

Voiceover: This program was supported by the Army's Office of the Chief of Public Affairs Midwest.

(Theme music)

Voiceover: The following is a production of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library. Bringing citizens and citizen soldiers together through the exploration of military history, topics, and current affairs, this is *Pritzker Military Presents*.

Clarke: Welcome to *Pritzker Military Presents* with Medal of Honor Recipient and author Staff Sergeant Sal Giunta, United States Army Retired. I'm your host Ken Clarke, and this program is coming to you from the Pritzker Military Museum and Library in downtown Chicago, and it's presented in partnership with the US Army Office of Public Affairs Midwest. This program and more than four hundred others covering a full range of military topics is available on demand at PritzkerMilitary.org. In the last fourteen years the American public has witnessed a steady stream of information about our military through television, newspapers, and online. But as involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan has scaled down the public is seeing fewer soldiers in the media. And what we are seeing in the media are reports about the challenges a minority of veterans are facing. However for the majority of soldiers the transition from soldier to civilian is nearly seamless. Veteran unemployment remains lower than national averages. Soldiers leaving the service have access to a large network of resources to find meaningful careers, educational opportunities, and services. They are invaluable members and leaders of our communities. The US Army is supporting the efforts of these leaders through its program Soldier for Life, designed to strengthen soldiers from the time they enlist to the time they become civilians and beyond. Here today is somebody that exemplifies the Soldier for Life ethos. Retired Staff Sergeant Sal Giunta, who will share with us some of his experiences serving in the US Army and what he has been doing since he retired. Sal is a Medal of Honor Recipient from the Afghan and Iraq Wars. He is also the author of the book *Living With Honor: A Memoir by America's First Living Medal of Honor Recipient Since the Vietnam War*, published in 2012. Born in Clinton, Iowa, Giunta enlisted in the US Army in November of 2003 where he attended infantry training and the basic airborne course at Fort Benning, Georgia, before being assigned to the 173rd Airborne Brigade combat team in Vicenza, Italy in May of 2004. Giunta was deployed to Afghanistan with the 173rd Airborne twice, from 2005 to 2007. It was on his second deployment when Giunta's platoon was ambushed in the Korengal Valley in eastern Afghanistan. For his extraordinary actions that day, President Barack Obama awarded him the Medal of Honor on November 16, 2010. Please join me in welcoming back to the Pritzker Military Museum and Library Sal Giunta.

(Applause)

Clarke: Well, it's been five years since you received the Medal of Honor. And how have your thoughts about the medal and the experience and all of the things that surrounded your receiving the medal evolved and changed in that time?

Giunta: I can honestly say my experience and what this means to me is more powerful now than ever before. My time in the military was eight years; it was fairly short. It was all overseas, in Europe and then elsewhere in the world. And I didn't have this grand view of the military. It was just this small group of folks that do this because it had to get done. And after receiving the medal I was welcomed to all sorts of different bases, seeing different people work different jobs, and how we all are one team for the one fight. It's not just the person there sweating next to you. It's the people in the sky and those that were there before and those that will come after you. This medal and what it actually means to me--when I first received it, it was this idea of selfless service. And I

was very--the last time I was here I was absolutely uncomfortable in my own skin because to be the representative of the biggest, the fastest, the bravest, the strongest, the most selfless people I've ever met I don't know why they picked me. I think they got it wrong. And no one was listening to me. Everyone said, "keep on going," and I didn't know how to handle myself all of a sudden. I became different. But seeing what this actually represents: the men and women that are out there every day, the ones that don't come home from combat, those that come home and are never thanked for their service, those that can't fully grasp what they did, how it mattered--it mattered to me, and it matters to people all around the United States. I receive accolades far more than I have ever deserved in my entire life, but it's not for me. They're not saying, "Thank you Sal." they want to thank someone like me because they're thanking the person to the left of me and the person to the right. And they would thank them if they could, but those people are still busy working. I get the opportunity to sit in the soft chairs and drink the cold water, but it's not because I'm busy working. Those men and women are somewhere else around the world so we don't have those hardships here in America. This medal encompasses all that. And that day, the first time we met, Ken, I had no idea that it was so much bigger than what I could ever imagine.

Clarke: Our friend, our mutual friend Al Lynch, Medal of Honor Recipient from Illinois, has borrowed a phrase from you, and he attributes it most of the time. But he likes to say that the medal that he wears around his neck is a daily reminder of the worst day of his life. And why is it important that people understand that?

Giunta: I think so often we--just in common speech when we talk about a Medal of Honor winner, we did not win. For any situation for it to be that bad, that's a terrible day. And we don't do anything alone in the military. It's always about--I can't even go to the restroom alone in the military. You've got to take three or four buddies with you. And for someone to call you a winner when none of your buddies won--we didn't win anything that day. We won a near ambush close firefight. I lost two of my great buddies that day. All of us were changed forever. I don't think there's anything that won't stick with us forever, and yet people want to celebrate us or call us winners is inappropriate. The worst day of my life because I got all my fingers, and I have all my toes, and I can walk, and I can talk. And I have very few injuries that are life changing, life lasting, and yet I lost two of my buddies that never came back. And every time someone wants to pat me on the back and tell me how great I am they don't understand what we lost. I will never take that day as a victory. I will never take it as a good day. October 25, 2007 sits in this deep place in my mind that it's tough to have a good day on October 25, 2007 because it has changed my life, not that day, but everything that has become of that day, and how I am recognized for the sacrifices that are others, and yet they can't share the stage with me. It was truly one of the worst days of my life, and things happened that were out of my control. And to think of it as a positive experience would be impossible.

