*Borne the Battle*

*Episode #117 James McDonough – Army Veteran, IVMF’s Managing Director for Programs and Services*

*Hosted by Timothy Lawson*

(Text Transcript Follows)

[00:00:00] Music

# **[00:00:10] OPENING MONOLOGUE:**

**Timothy Lawson:** Wednesday, August 29th, 2018. This is *Borne the Battle*, brought to you by the Department of Veterans’ Affairs. I’m your host, Marine Corps Veteran, Timothy Lawson. Secretary Wilkie has a Twitter account. That's right. The tenth Secretary for the Department of Veterans’ Affairs has officially launched his Twitter account. It is @SECWilkie, that’s SEC, like short for secretary, @SECWilkie. [Link to Secretary Wilkie’s Twitter account: <https://twitter.com/secwilkie?lang=en>.] If you want to stay up-to-date on the secretary, where he's going, what he's doing, his thoughts on things that are going inside of the Veteran community, and especially the Department of Veterans’ Affairs. Follow him there. This week's guest is James McDonough. He is an Army Veteran and currently the managing director for programs and services at the Institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University. You may remember back at Episode 85, I believe it was, Michael Haynie was on who is the founder and director-- or president-- of IVMF. And James is here to expand on the foundation that Michael laid down for the efforts of IVMF, but to specifically talk about two powerful programs: one called “America Serves”, the other one called “Onward to Opportunity”. They’re very cool programs, and James has a lot to say about them. If you’ve never heard about them, this will be very informative for you. IVMF is a really respected and highly regarded organization inside the Veteran community. So, I know there is a lot here for you to learn and get excited about. Without further ado, James McDonough. Enjoy!

[00:01:59] Music

# **[00:02:03] PSA:**

**Man 1:** I served in Vietnam.

**Man 2:** I served in World War 2.

**Woman 1:** I served in Afghanistan.

**Man 3:** And VA serves us all.

**Man 1:** No matter when you served.

**Woman 1:** No matter if you saw combat or not.

**Man 4:** There are benefits for Veterans of every generation.

**Woman 2:** See what VA can do for you.

**Man 5:** To learn what benefits you may be eligible for, visit [www.va.gov](https://www.va.gov/) [Link to VA’s website]. That’s [www.va.gov](https://www.va.gov/).

[00:02:31] Music

# **[00:02:35] INTERVIEW:**

**Tim:** Wonderful. So I have James McDonough from IVMF, managing director of programs and services. Sir, thank you so much for joining me.

**James (Jim) McDonough:** You're very welcome, Tim. It’s my pleasure. Thank you.

**Tim:**  So, uh, James. You want to go by James or Jim?

**Jim:** Jim is better.

**Tim:** Jim is better. Very well.

**Jim:** [Laughter]

**Tim:** Jim, we start these interviews at the same time in our lives that every Veteran can resonate with, and that’s that decision to join the United States military. Can you bring us back to that day for you?

**Jim:** I- I can. It begins with my formative years in high school. I went to a Catholic High School. Most of my friends were sons, primarily, of Air Force officers. I grew up in the shadows of a strategic air command base in the ‘60s and ‘70s; that was Plattsburgh Air Force base in upstate New York. Most of the kids I went to high school with were children of military members, many of whom who’d served in Vietnam ‘cause this was- I graduated, just for perspective, I graduated from high school in 1977. So, I’m an old-timer, I guess, by some people’s standards. But, you know, I was just in love with what I was seeing in the families of those who had served. It seemed to me like, most importantly, one of the most honorable things that anyone could do would be to serve their country. And so, from the moment I grew up in the shadows of this Air Force base, I always had an interest in serving. My dad is a Korean War Veteran. You know, I’m one of these kids who grew up playing “Army in the Woods” like so many kids [Tim Laughter] did back then. Yeah, I got all my dad’s combat gear from Korea. He was a Marine forward-observer, so I kept all that. You know, it’s all that stuff in childhood that worked for me, and I could see myself in that environment as a public servant of this country, you know, defending their freedoms. So, for me, it was that simple. I then put myself through college and in between summer graduation, I walked into a military recruiter and volunteered to go to officer candidate school. I just was one of those guys who was always drawn to the idea that this was a pretty cool opportunity for a young kid in upstate New York.

**Tim:** Yeah. Wonderful! Tell me about a close friend or a great leader that you had while you were in the military. You can choose either one, but tell me about that person.

