

Teamwork, Success, and Sobriety

Transcript: US Army Resilience Directorate Outreach Webinar

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Presenter:

Colonel Eric Kreitz, G9 Information Warfare Director for Special Forces Command Airborne at Fort Bragg

David Gercken: [00:06](#) Welcome to the Army Resilience Director outreach webinar for November: "Teamwork, Success, and Sobriety." At this time, all participants are in listen only mode. However, you can ask questions at any time or make comments by placing them in the chat box, and I really encourage you to do that. We've got a bit of a smaller audience this afternoon, but I know you will be no less engaging than our earlier sessions. There will be several opportunities to ask questions at the end as well. Please note the views of ARD outreach webinar presenters are their own and are not endorsed by the Department of the Army or the Department of Defense. This month our special guest is Colonel Eric Kreitz from the Army's first special forces command at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Colonel Kreitz currently serves as the G9 Information Warfare Director for Special Forces Command Airborne at Fort Bragg.

David Gercken: [00:59](#) Previous assignments include command of the 6th Psychological Operations Battalion Airborne, PSYOP division chief at Special Operations Command South, fire support officer in the 101st Airborne Division Air Assault, and multiple overseas deployment. His civilian education includes a Bachelor of Arts from St. Mary's University, a Master of Science in criminal justice from the University of Cincinnati, and a Master of Arts in international studies from the University of Kansas. His awards and decorations include the bronze star medal with one Oak leaf cluster, the defense meritorious service medal, the meritorious service medal with one Oak leaf cluster, and he is Airborne Air Assault Pathfinder. Jumpmaster, and US Army Space Cadre qualified. He is a native Spanish speaker and is active in assisting Soldiers struggling with substance misuse in his church and with the Boy Scouts of America. Please join me in welcoming Colonel Kreitz to today's ARD outreach webinar. Colonel Kreitz, welcome back. And thanks for doing this again this afternoon.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [02:06](#) Not a problem, David. I appreciate it. Can you hear me okay?

David Gercken: [02:10](#) Loud and clear, sir.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [02:12](#) Awesome. Well, first of all, I'd like to thank you for the invitation to come in and share my story, in the hopes that it may help somebody out there who may be struggling with the same thing. Somebody who can identify with my experience or somebody who may know somebody who's kind of going through the, through the same thing. Perhaps to provide some hope for the future and that folks can get back on track after an experience such as mine. So, thanks. This is the second iteration today and so for the few of those who were here this morning, the story may change a bit. It never comes out the same way really, but I think the gist is there. And so as David mentioned, I'm here at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, 1st Special Forces Command. I'm married to my wife of nearly 17 years.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [03:04](#) So it will be 17 years next month. And we've got two boys. John, our oldest, is 13 and William is 10. And those guys are all over the place. And so how might this morning, where I'd like to begin is just with something that I learned from one of my mentors. He's encouraged me that anytime I speak to right up front, let people know who I am through my value statement. And so, my value statement is I'm committed to keeping three balance promises: 1) to take care of myself, 2) to take care of my Family, and 3) to always be available for others. And so in there are five different values. One is balance, and you'll hear how an imbalance in my life led me to where I got towards the end before my recovery.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [03:55](#) And then trust. Trust is important to me and not only giving, but also being able to receive trust, something that I didn't know was a thing until after recovery. And then take care of myself because if I can't take care of myself or I don't take care of myself and I'm worthless to everybody else, another theme in threads about my story. Number two is to take care of my Family. And again, after being able to make sure I'm okay, making sure they're okay, like the masks on the airplane. You have to secure your mask first before helping others with their mask. And then the third is always seeking to help others. And so that's really where I am today. Actually doing these types of webinars and speaking engagements not only helps me help others, but it also helps me help myself.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [04:44](#) This is how I take my experience and put a positive spin on it: by helping other people and speaking with others who may be going through the same type of experience. So Dave, I don't

know if you want to go ahead and put those slides up. They're just essentially talking points to help keep us on track for my story today. And so again, thanks to everybody who dialed in. I appreciate you guys being here and this tells me, I think it's folks interested in my experience. It all started as a kid, as most of our stories definitely do. I grew up in Roswell, New Mexico, and, growing up in Roswell was actually a pretty great experience. I think there's a misconception out there that people who grew up to have issues with alcohol, drugs, and other substances, come from homes that may not have been the best childhoods and that have caused traumatic experiences and things like that.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [05:52](#)

And I'm here to tell you that in my case, that is definitely not true. I had a great, great childhood coming up. Two parents present in the home. I had a little brother two years younger than me. I never saw my mother take a drink and I never saw my father take more than a couple at any given time. Definitely never saw either one of them drunk. And so, as I go through the story, what I'll do is reflect a bit and share a piece of my story and then give you some reflections from what I see post-recovery and two kind of different perspectives from the time I experienced something to today after being able to think and reflect on it. And so looking back, I didn't have any really traumatic experiences coming up as a kid.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [06:43](#)

I was genetically predisposed, I think, to alcoholism. There were definitely members of my Family, in both my parents' generation and the generation before theirs, there were stories of folks passing away from, from alcoholism, drunk driving deaths, that kind of thing. But in my immediate Family, that wasn't the case growing up. And so as a kid, I liked to tell people that I had a uniform in my closet since I was six years old, from Cub Scouts to Boy Scouts, to JROTC, to ROTC, and now the Army. I've always had some kind of uniform hanging in my closet. And as a kid, I was definitely a rule follower. I was a people pleaser. If I wasn't in your good graces, by God, I was going to try and figure out how to get there.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [07:32](#)

I wanted to be the student of the month every month. So, I was a people pleaser, and I was always seeking that approval. And I know now that I'm just a big sucker for approval. I still have to deal with some moments of people pleasing to this day. But we'll talk through that here in a bit. So between the rule following and the people pleasing, that really shaped my personality. Somebody asked me once when I was in the Army, "What is your best quality?" And I said, "Well, I can make anybody like me, and I thought that was a really good quality,

but now I realize that it's just not being me, not being true to myself. I'm trying to form myself into what I think somebody wants to see, which is definitely not healthy."

