the CADRE were driving home, and then you know, rolling their cars off the side of the freeway. So whether it's a soldier or a police officer, or firefighter is it just simply sit there and do power nap or, you know, one of the very short ones just to punctuate and reset, so that only you're safe to drive home. But also, when you walk through the door, you know, in selection, you've been screaming at a candidate and doing whatever you guys do. And now you've got to be soft dad and do a tea party with your five year old, you know, to be able to punch her right there. That in itself, I think is an amazing tool for our community.



1:43:21

Yeah, for sure. I think one of the hardest things to do is get people to actually devote the time to something like that. So if it actually like shows benefits, and people see the benefits, then it becomes so much more valuable. Because even like with meditation for me, I got to the point where I was like, that have been working for me, you know, and it's not worth the 10 minutes that I need to spend doing it. But if something works, like it's so much easier to find that time to do it. And I think I think there's a lot of value to that, because that's usually the number one deterrent for people doing that. I can't spend, you know, 2030 minutes giving it like, I got shipped. Yeah, you know, yeah, I gotta get home and see my kid. I can't you know what I mean? So, yeah, it's cool. The seatbelt can actually work. And hopefully people use it.



James Geering 1:44:13

Absolutely. Well, I mean, it's also the fact that as passive, as you know, when you're meditating, and you're meditating, there's an element of work. All right, I see my thoughts. I'm trying to let them go focusing on my breath. And try not to think about how many minutes I got left, all that stuff. And I can't nap either. So I can't just lay there and take a 30 minute catnap never have despite being a firefighter, but it's passive. So you lie there, you may go into a kind of much deeper state, you may seem a little bit more surface level, but either way it's working. And that's what's so crazy about it and when you feel refreshed after you start to go, that 30 minutes is worth it's worth its weight in gold because now I'm so much more awake and focused and I'm actually a lot more efficient. So that was an investment of my time rather than as you said that was a waste of my time.



1:45:02

Yeah, that's true. Have you tried the focus one yet?



1:45:00

 James Geering 1:45:06

So I've been struggling to get back to write in my book. And I put focus on the other day and bang out an entire chapter. So I'll just leave that right.

 1:45:14

Yeah, so I have this, like, revolving to do is to do on my work schedule. And I have like, 15 things on there right now or whatever. And I, I find myself constantly like jumping from one thing to another. And I was like, you know, like, I'm not really getting as much progress as I want done on like, any one of these things. So let's just, let's try this focus. Let's go like they're trying to hammer out one thing. And yeah, like you said, like I was, I was mind blown with, like, the ability to just get into it. And you're right, it's so passive. Like, it's not like, you don't have to do anything intentionally. You just start working and put it on and it worked. For me, that was

 James Geering 1:45:56

one thing pretty cool to recover is actually the gold for you as well, because that's to me, that's the one that downregulates that's the one that's going to help with the anxiety. So I'm, I'm excited to hear, you know, when you explore with that,

 1:46:08

yeah, I know, I need to, I need to devote more time to that. It's so easy to get caught up in the, you know, rat race every day and try to get everything done feel fat, which is a recurring problem with me just trying to consistently push forward and not giving myself you know, time to time to actually reflect and chill.

 James Geering 1:46:27

Yeah, well, it's like that one guy said in the interview, you know, I mean, what does happen and this of all of us, you know, we, we have to be such dynamos to get to these positions in these professions, and then lives are at stake for them, we're driven to be the highest and best version of ourselves. But at some point, you got to realize that rest and recovery is a massive part of performance.


 1:46:48

Yeah, for sure. Like, you're gonna get to the point where you're burnt out. And if you're not, like, you'll probably get there at some point. And hopefully, you have something like this in place that, you know, you can counter that with, you know, which I didn't. So, yeah, having tools like that is, is often and the cool thing is, in the Special Operations world, you're seeing, you're seeing a shift, or people realizing how important that stuff is. That being said, though, there's still like, a huge stigma with going to behavioral health. And that's kind of one of the things that like, I want to get out there is like, yes, there the stigma, because there's so many unknown to going through it like UK, your career could be over a like you could be, if you're a

pilot, you could be put on a down slip, you're about to deploy, you can be made to stay home on the deployment, because yeah, whatever, whatever the million reasons are, that people don't go get help and don't do things to take care of themselves. I just think it's, it's so much more important, long term for yourself to do that. And take care of yourself. Like, even though it's so hard in the moment, because you have to be vulnerable, you know, and you have to actually, like, have humility and humility, you just have to almost be strong. And be like, Screw it, I'm gonna go do this, but I'm going to take care of myself. I don't care what people think. But, I mean, I was guilty of that period of not, you know, of letting my pride get that up to me. And, yeah,

