# Transcript: It Podcast – ep 57 – why not you – why not now military options with Dan Morrill - Davon Copeland

*The following transcript is a verbatim account of the video or audio file accompanying this transcript.*

Speaker #1 (Narrator):

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Speaker #2 (Dan Morrill):

Hi, everybody. I am Dan Morrill. I'm a former Navy enlisted E6. I was a Cryptologic Technician. I was CTO. My tours of duty were in Iceland; Edzell, Scotland; Rota, Spain and Office of Naval Intelligence in Washington DC on a good day and Office of Naval Intelligence on a bad day. I'm here with Davon today. Dave, on what did you do in the military?

Speaker #3 (Davon Copeland):

First and foremost, thanks for having me here today. Davon Copeland, I was a gunner's mate, the greatest rate in the Navy. We are there to not choose who goes to heaven and hell, but we arranged the meeting is what we used to say all the time while I was in. I did 20 years, four months and 23 days. I say that not because I was counting. Anytime that you ask the government, can you retire, they want to make sure that they've crossed their T's and dot their I's and gotten all the time. The reason why I know that is because of that, but I had the pleasure while serving of never doing anything twice. What I did was the first ship that I was on was a CVN, so it was aircraft carrier. After the aircraft carrier, I went to expeditionary squadron where I was boots on ground, did a lot of joint Task Force stuff out Fifth Fleet, which is like in your Iraq, Afghanistan area. Then after that, I went to mighty pick me, the proud to serve, that was a DDG, went to the Gary after that, did some drug ops down south. Got to get those bad guys and blow up some ships down there. That was fun stuff. Then my last tour in between I did some training tours, but my last one was on the LHA-7, which would be an amphib. I've been around the block, I've done a couple of things. Yeah.

Speaker #2 (Dan Morrill):

I have a funny story about gunner's mate if you want to hear it.

Speaker #3 (Davon Copeland):

I are is a gunner's mate. Of course I want to hear it.

Speaker #2 (Dan Morrill):

It's a cryptologic tradition. We're not necessary known for our ability to shoot straight. The safest person is the person that's in front of me if I'm holding a gun. I was out at a shooting range with some gunner mates when I was in Edzell, Scotland and I was such a bad shot, they actually took my ammo away from me and wouldn't let me get my qual because I was such a bad shot, I was apparently shooting the grass. Not the target, but the grass in front of the target, so they took it.

Speaker #3 (Davon Copeland):

Yeah. That is the smart thing. I'm sure that there were some colorful words that follow, maybe a swift pat on the back and the exit from the range area. But yeah, I'm happy that you live through that experience.

Speaker #2 (Dan Morrill):

I did but it was fun. It was definitely an experience, one that I still remember after all this time. After 20 years, I still remember this. But we're here today to talk about education and being in the military and how can your military service actually serve you well in the academic field. I've gotten my PhD in Research Scientist now. Davon, what did you end up getting?

Speaker #3 (Davon Copeland):

I'm three classes away from another Master's Degree in Health Services Counseling. I was able to leverage everything that I had in the military to get scholarships and do all kinds of stuff because of my military service. We'll definitely deep dive into all that.

Speaker #2 (Dan Morrill):

We're going to talk about CLEP as well?

Speaker #3 (Davon Copeland):

We can talk about CLEP, we can talk about DANTES. We can talk about the College of the Navy, the Air Force. We could talk about the enlisted, the advanced education voucher, the graduate education voucher. That's for enlisted people, that's for officers. We can talk about all, big guy.

Speaker #2 (Dan Morrill):

There you go. You're in the military. Now, you know how to pay for college. I did. I was at University of Maryland for my bachelor's degree and I was in Rota, Spain when I got mine started. We had a combination of in-class schools and because the Internet was just starting, I was able to be one of the first early ones to do CLEP online. I did about a dozen CLEP exams and just really accelerated my degree in the University of Maryland system by doing that. Really neat, because it was just a way almost like WGU. Show your skills. If you can pass this CLEP exam, you've basically proven your competence and you get that credit with your college. WGU will take those same CLEP scores as Maryland did back in the day when dinosaurs totally roamed the earth, 1999. How did you get through, how did you accelerate through?