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [08:15](#)

And so growing up as a kid, that's what I tried to perfect. I could fit in wherever I was. I found myself whether it was with guys who like music, guys who like sports, guys who like school, you name it, I could fit in. And so I was constantly changing that mask that I wore because I never really wanted anybody to know who the true me was, all the way back to when I was a kid. So the masks were ever changing, and I would get more and more of those masks as I grew up. And so the big problem as I learned later was, vulnerability, I wasn't really looking to be vulnerable with anybody. If I had a need I was going to take care of it myself, if I want something, I was going to take care of it myself.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [08:59](#)

I wasn't all about reaching out and asking folks for help. So as a kid, as I came up, I would accomplish these things and I'd pat myself on the back and I started to develop this unhealthy self-reliance that I know now is a big part of my story. My first experience with alcohol was actually in Mexico when I was about 16 years old. My mother is from Mexico, and so we still have Family down there, and we'd go visit. It was at my cousin's wedding and on the tables, they would have different alcohol, bottles of alcohol, and they had brandy out there. I looked at my parents and I said, "Hey do you mind if I try something," and they're like, "Nope go right ahead."

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [09:43](#)

And I think they were of the mind that if I was doing it right there with them then I wasn't going to go out and get in trouble or anything. And I was never really the type of kid that was running around on a Friday night or anything like that. I was perfectly content to be in my room at my house by myself doing nothing. Cause that's when I could let my guard down and I didn't have to try and fit in with anybody. And so I didn't keep a lot of close friends because of that reason. When I had that first drink of alcohol, it was terrible. It burned on the way down, but as soon as it hit my stomach, I got that warm feeling, and I got the sense in my head that maybe I could start to be a little bit more of myself.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [10:22](#)

And the more I drank, the more I got a sense of ease and comfort, but the more I drank, I'd always have an underlying sense of discomfort as I was growing up and through my adult years. It was always there and more and more I used alcohol to deal with it and take care of it. And so that first night I had my first drink, I drank to blackout and that became my M.O. from

that point on. Every time I would get a drink in my hand, if I could, I would drink all the way to blackout. And now I realize that the reason I did that was because if a little bit can make me feel good, then more must be able to make me feel better. And so that was my first night and the next morning I felt terrible.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [11:06](#)

But I couldn't wait to get that feeling again. That ease, that comfort that came with not being concerned about who I was with or how I felt or who was looking at me or what I thought people were thinking about me. It was a really good place to be, and I really, really liked it. My problem is that I didn't really have a whole lot of access to it, after that point until I got to college. And it's when I got to college that I went to St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas. They were of the mind that they would rather have students drink on campus than go out and try to drive back on campus. And so you were allowed to have alcohol in your room if you were 21.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [11:47](#)

And so my roommate was 21. I was not 21, but he had alcohol in the room and that's when I had my first beer, at the ripe old age of 19. And I got that same feeling I got when I drank that brandy in Mexico, and I remembered that feeling. And I would chase that feeling from that point forward that again, that sense of ease and comfort that I got from drinking alcohol, and I fit right in because what else are you going to do in college? You're going to drink. And I never understood people who didn't drink as much as I did. I thought I prided myself on how much I could drink. I prided myself on being able to blackout and then go to class the next morning, the ROTC. I was able to run the two miler or the five miler, the total amount of road march the next mornings, and then go back out and do it again that night. And so that was a point of pride for me going through that, and I never understood the people who would go out, have two beers, and then say, "Well, I'm not going to have any more this evening I got work tomorrow, I have to study tomorrow, or I have a test tomorrow." That may made very little sense to me. And so, as I went through college, got good grades freshmen, sophomore year of college and then my junior year, as my alcoholism ramped up a bit, I became less and less concerned with my grades. Towards the end of my senior year, I think I got a C in a communications class, which is the worst grade I had ever gotten in college, and a D in philosophy. And I said, "You know what, I'll just go and drink." And I became less concerned about it. That's one of the points in life where I started to figure out that alcohol could really, really help fix some of these concerns that I had when it came to being worried about tests or grades and those types of things. I knew with the D I was still

going to graduate and to help ease that anxiety, I continued to drink.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [13:49](#)

From there I went in the Army, commissioned at the St. Mary's as a Second Lieutenant was stationed at the 101st at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. And the drinking continued there. I would go down to Nashville on the weekends with the other Lieutenants and would continue to drink down there. And again, drinking to blackout nearly every time. I heard in recovery that, the difference between a blackout and simply falling asleep somewhere is intent. If you intended to fall asleep on the bathroom floor, then that means you just fell asleep, but if you didn't intend to fall asleep there, that's called blacking out. I kind of wish I had known that then. There were times where I would remember getting to Nashville, but I wouldn't remember getting back to my apartment or to a buddy's apartment the next day and then go on like nothing had happened.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [14:39](#)