Clarke: Let me ask you a question that I've been able to ask Al and other decorated combat soldiers. How do you feel about the moniker "hero" when people talk to you and call you a war hero? Because that's what people call you and all Medal of Honor Recipients, and you are. But how does that make you feel?

Giunta: It's a tough pill for me to swallow. I've met war heroes. I have stood next to war heroes. It's not me. I don't have time to correct everyone who has it wrong with me, so I choose not to. But it is a tough pill to swallow. And I know what they mean. They mean guys like me, someone like me. And for that I can accept it, because I've got a whole lot of buddies that are back home in Indiana and Ohio and Iowa and Texas and Washington, that they don't feel like they did anything that they did mattered. We're still fighting this war. It has been fifteen years hard now, and no matter what our input is and our force fluctuation is, we have Americans that are in harm's way every day around the

world so that harm doesn't come here. And it's tough to say that it matters if it's still going on. If we did such a good job, than it should have been over. So for me to take the hero, I cannot. But I will take it silently and pass it on to my brothers in arms because they deserve it. They are.

Clarke: How is your thinking about the ambush changed since you have had this time to reflect, this five years since receiving the medal and then the time before that? There's been a patch of time. There's this notion that time does things to our ideas and changes them and enhances them. Has that happened with this, or is it pretty much as raw as it was the day it happened?

Giunta: I'll tell you, that's a great question because it has enhanced thing for me. And what stands out to me more now than ever is what all the men around me were doing at that time. I think because everything that we talk about for that is about the Medal of Honor and what I did is wrong because it is just one person's motions throughout this battle. And yet I think of my guys, Casey and Clary, who were my responsibility, and how heroic they were, how truly amazing they were and truly self-sacrificing for all of us, and yet their names don't get said. And the more-- with five years that have gone by since receiving the medal eight years since the event, what shines brighter now than ever is how amazing those people were on either side of me that entire time. That's what really ahs changed.

Clarke: So I think it's the way that your memories have been enhanced from that time now is really the memories of those who you carry with you. You're really their--you're really their voice.

Giunta: I hope to be. I think that's what stands out the most to me. My story is not mine. It's always been ours, but we don't talk about what everyone else was doing. And in a near ambush thirty meters away and fifteen enemy fighting positions, no cover and no concealment, no one was not doing the right thing. And when I look back on it, how could this even have happened? And then I start dissecting it and thinking about it harder and researching it. I didn't research it the last time. It just happened, and it was a thing that happened in the past, and I don't need to talk about it, and I don't need to think about it. And now I do know I need to think about it because I need to portray it appropriately. And the thing that just keeps on coming up is how incredible these men are that are still, their names are not spoken. The Casey's, the Clary's, the Gallardo's, the Eckrode's. That's what I want to talk about. They're still out there today kicking butt for us.

Clarke: Well, in honor of them and then also in memory of Hugo Mendoza and Sergeant Joshua Brennan, do you mind sharing a little bit of your thinking about that day and what happened from, kind of, this perspective, this perch if you will, of having time passing and thinking about what happened?

Giunta: I can talk about that. I think one of the stranger things with my memory as it goes back-- I almost become elevated in the circumstance, in the situation, where it's not a firsthand account. It's almost an overview of the situation. And to--I think through reading the documents and what everyone else was saying had happened, when I think about them, it's incredible. When the gunfire first started, for me my instant response was to drop down to the ground, find cover, find concealment. There's no cover, there's no concealment, so the ground is the best we can do. Before I had fired a single shot, when I looked to the two guys of my responsibility Casey, who had the M249 Saul--shoots about a thousand rounds per minute--was shooting at exactly grade of fire, at a thousand rounds per minute. He looked like a dragon blowing fire in the middle of the night. He had three feet of flame coming off the front of his gun. I promise you that does not benefit Casey, not one bit. It is very--it is gonna shorten his life drastically, and he did it without thought. I think about Clary right next to him, and Clary had a 203; it shoots a