J James Geering 1:48:37

yeah, well, I mean, again, it's, it's a harder conversation if someone is younger and not married and doesn't have kids. But certainly, you know, when you have family, you know, you want to be there on all the shifts all the fires all the firefights, but ultimately, who are you really doing this for? You're doing it for your family, to protect them at home, in their community in their country. And so if it becomes detrimental to the very people that you adore more than anything, that's when you go look in the mirror and go, Is this about them? Or is this become more about me and my ego, like I need to be seen in Afghanistan deployment after deployment, or, you know, as you said, and a lot of people on here have said recently, you know, I transitioned out because I realized I wanted to be the dad that was that my dad wasn't there, you know, whatever the story was, but you know, there is a balance. And it's the kind of, I know it's overused, but it's the Air aircraft analogy, you know, you have to take your own mask for first before you can help others. And if you burn yourself into the ground, there's going to be a wake of destruction, and you're going to be useless to everyone then.

 1:49:41

Yeah, and that's another kind of you nailed it, because even when I was going through that crap, like, I don't even know what kind of a data was to be honest. Like, I'm a compassionate person just by nature. So I think I mean, I think I like state the fact I'm pretty well, but I wasn't present. You know, like, that was three, four years of my life that I was just getting by and just floating through life and still somehow performing workwise. But my, you know, my home life was not as good as it could have been, you're in my relationship with my wife was just because I wasn't being honest with anybody, even myself, like, I was just holding all this in that, you know, yeah, I just, I could have been such a better husband and dad during that time, if I would have just talked to somebody before then that of holding them for literally years, and, you know, just floating through life.

J James Geering 1:50:40

So Well, this was what made this conversation. So important, though, is that you're sharing your story. So hopefully, people that are kind of at the beginning of that will, will be able to have the Self Realization and kind of question that old school mentality of, you know, suck it up, rub some dirt in it, and actually look in the mirror and go, Okay, you know, who's most important to me? Am I the best version of myself, but then, can I find a happy medium between still doing the job that I love, but also taking care of my own health? And therefore my family's?



1:51:11

Yeah, exactly. And I don't want to make it seem so like, extreme as, like, if you go get help, you're gonna, like, be kicked out of the army. You know, that's not always the case. That's actually the majority of time, it's not the case, it's just the matter of a uniform support for a couple of months, you know, and then you'll be back at it. For me, it was just, it's a done deal, because I held him for so long, that it got to the point where I was like, like, I just need out of the army, I need something to change, you know, and I was just so ready to just move on and do something else that that will happen to me. But yeah, if it's just like early on, you know, and you go get help. And literally, I probably would have been fine in like two months, you know, whatever it would have been, I don't even know. But I think the end result would have been a lot different if I hadn't have held it in for so long, and just let it fester and let it get worse and worse and worse, and just snowball.



James Geering 1:52:08

Well, I want to throw a few closing questions at you. But before we do, I know that you are writing a book at the moment. So is there any kind of teaser you want to give the people listening right now?