And so really the purpose behind the drinking was because I was wearing all these masks. I would be Lieutenant with this mask, I'd be a son with this mask, I'd be a friend with this mask. And if I hadn't mentioned before, I'd probably had some kind of fourth mask where I would wear a mask that I thought you wanted to see. That takes a lot of work, and it puts a lot of stress on folks, and it definitely did for me. And that's where, that progressive alcoholism really, really started to take effect. The more I was stressed out, the more I would drink, and the more I would drink, the more I would stress out about things and it became a pretty good cycle. So I met my wife in college actually, and we didn't get married until about four years after college.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [15:28](#)

I had been through a rotation in Iraq by that point. And my story doesn't involve real combat trauma, any PTSD or anything like that. My story really comes from a place of behavioral health and alcoholism and having those same tools to be able to deal with the alcoholism. And so a lot of the time, I know when I speak to folks, particularly outside of the Army, they think that there's some underlying type of PTSD or something like that. I'm just a regular alcoholic. I'm no different from people that you see in the civilian world or the people that you see in the Army, there doesn't necessarily have to be an element of PTSD to abuse alcohol or other substances, all they need is behavioral health. PTSD and combat trauma are not part of my story.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [16:17](#)

But I got married. My wife and I got married in 2004. We waited for about four years before we had our oldest son, and the

drinking continued. My wife is not alcoholic. She's a normal person, she's a type of person who can drink a glass of wine and leave half of it on the counter. That blows my mind as to why people would do that. People say that is alcohol abuse, having to pour wine down the sink the next morning. But, after we got married, she would do her thing and I would do my thing. And she got used to it after a while, and I was living on the sofa. And then I would wake up at some point in the night and go up to bed.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [17:00](#)

But it really wasn't initial. I was still performing it at work. And, for all intents and purposes, I was still being a good husband and a good Family member. And so there was really no reason for alarm, and she knew me in college. And so she knew how much I drank in college. None of this was really a surprise at this point. When my wife and I got pregnant with our oldest son, she said, "Hey, we're pregnant" on a Friday. On a Monday, I was on a plane, deploying to Bogota, Columbia, and I was there for eight months. I got back two weeks before the birth of our son. And down range, we had general order number one in place.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [17:42](#)

And that was really the first place where I experienced not being able to drink as much as I wanted to. So I became, without my tool, which was alcohol, a pretty miserable person because I didn't have any of the tools to deal with the things that come with a deployment with taking care of people, with making sure the mission was accomplished and those types of things. So, I did not like that a whole lot, just because I felt like I was robbed of one of my tools. And so we came back, and our second son was born a couple of years later in 2011. And it was around that time that we were stationed at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. I was there for CGSC and my brother was getting married around that time in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [18:28](#)

I went down there and my wife stayed back with our newborn. I just went for the weekend and my entire Family was there. I drank to blackout, and I made them all angry. And so I did some things in a blackout that, causing to, that angered them. And so the next morning everybody was mad at me, and I didn't know why, it was one of those moments, and I didn't talk to people to figure out, okay, I did some stupid stuff. And now, they're all mad at me. Word got back to my wife, and she was also mad by the time I got home. And so I said, "You know what, I need to do something to get all these people off my back." And so I said, "You know what, I'll go down to ASAP here on Fort Leavenworth.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [19:10](#) And the biggest problem with that was because was that I went for them and I didn't go for me. I didn't want to get better. I didn't want to stop drinking. I just wanted to learn how to cut back. maybe I could drink like a normal person, and not really have to deal with not drinking. And so part of what ASAP introduced me to was Alcoholics Anonymous, and I went to a couple of meetings there in Leavenworth. And I saw the folks that were there, and I thought, man, this is not for me, I am not like any of these people. These guys have lost their homes. These guys have lost their families or jobs. They've got DUIs or they've been in jail.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [19:53](#) They've been in treatment. I am not like any of these people. And so, that was mistake number one. I didn't identify with anybody. I started to look for the differences to convince myself that I wasn't an alcoholic as opposed to seeing how I could share their experiences with what I was feeling. And so that's really where I had my first bout with vulnerability and not willing to be vulnerable and not willing to be honest with myself and looking inside myself to see exactly what was wrong. Everything that I did was outward facing. Again, going back to those masks and making sure that you saw what I think you wanted to see from me. I became really, really self-reliant, and thinking that everything that I got I've gotten because of the hard work that I've put into it.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [20:40](#) And if anybody's going to say, "Well, I'm not going to stop drinking," it's going to be me. And so I went through and then for about three months, I kind of halfway used some of the tools that they provided me in ASAP. And then we PCSed back to Fort Bragg and "I thought, you know what, I'm good to go now, I've done what I need to do, and I think I deserve a drink." And so that's where I realized that justification was my weapon of choice. Well, I could justify having a drink for any occasion. Whether it was a good day, I would have a drink; a bad day, I could have a drink. There's football on Saturday, I'll drink. There's not football on Saturday, that's a great reason to drink. I have a big presentation tomorrow, I'll drink, or I don't have a big presentation tomorrow, so I can drink. And I started to see that there was a lot of fear starting to well up and develop: a fear of missing out, fear of inadequacy, fear of abandonment, fear of loss that I may lose my job if I don't do well. And so I doubled down on the things that I did at work. I doubled down on the time I put into work and that was all at the expense of my Family. And so, essentially the last people that were going to know that I had a problem were going to be the people at work. And so I called that the work wall. What I put up this wall, and I said, "You know what, nobody's going to get past this. Nobody's

going to know what's going on with me and I'm going to have a great career."