**Jim:** Yeah. He’s still in it to this day. The guy’s name is Howard Bromberg and I served with him multiple times throughout my career. I first met him during an assignment to Germany-- then, West Germany, for your listeners; kind of a little context-- in the mid ‘80s, and he was this captain who I just thought had the right stuff. He was personable, he was- he knew his trade very well, and I immediately found myself just impressed with him. So much so that later on in life, when I was stationed at the Pentagon, I followed an assignment of his in the Pentagon. We served in the same billet, if you will. And when I got to the Pentagon as a promotable captain, and the opportunity presented itself to volunteer to go to Korea to serve as this guy’s operations officer, S-3, and later on, XO, I did so. You know, I wanted to work for this guy so bad. I tracked him down one day in the Pentagon athletic club, and I had a conversation with that was like, “Hey who’s gonna be your three? Who’s gonna be your XO?” He said, “Are you interested?” And I said, “Yeah. I am.” So, at the time, I was the speech writer to the Secretary of the Army on what they call a payback tour from grad school. And I had to go in and see the Secretary of the Army about me wanting to volunteer to go to Korea to serve with this just dynamic, ‘the right stuff’ leader. And he said to me, “Is it good for you? Is it good for the Army?” And I said, “Absolutely, sir.” He goes, “Then go.” So that was the beginning of my service with this one individual who I hold up to the highest, kind of, possible standard that anybody could subscribe to. I later went on to be a battalion commander for him. It’s just one of these guys, and you encounter a lot of good people in the United States Army as I did, but every now and then, there’s one or two who are special. And the other individual I’ll tell you was my first platoon sergeant. This guy, Staff Sergeant Chris Taylor that served in Vietnam when I was a brand-new second lieutenant. He was my assigned platoon sergeant in Germany, and I just looked at this guy and I knew he was there to teach me the right stuff as a young leader. And so, between one first platoon sergeant and a guy who later became a three-star general, I would tell you that those are the two most influential individuals in my life in the United States Army. And there have been a lot of other people, but I go back to Staff Sergeant Chris Taylor, who was my first platoon sergeant as a young platoon leader, who grounded me and everything right in the Army: my outlook, my just ‘100 percent or beyond’ effort to care for soldiers and their families. He taught me everything the right way. And then I later looked up to this leader who was above me in rank that I just- To this day, I think the world of him. We still keep in touch. I just think there are a lot of good people in the United States Army, but these two stand out for me.

**Tim:**  Yeah. That’s great. The reason I love asking that question is, you know, when you’re in the military, not only do you so often have admirable leadership, but you’re also among great leaders, right? Even as your peers.

**Jim:** Correct.

**Tim:**  And so, I always like hearing, you know- It’s challenging, right? To choose that “one”. But then, I feel like very Veteran just recalls onto that one that just stood out a little bit more than the rest and it’s always interesting to hear about those people.

**Jim:** Yeah. It’s interesting for me, too. One was a noncommissioned officer and one was an officer—

**Tim:** Yeah.

**Jim:** -- and I think in the formative years of becoming a young officer, there’s no better person to kind of have at your wing than a very good noncommissioned officer. So, for me, that was my first great experience with wonderful Army leadership.

**Tim:**  Wonderful. So many of us when we serve, no matter what we served for-- whether it was to deploy, whether it was to get, you know, money for college, whatever it may be-- still felt some sort of sense of service. And I’m wondering if you can recall to any time during your service that you felt was, like, the epitome of serving this nation? Were you, like, in a situation where you realized, “*You know, what? What I’m doing right now is so valuable to not only my service but for my nation.*”Like,“*I am good for the United States of America right now.”*

**Jim:** [Laughter] I kind of think it was all that. The 26 years I served, to me, represented everything good for our country. There are a couple of standout moments, I will tell you. The year I spent in Korea away from my family as battalion operations officer. It was high-tension military operations. I was an operations officer Patriot Battalion. We had six firing batteries up and down the Korean peninsula and we were always at a very high state of alert. So, I just felt like-- it sounds stupid to say-- but somewhere in this country, someone served that way every day, and I was doing that. It’s not anything to be taken for granted. I can remember many nights in Korea, 2 AM-- whatever the time you want to kind of mark time with-- it was all that. To me, it was a chance to represent, most importantly, the people who I was serving with in the best way I could, and in so doing you knew you were doing the nation’s business. And I think, I don’t know, there were a couple moments in time where you just know you’re on the right side of doing things for your country. And there was another time, too, when I was a battery commander, and we had instituted something as simple as home visits of our soldiers just to make sure we knew that their living conditions were… You know, this was the mid- ‘80s and then West Germany. So, you can imagine, young E-4, married with family, living on a German economy. And I remember this kid’s name was Zulke, Specialist Zulke and he was a generator jock for me. Your listeners will know what that is. And I went out to his house. I had never met his wife and all she said was, “This is really nice that you took the time to kind of come out and see how your soldiers are living.” And I’ll always remember that. So I- That moment with Zulkie’s family sticks out in my mind. The time spent in Korea every night of my life worrying about what was going to happen in the next 24 hours. On behalf of this country, I kind of felt that was pretty special. But throughout all the years of service, I actually thought all of it was pretty special because not everybody gets this opportunity. So, I felt like when I was given the opportunity, I was going to make the most of it, no matter where I was.