1:52:18

Yeah, so I'm writing a book called stigma. I don't even have a good subtitle for it yet. But the whole premise of it, so I'm gonna go through my story in depth, and explain just kind of what I went through even, I'm even gonna get into, like, the thoughts that I had. And so it's gonna be pretty intense. But the overall theme of the book is, it's, it's a success story. Like it's not, it's not meant to be grim. And it's not meant to be doom and gloom. It's, it's meant to expose the stigma that's around mental health in the military, and certainly cooperation, and kind of go through all the reason why people don't get help. And it's more of a culture, bring awareness to the culture, that's so people are so scared to go get help. So I want to just, I want to be avoided, for those people that are going through something right now. And I, they can relate to this 100% I guarantee it, and just let them know that like, your life is going to be way better off if you go get help. And the alternative is not what you want. The alternative and not getting help is not what you want, like getting help is, is the answer was the answer for me. Might not be the answer for everybody, but at least talking to somebody about it. And even like this conversation right now, because this is the first time of them. I've actually, like publicly talked about this, like, the only people I know are my wife, my brother and my parents and a couple of close friends now. No. But yeah, just talking to somebody, like I talked to my when I first told my brother about it was about a year ago, and he just started bawling. And he was just, he was almost kissed me that I didn't tell him, you know, and he was just, I think it's a black mine, like, holy shit, my brother could be dead right now, you know, and I would never know, like, that kind of thing. So that's why I want to bring awareness to all all the reasons that people don't get help. And all the reasons that people tell themselves, why they're not going to get help and why they're just going to go out there and show them the benefits to to actually getting help. So So yeah, that's, that's what I'm gonna do. That's how I'm working on right now. I'm excited, hopefully, hopefully, I can get that message across. And another big goal through it is to not

like talk badly about the military and special operations or anything like that, because that's not the intent at all. Like they do great things for the world. Um, my intent is really to that individuals that are going through something to hopefully help them.

J James Geering 1:55:07

Brilliant. Yeah, it's the same with the fire service. I mean, you know, we have some amazing men and women in uniform. And I don't think that most people in leadership positions wake up wanting to contribute to their early demise. It's just, you know, pulling back the curtain and showing like, hey, we can improve on on all these different levels and make an environment that, you know, creates a more physically and mentally resilient, you know, military first responders, etc. So, you know, it's not again, demonizing. But also, if we don't pull these problems out of the shadows, people keep, you know, we keep losing people. So there's definitely that middle ground.

o 1:55:46

For sure, and, yeah, that's, that's really, the mission of this book. And the mission that I'm kind of on right now is just to bring awareness to that, and hopefully, through that help people, because the big thing, too, is like the focus right now, as you know, very well is on PTSD and veterans, right, like, the most people don't really talk about what happens if you're going through it while you're on active duty, you know, and that's because people don't talk about it on active duty, because of what I just said, because of the fear, and all the stigma associated with it. Like, here's a so day one in basic training, when you show up there literally IDs that are already pulled through training, and the drill sergeants take their shoelaces away, because they're suicidal, like, and all of us little high unit privates, you know, that are still in training are laughing at this kid. And that's where the stigma is born from, you know, and it just carries with you and everybody just has that, like, you're going to be able to have your week and you, there's something wrong with you, and you're weak. And that's kind of the attitude, which is horrible and needs to change. Because if you're actually strong to behavioral health, like, you're actually like, paying, like, Fuck the system, I need help. And I'm taking care of myself, when you go there, and it's so liberating to finally get to that point, and like, finally be able to talk about it, even for me, like, this is the first time I've spoken publicly about this, you know, like, people are gonna listen to this and be like, Oh, my God, I didn't even know you're going through. And you're, you know, so it's just, it's crazy. But it needs to change. It's not, it's not okay.

J James Geering 1:57:36

Well, another topic that's come up, especially more recently, and you're kind of touched on this with the book as well, is just that post traumatic growth. And I don't think that's in the messaging, if you take a trauma, and I've heard some frickin horrific things that have happened to people, whether before they put the uniform on when they put the uniform on, but you find whatever your unique individual toolbox looks like to navigate that trauma and you come out the other side, that becomes a superpower for a lot of people, you know, you are more empathetic, you have commonalities with people that are struggling, you can tell your story and say, Look, you know, this is what worked for me, you know, it may not work for you, but

there's hope because looking I'm here now and I'm a better soldier and a better firefighter for. So I think that's the other conversation is not stop the stigma, and you know, find the thing that helps you deal with your mental health, it's like fuck that push through, you know, high performance is from a clear mind. So whether you're struggling immensely, or whether you just starting to get foggy, because you've got some shit you haven't dealt with the other side, is hope there's some amazing things. So rather than just you know, talking about dealing with it, overcoming some of these very kind of meta terms, we need to focus on this can this can be an amazing strength. I was just talking to a guy just a few hours ago. There's that Japanese term, I forget what it is. But you know, when that when it's a broken part, and they mend it with the gold so that you're proud of your trauma, you're proud of your scars, that philosophy needs to be in our mental health conversations as well.