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [22:14](#)

And so as I went through that, starting to deal with a lot of different types of fear, I knew that it was going to catch up to me at some point to where I started drinking really heavily the night before a big presentation, and I would come in not feeling my best, I'm hungover essentially. And if the presentation went well, I would say, "Oh, awesome I can still do these even hungover." And if the presentation didn't go well, I would say, "Well, it didn't go well because I was hungover. There's always next time." And so that started to affect, not necessarily my work performance, but it started to affect my Family life and my own personal wellbeing, if you will.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [22:58](#)

And so as we kind of went through that, I knew I needed help based on the things that I went through at ASAP. But then I simply ignored those things. It became really easy to hide the drinking. I never drank at work, because I knew I'd probably get caught there. And so I would drink around work a lot of the time, on the weekends. We PCSed down to Florida, and I was able to drink there a lot more. Fortunately, I guess you could say, the environment for drinking during work hours where I was stationed were not as strict as here on Fort Bragg. So I could definitely drink as much as I wanted and still be okay. Coming in and still not have people talk to me about my drop in performance or anything like that.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [23:50](#)

And so as I went through that point, I started getting concerned about different things. And so when I was in Florida, I would drink to blackout and then I would have to play CSI is what I call it, the next day. I looked in the trash can, "Okay, that's what I had for dinner last night," and look at my phone and be like, "Okay, that's what I was texting from work." And that's what I said, "Oh, I probably shouldn't have said that. I'd wake up and my wife would be mad at me, and I'd have to figure out why she was mad at me." I'd wake up and my kids would be upset and then I had to figure out why my kids were upset with me. There were all these things that started the cycle of shame, fear, and alcoholism, where I would drink to blackout and do something stupid and feel shame and guilt for it the next morning. And that feeling would persist throughout the day to where I would have this fear of not being an adequate husband, employee. Then I would drink again that night to forget those feelings, which would cause that cycle to start over again. And so as I would go through the cycle, those feelings would intensify.

- Colonel Eric Kreitz: [25:12](#) Till I got to the point where I started to get pretty much untenable. And so we PCSed back to Fort Bragg I took command of the Sixth Psychological Operations Battalion. This is 2017, and we lived on post, and I was getting to the point now where before I went out and did normal things, we had backyards that all butted up against each other here on post. And people would gather out there in the evenings and on the weekends and stuff, and I would have to have two or three beers before I could even go out there and just talk to people and feel normal. Just because I was so afraid of going out there, thinking, "What if I say something wrong or what if somebody asks me a question, and I can't answer it."
- Colonel Eric Kreitz: [25:52](#) I became paralyzed by this fear and it took two or three drinks just to loosen me up to be able to go out there and do normal things. Things like going out to watch one of my son's baseball or basketball games, two or three beers. Going to the movie theater I would take the little bottles of alcohol to put in the slushie drink at the movie theater. It was because I was living with this incredible fear, and some of those feelings of guilt and shame. And then as I started to my second year in the battalion command, I got the best evaluation that I've ever gotten in my career, which told me, "Hey, I'm doing great at work, everything I'm doing here is awesome." But then I started getting that feeling, "Well, what if my senior rater finds out who I really am? What if my senior rater, if only he knew who I really was, and I'm just this no-good alcoholic, that he wouldn't give me this rating that he gave me." And that really took me down this dark path.
- Colonel Eric Kreitz: [26:52](#) It was that summer where my wife's cousin was getting married out in Colorado. We went out there for the wedding, and it was in a beautiful location out in Colorado. It was on a ranch and a nice big wide area. It was open bar, which is bad for a person like me who thinks the way I think. So I went and I drank the way the way I always do, which is drinking to blackout. When I woke up, I was staring up at the stars and I thought, well, I've not come out of a blackout this way before.
- Colonel Eric Kreitz: [27:27](#) There were people, as I started to come back into consciousness. I could hear people talking around me and there were some pretty hurried voices and things like that. And I thought, "Okay, this is interesting, where am I?" And then I saw the flashlights in my eyes, and I thought, "Oh, okay, these are paramedics. There are paramedics here." And I thought, okay, somebody has severely overreacted. And immediately my brain went into, okay, how am I going to mitigate the fallout from this? And I thought, "Well, we'll see what happens." But what

was really interesting was, as I was laying there, looking up the stars before I could see the paramedics' lights in my eyes is I just felt this overwhelming feeling of calm at that point. And we'll get into that here in a bit, but they loaded me up into the ambulance. I hit the emergency room and there was a police officer there, and I'm like, "Oh my God, I hope I didn't do anything stupid, illegal, or otherwise to hurt anybody while I was in the blackout."

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [28:27](#)

And he comes over to me and he holds my hand, he says, "Hey man, from one veteran to another, it's going to be okay." And I thought, "I have no clue what is going on." And so he asked me, "Do you know what happened?" And I said, "No, I don't." He said, "Well, you took your belt and you tried to hang yourself with it." And luckily people who were walking through the woods found me and took care of me. And I'd been dealing with suicidal ideations up until this point for about the previous four or five months where alcohol really wasn't doing what it had been doing for me in the past. Where it had started to help me with the fear, with the anxiety, those negative feelings of guilt, the shame, I was starting to feel those even throughout the blackout.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [29:12](#)

And no matter how much I drank, I couldn't get rid of them. And so I started thinking, "Man, there has to be something else that can help me get rid of these things." I started thinking about suicide and having those ideations. So, I'd never rehearsed anything or had written out a plan or thought through a plan or anything. So that was the first time that those ideations had manifested themselves. When my wife came into the emergency room, the first thing I said to her was, "Thank God it's over." And what I meant by that was that I knew at that point, that my chain of command was going to know, the folks back at Fort Bragg were going to know, and then I was going to be able to get the help that I needed.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [29:52](#)