forty-millimeter grenade about the size of my fist. Clary's shooting. He probably had five or six grenades out there before I made a move. And these things highlight me—they're highlighted in my memory because I think that was my call to action. This is okay. This is okay. You can't tell someone what to do if they're already doing it right. You're just making noise. Move on to the next thing. And because they are incredible soldiers, because they are incredible men, selfless men, I was able to do what I did. And that's always how my mind starts in that. It doesn't start with anyone falling or being shot or shooting back. It starts with Casey and Clary protecting us. After I looked at Casey and Clary I looked for my leader, Staff Sergeant Gallardo. And when I saw him I saw his body twitch, and he kinda fell down to the ground. And I was overcome with emotion. I was overcome with sadness and anger, and I didn't know what to do with myself, and so I just did what I thought was right; grab my buddy, bring him back to where I was. It was safer than where he was. His body won't get shot anymore. After than when I started pulling Gallardo back, I got shot in the chest, but the plate stopped it, so no harm no foul. We can't cry over that. And as I brought Gallardo's body back, his feet started kicking, and he came to. And the bullet hit his helmet, bounced off, knocked him out. And the very first words out of his mouth were, "throw grenades." I got shot in 2004 in my leg with a ricochet, and the first words out of my mouth were, "I got shot." That's very—I, I, I. Me, me, me. You see the leadership qualities come out when the very first words out of Gallardo's mouth when he comes to is, "throw grenades." That's incredible. I did exactly what I thought I was supposed to do, what I was being told to do and continued to move forward. With the ambush to the west, I moved to the north. I came across Eckrode, and Eckrode was on the ground shot twice in the leg, twice in the chest. And before I could get to Eckrode, Gallardo was already there. This is a guy who just got knocked out. If you knocked me out right now I'd probably be sitting in the back room for the next hour and a half thinking about what the heck just happened. Gallardo was on it and doing the right thing. Not for Gallardo. It's best just to stay down and stay low and stay quiet. And that was not what he was doing. He was taking the fight to them. He was being a leader in every sense of the word. I can't do another thing that I thought I was supposed to do because Gallardo was already doing it. So there were more boxes to check than people to check them, and I just moved on to the next box that needed to be checked. When I couldn't find Brennan, ultimately I knew what happened. The textbook answer says in a near ambush, you shoot the enemy, they shoot you. Last man standing gets to declare he's on the winning team. Seventy-five percent casualties will be an acceptable success rate. Except for those seventy five percent casualties are your buddies, and you know them, and you know their wives, and you know their children and their parents. And you've heard stories. This is not how it's supposed to end. That's a terrible feat. And yet Brennan ran. I know Brennan went to the ambush. Brennan charged the ambush line. That was what had to happen. Brennan did it. When I went I didn't charge the ambush line. I just chased after my friends so I didn't get left in the dust. I wanted to be part of the solution, not part of the problem. When I came further on I saw two enemy carrying one enemy, and I did exactly again what I was supposed to do, what I signed up to do in the basement of Lindale Mall in Cedar Rapids, Iowa; close with and destroy the enemies of the United States of America. There's nothing above and beyond about that. That's what I said I would do three years ago, one deployment ago. That's what we all said we were gonna do. I did exactly that. Nothing I did stands out to me. It's awkward that I am the one that's—I'm put on this pedestal, because it's not me. It's always been us. If anything I can say I'm proud to have been a member of that team. Proud to be a member of the 173rd, because that's how we held ourselves to a higher standard. And that's what—I think that's what pops out the most is just how incredible we were, how incredible they were at eighteen, nineteen, twenty years old. That's the biggest change for me is I can

honestly call them up and say, "I love you. You mean the world to me. You don't know how everything you've done matters." And it's true, not 'cause I'm trying to build someone up, but because I truly feel it.

Clarke: For the guys who didn't come home, are you in touch with their families.

Giunta: I am. It is a toughest relationship. My toughest relationship is with Josh Brennan's folks. And that's because I was there. I was there to affect the positive change or there not to affect the positive change. And I struggle with that story, knowing that I was the closest one to do something. And I tried the best I could. I want to believe it. It's too difficult to rehash that to try to change things in my mind that I cannot change. But when I talk to his father--that was his only son. That was his oldest child. That relationship is a good one. And he never asked anything of me-- just to stay in contact. But I know my life and my relationship with my parents have grown, and his was unable to do that because his son gave absolutely everything for this country. And in that respect it makes our relationship a bit strained, because I don't have the words for it to tell him anything that I think would be meaningful enough that would change his opinion. And his opinion is a great opinion in us and in his son, but I wish it was different. With Mendoza's folks, I talk to Mendoza's folks every once in a while. Every once in a great while. I don't--again, I don't know what to say. To talk to the guys, it's easy because we can pick up where we left off when we were eighteen. But to talk to their folks who are now sixty years old, and tell them about how my life has changed in the last eight years. And I know their son has not. They always stay twenty-one, twenty-two years old in my mind. I do stay in contact the best I can, but it's not anyone's fault that the relationship is what it is.

Clarke: We have a friend here, a guy named Jim Frazier. He's a gold star dad. And the one thing that he taught me about situations like this is say their names, remember them, remember their stories as tough as it is, because it's like they're present with us. And it's why I wanted to ask you about that, so thank you for talking a little bit about it. I know it's tough stuff. Let's go to something a little more lighter. What do you think--what do you think it means to US Military history that you are the first Medal of Honor recipient since the Vietnam War? What does that mean for us as a country? What does that mean to the legacy of the Medal of Honor as far as the recipients who've received it? Because there is quite a gap in between you and the guy before you.

Giunta: I don't know what it means to the United States of America. One of the first people to talk to me about this position was Roger Donlon, the first living recipient from the Vietnam War. In my mind when I always gets brought up that I was the first recipient, it hurts because I know there were seven before me that received it posthumously. It's never--I was not the first. The first living is like, I don't know. I don't know how to take that. Everyone congratulated me, shook my hand, and thanked me, and all's I want to do is not do this. Anything but this would have been better than doing this. And it was again a mentor of mine, a leader of mine, Walt Ehlers--Medal of Honor recipient, stormed the beaches in Normandy--who took me under his wing. We had some fried chicken out at his house in California, and he talked to me that it's not about me, and that it's always about those around us that didn't come back. And I was struggling with maybe some survivor's guilt. I was struggling with being recognized inappropriately. And when I listen to Walt talk about D-Day, when I listen to the losses that were taken there and why he wears his medal, I promise you that man did not wear that medal for himself; he wore it for those around. His brother died down the beach about 150 meters from where he received the Medal of Honor. And it's about us. And then I saw the value of actually talking about it. Like I said before, I got a whole bunch of buddies that have way better stories than I have, but they're busy working. They're busy still creating the future that we're gonna live in because they're tough guys. And if they can't--if they're unwilling to