1:59:16

Yeah, exactly. And I'm, I'm actually like Jeff starting to feel that, you know, cuz I'm just now like, talking to people about it. And with that, too, like, you're well aware, but you'd be shocked how many people are into who have actually told about this stuff. Now, like, Dude, I've dealt with that, too. You know, like people in the military and you're just like, what, click out like, our there's so many people that have dealt with it and just hold it in like, Thank God, so many people are making it through but, you know, for every 10 that do, there's one that doesn't, you know, I was just I've been shocked with how many people that have actually like related to me because when I was first gonna, like start talking about this, and just kind of lay it all out there, I was terrified, like, I was like, everywhere, all the freaking, you know, opinions that were in my head before was everybody's just gonna, you know, call me Percy and say that, you know, whatever if we can, is yeah he's got he's gone wrong with it you know. But the more I've spoken to people about it and the more I've been open about it, the more I've just realized like sentiment that abnormal, like people just hide it really well. And people don't want to talk about it. So, but it feels so good to talk about like, it's so liberating. It's it's so nice.



James Geering 2:00:42

Well, that's so good to hear. So good to hear what so you've got your book, stigma coming out? And obviously once you have that ready, I'll share it on all the platforms that I have as well. The first of the closing questions, is there a book? Or are there books written by other people that you love to recommend? It can be related to our discussion today or completely unrelated.



2:01:04


So I am the worst reader in the world. I listen to audiobooks when I can. But not often, honestly, like, I'm not a big book reader and so on my daytime job as a financial advisor. So all the books I read are like personal finance related. So long story short, no, I'm more of a podcast guide and books guy. I honestly can't even tell you the last five books I read, like they've been studying for financial exams and things like that. So no, I haven't consumed much, much, many books.



James Geering 2:01:45

No problem. And what about movies and documentaries? Any of those?

no problem. And what about movies and documentaries? Any of those.

 2:01:50

Oh, man. Yeah. So there's a new documentary. Right? I'm blanking on the name, but it's it's literally they run a mile race. I don't know if you've heard of it.

 James Geering 2:02:03

Chad. Speech. I literally my guests yesterday spoke about this exact the documentary. Have you watched it yet? I haven't yet. But let me see if I can find the title.

 2:02:15

Yeah, you gotta watch it. So essentially, there it starts with a large field. And the premise of it is they have to run a mile. They have 20 minutes to run a mile and the race there's no end to the race. It's literally last man standing so they they have to run a mile every 20 minutes. And I don't remember the I'm not gonna spoil it because it but it's just amazing. The guy that wins is like just the freakin nature and throughout the whole documentary like that guy's just this guy's insane. But it's such a cool documentary to watch. It really showed like the like, extent the human spirit can go. Yeah, you find no I

 James Geering 2:03:02

did. I don't know if he can remember the title. Yeah, I think that's what happened. But I think Navy SEAL Chad Wright was the one that won. That's yeah.

 2:03:09

Yeah, that's right. Yeah, you gotta watch that. It was incredible. That and then the solo one about that free primary solo. Yeah. Free solos. I don't know why there's just people like pushing the limits of what a human can do or should do is just so interesting to me. Like, I would never do that shit, but, but watching it, I'm just like, oh my gosh, it's so amazing. What a human being. Yeah,

 James Geering 2:03:37

there's two other ones in that vein, one called The Alpinist, which is about Ice Climber. And then there's a recent one, I think I've got this right, the deepest breath. I think it's what's called, and it's about these, these freedivers both of those. They're not just documentaries. You're taken through this, again, visceral nervous journey where it's like free solo, you're on the edge of your seat the whole time. But I recommend those two as well.



2:04:01

Yeah, okay, cool. What was the second one?



James Geering 2:04:03

So yeah, sorry, I'm The Alpinist. And I think it's the deepest breath.