I felt this relief coming off my shoulders because I'd been hiding it for so long. Like I said, that work wall was pretty big and it took a lot to maintain that. I knew that at that point I was going to be able to get the help I needed. So from there the chain of command really kicked in for me, the Special Operations Command Care Coalition made sure that my Family got home safely. They were able to provide us plane tickets because the ones that we had had to come back. We stayed an extra week and called out while I was in Evans Army Community Hospital, there in Fort Carson, so they made sure my Family was taken care of. They put them up in a hotel room and they made sure that they had plane tickets to come back.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [30:35](#) And while I was out there, the 10th Special Forces group, the Deputy Commander came by and visited me. I got calls from my rater, my senior rater. And when my Family got back home, my Chaplain and his wife were checking on my Family. Sergeant Major was making sure everything was taken care of. And again, my senior rater called my Family, calling me and making sure everything was good to go. And I knew at that point that I was going to be able to go through recovery without having to worry about whether or not my Family was taken care of, which was a huge burden off of my shoulders. So I came back after a week in Fort Carson in the psych ward just to stabilize me. I came back to Fort Bragg for a week.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [31:19](#) And then I headed up to the Farley Center, which is in Williamsburg, Virginia, and an excellent program there. And again, my chain of command really working hard to make sure I got into the right facility. They have a program there for military officers and enlisted folks. I spent eight weeks up in the Farley Center in Virginia. And that's what I really started to look into myself and start to see these feelings for what they were. And I realized at that point that I'd been using alcohol as an external means for an internal problem. So what that means is instead of trying to figure it out and deal with the fear and all these other negative feelings, I was just using alcohol, to simply smother them. And it really was an interesting experiment when I was in treatment.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [32:14](#) Now that I didn't have alcohol, my brain started looking for other external things to make me feel better. I had never bought a lottery ticket in my life, and I found myself buying lottery tickets during that time. Food was another thing. At one point I got hooked on Pop-Tarts, and I remember standing at Walmart looking at the display of Pop-Tarts and having the exact same feeling I had when I was looking at alcohol at the liquor store. And so that was my brain saying, "Hey man, we can't handle this on our own. You need to take something outside of yourself and put it inside of your body to make yourself feel better." From that point, I realized that thing that I needed to take from outside of me and use to deal with my feelings is my higher power, which I choose to call "God," but for other people, it may be something different.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [33:08](#) A higher power I've learned can really be anything that is outside of yourself that you can become reliant on. That causes you to not be a hundred percent self-reliant. So for me, it's my higher power that I use to plug that hole that alcohol used to fill. And so I learned a lot about myself in treatments. And if anybody knows the serenity prayer, "God, grant me the serenity

to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things that I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." That acceptance and that change were really far apart from me, and in that gap was a lot of fear. That's where my fear lived. I certainly wasn't going to accept things, but I wasn't going to take any action to change them because I simply didn't have the courage.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [33:52](#)

Because again, what if somebody thought ill of me or I did something wrong or those types of things. So that fear gap was pretty big for me. Now today in recovery, I'm trying to close that close that gap. And so as far as my Family was concerned, there were definitely some impacts on my Family. My wife now has her own program of recovery just dealing with my recovery, which is good for me. My kids, and my wife and I, we all went to Family counseling during that time. And it was amazing to me, just how many of those problems that we had before start to be a lot easier to resolve once I had acknowledged the alcoholism and started getting help for the alcoholism.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [34:42](#)

My younger son had some behavioral issues and those types of things, and those were much easier to fix once I started to look at my own problems and start to fix my own problems. I was always thinking it was just him. But that was not the case. A lot of them stemmed from me and my behavior. And so, Family counseling, getting my wife on her own program of recovery. The Farley Center had a great program for families that they can all be involved because I realized that this is not just for me to get better. This is for my entire Family to get better. Recovery is not just for me, it's for them as well. And so, it's also helped us have a lot more open and honest conversations just about things that I would never ever dream of talking about before. My own fears and anxieties. Being able to talk to my 13-year-old son about those things, so that he can talk about his are invaluable.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [35:33](#)

If anybody listened to The Indigenous Approach podcast, which is the podcast that kind of precluded this webinar from April of this year, I kind of go through my story there as well. And I was able to sit down with my son, through the podcast and answer questions about, what does it mean that that dad a suicide attempt and those types of things. It was hard at first, I'll acknowledge that, however, now we have a much more open relationship and are able to talk about those things, but I used to beg my son to talk to me before. Now, he comes up to me and is able to talk about those things, both of them. In a way it's improved the company. The relationship with my wife a lot of those things that we have friction about before are now easily

resolvable because we both have our program of recovering, but we still have to work at it.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [36:28](#)

I still have to work on my own recovery. There are things, I mean just because I have tools now to deal with that fear and anxiety, guilt, shame, those types of things. Just because I have the tools now to deal with those things doesn't mean I don't experience them. So, I mean, I still experience the desire to people please. I still struggle with perfectionism. One of those things where if a brief didn't go a hundred percent the right way, then it was worthless, right? So it's all or nothing thinking. I still have those thoughts and I still have those feelings. I just now have healthier tools to deal with them. And so, as we go through, that was really what caused me to seek help. How was that experience and something that, that I realized through that experience is that it not only takes the individual who needs the help, but it also takes that that chain of command working together.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [37:27](#)