talk about it or they're too busy to talk about it, I have a great platform to talk not about what I did but about what we did. And so I pursued that. And I started talking to Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCAs, ROTCs, the bankers, the lawyers, ethics committees. I started talking about heavy combat. I started just trying to be the voice of--I can't say I'm the voice of reason, but just the voice of the guys I know I was with. I don't have anything smart to say, but I can tell you what I experienced. And it became meaningful. And then I decided I wanted to do something different and something new. My wife went back to school. She became a nurse. She already had a degree prior. She told me she wanted to make a difference in this world. And I said, "I'm with you. I'm trying to figure out that myself. What are you thinking you're gonna do?" She said, "I'm gonna go back to school and become a nurse." My wife's very motivated. She did that; she's now a nurse. And I decided I need to do something different too. If you do what you always did you'll get what you always got. And not that what I'm getting's bad, but I want something different as well. And I started getting into manufacturing, and I found Ability One Manufacturing. Ability One Manufacturing is manufacturing by the blind. And these people could not do anything and they would still live a decent life because we will take care of them as a government, as the people. And yet they don't. They ride buses for hours at a time to go to hot factories, sharp factories. They're not really dirty; they're very clean factories. And work their tails off to make a product and then sell it. And I don't know where my relationship got in that, but I thought if I'm gonna sell something, I gotta sell something I believe in. and this I believe in the people that make this product. And the--they make can liners, and I thought, "I can do this." The first thing everyone does when they buy a can liner or trash bag is throw it away. I love that. I love selling stuff the first thing you do is throw it away and need another one. But the people that are doing it is what I got behind. And so I've been getting involved with the National Industries of the Blind. It's not about one thing; it's about people helping people, doing the right thing because they believe it makes life better. Not just them but for us, all of us, as citizens of America. And that has been the new time-consuming project for me. My wife just had our second child Vincent Joseph three weeks ago, so I am now a father of two, and that has changed our dynamics at home. But just trying to make a positive impact every day has been my new goal. And to represents those that I know I'm supposed to represent the best I can. This changed me and forced me to be a better me than I was before, because I know what it means. I know those that don't get to enjoy today. I know what they sacrificed, and I better step my game up and be a better person-- I have to be a better person 'cause I'm representing better people. I'm a shorts and a t-shirt guy, and I put this on not because I like to wear it and look fancy but because I know what it represents, and it represents the greatest people I've ever met. And for me to do it the way I want to do it is not the appropriate way. They deserve better.

Clarke: How did you discover the--what's the name of the product again?

Giunta: Ability One. It's--

Clarke: --Ability One. How did you discover them?

Giunta: I took a semester down at SMU. I thought I was gonna start a business, and I believe knowledge is power. And I would go to the university. They seem to be handing out knowledge here and there. And I got involved with a guy who makes trash bags, can liners, and I thought maybe sales was something I could do. And I found out I don't just want to sell a product. Hey, I can sell you a Ferrari because you like Ferraris, you just gotta have the money for it. I want to sell you something that changes not just your life-- it's a service here. This will do exactly what I said it will do--but what it does behind the scenes is so much more. It instills value in an individual. I think one of my biggest struggles when I was going out talking about my buddies was to see people who are so proud and so determined to change the world, impact the world positively, and then

when the team goes away and they go home to their small town in Iowa, they forget that their goals. And they start feeling negative about themselves. And then they call up and they say, "You know, well, I don't really feel that good. I put on fifty pounds, I don't feel like myself." You're not yourself. You need to do something that makes you feel like you. And it's interacting with other people, having value. They lost value in themselves 'cause they stopped doing stuff. If you play video games all day I don't know how to tell you you're doing something meaningful. If you're the best video gamer, which I don't know who that is, maybe it's meaningful. But everyone else is just playing video games. do something meaningful, not for yourself but for others, and watch all of a sudden you become a value. And that's what I saw Ability One doing: giving people value in themselves. They could do anything they want or nothing if they chose to. And yet they don't. They do more than most able-bodied people because they have value in themselves, and that's something I can get behind.

Clarke: Pretty cool. Just so that years down the road when your kids are watching this show, you mentioned Vincent Joseph, but your other child's name?

Giunta: Oh, Lillian Grace. She's old news now. She's four-and-a-half. So--
(Laughter)

Clarke: We don't want Lillian saying, "Oh, Dad, you didn't mention me. Thanks a lot."

Giunta: My wife Jen--I better throw that out there if I'm gonna get in trouble for not naming people.

Clarke: Definitely mention them 'cause they're a part of your life in a major way. You're here through the US Army and their Public Affairs Office today, and I want to thank them for bringing you to us, or back to us I should say. And they've got a program called Soldier for Life, and it's this concept that from enlistment all the way through going back into the civilian world and then surviving and excelling beyond your army life is something that is kind of a core value in the army. What are your thoughts about this program? It wasn't there when you were in, but this is something they're trying to embrace. What do you think about all this?

Giunta: I love it. You know, one of the reasons why I love it is you see it in the marines. There's no former marines. There's no ex-marines. Once a marine, always a marine. And it's the way you carry yourself. It's your purpose in life, how you prioritize things, what time you wake up. I tell you, there's not a whole lot of marines that wake up at 10:30 in the afternoon. They just don't. They're busy, even if they're no longer in the marines, they're still a marine, and they still hold themselves to that standard, that standard of life, that standard of living. Us soldiers, we do that every single day as well. And you see that you can't really, even if you wanted to, escape the military. It becomes engrained in us, but the values that it ingrains us with are very positive values. These pillars that we can grow the rest of a very positive life off of, about caring for others, selflessness, courage, honor, respect, integrity. These are things that the military takes very seriously. Leadership. The military does not teach bosses. They've never taught a boss in the army's life. They teach leaders. They don't teach someone how to get paid more than you; they teach someone how to lead you to make you better. That's it. The Soldier for Life Program is that, holding yourself to that higher standard, that military standard, not just because you wear a uniform and the United States of America's flag is on your shoulder, but because you once did that and you continue to represent that for forever. We are the less-than-one percent of this country that serves, and we are soldiers for life. That's easy to get behind.