**Tim:** Yeah, absolutely. So, what prompted your transition out, then? Was it simply retirement or was there something else?

**Jim:** No, no. So, my brother and I were both actively serving officers in the United States Army.

**Tim:** Oh.

**Jim:** I grew up- My parents were divorced at an early age, and as people age, my mom’s health worsened. So, my brother and I had a conversation. He was then stationed at Fort Drum, and I’m from upstate New York. And so, we had agreed to kind of-- to the best of our abilities-- one of us was going to be responsible for looking out for Mom while we were serving. So, her health declined. I was at the War College, and I was- we were considering, you know, where we were going next, and I remember having a conversation with my brother about like, “Ok, who’s next in line? How are we going to do this?” Between my brother… I got to give credit to my wife, I guess, more importantly. She just said, like, “What are you going to do about your mom?” and I didn’t have a good answer. And it was then that I thought about, ‘*You know, there’s nothing wrong with having served 26 years, being upfront with the Army and saying, “*This is a situation with my family. I know you may have had other plans for me, but I’d like to go home. So, get me somewhere close to my Mom to be able to care for her in her later years.”’ The Army, I think, respected that. I didn’t try to play any system. I wasn’t thinking of myself. I was just thinking of how to be fair to the Army, how to be honest with the Army, and how to do whatever I could do to take care of my mom. So, I think, in hind sight, everybody told me that they respected my openness with that. And I could’ve, probably-- I’m assuming-- gone on in life in the Army if I chose to because I was at the War College, but it was about my brother and I coming up with the best option to care for my mom and in so doing the ability to care for my family after the Army also unfolded. So, I had no great plan; I was always considering the Army my life. And then things happen and they change. And it just takes you in a certain direction and you make the most of it. So, the Army assigned me to West Point out of the War College. It was a three-hour drive to upstate New York where my mom was living, so that was close enough. And then, the war broke out, so. [Laughter] Of all things, you know? I got deployed from West Point for the war and my wife stepped in to care for my mom in her later years. So, it was a simple personal decision around what’s best for my family and my extended family that gave me the opportunity to retire.

**Tim:** Yeah. Okay. I’m glad that that was a situation where, it sounds like, all parties involved understood what was going on. Everybody did their part to make sure that what needed to happen, happened.

**Jim:** Yeah. I’ve got to give credit to the Army.

**Tim:** Yeah.

**Jim:** Because… I think because I was the person who I was and I was honest about my intent, they respected it. So, they were like, “Yep, we can do this. We get it.”

**Tim:** Sure.

**Jim:** So, it ended up- First of all, it ended up being a great Army assignment to the United States Military Academy. That was a pretty cool gig for a kid who went to Officer Candidate School. It was just one of those rare opportunities where honesty in all parties kind of saw things the same way.

**Tim:** Right. So back in Episode 85, we talked with your colleague, Michael Haynie—

**Jim:** Okay.

**Tim:** -- and we learned about the Institute for Veterans and Military Families then. How did you start getting involved with IVMF?