And so I think a lot of the time, it's a dichotomy. We either say, "Hey, if you need help, go get the help." Or we tell the leader, "Hey, you need to know your people. You need to be intrusive. You need to know everything about your guys." But we never really talk about it working together, at least in my experience. So, I think one of the best things that we can do as leaders is we create that safe space for Soldiers to be able to seek that help. And I didn't see it any clearer than when I came out of the Farley Center. By that point, there was a new Battalion Commander in place. I asked my former group commander, if I could come back and speak to the battalion and just let them know what happened, share my experience with them.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [38:14](#)

There's a lot of the time guys disappear and you never see them again. And so I didn't want that to happen. I wanted them to know exactly what happened because I felt I owed it to them. And so I spoke with them, and I shared my story and what that battalion commander did was he created that safe space, for the Soldiers by allowing me to come in and speak to them in an intimate setting and just say, "Hey, this is what happened to me. And this is my experience now." And as a result, three Soldiers came up to the first Sergeant. And said, "I think I may have the same issue as Colonel Kreitz." And we were able to get them help. And so that was the Soldier getting the information and being willing to get the help.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [38:52](#)

And that was the leaders creating a safe environment for that Soldier to be able to do that. One of my favorite authors is Simon Sinek, and he talks about that all the time, that when we

stop having to look inward to watch our backs as a team, we're able to look outward and get a lot more done. I think that's no truer than when it comes to things like recovery and substance abuse and mental health, behavioral health is being able to create that safe space as a leader. One of the things that I've also learned through this process is when folks are going through that, something my chain of command did perfectly, I think was, I came back from treatment and they put me right back into circulation, right. They gave me a purpose.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [39:36](#)

So I came back from treatment. They didn't shut me away in a closet and make me work on busy work until I PCSed or get me into a post transfer or something like that. What they did is they moved me from the battalion command position to treatment right into the group deputy command position, right. They gave me that purpose for about four months, and then they moved me up to the three-star headquarters, and they gave me a job on the commander's action group. So they continued to give me that purpose. They didn't shut me away. And they allowed me to get right back into work. I think that was crucial for me coming back in early recovery was providing that purpose and giving me the ability to show people, "Hey, I'm okay. I can still contribute."

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [40:19](#)

And I'm still valuable to the organization. And so that really gave me three things now that when I mentor folks, I talk about. One is values, which I talked about right up front, know what your values are. I know with my value statement, which makes it very, very easy for decision-making. I can now flip through all my decisions and often to my values, and I can see what what's important. Two is trust. Being able to give trust and receive trust. I used to come in and say, "Hey, you have to earn my trust." And now I can come in and say, "Hey, I will trust you until you give me a reason not to." And I find that it makes things go a lot faster, a lot smoother, and we can get a lot of stuff done a lot quicker.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [41:00](#)

And then that last thing is purpose. How do we give all of our folks purpose? But we have somebody in our troop right now dealing with something with his Family. But we keep them engaged and we keep him with that purpose. So when things are going rough at home, he can come in and still feel like he's contributing somewhere while he gets the help he needs with his Family. That's been my experience throughout recovery. And this is what really keeps me grounded. This is what keeps me fulfilled, is being able to speak and engage with folks in these types of forums, whether it be a podcast, a webinar, or talking to live groups. It helps me, I think just as much as well, frankly, I

know it helps me more than the people out in the audience, because this is how I get my fulfillment now.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [41:44](#)

It used to be all my eggs in one basket, and that was the work basket. And now I know that I've got to have that balance in life. Before when I put all my eggs in that work basket, it definitely got me off kilter, and I think that's what spurred a lot of that that stress and anxiety, the fear before. So it's that balanced life that really keeps me grounded. One of the interview questions that we ask when people want to come work here in the G9 is: Without mentioning your career or your job tell me about yourself. And I found that a lot of people have a hard time answering that question. I know I would have had a hard time answering that question back when I was a Major or a Captain because a lot of what I did defined who I was.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [42:25](#)

I used my job and what I did to define myself instead of using my character to define myself. And so again, it's one of those things that I've learned in that self-reflection, and that willingness to be honest with myself, that vulnerability that came from recovery. And so the last thing I'll say is, when it comes to Soldiers in the formation that have that have issues a lot of the time, the commanders think, "Well, I don't want to send a Soldier down range who's got behavioral health issues or alcohol issues." What I would say to that is I would rather have a Soldier going down range who was acknowledged that he's got issues and is getting the help for it instead of a Soldier who's hiding it and then they have issues when they're down range and endanger their teammates and that's dangerous.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [43:11](#)

I did lose my clearance when I was going through the process. It's really a lot harder than I thought to lose your clearance. You have to do something pretty egregious to lose that clearance, but that was never an issue for me. And it hasn't been an issue for a lot of folks that, that have gone through the same experience when it comes to things like creating a safe environment, a lot of commanders, or excuse me a lot of Soldiers will say, "Well, if I go get help, then I'm going to be less of a teammate." You guys are depending on me, "What's going to happen to my guys?" I can tell you that when I left the battalion and I came back that battalion, it was running absolutely perfectly because we have a lot of good people in that battalion, and they ran it like I never left.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [43:58](#)

And then, you know when it comes to things like, like DUIs, things like domestic violence and involving alcohol and substance abuse, what works in those situations is what folks come up on the mat and say, hey, I need the help before they

get to the DUI, domestic violence. That's what we can help people. Once, once people commit those crimes of DUI, domestic violence and other things fighting, whatever it may be, we can still get them to help from the substance abuse and alcohol abuse. They still have to face the consequences for those crimes. I'm a firm believer that whether you were stone-cold silver or you were blackout drunk, if you have a domestic violence incident or you hurt another Soldier or hurt something in your community, you should still face those consequences of your state of mind.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [44:47](#)