Clarke: What do you think about the fact that we're hearing a lot in the news and the media these about all the problems that soldiers are having not just soldiers but military personnel in general. And yet the facts don't really support this. The facts are that most people in the military who get out of the military go on and lead productive lives. And

they do become leaders in their communities--usually quiet ones. Usually that ethos of "it's not about me, it's about us", what are your thoughts on that?

Giunta: It's tough. I can see it. I see it easy because I have a thousand channels, and twenty of them are news channels, and they're on twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week they have to tell stuff, and bad stories sell. I do think we have an epidemic right now in the military, and it's suicide. It's not the negative things we do to others, it's the negative things that happen and truly quitting. I have five personal buddies that I went to war with, to combat, to fight the evils of this world that would do anything so we could enjoy another day on this planet, and they gave up on themselves. And it hurts me. I don't know how else to handle it other than to be angry about it. And the only thing I can think of is 'cause no one was holding them accountable; now one was holding them to the standards. They stopped holding themselves to the standards. That's the only way you can quit. My buddies don't quit. They don't. They suffer until they can't suffer anymore and they'll black out, but they didn't quit. That's just the body stopping. And yet I've seen five guys that I know quit on themselves without someone holding them accountable, say, "Don't do this." I see that to be a huge thing, and that should be in the news. It's in society. It is a society epidemic right now, but when I see it with the military. These are people who have already proven they'll go out of their way to assist people whether they voted or not or it doesn't matter race, religion, creed. It's for America. And yet when it came down to them they quit. I struggle with that. It has to be addressed. We have to talk about it. There is no--I don't know how to address it other than that. I know there's no one magic pill; I know there's no one silver bullet, but as long as we can attack it from every angle that we have ability to and tell them that they matter and hold them accountable, both positive and negative, maybe we can change this. That's what concerns me the most of what we see in the media. Suicide is like, it's terrible. It's terrible. There's no redo. There's no perseverance in suicide. It's awful.

Clarke: How do you think a program like Soldier for Life can help with something--a problem like that?

Giunta: I think it's that accountability. In the military you're accountable. You're accountable from the second you wake up and where you were and who you were with and how you got there and when you got there and what you were gonna do after that. And you're not just accountable for all that, but here's what everyone's gonna do. Here is the standard for you. I expect you to achieve this. We're given purpose, direction, motivation. We achieve goals. Certainly not goals set by us. They come from higher. Some goals are ridiculous. But we have a goal that we set out to achieve. And when these folks go back to their hometowns or they leave the military, there is no purpose. There is not necessarily--there's a ton of directions, but there's not one defined direction. And the motivation is I did all this for so long so everyone--my peer group can be ahead of me. It's tough. And then no one holds them accountable, so if you want something better, do something different and give them that kick that they need. And that's not there. I believe that Soldier for Life is holding each other accountable. I love applause, right? Applause is acknowledging, good job, thank you. I love someone being called out on the carpet in front of the man when they do something wrong, too, and seeing that, because it only makes the applause worth it if we also hold them accountable for the negative things they do, too. And the military does it great. You're pretty much only as good as the last great thing you did. And that's not exactly right, but you're accountable for it. I have struggled. I had my mistakes in the military, but they also gave me the lifeline and the rope to say, "work hard and you'll do better. " Good. I'll do that then. And we're missing that in everyday life. We don't hold ourselves accountable as civilians. We're afraid to tell someone what we think. I don't think you're doing it right, guy. Don't do that. You're gonna hurt yourself." I wouldn't say that to someone 'cause I don't know

that guy. He's weird. In the military I can say that to anyone because I see that flag on your shoulder, and you're better than this. "Don't do that because you're doing it wrong. This is the right way." And we miss that in the civilian culture. We become timid or afraid to say the right thing because, well, that's them, and this is me, and I'm only responsible for me today, so good luck to them. I think that's part of it. I don't know what it is. That's just me brainstorming on stage with you, Ken.

Clarke: Sounds good. It sounds right on, actually. You--I can only imagine how many times you've been approached to become involved with a not-for-profit that has to do with veteran causes or you now, you name it, somebody's probably approached you. What are the causes that you've chosen, beyond your daily living, to get involved with and get yourself behind?

Giunta: I'm behind a few causes for sure. Veteran suicide. It has to be addressed at every level. We have to really put pressure on our buddies. I called--in the last two weeks, I've called seventeen of my buddies I was in the army with. One because we're gonna meet for Memorial Day. It's a way we can visually inspect each other and how life's going for you. Oh, you have a new wife, you have a new kid. What's going on? What's happening? Accountability. Second because I want to invite them. I want to talk to them on the phone before I see them. Traumatic brain injury, posttraumatic stress. These things are invisible killers. And it affects--it's poison in the mind, it's poison in the body and in the soul. And I don't know how to notice that or effect change on it without being involved with someone. And that's that. So I set on a non-profit for posttraumatic stress, traumatic brain injury. The invisible wounds. But then also the very visible wounds. We have amputees; we have a lot of people with gunshot wounds. But not just getting involved with them to see how's your leg because you got shot in it. How's your leg 'cause you got shot in it? What are you doing with your life now because you have opportunity with it? I think a lot of us didn't see--we couldn't see ten years down the road. We couldn't see five years down the road. Heck, in the Korengal Valley you can't see next week. You just hope that today you get lunch or some sort of food, and then you'll worry about dinner after that. I talk about these because then I get to interact with the people. And you'll never know an organization without knowing people. I love these general statements of this is our mission statement, this is our goal. Perfect. I want to meet the people in your organization, and I want to talk to them on how this assists. And you know what, almost every single one of them, these organizations help, and almost every single one of them, these organizations help them in a different way. And I wouldn't know them because that's not what the statement line says. I had to hear it from the individual. And I love that. And then I can use their stories. My stories are not mine; they're ours. So I can use--I don't believe their story's theirs. It's ours as well. And I want to share this, and I want to share an idea of growth and prosperity, not about struggles and hardship. War was not about anger and hatred. It's always been about love and caring. We go to war not because we're angry at the other side, but because we're very happy and caring and loving of what's at home. And if we don't go there, that will come here, and that's unacceptable. I think that's where we get misconstrued. Soldiers and military people are not angry. They're some of the most loving people in the world. They--the only thing they're angry about is war. The people who dislike war and combat more than anyone else are those that have seen it, those that have lived it. And to be able to relate to these people. I have met people that have changed the world, like the people I was telling you, Ken. Heroes. I've met a lot, a lot of heroes, and I would never meet them if I didn't go out there and start hanging out and telling stories and listening to what they had to say. And it makes me a better person just knowing that, hey, this guy did this with half of the opportunity that I have. I better step my game up. I better step my game up. Being accountable.