Speaker #3 (Davon Copeland):

That is so hilarious that you just said that you went to University of Maryland because I got my bachelor's at the University of Maryland also. What happened was I had this old crusty chief come up to me and was like, "Hey, you know, education is a big deal." I'm like, "Yeah." He goes, "You should do it" and I'm like, "Yeah." Then he kept coming back every week until I enrolled. What ended up happening was at one point in my career, I realized that all of the stuff that people were telling me about transitioning out of the military, about making sure that you have a plan. In the military, we have something called the seven Ps. It's proper prior planning prevents piss poor performance. Usually, when it comes down to the seven Ps, you're talking about mission accomplishment and all of these other things. We're not really talking about transition. At some point, I want to say about my 15-year mark, I have been going to classes and not doing the accelerated thing that you did. Obviously, you were more focused than I am when it came to that, and getting there because nothing is more enticing to a military member than that insensitive base. If you do this, then you'll get this. Nothing is more military than that, but I digress. I finally decided to go to college. When I started going to college full-time, I'm like, this is going to end up costing me if I want to keep going because sometimes TA runs out, you got to wait, or you got to pay yourself or supplement it with the GI Bill. What ended up happening was I ended up getting a military scholarship, which is the advanced education voucher, which is a resource that not very many people are using right now. I'm saying aloud for the people in the back, AV is an untapped resource in whatever you want. They're probably going to give it to you if you apply. I get the AV and because of the time that I had left before retirement, I didn't have to give any extra time up to sign on. I signed on and I was able to go to school, back to back and stick to that eight week mantra that they do at the University of Maryland. It was awesome to be able to do that and that's how I got it done. Utilizing the resources and getting out there.

Speaker #2 (Dan Morrill):

It's funny. You talk about crusty old chief, I had a crusty old warrant officer, Warrant Officer Burke. We nicknamed him Task because he was old school. By the time I was enrolled in Spain, he'd already been in for 27 years. He joined in mid-'70s. He was a screamer. He's old-school Navy.

Speaker #3 (Davon Copeland):

Yeah.

Speaker #2 (Dan Morrill):

He's yelling, he's screaming, he's pitching a fit. There's no cards, no nothing, man. He's hey, Petty Officer moron. He'd come over to my desk and would be like, why don't you sign for school yet? Well, why would I do that? Why would I even want to go to school? You're going to sign up for school. Well, okay. Yeah. If you want me off your back, you'll go to school. He got the Chief Hester, who was my chief of the time, on-board. These two tag teamed me to get me to go and then they got my wife involved. I started going to school with my wife because by then I had already been to a number of C schools. They really just wanted to do a bunch of things there and were brand new with the Internet at that point, it was all brand new. I needed to learn routers, I needed to learn computer architecture. The only way I was going to get that was in college. The navy just didn't have those schools. It's Christmas 1997 and we're rebuilding all the routers because we're dealing with the entire European communications net at that point and he just didn't have the people. Each commander was selecting people at that point to go to University of Maryland to get these skills. They actually brought us all together at University of Florida to learn databases. They had about 50 people in this database course at the University of Florida. We're all from all over the world. The Navy was more than willing to pay for it. That's the cool part about education in the Navy is that if you ask for it, you say I would like to do a thing. Your commander is really supportive of you, your family service center is really supportive of you. I was really thankful that they enlisted my wife to poke me in the side at the same time going, you can't skip school time again.

Speaker #3 (Davon Copeland):

That's funny. You started telling your story and it was a losing battle when a Chief Warrant officer and a Navy Chief get together and tell you you're going to do something, it's going to happen. Then when you think for a second that it's not and they call your wife, you might as well get you book bag, Timmy, hang on, make sure you have your sharpener, your ink, and everything else that you need because guess what? It's going to happen. It's awesome to be able to have that mentorship that you have where somebody sees something in you and knows that they are preparing you for the things that you're probably not concerned with.

Speaker #2 (Dan Morrill):

I wasn't thinking that the Internet in '97. Who was? I think that's a neat thing though and that was a cool part is that we had actually them coming to me but me also going to them. That was the other thing. That's another good thing about the military that I really like, is if you go to your commander or your officer and you are in good terms with them, they will bend over backwards to help you. They will make sure that there's funding somewhere, because there's all sorts of training dollars that can go into things. They'll make sure that those opportunities are there as long as you keep on going in that direction that they need you to go in.