2:04:09

Okay, yeah, I'll check does that. Yeah, it's just funny when I watched it, uh, well, I kind of watched it with my wife. She was closing her eyes at the time, but I told her I'd seen it before and I'm like, just wait till the end during like, you're gonna be so mad. Like, the whole time. She's thinking like, stuff like that, like he catastrophically falling off the cliff and then it's fun on them. So they're like,



James Geering 2:04:33

all right. Well, speaking of amazing people, is there a person that you recommend to come on this podcast as a guest to speak to the first responders, military and associated professionals of the world?



2:04:45

Hmm, that is a good question. And I don't have anyone that's like not on active duty right now. That would be would be Good candidate, because most of my friends are still on duty. And they probably wouldn't want to speak publicly yet. But I can I can make some connections and reach out to people, potentially. Yeah, absolutely. I have a couple in mind. Yeah, a couple of mine that that might.



James Geering 2:05:17

Beautiful, beautiful. That works for me. All right. Well, then the very last question before we make sure people know where to find you online, what do you do to decompress.



2:05:28

Um, so I finally got back into a little bit of running, like my knees are good enough to run. But my wife and I just got into CrossFit. So I've always kind of done like CrossFit style workouts. But now that I'm out of the Army, we were like, well, we don't have a military army free gym membership anymore. So let's join a gym. And I tried to Planet Fitness for like three weeks. And we're like, now that we've been doing it, though, we joined the local craft the gym, and I just love it. I love the like, competitiveness and a sense of community. So that's, that's my real outlet. Like, that's where I can really just go lay it all out and crush it, and just get it done still.

J James Geering 2:06:15

Now, usually, when people have Rhabdo, there tends to be an element of dehydration. When you look back now, what were the mistakes that you made?

i 2:06:24

That's funny, that's funny, you asked that. So um, I'm sure you're familiar with prostate, there's a lot of like super technical movements in CrossFit and like things that you don't do every day. So my whole career, I've done CrossFit style workouts. But that being said, if there was something that like, I didn't want to do, or I wasn't good at, I would substitute it. So now that I'm going to the CrossFit gym, I can't substitute because, you know, that's not in my nature. So it was a workout with it was a bunch of pull ups, and then progressing the chest to bar pull ups, and then progressing and muscle ups. So I had not been doing any of those frequently. And I thought I did really well on the workout. I didn't do really well push myself to the limit, clearly. And yeah, that was it. So it was really just me, I don't, I don't think I was dehydrated. Like I'm not, I'm always really hydrated. But it was also like 100 degrees. And the CrossFit gym is like the typical warehouse one with the doors open. So I think that was it was just, I thought I was 21 Bill and I, you know, worked out like I was 21. And I realized then 34 and not quite but not quite that 21 year old. I used to be

J James Geering 2:07:47

one of my friends who was an older athlete, one of my fellow coaches, too, it was a similar one. It's funny before you even said anything. I was like I bet there's pull ups in it. He had and again, not not super extreme, but pretty, you know, moderate Rhabdo and again, his arms were just on fire and swollen. Is that what you had as well?

i 2:08:05

Yeah, if I couldn't straighten my arms for like three days, they I was just talking off go on, like 90 degree angle. And I was in the hospital for six days, like my levels were, it was almost a Hot Zone almost 100,000 I forget the even whatever what they measure, but yeah, the regular was like three to 500 and I was at like, 100 back. And even when I got released from the hospital, my levels are still like 1005 still technically in Rhabdo. But it had progressed to the point and there was no like, any damage or anything that they they were like I will check you in a week and just stay hydrated. But yeah, learn my lesson the hard way. But it's so funny. You go through all these like crazy training pipelines and everything and you know, you think you're invincible and then something like that happens you're like what the hell like I've always worked out like that, you know? So that was kind of funny to look at it that way.

J James Geering 2:09:02

I've definitely as I've got older gone away from the and it's not you know, it's not being naive it's just not really taken a step back and thinking but I used to be able to do this so I can still do

this you know and you have a break and you go back and hit it hard now I'm like I am more than happy to do a you know a slow on ramp again you know start 60% of what I used to do How does that feel? Okay you know and just titrate to effect but yeah there's there's the cross was amazing but you if you're not careful you get swept away and you get a little competitive and I used to be at a beat that fucking guy I'm going to put the same way on but he hasn't missed the last month two months whatever. Or she got my ass kicked where many women and you know and then you end up not be able to train for weeks which sets you back versus just kind of swallowing your pride a little bit going alright, I haven't done this many whatever. Let me do this for it. Let me do strict instead of kipping. You know, let me just work on that and then build that cranked up and then go. But it's, it's, you know, it's a new arena, if you haven't done CrossFit specifically, and it takes a while as an athlete to have the kind of toolbox to go. This is not a good day for me today. I'm going to take it down a bit, and that's okay.