Clarke: Being accountable and a little competition. That's not a bad thing either.

Giunta: I like competition.

Clarke: Competition's good. Yeah. What resources did you—you're a well-read guy. You've done a lot of research in your own—you know, your own experience. What resources did you find helpful to you as you were transitioning into civilian life?

Giunta: My transition into civilian life was an interesting one because of how it happened. It came in the form of people, of individuals being a counselor or mentor towards me, to help me--there is no book on this. There are books that we write, but it's not the book to the answer, it's just a story of an experience. And I had some very key, high-level military take me under their wing again and say, "Hey, knowledge is power. Pursue it. This is an option. Chase it. Don't be afraid of saying no if no's the right answer." That was new to me. And I need to hear that from people that are on the news that effect change over groups of 100,000 folks. And so my transition out of the military came in a very personal form with very high-level people to help me feel comfortable with, I guess, understanding that I'm on the right path. 'Cause no one knows the path. We all choose different paths. We all came from somewhere different, so to end up in the same place would be--to think that we're all gonna end up in the same place would be silly. So we have to understand that this guy will do this, and this guy will do that, but they're gonna end up in different places. But we can't go wrong with the right answer.

Clarke: So your number one resource is mentors.

Giunta: Mentors, absolutely. Personal mentors. Ones that I can call on the phone at ten o'clock at night. I try not to. I usually don't. But anyone that I know has my best--the best outcome for me is top on their mind. Not because it's easy, not because it's--they know it's what I want to hear, but it--most of the time they tell me, "No, and that's not so smart, Sal, don't do that." And then they. But they don't just say no, they say, "Maybe this is a better way of doing it." Mentors. Personal people I can call. Not text, not email, not words on a screen. A voice I can hear and a person I can see.

Clarke: That's probably something important for just about anybody, military or otherwise.

Giunta: I think so. I hate orders that come over the radio. They don't know what I'm looking at. Like it when the guy is standing right next to me and says, "This is what we're gonna do. Okay, you see that though too, right? That's okay. You do. I was just checking. Okay, we're on the same page. Let's do it." it's not that I didn't like it, it's that I just wanted to make sure we were understanding each other, and the radio doesn't do that. Email doesn't do that. Text message certainly doesn't do that.

Clarke: So what's your advice to someone who's transitioning out of the military or currently in the military or whatever? What is your advice for them to look for those mentors?

Giunta: It has to be someone you trust. Our parents are mentors. Our schoolteachers for me were mentors. Growing up, I was not a good student. My teachers took-- they were concerned about me not because--

(Laughter)

Giunta: --not because they just needed me to pass, but because they cared about me as a person. That's awesome. That person's a great mentor, and I look back on that, and I see how incredible these teachers are as mentors and how much they affect our lives. How much time we spent with them. They're not our parents. They don't owe us anything other than to stand in front of us and teach us something, and yet they do more than that. For me my mentors came in the form of other military people, because they've been there, they've done that. They've experienced the hardship. What I was talking about, how I had survivor's guilt. And I was struggling. I don't know how to say that. And knowing I can say that to you now, but when I was going through it, everyone would say,

"You're the man. Congratulations." I'm so sad. And you don't care. You do care, but I can't tell you that. No one wants--no one came here to hear a sad story. They came here to hear a story, maybe something uplifting hopefully. So you don't want to say that. And it takes someone who knows you past all the face, or past the face you're gonna give the public and cares about you holistically. I still am in great contact with one of my team leaders from the army when I was eighteen years old. Our families get together and hang out, and he cared about my family before I had a wife. He cared about my parents in Iowa when he lived in Colorado and we were only together in Europe and in Afghanistan, 'cause he cared about me holistically. And that's someone you can--I can easily take what he says and I know it's honest and it's true. And then try to choose someone smart because they'll give you honest and true. But hopefully it's also the right answer with it.

Clarke: Right answers are good. Was there anything that when you were doing all this transitioning and thinking and listening and learning, that you were like, boy I wish there was this one thing that was available. Like, where is that thing? I don't know what it is for you. We all have that thing we wish was there when it's not, and--

Giunta: You know, I think because I chose to put my--I've signed up for people. They're always there. It's not one person. There's multiple. And I call different people for different answers as well. They're not all here to champion my cause, but they are here to make my decision a good one. And I haven't--I can honestly say this. My life is so great. It is so good. I have so many positive people around me that are willing to assist and hopefully that I'm willing to assist back. I can't think of a time I was in need after I'd gotten out that I didn't have it.