Speaker #3 (Davon Copeland):

Absolutely. I think that it goes without saying the military has shifted over time. That old crusty chief and warrant officer, strong arm GM made you go to school but at the end of the day, that was their way of letting you know that they were concerned about you. In the military, I would say this across all services, that investing in people is your number one thing, because people don't care what you know unless they know that you care. To have those people have your back, you wouldn't be standing here right now as a doctor from enlisted, had it not been those people planting those seeds in your head to get you to realize that you could do it.

Speaker #2 (Dan Morrill):

Well, the thing I like the other two part about this 12 years, there's a bonus for college credits. That's the part I liked. You get a couple extra dollars and few re-enlist and you have college credits. You also can come in as an E2 or E3 depending on how many college credits you got. I came in as an E2 because of Bellevue Community College, I had like maybe one year of college when I joined there.

Speaker #3 (Davon Copeland):

It's so funny that you and I are talking, our paths are so similar. Obviously, we're both Navy veterans and we're talking about that, but when I came into the Navy, I came in as an E2 also because I went to a community college, Mesa San Diego City Community College at Mesa. I was able to get 24 units and that shifted over and gave me E2 in the military, which started my career. Like I said, you've got two rows down and a whole lot faster because, cleft and Dante and all that other stuff, and it's sit at based stuff.

Speaker #2 (Dan Morrill):

Well, the other thing too is, if you have that single mindedness as a Navy person or just as a military person. Here's your goal, here's your target, here's what you want go after. You are going to get there, but you can get there as fast as you want to get there. You just want to get it over with. If you are scrubbing that hallway and your are bathing it, you just want it done. To me, that's what college was. It was bath in a hallway. I just wanted it done and over with so I can go play video games.

Speaker #3 (Davon Copeland):

Yeah, absolutely. Just thinking about WGU in itself and how our competency-based learning model fits into the military culture, we have over 200,000 alumni. Currently we have 127,000 students. I know that the Live Share that are not military students. Even though we call it competency-based learning at WGU, it's exactly what we do in the military. If you learn something, you prep for the test, or you write the paper, you perform the test, and then you're on to the next. I know that that sounds funny and people in the military are going to be able to relate to what I just said because that's LPTO, L-P-T-O, and that's an acronym, and since everybody in the military uses the acronyms, you learn it, you prep, you test, or turn into paper, and then you are on to the next. I know that it seems simple because it is. We are taking all of your experience, we are taking all of your knowledge, and you are able to show competency and knock things out. It's so funny because in the College of IT, I just watched a YouTube video of a guy that was a student at WGU, this guy finished 79 units and got a degree in computer science. Now, I want the people listening to my voice to know that this guy is obviously an anomaly. I'm not saying that everybody is going to be able to do it, but he tested the theory, and he got it done.

Speaker #2 (Dan Morrill):

I've got one guy right now, the government in running something called AWS Cloud, he has gone and when he got all of his Amazon certificates, he went ahead and walked in with four Amazon certificates and they are giving him four classes in credit. With that transfer in it and everything else, he walked in the door with 83 COs and he needs 122. He's got 41 left to go and he is thinking, can I knock this out in six months? Why not try it? He starts up July 1st and he's already making plans to get to that 41 at the end of six months. He's just got that mindset that, let's just learn it, practice it, test it, move on to the next.

Speaker #3 (Davon Copeland):