2:10:14

Exactly. And, yeah, I think it took something like that to make me realize that, because I've never had to, like, you know, hold myself back physically, or I've always been able to push it to the limit. And, yeah, I think it was a good awakening, like, wake up call. Alright, man, you're not. You're not a Greenbrier anymore. Like, let's, let's take care of yourself. You don't have to be running, you know, full minute, two miles anymore. You're just a normal person, you can actually like, just try to be healthy. You know, the different. Yeah, it's funny mentality. And it's still hard for me to turn it off, to be honest.



James Geering 2:10:50

Yeah, well, then this, there's a performance and there's a wellness and there is a happy medium. But like you said, when you're in selection, you don't have a choice, you have to do all the pull ups and carry all the logs and you know, do whatever you're asked to do. And the same in the Fire Academy, you can't take your bunker gear off and go, I'm hot. You know, you have to get through it. And whatever they put you through, they put you through. But as you go through your career, you become more efficient with your strength, endurance, etc, you can still maintain a high level of performance without brutalizing yourself three or four times a week.



2:11:22

Yeah, exactly. It's kind of amazing to think about those, like, older, you know, because I was what 21 When I went to the key core stop my game, you know, it's crazy to think that there were like, 35 year old men that were going through with me that, like, their bodies had already seen, you know, 15 more years of beat down and they still succeeded. It's just wild. I couldn't imagine trying to do that right now. I might be able to grind through it. But it would not be pretty, that's for sure.



James Geering 2:11:51

All right, well, then for people listening so that they can, you know, stay updated with the book, and maybe they want to reach out to you after this conversation. Where are the best places to

find you online or social media?

 2:12:02

Yeah, and then Instagram, I am at Task Force stigma. And now we'll be starting to post content on there. Just little teasers of the book and starting to kind of document my journey through that as well. And then I also am going to start documenting kind of my progression to, like you said earlier, like, get, get towards the point where I can get off these meds and start finding holistic approaches and just see what works. So yeah, feel free to follow me and follow me through that journey.

 James Geering 2:12:39

One thing I didn't ask you Kagan found huge benefits when it came to the psychedelics. How did you guys come across each other?

 2:12:48

Yeah, so I actually heard him on the Andy stump. Podcast. uncleared hot. And this was Oh man, I think it was, yeah, it was about a year ago, maybe even more. So this was even before my anxiety diagnosis. So this was when I was still technically fighting the narcolepsy diagnosis and trying to figure all that out. And I reached out to him because I was like, Hey, man, I just heard your story. Like, I am potentially getting med board out of the army. And kinda like, I need help, because I'm in this weird Limbo situation. Like, you have time to talk to me. And he, he was more than happy to and he, he was awesome. He gave me a ton of resources to reach out to. And yeah, I was just so blown away by his story that I like, I felt like obligated to contact them. I was like, I need to, like, talk to this guy. And just be like, if story's amazing, this is incredible. So yeah, that's how I that's how I got connected with him was I reached out to him through that

 James Geering 2:13:54

brilliant. This is the power of podcasts. That's what I love about it. You get to hear someone's whole whole story, and then hopefully connect with them as well. Well, Nick, I want to say thank you so much. It's been an amazing conversation. And you got a very unique perspective. And so I think a lot of value in being with some high performers, and then finding yourself, you know, not around that close knit tribe anymore. I think there's a lot of people listening, whatever, they're professionals that can probably relate to that. And I know that was one of my biggest struggles, but leading us through the Depression, the anxiety, your perspective of you know, the the intrusive thoughts, and then what's worked for you up to this point, including pharmaceuticals. It's a very, very important conversation. So I want to thank you so much for being so generous with your time and coming on the show today.

 2:14:39

Yeah, thank you to James and thanks for giving me this platform to get my story out there.

Hopefully. Hopefully, we can help people through this