**Jim:** Yeah, so I met Mike in the early formative years when he was- It was pre-IVMF, when Syracuse University was sponsoring its entrepreneurship bootcamp for Veterans. The first programming aspect of this organization, now a decade later. I was serving as a State Commissioner of Veterans Service for New York state, and I drove out to Syracuse to meet Mike and then the Dean of the Whitman school, Mel Stith, a decorated Veteran himself. And he asked me to help him support visibility of this brand-new program, EBV. And so, I saw him, like, kind of like this instinctive, entrepreneurial spirit that was going to leverage everything in this university at some point to serve people best who serve their country. So, you know, I was serving the state government. At the time, Mike was a professor in the Whitman School of Management. But I knew he had a good idea and I saw the value in the university extending itself the way Mel Stith and Mike Haynie kinda positioned themselves. I dragged along with me the Adjutant General for New York state, a guy by the name of Major General Joe Taluto, who himself was a really good Army officer and leader, and together we sat there and listened to Mike and Dean Stith‘s, kind of, vision for what EBV could be. Fast forward, I went into-- after state public service-- I ran a non-profit called Veterans Outreach Center. So, I began serving people. And that was in Rochester. So, Rochester, Syracuse. Not a big distance to kind of close in terms of mileage. I watched IVMF form and grow. I left the position of Chief Executive of that non-profit and went into philanthropy. And I actually made a grant to IVMF from this foundation I was working in. And it was in that vein that I started supporting, you know, IVMF-- as it was becoming IVMF-- for what I knew it could do to serve people who serve their families and Veterans. And so, throughout that course of meeting him initially in the early days, supporting, really, the formation of this organization, the opportunity presented itself to come into this organization and build out its programs and services portfolio, which is pretty robust at this point. So, If you look back in history from where this began to where we are now, I, myself, am amazed with the accomplishments of the organization. And there’s a lot more to be done, but it’s a great organization really trying to do really important things for this country.

**Tim:** So, just briefly before we step into the programs that you, uh, that you, you know, oversee and assist with, what-- as managing director of programs and services-- in a nutshell, what does that mean?

**Jim:** [Laughter] It’s everything this place does [Laughter], in one way or another. The arm of the organization that serves people is what the managing director’s responsibilities are. It’s the external facing delivery of programming and services for those who serve and their families that I sit at the nexus of. So, it’s not just me. There’s a wonderful team in this programs and services portfolio. We’re probably two-thirds to four-fifths of the organization itself, and so it’s a big chunk of the organization. A lot of it is in motion everyday around the country and beyond. And as managing director, my responsibilities are essentially to make it all work and get those who work with me to drive great programming opportunities that attract our nation’s Veterans and their family members into what this organization does on their behalf. So, building programs is one thing, delivering them is another. I’ve been responsible for kind of some of the innovative work that’s taken place: developing new programming opportunities, expanding upon what’s been started, and really growing the scale and reach of this organization. I think the managing director’s simple responsibilities are to make the organization work best, day in, day out. I think it’s really in that, I’ll call it a grind-- which I affectionately refer to it as, by the way. I think it’s all the dynamics of day-to-day pushing a program out around the country and, in some cases, around the world so that you’re touching people who served to the best of your ability. So—

**Tim:**  Sure.

**Jim:** That’s what a managing director does every day.

**Tim:** So, the two programs that I wanted to touch on today: “America Serves” and the “Onward to Opportunity” program. Let’s start with “America Serves”. Briefly, what is that and how does it benefit the Veteran community?

**Jim:** Sure. It’s-- I’ll keep the description of it very simple. It’s actually a national-facing movement to deliver coordinated care, resources, and services to people who served their country and their families. I’ll break that down for you because it’s an over-simplistic kind of description. We literally have built and sustained, at this point-- across 16 major American cities and vast geographies of counties around them-- networks of resources, services, and care that are unlike any other thing out there today. These are, most importantly, designed to counteract the challenge that we all faced when we transitioned from military service which, research will tell you and validate, is our inability to navigate across this plethora of services that this country puts forth on behalf of those people who served. So, on the one hand, it is an initiative designed to take responsibility for the navigation of people like us and ensure that the services, resources, and care that they need is actually delivered in a very accountable and transparent way. Part two to that equation is that the organizations that serve the needs of these individuals don’t necessarily coordinate their solutions across the community. And so, you have situations where, “*Jim McDonough: loss of job, has a couple of family issues, is looking to the community for help. Don’t know where to start.*” That’s navigation challenge. In these communities that “America Serves” resides in and is part of, we take responsibility for that navigation. We own the navigation piece. We get the Jim McDonough’s of the world to the right place in the least amount of time, and we do that at a very high, and effective, and efficient rate. We do all this, Tim, because we digitally connect our communities on a bit of technology that allows providers to coordinate solutions beyond the boundaries of their walls. And this is what is not understood in this country is there is a lot of capacity. The difficulty is in accessing it because we don’t know how to navigate through it. And part B is coordination between providers does not exist in this country. So I took this novel idea from my experience as a non-profit executive where I assembled pieces of the community and my own organization, and then I knew I could do this at scale. So, we went out and attracted some of the best philanthropic partners in this country to generate the funding to pay for these solutions across these 16 communities, and we continue to do that work at a very, very effective rate today. I’ll give you some bench marks. We’ve served almost 18,000 unique individuals across the country in the last three and a half years, and they’ve presented us with more than 35,000 unique needs. And what that means, Tim, is: for every one person we have supported, they have introduced themselves needing more than one thing, and that’s important for your listeners to understand. These needs are interconnected often. And so, you can really understand that if there are two needs for every one person, how can one organization address both those needs? The short answer is: there are not many organizations in this country that are built to address complex needs beyond their own boundaries. We want organizations to do what they do best, and then we want other organizations to do what they do best so that both the needs by that one unique individual can be served accountably and transparently. We also know, Tim, that for those nearly 18,000 unique individuals, 7 of every ten of them, we have been responsible for successfully resolving their issue. So, while a point of pride, there is three of every ten that we have been unable to. So, you can get the math where we work. We work that 30 percent to make sure that we are focused on outcomes at a higher level every day of our lives. So, what “America Serves” does is just reorganizes community capacity, it drops over a bit of technology, it allows providers to coordinate their solutions, and, most importantly, it delivers on outcomes for individuals in need. So, we have built that from nothing. These were ideas, much like EBV that the Institute embraced, and now-- with a very talented staff around me-- is responsible for really just the performance of these community-based networks over time. So, it’s a really cool model.