That's definitely awesome. I think that we need to bring him home once he gets it done, especially if you're a military member, you understand the concept of incentive-based and not to get too crazy and off into a tangent, but I'm going to get off into the tangent about the mentors that we have. Although we have this mantra of competency-based learning that completely aligns with the military culture and how we train and how we fight. We also have the mentor. Let's be real, the mentor is assigned to every one of our students. Why is that important? The mentor in the military will be like your battle buddy. You don't go anywhere in the military without a battle buddy or for the Air Force, they call them wing-man. If you go on liberty and you are in a foreign country, you've got your wing-man, you've got your battle buddy. If you want to stay out late and have overnight liberty, you've got your wing-man, you've got your battle buddy. If you are going out into the battlefield, who's going to go on the battlefield without their battle buddy. WGU has that built in. It's another piece of military culture and maybe it wasn't done intentionally, but it does. It fits our military culture and it allows for us to say, hey, we keep saying that, hey, we are interested in military service members coming in and getting degrees. Well, here's the thing. I could say that until I'm blue in the face, but do my actions align with that? In the WGU they do because now, not only am I on this run myself where I'm realizing my dreams, I'm going to the College of IT and I want to get this thing knocked out, but now we got another person that's knocking on your door, Chief Warrant Officer, knocking on your door saying, "Hey, this week we want to get this done. You already know this stuff, why don't we knock this out?" Just to let the world know, my wife just started at WGU. She did her first class in three weeks. The proof is in putting.

Speaker #2 (Dan Morrill):

I think that's the new thing now. Again, you've got that support system here as well. You've got me as a former military and I'm a Program Chair, I run the Cloud computing program. We've got Mike Peterson, who is a former Coast Guard Officer who will be with us next week, who runs the computer science program. You've got course instructors who are former military. You've got program mentors who are all former military. You can actually request a program mentor if he can guide you through the whole program. That's military, used to be a military. You could actually work in that shared environment, that shared common culture to get you through WGU as well. You are going to find a lot of military people in WGU that are in management or in training or in support services to make sure that you are going to get to where you need to go. We've got that shared culture of the military values, military processes the way we think, and that's a huge advantage walking into WGU.

Speaker #3 (Davon Copeland):

It really is, and we're bridging the gap. Just yesterday I had a situation that took about four hours to fix. I had an Army Sergeant, she is PCSC, she is in a state where she is doing her clinicals for licenses. She's in that state and she just got told that not only is she PCSC, but a month before PCSC, during the same week of clinicals, she's going to have to go to California for a month and not get anything done, not be able to do her classes. It was real easy for me to be able to explain it, bridge that gap, to speak military to the civilians to assist and to make sure that person can, look at the end of the day, any organization can say that they are military friendly, but there's a difference between being military friendly and being military focused. When you are looking at the things that we do, the dynamic, those military members that you just said that are going to be mentors that are support group, our VA system, our military outreach, the reason why we exist is to make sure that you don't have to worry about any of the other extra, and if you are worried about it, you reach out, you call and all phasers, all illuminators, all targets are going to be pointing in a direction of where we come around you because it takes a village to get this done and that's exactly what we're doing. That's why I'm excited about the College of IT and where we are going with it. If you look at the four colleges that we have, the College of Business, Teachers College, College of IT, and the College of Health Professions, the lion's share of our personnel are military personnel in the College of IT.

Speaker #2 (Dan Morrill):

30% of my student body is military.

Speaker #3 (Davon Copeland):

Exactly. You know what? That's not enough, we need more.

Speaker #2 (Dan Morrill):

We do. Although I got to admit, it doesn't help military center PR. It's pre-COVID, so we didn't really have remote testing the way we have it now. I had a military person that's in Japan. He's trying to find an English language version of a CompTIA test to pass his class. We had to find him a testing center in Japan that would hand him and get him the English language version of that test and a testing center where everything's in Japanese, the operating systems are set up in Japanese and everything else. We were able to finally get him a special system, a special place so he could go take his test, but it was in the Family Service Center.

Speaker #3 (Davon Copeland):

Hey, look, by any means necessary, WGU, we don't make excuses, we make it happen. What's more military than that?

Speaker #2 (Dan Morrill):

That was just funny, though. Because our family service centers have got, what do you mean I have to have someone in the room to monitor this guy taking a test? Oh, no, trust me, we need all this stuff to make CompTIA happy. But we did, we find out I'm hooked up, and it was fun. But the good part is that, yeah, we'll work with family service centers, we'll work with your officers, your staff, we'll work with whatever we need to to get whatever we need to get done. I've had students go TAD. Got someplace where there's no Internet connectivity whatsoever, so we give them an extension. You go get an extension for the amount of time you're going to be TAD, and when you come back, it's like you never ever left. Those are the fun, that's what makes my job fun. That's what I love about this job the most, just finding those solutions.