Clarke: That's a blessing. Definitely a blessing. So you're here today also under the auspice of this idea that the army's doing called Meet Your Army. And we've had a couple of people come through and sit down just like this and have conversations about what they do in the army and what it means and all that stuff. From your opinion how important is something like that that the army's doing to bring kind of a civilian world and a military world together?

Giunta: I think it's super important. The civilian world and the military world are together because every person in the military was a civilian first and they all turned eighteen and they became a citizen of the United States of America or they came from a foreign country--maybe Guam, maybe Puerto Rico--and they decided they wanted to serve in the military and then became a citizen of the United States of America. Soldiers don't all look alike; marines don't all look alike. We don't all come from the same place. We don't share the same religions. We don't share the same preferences. We've all lived on a block somewhere. We've all had neighbors and parents. We're all civilians that just chose a different path in life. And so to say hey, it's not all camouflage and guns in the military either. They have jobs that exist that are very similar to civilian jobs except for you get to do it for a little less pay, but you get a lot more opportunity and the cause is just. I think it's great. I never--I grew up in Iowa. I didn't see anyone in the military. There's not--there's military in Iowa. I'd be wrong if I said there wasn't. Not visible military. They're either busy training, where I wasn't gonna go, or they were never seen. Otherwise they change back into their normal clothes and live their life. And outside of them saying it, I would never know that. And it's important that we see this. They exist all around us. They're in the audience today. They don't all sit together. They don't all look alike. But they've served this country. That's what's in common.

Clarke: Silent leaders. Silent leadership. So you wrote a book, it's *Living With Honor*. And what do you think--what do you hope that when somebody reads this book, what do you hope that somebody takes away? What are a couple of things that you just hope they take away and carry with them and kind of think about?

Giunta: I have to say this. When I was approached about the book, I was approached about the book maybe ten times, maybe fifteen times, and I kept on saying, "No, no, no. I'm not the kind of guy that's gonna do a book." And then I decided, yeah, I will. And it's because I need my buddies' names in thick, black ink. I want not heir names to be forgotten. I need it to be told, the stories and accomplishments that these men achieved. And I can say it, but if I say it to this room or this audience it's only earshot or who's watching. But you put it in a book, I put it on another format, another opportunity to put that out there. Something that their kids can see. Almost all my buddies don't talk about this stuff. They haven't had to, they choose not to, they don't. But I think it's important that they get recognized for what they did. And I want their children to know this. And that book was the idea. Put it in thick, black ink forever to say, "Hey, it's not me. This guy on the cover's not me. It's one of us. It doesn't matter who it is. It's one of us." that's what's important. And it was never me. And the book, I wanted to portray a few things about guilt. That first year I really couldn't--I could say whatever I wanted; I chose not to because it would be misunderstood. All of a sudden I'd need to seek help, and I don't need help. I just needed to work through something that-- if I do five events in five different cities I'll hear the same thing that upsets me every single time. But when you deal with five hundred people in five different cities it's just gonna happen, and you got to let that roll off. And the book allows me to say it without anyone talking back to me.

(Laughter)

Clarke: That's awesome. We're almost out of time, but I want to throw one more question at you that has to do with who we are. We're a museum and library that is devoted to remembering what's happened in the past and providing resources for veterans and their families through information resources, and also documenting those stories of service either through donations of artifact and memoirs and journals and things like that to the artifacts and things that soldiers carried--the things they carried, if you will, to talk about Tim O'Brien's book. So my question to you is, since we are in a library, do you have a book you can recommend to us that you're reading that we should all read in your opinion?

Giunta: I just read--I read a great book, and it was *To Quell the Korengal*. And it was by a buddy. It was a military book. And I don't read a whole lot of military books, at least in this war. I've read a few. I've read a few by the recipients, but usually I would prefer a different war to read about. And this was a guy that I was with, and to hear his interpretation. I know what I would put in there. I know my thoughts and my opinions, especially of these guys. But to hear someone else say it, it kind of validated what I was saying. I wasn't just complaining about some tough days out there. But his was very raw. He wrote it himself. And I don't know too many people that write books. I didn't know too many of us could write books. The real author is Joe Laden. I gotta tell stories. Joe put ink to paper, and Darren Shadix put ink to paper himself in his book called *To Quell the Korengal* gives this very same experience with a different set of eyes. And I found that, I just finished it on the plane coming here. I liked it. I liked it a lot. I liked it--that's probably one of my favorite military books of the Global War on Terror because I understand what he said through the sadness, through the anger, through the bitterness, thorough the disdain. I get it. And that's okay. If you don't say your opinion no one's gonna understand what you're thinking. He said it. He put it out there, and I liked it.

Clarke: Awesome. I want to thank you for being here today.

Giunta: Thank you, Ken.

Clarke: Awesome talk.

Giunta: Thanks for the opportunity.

(Applause)

Clarke: I'm gonna turn you over to Q and A.

Giunta: Heck yeah.

1: You are very clear that you do not prefer to be called a winner of the award. What language do you prefer? Recipient sounds passive? "Look what I got." Honoree? Challenge?

Giunta: I like recipient. It is, "Look what I got." No one sets out to receive the Medal of Honor. If you do you truly are clinically insane.

(Laughter)

Giunta: It's gonna be terrible. That would be a terrible goal. We are just, "Look what I got." It is a recipient thing. I truly believe that.

2: Thank you for your service.

Giunta: Thank you sir.

2: In business we talk about a company having a culture. You were with a great unit. The 173rd's well known. Do you think they had a culture that helped you when you got to that day?