**Tim:** Yeah. So, I mean, we know of most of the, you know, the hot-topic items that Veterans are often in need for—at least, that we’re told Veterans are in need for: you know, gainful employment, you know—

**Jim:** Mhmm.

**Tim:** -- permanent housing, financial guidance, you know, emotional and mental health, physical health. Give me one or two, maybe- one or two issues that “America Serves” is receiving as an issue that a Veteran needs help with that maybe isn’t talked about often or not something that we—

**Jim:** Yeah.

**Tim:** -- think about when it comes to Veterans’ issues.

**Jim:** So, let’s talk about housing. The number one demand on all our community-based efforts, really-- you’d be surprised to hear this—comes in the form of housing. Safe, affordable housing, whether it’s rental, whether it’s to be purchased. The number-one demand being presented to us across these communities is access to safe, affordable housing. Now that sounds like a singular issue, but you need to understand, typically, what’s associated with that need for housing is financial stress within the family, right? Maybe some legal matters, maybe some underpinning mental health issues. These things are not singular in their dimension; they’re actually-- the word for it is cooccurrence. Needs cooccur. They overlap; they intermingle. So, where the number-one demand-- this should not come as a surprise, probably, to your listeners, either-- when you think about doing work in places like Seattle, Washington D.C., New York City. You can really get a sense that, for those people who served their country and their families who live in those localities, access to affordable housing is a big deal. Not surprisingly, each of those communities has a fairly substantial or had a fairly substantial Veteran homelessness problem. And so, these things, while we’d like to think of them exist in isolation, the actual overlap of needs is what’s presented upon our networks, and that’s the value of the networks approach. Is that, if you come to us with complex needs, you know, one or two or three overlapping, cooccurring challenges in your life, the only solution that you know works is to coordinate the delivery of services unique to each of those needs, and there is not one organization in this country that can do that. And so, I would like to make sure your listeners understand that, when it comes to needs, they’re overlapping, they cooccur, and what “America Serves” does best is it addresses the complexity of those by funneling out the needs to various providers across communities who then coordinate solutions in a known way. Provider A knows what Provider B is doing. Provider A addresses housing. Provider B addresses financial stress through counseling or arrearage, you know, things like that to go into financial- Making people financially whole. And the two providers know what one another is doing. So, for your listeners, it’s a little bit of a peek behind the scenes about the complexity of needs and how “America Serves” works to address that.

**Tim:** Sure. Something I’m curious about-- maybe you can speak on when it comes to how “America Serves” works or maybe even another program-- when we talk about, like, employment and gainful employments among Veterans, we often talk about how do we ser-- A lot of the services that are offered, a lot of the guidance and counseling that is offered, a lot of it usually has to do with career transition from military to civilian life or, like, some sort of entry-level, or, like, “get your foot in the door”-type jobs. What is available for Veterans? Where should Veterans look if they are succeeding in their current industry but are having a hard time getting any upward mobility within their industry, and are looking for a way to advance themselves that way? Where can they look for, at least, some guidance on that?