Speaker #3 (Davon Copeland):

You know, earlier you spoke about being able to articulate things over. I know right now, and I'm not sure if you want to announce it, but I'm going to tell the world. He is working to make sure that those of you that have any C's, MOS's that deal directly with IT, that it gets articulated over so we can get you to that finish line faster. Because again, it's not enough to be military friendly. You got to be military focused, and you got to make sure that the initiatives, the things that you do, the services that you provide are comprehensive and that they are military focused so we can get you to the finish line as fast as possible.

Speaker #2 (Dan Morrill):

I'm really proud of this one. If you're doing anything with Word Cloud, you're doing anything with FedRAMP, the two government contracts that have to do with cloud computing, either in Azure or in AWS. We've set it up, so there's a direct mapping now between your military MOS and where you can be placed in the program. Where you are by rank can go into your transcripts, or being able to transfer stuff in and transfer in your credits. For MOS's, it's good for that system and it's good for any C Navy enlisted codes, it's good for those who've got them all mapped out. If you ever want to know what we are, go out to the BSCC computer forum, if you've got time, on the WGU website, and definitely what we can talk about it there. It's a new thing, we hope to launch in October, you're going to hear more about this. I have the feeling.

Speaker #3 (Davon Copeland):

Absolutely. They are going to hear more about it and look, let's just address the elephant in the room but not the cat that's in the bag. That's right. The elephant in the room is, the moment that you're in the military, and no one tells you this, but I must say it right now, the day that you go into the military, you need to be prepared for transition. What do I mean? No one ever says this stuff, but after 20 years of service, if you're in for two days, three days, two years, 30, 60, whatever, and they got to kick you out, you are going to transition. At the end of the day, most of us that get out of the military get out, and I just went to the Council for college and military education, 60 percent of people who get out of the military and they don't have a degree. They still need jobs, they still have kids, they still have families, they still have bills, they still have wants, desires, and needs. At the end of the day, it is our responsibility as service members to make sure that we're preparing for the transition. What better way to do it than to pick a career, than to pick certifications, and to do all of these things that are going to allow for us to not only explore more in school, but also make a livable wage, that's not just livable, but allows for us to do the things that we want to do because after however many years, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 20, 30 years of military service, you want to be able to treat yourself also in careers and techs. The industry right now has gaps. There are so many tech jobs that are out there right now and we don't have people to fill them, and so at WGU, not only are we focusing in on the tech and getting you to degree, but we also have partnerships with employers that we're going to be bringing on into this podcast series so that you can have access and attainment, and still be able to get out there and instead of making $16,000 a year after you serve in your country, you can make 40, 50, 60. You're working at Amazon, you're working at PlayStation or Xbox, like I've said, why don't you tell him about that, right?

Speaker #2 (Dan Morrill):

This is funny. A friend of mine, we both got out at the same time and we both went to Computer Sciences Corporation for a bit, before they got bought out. We both worked at Office of Naval Intelligence, we both did the same job. We both had the same post, same rank, we were identical in every way. The only way we weren't identical is, I had a bachelor's degree and he did not. He started at Computer Sciences Corporation for $55,000 a year, in 1999, money not bad. Started 65, and it's just a bachelor's degree, that's the only difference between the two of us, we had the exact same schools, backgrounds, had served with this guy for 11 years, and he was attacked. It's like $10,000, that's a lot of money in '99. That was a new car in 1999.

Speaker #3 (Davon Copeland):

The power of certifications is real and so there's this thing that the Navy uses, actually all the services have, it's called COOL. COOL is the prediction lean outlet and it allows for our website and it allows for service members to go in and get certifications that the military pays for. Again, certifications are the hot thing. There's a story that they have, you have three people that get out of the military on the same day, one of them is an E4, that decided to do all the Navy COOL stuff, was only in the Navy for six years, decided to get out but did all of the Navy COOL, and US maps certifications that she could. There was an E6, who had been in for 10 years and decided, you know what, I'm going to get out and make more money working at one of these military contractors, like LightOS, or SAIC or Booz Allen, or something like that. I'm telling you guys out there because I'm trying to get these partnerships goal with these guys or whatever. So if you hear this, then call me. But anyhow, then you have a chief, who's been in, 24 years, is retiring, doesn't have a degree, but has a whole lot of experience in the area, and they all apply for a contractor position, and they all get the contractor position, they show up to work and you find out that she, the E4, is the supervisor for the first-class for 10 years, the chief for 24 years, because she took the time to let Navy COOL pay for the certifications. There's power in that.