And so it's one of those things where you do the action, you've got to face the consequences. So, I don't think a substance abuse issue or a behavioral health issue should be a basis for defense if it's absolutely a mitigating circumstance. But this is all I'll just to say that as a commander, I'd rather have the guy come into the Soldier, come and get the help before an incident occurs instead of after. So as commanders and leaders, we've got to create that safe space. But if the unfortunate event does happen where a Soldier does have to go through a DUI or domestic violence, he or she has to face those consequences. That will wrap up my portion. David, I'd like to turn it over to you to see if there's any questions,

David Gercken: [45:37](#)

Sir, thank you. Thank you so much again, for sharing your story and your Family's story. We talk a lot in the Army about leading by example. And I think you're absolutely doing that in this area where a lot of people need to see those examples from leadership. So thank you very much. Thank you for being open. Thank you for sharing. You answered that with a great answer. You had this morning about good order and discipline and combining it with also empathy and helping folks get treatments. So thank you for addressing that. I know you do some work at Fort Bragg, and you meet with Soldiers and sometimes maybe there's a barrier of rank. Sometimes there's a barrier just in discussing personal issues. And we have a lot of folks on here that work with Soldiers, try to provide support for Soldiers and Family members. How do you break down some of those barriers and open up the conversations to talk to them about some things that are just so personal?

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [46:44](#)

Yeah, that's a great question. I think what works best for me is by starting by sharing my own vulnerabilities and fears and those types of things. And I learned that if we expect other people to open up to us and ask us and tell us about what's wrong and what their concerns are and what they're facing, it's tough if we just sit down with them and say, "Hey, tell me about yourself." I find that if there's been a Soldier who's been

referred over to me because a leader thinks that they may be dealing with some of the same issues, I'll start with telling them about what my fears and vulnerabilities are. And it's a humbling experience to have to have to do that, especially when a captain or a staff sergeant walks in.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [47:30](#)

And you're talking to them about some of the things that you've done, it starts to crack that the veneer that I worked so hard to present before recovery. And for me, it's sometimes tough because that's where a lot of my fear stems from: a fear of inadequacy. So, what I find a lot of the time to get people to open up is I'll just share a couple of my own issues, my own vulnerabilities, my own fears, and that really gets the conversation going sometimes because they see that you're being vulnerable with them, and they want to reciprocate.

David Gercken: [48:12](#)

Yes, sir. I think that's a great point in sometimes just sharing and then listening. It can be very powerful. So thank you very much for that. This is a good question from this morning that I thought was interesting, "What do you do resilience wise? When the end of the day, I think the question was, when your mind starts to go down those rabbit holes, what do you do? What's your go-to activity? What is your go-to, reading, thoughts, things that you do, at the end of the day when you have that open time now."

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [48:51](#)

Yep. Thanks, Dave. That was a good question from this morning. And so for me, there were a couple of things that I do: a couple tools that I've picked up through my recovery experience and that one of the big ones for me is prayer meditation, just calming my own brain from going a hundred miles an hour. And one of the things that really helps me is just remembering that all the action belongs to me, and the outcome belongs to my higher power. Once I know that I've done everything that is within my power to do, I can't worry about anything else that's outside of my control. I can't control how the CG is going to react when I give him a brief, all I can do is put there for that belief, the best I can, and if he has a concern with it, he'll share it.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [49:33](#)

And if he doesn't then, then it's a great brief, right? And so, there are a lot of times where I find myself worrying about what other people are going to do instead of worrying about what I'm going to do. And so it goes back to, I've had to rely on something outside of myself to take care of that because if I put it all on me, then I'm going to go down those rabbit holes pretty quickly, and I'm going to spin my brain out of control every evening. But I just got to know that before I leave work, I said,

"If I had done everything I can do today and if the answer is yes, then great." And if the answer is no, then I have to run it through my value statement.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [50:10](#)

Right. Which is it going to help me? Is it going to help my Family's going to help other people? And so my CG, my boss, my teammates, they're all in that third category of the people. If I'm not leaving the office until 20:00, then I'm violating the second value, right. Which is my Family. And so I've got to strike that balance and I've got to lean on my teammates. That's where that trust comes in. If I need help, I've got to be willing to ask for help. And sometimes I've got to go to my chief of staff and say, "Hey man, I know this is what we need for tomorrow, we're still working on getting it to you, but what about this solution?" Right. So that's me taking an action. That's not me saying, "Well, I hope this works out tomorrow." And so if I can do those things, that typically helps me from my brain running away every evening,

David Gercken: [50:58](#)

Sir, you were, fortunate is probably not the right word, but in your experience you had a very supportive chain of command, and that's true across most of the Army, but what are your recommendations to Soldiers, leaders, union leaders that don't have that supportive chain of command? Do you have any thoughts on how they should approach these issues?

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [51:25](#)

Yeah. In fact, I think I saw a lot of folks logged on here today that are the exact people I would refer them to, there are always Chaplains, there are Substance Abuse Counselors on post. There are civilian solutions that you can go through. There's a behavioral health unit psych surgeon, Chaplain are really good resources to do that with, and they can lead you through different options, I would say, for getting the help that you need. And so it goes back to the person that wants to help, I think it's our job as leaders, even if we're not that chain of command to figure out how we can best help the Soldier do that. To me that's a really big threshold.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [52:12](#)

If somebody comes in to say, I need help. That's a good place to catch somebody. It's when people don't think, or don't realize that they do need the help that is what's most painful because, as in my experience, I didn't want to get help initially. And so I made it really tough for people who wanted to help me. It's once I had that realization that I needed to help that's what a lot of people took advantage of that said, "Hey, let's get you to the right place."