**Jim:** Well, I’d like to think that a good number of them can look to us. So, there is a term that I’ll introduce to you, and it’s ‘employability’. And whereas, I think, past experiences or attempts to address the needs of transitioning service members, to kind of rocket fuel them into meaningful careers was focused on that first job. Well, we have come to learn, through research, that that focus is partially responsible for the first job being the wrong job, and, therefore, what do you do to obtain the second job? This idea of ‘employability’ over one’s life is really what the IVMF is actually all about. So, our program “Onward to Opportunity”, it’s done in concert with 18 different DoD installations today, and it’s delivered online, around the globe to more than eight hundred Veterans, transitioning service members, or spouses every month for 11 months of the year. So, we’re talking thousands of transitioning service members, Veterans, and their spouses who today are accessing what we really do as a bread and butter program, “Onward to Opportunity”. And what it offers, Tim, for your listeners, is if you’re a transitioning service member, and you’re interested in in-demand labor market careers, “Onward to Opportunity” offers you access to the training and credentialing represented by those labor market sectors, and is responsible for the talent pipeline into more than 500 of this country’s best private sector employers. And so, what we do there is we take transitioning service members working in parallel with our government’s efforts around TAP, TAP, GPS to see them transition away from the military. What we’re actually doing is delivering this innovative programming up to 6 months prior to separation itself. Meaning jobs, meaningful careers, before one transitions from military service are the new reality associated with transition itself. And so, we are doing that at scale. We are doing it in partnership with the DoD. It’s funded entirely by the private sector and our best philanthropic partners. It costs our participants nothing. The training and credentialing is associated with in-demand labor market fields: information technology, business, cyber security. These are all the hot jobs in this country that our nation’s employers are having a great deal of difficulty kind of finding to keep their companies working. So, we’re delivering on that. We just surpassed our 10,500th successfully placement or, to your point, Tim, a better job. And this term around ‘employability’, for people who have separated on the idea of taking that first meaningful career and advancing, oftentimes in today’s workforce involves ongoing credentialing, ongoing education, leading to life-long ‘employability’. So, we become the outlet over one’s trajectory or time. In service, out of service. And even if we’re not the right answer for some of those training or credentialing opportunities, our teams in “Onward to Opportunity” on the installations around the country are ensuring that another program is the best fit for the individual’s interest and aptitude. We’re going to take responsibility for getting that transitioning service member into that opportunity, as well. But I would like to think that your listeners could turn to IVMF over the course of their life to improve upon the life-long employability associated with working in the private sector. That is “Onward to Opportunity” and we deliver it online. We deliver it physically. And we have a goal of having successfully employed or upskilled 30 thousand transitioning service members, Veterans, and spouses by the year 2022. That’s a big goal for a non-profit organization to kind of subscribe to and hold dear in terms of responsibilities to deliver upon that kind of commitment, day in, day out. So, I think it’s a simple answer: IVMF. Find us, work with us. You’d be surprised what our back-room capacity looks like. Our enrollment team, our advising teams. The care and feeding that they apply to those who served their country and their family members. It’s one of those incredible secrets about this organization is what exists in the background. It’s really a group of talented, driven people who have one motive: serving people best. It’s really an honor to kind of just be around these people, day in, day out. So, that’s what I think your listeners should actually pay attention to: ‘employability’ and the IVMF over the lifetime that they’re kind of going through the private sector.

**Tim:** So, you know, we talked about “America Serves”, you touched on “Onward to Opportunity” there. These are established programs that are succeeding and benefitting the Veteran community right now. But of course, like any institution, you are looking at the next gap to fill. What can you speak on as far as where IVMF- What issues you’re looking to address? What gaps you’re looking to fill? What benefits or services you’re looking to assist Veterans with in the future?