Speaker #2 (Dan Morrill):

Yeah. Out of one of the things I was taught was interesting is this that came from my upfront, as a scholar is don't ever say no. If your commander says, "Hey, would you be interested in?" Say yes. Because if you say yes, you end up doing COOL stuff. I ended up actually running around with the Royal Marines for six months because I said yes. How many American sailors can say you ran around where the Royal Marines and you served on board at Royal Navy ship? Did you know that Royal Navy ships still have run rations?

Speaker #3 (Davon Copeland):

I was about to say.

Speaker #2 (Dan Morrill):

They would literally give you run rations onboard a British ship, so basically- Yeah. American ships can have a beer.

Speaker #3 (Davon Copeland):

I would say this, there's copious amount of AL on board those foreign ships and they allow for them to partake while on their way.

Speaker #2 (Dan Morrill):

Honestly, and it's that way too even nowadays. If you don't say no, if you just go ahead and try it, all of a sudden you're seen as adventurous, your taking advantage of all the military benefits, you're taking advantage of that military culture where you are going to be rewarded for going out on point in ways that your brother may not necessarily go, there're other people who will hang back. It's a lot of fun being out there because you just get this wild experience that, my Navy wasn't like everybody else's Navy.

Speaker #3 (Davon Copeland):

That's awesome. I do want to bring something up specifically about what separates WGU from the other people that are out there in this space, doing it is, we have very competitive scholarships and everybody will say, "Well, scholarships, everybody has scholarships." The difference with us is that, when you're looking at our students, we got about 18k that are military connected. We're not just talking about active duty, reserves and the guard, and the Space Force. Yeah, I said it. We're also talking about their spouses and their dependents.

Speaker #2 (Dan Morrill):

Knowing that, you've got Military Appreciation Scholarship here?

Speaker #3 (Davon Copeland):

Yeah, $2,500 and I know that that sounds like it's not a lot, but the thing about WGU is that we want people to come to our school and not have to go broke going to college because they want to pivot our Upskill. We have a flat rate tuition, and we're cheaper than all of the colleges and we're accredited everywhere. That is correct, everywhere. Then here's the thing, you can take your degree with you wherever you go.

Speaker #2 (Dan Morrill):

Here's the thing I like about it, that 2,500 bucks I figure that my program for six months, the total six months cost is $3,500. So if you get that $2,500 scholarship, you're going to come up with $1,000.

Speaker #3 (Davon Copeland):

Yeah.

Speaker #2 (Dan Morrill):

That's for six months, and that's for as many courses as you can take. So if you transfer in 83 courses, or 83 credits and you only need 41, you're paying 1,000 bucks, and you can get it done in six months.

Speaker #3 (Davon Copeland):

Exactly. With the competency-based model, you probably already did it, so the question is, why not you?

Speaker #2 (Dan Morrill):

Why not now? I'd do it. I did it. You know, come. Talk to me. Talk to Davon, and have a good time. Let us know what you're thinking. It is truly a privilege just serve you, and it really is. Again, you've got this really warm, welcoming military community here at the college and you might as well just do it. It's not going to hurt you, it's not going to take anything away from you.

Speaker #3 (Davon Copeland):

Again, what's the worst that can happen? You'll be successful, you'll have options.

Speaker #2 (Dan Morrill):

Yeah, you won't see that chief walk around with that coffee mug, permanent hand grip.

Speaker #3 (Davon Copeland):

First of all, you'll always see the chief walking around with a coffee mug, that is definitely a requirement, I got mine right here.

Speaker #2 (Dan Morrill):

It was good talking to you. Thank you very much. We'll be back around next week, and we'll be having Mike Peterson on board, talk about that route from enlisted to PhD, or from gunner's mate to multiple master's degree, or from officer to PhD, and the role of Mike Peterson.

Speaker #3 (Davon Copeland):

Everything in between. Let's get it.

Speaker #2 (Dan Morrill):

All right, guys. Thanks for coming.

Speaker #1 (Narrator):

WGU, a new kind of you.