Giunta: Absolutely. I know that for a hundred percent of the fact. I only served in one unit in the military, and that was the 173rd. I showed up from basic training, and I thought I was ready to kick down doors and take on the world, and I thought for sure Iraq. I joined needs of the army. That's how you go to Iraq: airborne infantry needs of the army. And I showed up to Vicenza, Italy to 2,000 battle-hardened combat jumping paratroopers that just spent a year in Iraq, and I heard stories of what they accomplished opening up the northern front. Then we had a ball that winter, and I'd been there maybe six months. And all of a sudden there was about twenty Vietnam 173rd guys that showed up to just see us, to meet us, to have cold drinks with. And we--these are documented stories. The fights that they fought, the America that they preserved is incredible. And most of them did it because they were drafted. And we have the opportunity that we signed up, so we should--they put the footsteps in the jungle before us. They put the footsteps in the sand before us, and it was our ability that alls we had to do was step in those same steps and we'd be stepping in greatness. And I understood that being in the 173rd. I think we all did. That is a standard that we hold ourselves to because they held it to themselves before we were even alive. I'm very proud of it.

3: When Brennan charged the ambush--is that who you said did that?

Giunta: Yes, sir.

3: What was he awarded?

Giunta: Purple Heart. We don't know that he charged the ambush. I know that he charged the ambush. His body wouldn't be up there. Because of the ambush--it was an L-shaped ambush, and Brendan was walking point, and he walked into the apex of the L, and we didn't see anyone because it was nighttime. There was a full moon. We were about fifteen meters between people. No one RPG or one grenade would get us. And when things happened I looked back before forward. I couldn't see where he was anyway. I know he charged the ambush line. I said that when I got shot in my calf, the very first thing I said was, "I got shot." Two months prior to this, Brennan got shot in his calf clean through. And I told him--I was out for ten days eating ice cream, I met the Denver Bronco cheerleaders. It was awesome. And I told Brenna, I was like, "Hey dude, ice cream, wine if they send you back to Italy. Take it." And two days after he walked himself out of the valley from being shot clean through the calf, this Blackhawk helicopter came in, and we got all excited 'cause it's gonna have food or mail or cold--it doesn't matter what it had on it. It was better than what we had. And only one thing came off the helicopter. It was Brennan. And I looked at him in disbelief, like, "Come on, guy. What are you doing?" And alls he said to me was the ice cream was making him fat, and the showers were making him soft. And if there's things that need to get done then we might as well get to doing them. That's how I know Brenna charged the ambush line. Brennan

wouldn't sit out when he got shot in the calf for more than two days. Son of a gun's not sitting out on an ambush.

4: Sal, thank you for your service. I served in Vicenza '85 to '87. Do you ever make it back there to Italy at all? Have you been?

Giunta: Every year.

4: Do you?

Giunta: Every year. Eighteen to twenty-six is my very formative years. It's where I grew up. I grew up a United States military soldier, but I grew up eighteen to twenty-six in Italy. I love it. I love seeing the faces. You know, I feel old now. I'm thirty-one, and I get to go there and feel old. But I see something that I didn't see before. You still see eighteen year olds who have seen fifteen years of war in this country and what it costs, and yet they still willingly raise their hand and pledge allegiance to this country in dedication to make this country a better place. And that's what you can see in Vicenza, Italy every single day. And that fires me up. That's worth going to.

5: Thank you for your service, first of all, and just a quick question. What did you learn about yourself? I was shocked to actually hear you're thirty-one years old. I think you're very mature for thirty-one and it seems like you have been forced to just grow up a lot throughout your experiences. Not to discount what you were like before that. But what did you learn about yourself throughout your time in the service whether it was your experience with the ambush or just being in the military itself?

Giunta: I think one of the greatest things I learned was the heart of resilience. I've met people that aren't so smart in amazingly smart-people jobs, and they kick butt at it. And it's because they try every single day, and they become better. They work on themselves as a tool to be sharpened. I think the military taught me that. I saw people come from nothing and achieve the highest rank in the military, then get out and run a company. Not because they're super smart but because they're very determined. I think something that we lack sometimes is this determination that we can do anything we want. This is America. We forget that. The opportunities that happen here don't happen everywhere else. You can truly be a do anything you want in the entire world as long as it starts here because we will assist you, aid you, or at least we won't belittle you or trap you in this certain circumstance. The military opens up that world. I'd been to five states in my entire life before I joined the army. I'll just tell you I've been to fifty-five countries and every state in the United States. That probably wouldn't have happened without the military. I didn't know I needed interaction from different people to feel like I've been somewhere. I thought you just get off the plane. "Hey, I was just in Memphis. I was there." Unless you met the people, you weren't there. The military, you get to meet the people, and they come to you most of the time. You can be in Vicenza, Italy and meet a guy from Alabama, Oklahoma, California, New York, and be standing in the same circle talking about the same thing somehow, and that doesn't get to happen very often. The military truly lets you know anything is possible, and it gives you the tools to pursue that to your utmost, I guess.

Clarke: Sal, I want to thank you for being here. This was a great talk.

(Applause)

Giunta: Thank you very much.

Clarke: Thank you to Sal Giunta for a gripping discussion and to the US Army Office of Public Affairs Midwest for supporting this program. To learn more about our guest or the Soldier For Life program, visit SoldierForLife.army.mil. To learn more about the Museum and Library, become a member, and explore all that it has to offer, visit in person or online at PritzkerMilitary.org. Thank you, and please join us next time on *Pritzker Military Presents*.

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(Theme music)

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(Theme music)

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