**Jim:** So, I’m going to answer this a couple different ways.

**Tim:** Okay.

**Jim:** One is the university’s commitment to be the best place to serve Veterans and their families-- it’s our chancellor’s, one of his four strategic priorities in this university-- and to become the best place for Veterans and their families. Period. To be the best institution of higher education that delivers on that promise. So, I think you have to understand what the IVMF represents is what the university represents. Those two things are not mutually exclusive; they actually coexist. So, what we do as an Institute is what we do as a university; the programming and services that we put forth are a reflection of this university’s commitment which goes back to World War I, Tim, and really blew up, so to speak, during World War II. When it recognized a responsibility to really educate returning—then, G.I’s-- who went on to become some of the country’s best people in leading private sector interests, serving the public, etc. So, our historical lineage, the foundation for what we do as an Institute is embedded in this university. In the next two years, it will open the National Veterans Resource Center. It’s not just a building. It’s a home to this Institute. It’s home to all the military-connected programs that the university offers, both educationally and training-wise. The things that this university’s doing-- I’ll give you one tip on the future of this university: it is opening up education pathways for individuals who serve their country in unprecedented ways. We are, for the first time in our history-- even though the university has had various Associate’s degrees—we’re opening those up as learning pathways for active duty soldiers and members of the guard. We’re doing that importantly, Tim, at the tuition-assistance rate, making college affordable in a non-traditional way for those who serve their country. That’s really important to recognize, Tim, because this goes back to our lineage. When we opened our doors to returning G.I.’s at the end of World War II, we waved the high school education requirement for returning G.I’s. Now, if think about that. Think about the end of World War II. Think about what universities were opening their doors and they were waving high school education requirements? Why? Because war interrupted those individuals getting those requirements completed. This university’s lineage traces all the way back to that, and our ability to offer, now, learning pathways at the Associate’s level, at the Baccalaureate level. This is a very real thing for those who are serving our country, and it’s unprecedented in this country to see a major private institution of higher education extend itself in such a manner. So, the future for the university, and here in the IVMF, is about serving the educational needs, in one way, for the transitioning population, the serving population itself. So, that’s one piece of our future. The second part of our future is to get all this that we do to the best of our ability. We focus on quality. You notice I talked about outcomes: 7 of every 10 individuals getting their issues successfully resolved. By the way, those 10,500 people who we’ve been responsible for, who gained meaningful employment or got better employment, interestingly, is about 7 of every 10 of the people that we enrolled. So, we focus on outcomes for our program participants, I’d say acutely. We have a reputation for paying close attention to what we put forth in terms of our programming and our services. So, I think you’ll see us scale those initiatives, but I also know you will see us improve upon those initiatives in terms of the outcomes for our program participants themselves. I honestly know our future is bright, but I think it’s important for your listeners to understand that it is not some standalone non-profit; it’s actually part of one of the finest universities in this country, and it’s core to the university’s DNA to kind of make it a strategic priority to make this the best place for Veterans and their families.

**Tim:** That’s incredible. Jim, you are just taking off with these questions. [Laughter] It’s pretty remarkable. I love it. To round this off, a couple questions I like to ask. Tell me about a skillset or an experience you gained in the military that you believe is contributing to your success today?

**Jim:** This is weird. I never realized it at the time, but becoming a speech writer for the Secretary of the Army made me love writing. [Laughter] It sounds goofy to say, but as a skillset, writing is critically important. It’s how you persuade others to follow what you do. It creates followership, and I-- this is really a weird thing for me to realize-- but it was through my advanced education that the Army extended to me. They sent me to grad school privately, and it was the payback tour as a speech writer where I actually learned to appreciate the art of writing well. And I’m not saying I do it well, but I try to write a lot. I try to get others to write a lot because I think it’s one of those things that is responsible for winning and succeeding. It is the art of persuasive communication. It is more than just speaking. It’s actually the content that goes into the speaking. The principles associated with thoughtful writing. Extending yourself in challenging ways. For me, it was that one tour as a speech writer, which I-- It scared the death out of me, to be honest [Tim Laugher], that I was the one speech writer for the Secretary of the Army. No one could write that script if you paid them. You know, this kid who grew up in upstate New York, traveling the world with the Secretary of the Army, and being a speech writer. The guy I replaced was a Colonel. I was a major. And he just said to me-- I had, well, like a thirty-minute transition with him. His name was Colonel Red Adiar. He was a field artillery officer. And he looked at me, and he was like, “Good luck, and you’re going to need it.” And I was like, “Okay. This is introduction to serving at this level of the United States Army.” He was going off to brigade command, and I knew I was in for probably a rough ride, but I just gutted my way through understanding how the Secretary of the Army wanted to communicate. Did all the research to give him the thoughtful ingredients to be not only-- he was a great public speaker. He has recently passed away, Secretary Togo West. And I learned to appreciate writing, Tim. I’d like to think part of me around here at this place tries to create the same kind of energy and responsibility in others because I believe-- I don’t think everybody has that as part of their natural upbringing-- and I really value writing as something of a lost art and being responsible for that is really near and dear to my heart.

**Tim:** And to round off, Jim. We like giving credit to as many people as we can on this show. Tell me about a Veteran or a Veteran organization, other than IVMF, that you are familiar with that has you excited about what they’re doing right now?