- David Gercken: [52:41](#) Sure. And that's a great segue into our next question from this afternoon's audience. What are the best approaches when you have a battle buddy that's showing either early onset indicators, or even later indicators, like blackout or excessive drinking, how do you approach them and not be an enabler?
- Colonel Eric Kreitz: [53:01](#) Right. That's a tough one. Everybody's different, everybody responds to different things. I think to show that you're concerned about them and you're making your concern known to them and then providing them with the information that, that you've got. And that's the thing, kind of going back to my experiences, people who get better have got to want to get better. I think my wife kind of experienced that. You can't make somebody go and get veteran treatment. I went to treatment with folks that had been through, five or six times. And it wasn't until, the sixth time that they said, "Okay, I really need to do this, or else I'm going to die. I'm going to lose my kids," or something like that.
- Colonel Eric Kreitz: [53:48](#) Then something clicked for them. Even in my experience, it didn't take until the second time I went through it was because I wanted to get somebody else off my back. And it took me eight more years to finally figure out that I needed to do this for me to get better. And then as a side effect, my Family and relationships grew from there. And so, I think making your concern known and making sure that that person knows that you're there for them. What some people have done here is they've referred people to me because they know I've gone through the same experience. Sometimes all it takes is sitting down with somebody who was where you were. if I can sit down with somebody and say, "Hey man, when I was drinking, I felt a lot of fear, guilt, and shame."
- Colonel Eric Kreitz: [54:32](#) And somebody says, "Oh yeah, I feel the same way too." That's meeting somebody where they are. And if you don't have that experience, you can find somebody who does and just ask them to sit down with them. But at the end of the day, if that person doesn't want to get better, it's really hard to force them to get better. They really have to want it. That is to say if I knew how to get people better, I would share it with everybody, but unfortunately, I don't think that exists right now.
- David Gercken: [55:05](#) Sir, thanks. Folks, the Colonel has a hard stop at 1500, so I think it would have time for maybe one or possibly two more questions, but while you're typing that, sir, just want to thank you again for your time this afternoon, you talked about leaders, we talked about Soldiers. How about your peers or the support from your peers? How was that?

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [55:31](#) Looking back, it's kind of funny now. My peers didn't quite know what to do with me. When I came back from treatment, I went to lunch with a couple of my friends, and I got to go to the bathroom. I came back, they're all hiding their beers behind their menus. And I told them, "Hey, listen I'm not an alcoholic because there was beer available, I'm an alcoholic because of what's up here. And I have the tools now to deal with that." I don't drink because there's alcohol available. I drank because I was the only tool I had. And so peers are pretty supportive. Senior leaders are absolutely supportive and one of my mentors is the DCG of a U.S. Army Special Operations Command. And he's the one who actually encouraged me to do the podcast at the beginning.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [56:16](#) And he kind of got me started on this journey of helping others outside of my own recovery community. And so, my superior, my bosses, my raters, have been, hugely, hugely supportive. They're the ones who kind of took me under their wing after I came back from treatment and made sure I was in the right places and gave me that purpose. And so I think by sitting down and speaking with them, sharing my story with them and they can see the value that my experience can bring to the other Soldiers. Then they're the ones who actually have encouraged me to go out and do this type of work. Looks like David dropped off. Well, I'll jump into another question here really quick from the audience. Let's see.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [57:27](#) Okay. From Greg Pryor, I see "What if a spouse is reluctant to come forward because she's afraid it might affect the spouse's career?" It's one of those things where my career was the center of my universe. And I realize now that if I had followed through and was successful in that suicide attempt, my career wouldn't have meant anything. And I think my wife, and again, this is my experience, I think my wife would rather have a healthy husband, who she has a good relationship with than somebody who has got a good career in the Army. Somebody who's talented and what they do in the Army. If they get help in their career goes sideways for some reason, veteran or commander or whatever it may be, they're going to be successful outside the Army anyway.

Colonel Eric Kreitz: [58:11](#) And that kind of goes back to the value statement. I think that spouse has got to take a look and say, "Okay, do I want to help the husband, or do I want a husband with a good job?" And sometimes it is that binary choice, unfortunately, most of the time. It's not, you can still get help within the Army and still go on to have a successful career. But I think that may be more working with the spouse and that's where my wife's program of

recovery really comes in and helped us in our marriage because she's also going through living with somebody who has alcoholism, who's in recovery. What can I do to take care of myself? And so she now has tools to take care of herself. Should I have a relapse or if we're faced with the same situation with, "Hey, my husband was drinking, but I don't want his career to be harmed." Sometimes it's a trade-off and that spouse has got to say, "Hey, do I want a husband who is healthy and happy, and we have a great relationship? Or do I want a husband with a good career?" And like I said, unfortunately, sometimes it's binary, but many times it's not,

Colonel Eric Kreitz:

[59:22](#)

Hey guys, I appreciate it. And if anybody has any questions for me to follow up, with you can shoot me an email I'm on the global and I will, I will get back with you. I've had a couple of folks from this morning do just that. Unfortunately, I do have a hard stop at 1500. And so I'll turn it over to either Ash or Shirley we'll go from there.