**Jim:** Easy. Veterans Outreach Center in Rochester, New York where I served two years as the chief executive. The place has been around since the end of Vietnam, formed by Vietnam Veterans. Community-based, holistic programming model, right there in the heart of downtown Rochester. Been serving the needs of people who serve their country in so many meaningful ways since the 1970’s, and it’s still around. The most incredible thing is, in the ups and downs of non-profit organizations, and gutting it out through difficult financial times, and gutting it out through very difficult, you know, leaderless times, this place has survived. It’s run today by a dynamic young woman. She actually worked for me when I was chief executive there. I think the world of the place; it was the place that taught me the value of communities, and that’s not often understood to those who served their country and their families. But the funny thing is, we all return to a community and we all left a community, so why wouldn’t our communities be the epicenter of seeing us succeed? And so, I give a lot of credit to Veterans Outreach Center in Rochester, New York as being a place that taught me the value of being community-based, being comprehensive in your approach, and just really trying to gut out the up and down cycle that’s associated with non-profit organizations in this country. So, I like to think I became somewhat, I don’t know, better at serving people through that experience? There were many, many Veterans who were homeless that we housed, that we fed, that we helped find meaningful employment. There is just so many things about that place that I think still exist today that are special. So, I’ll make sure it’s very localized. I actually think most of the efforts in this country that work best are hyper-localized.

**Tim:** Yes.

**Jim:** I think they’re invisible to the run-of-day life for many people, but that place was special and remains special in my heart.

**Tim:** Wonderful. Well, James McDonough, thank you so much for your time. Thank you for talking to my audience. Thank you for all the work you do at IVMF and educating us on the programs that they offer, and most of all, sir, thank you for your service to our country.

**Jim:** And, Tim, thank you back for what you do through this show. I think it’s important to kind of bring people together through this opportunity, so I just want to say thank you to you, and to your listeners for what they do every day. So, much appreciated.

[00:46:34] Music

# **[00:46:38] PSA:**

**Man 1:** My grandfather served in World War II. Spending time with him were the best memories of my life. I became a physician at VA because of my grandfather so I can help others like him. I can’t imagine working with better doctors or a more dedicated staff. I’m fulfilling my life’s mission with the help of my team and thanks to these Veterans. I’m proud to be a doctor at VA, and proud to honor my grandfather every day. Search VA careers to find out more.

[00:47:05] Music

# **[00:47:09] CLOSING MONOLOGUE:**

**Tim:** If you’re curious about more things regarding the Institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University, go to [ivmf.syracuse.edu](http://ivmf.syracuse.edu/) [Link to IVMF’s website].

This week’s Medal of Honor citation reading is for John Chapman. John Chapman was just awarded the Medal of Honor from the President of the United States last week. His family was there to receive it. I finally got a copy of the citation. So, he will be this week’s Medal of Honor citation reading. Service is the United States Air Force. Rank of Technical Sergeant. Conflict was the War on Terror in Afghanistan. Year of Honor is 2002. Citation reads: “Technical Sergeant John A. Chapman distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism as an Air Force Special Tactics Combat Controller, attached to a Navy Sea, Air, and Land (SEAL) Team conducting reconnaissance operations in Takur Ghar, Afghanistan, on March 4, 2002. During insertion, the team’s helicopter was ambushed causing a teammate to fall into an entrenched group of enemy combatants below. Sergeant Chapman and the team voluntarily reinserted onto the snow-capped mountain, into the heart of a known enemy stronghold to rescue one of their own. Without regard to his own safety, Sergeant Chapman immediately engaged, moving in the direction of the closest enemy position, despite becoming under heavy fire from multiple directions. He fearlessly charged an enemy bunker, up a steep incline in thigh-deep snow and into hostile fire, directly engaging the enemy. Upon reaching the bunker, Sergeant Chapman assaulted and cleared the position, killing all enemy occupants. With a complete disregard for his own life, Sergeant Chapman deliberately moved from cover only 12 meters from the enemy, and exposed himself once again to attack a second bunker, from which an emplaced machine gun was firing on his team. During his assault from an exposed position directly in the line of intense fire, Sergeant Chapman was struck and injured by enemy fire. Despite severe, mortal wounds, he continued to fight relentlessly, sustaining a violent engagement with multiple enemy personnel before making the ultimate sacrifice. By his heroic actions and extraordinary valor, sacrificing his life for the lives of his teammates, Technical Sergeant Chapman upheld the highest traditions of military service and reflected great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.” We honor his service. That wraps up Episode 117. Thank you so much for taking the time to listen. Big thanks to James McDonough for joining me. Be sure to follow us on Twitter [Link to VA’s Twitter page: <https://twitter.com/DeptVetAffairs?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor>] and Instagram [Link to VA’s Instagram page: <https://www.instagram.com/deptvetaffairs/?hl=en>] @DeptVetAffairs for more stories and images from our community and, of course, now our Secretary @SECWilkie [Link to Secretary Wilkie’s Twitter page: <https://twitter.com/secwilkie?lang=en>] for more information and perspective from him. I’m Timothy Lawson, signing off.

[00:50:18] Music