

*Borne the Battle*

Episode #118 Jared Lyon, EJ Delpero, and Kirsten Battocchio- 'Back to School' Round Table

Hosted by Timothy Lawson

(Text Transcript Follows)

[00:00:00] Music

## [00:00:09] OPENING MONOLOGUE:

**Timothy Lawson:** Wednesday September 19, 2018. This is *Borne the Battle* brought to you by the Department of Veterans' Affairs. I am your host, Marine Corps Veteran Timothy Lawson. Been a little while since we put out an episode. Last week I was fully prepared to put out an episode, but I wanted to include information on the hurricane and how it was impacting facilities and Veterans down in North Carolina and Virginia and each time I would record my monologue, I'd get ready to put it together and then new information would come out and I'd feel obligated to include that information. I ended up recording my monologue about 3 or 4 times and finally sort of decided well there's no way I can really keep up with this, and then had the dissonance of like well do I really put out- do I put something out without acknowledging what's going on? And, you know I just gave it a wash and before I knew it was Friday. I just decided just to wait 'til this week to put out the next episode. If you are interested in learning about any of the impacts that the hurricane has had still on VA facilities and Veterans down in the impacted area, if you go to [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov) [Link to VA Website] you'll see an alert banner at the top of the page. There is a link to VA's disaster assistance brochure that's going to answer some questions you may have regarding benefits during a time of disaster and there's another link just below that; Veterans in the Mid-Atlantic regions can follow updates regarding VA medical centers closures evacuations and then a link at our website that's going to bring you to a web page. It's going to have a bunch of information on Hurricane Florence updates, on what facilities were impacted, and what Veterans need to know regarding benefits, health care, and such moving forward as we recover from from the disaster. This week's episode is a round-table discussion that I had with a group of wonderful individuals at George Mason University. I got with Student Veterans of America and collaborated with them on this. In the discussion, we have the George Mason University Mason at Veteran Patriots chapter leader and president EJ Delpero. We have Kirsten Battocchio who is a student Veteran at Georgetown University. You may recognize that name from earlier this year. She was on the podcast as a student Veteran of the year finalist from- at NATCON back in January. And then Jared Lyon, the president of Student Veterans of America. The four of us talk about being a student Veteran on campus as an individual, we talked about getting involved with a local chapter, how that student veteran group or chapter can thrive, the importance of collaborating and working with other clubs in your university and other

aspects of going back to school and getting involved with your campus, with your club, and being an individual as a student Veteran on campus. Enjoy.

[00:03:38] Music

### [00:03:42] 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](http://www.va.gov). That's [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov).

[00:04:09] Music

### [00:04:13] INTERVIEW:

**Tim:** Alright everybody, sounds good. That cup of coffee right there, yeah that's me.

**Jared Lyon:** You need your fuel?

**Tim:** Yeah. I need a little bit of my fuel right here. Alright.

**Jared:** Give me fuel give me fire.

**Tim:** I've done so many of these with SVA I don't know if we need formal introductions, but I do think that the audience should have an idea of who we're talking to here. I'll start. I am Tim Lawson, host of *Borne the Battle* part of the digital media engagement team at the Department of Veterans' Affairs. Sir, give us your branch and your current role as a student Veteran.

**EJ Delperio:** Alright my name is EJ Delperio my branch is U.S. Navy and my current role as a student Veteran is that I'm in my last semester here at George Mason

University and of my senior year. And I'm the president of the Student Veterans of America chapter at the Mason Veteran Patriots here at Mason.

**Tim:** Word. Kirsten.

**Kirsten Battocchio:** Hi I'm Kirsten Battocchio. I was in the United States Marine Corps. I was the former president up at Manhattan College in the Bronx for their Student Veterans organization there, and now I'm starting grad school at the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown next week. [Laughter]

**Tim:** Jared Lyon give us- of course we know the president of Student Veterans of America- but for those who are unaware you're where you are Alum to.

**Jared Lyon:** Sure. So Jared Lyon, a Navy Veteran. I am an Alum of Brevard Community College which has changed it's name to Eastern Florida State College for my associate's degree, did my undergraduate at a small state school in Tallahassee (nobody's probably ever heard of it), Florida State University go 'Noles. [Inaudible] Wha-? Ouch. [Laughter] And then I did my graduate education at Syracuse University in upstate New York.

**Tim:** Wonderful, wonderful. So the purpose of this discussion is to talk about being a student Veteran, being a part of a chapter, chapter best practices. These are conversations that I've had with Jared and- is it Kersten or Kirsten?

**Kirsten:** Kirsten.

**Tim:** It's Kirsten?

**Kirsten:** Yes. [Laughter]

**Tim:** Forgive me now if I continue to say Kersten just out of habit.

**Kirsten:** Yeah.

**Jared:** Don't be sorry, Tim, just be right.

**Tim:** [Laughter]

**Kirsten:** That's right.

**Tim:** I am confident, though, when I mess it up, I'll be confident that I messed it up.

**Kirsten:** [Laughter] Alright.

**Tim:** So, EJ. We're gonna start with you since this is a discussion that we haven't had you on the on the podcast for yet. When it comes to your your first

experience as a student Veteran, when you first came to campus were you aware that there was a Veteran group on campus? And if not, I guess the better question is when did you learn that there was a Veteran group on campus and how did you start getting involved with them?

**EJ:** So my first couple of semesters here at Mason were difficult because I didn't really know anybody on campus here. And I started researching and eventually I went to to get some help from the Office of Military Services at Mason and I learned about a student Veteran organization that existed for over a decade called the Veterans' Society for George Mason University. I asked about that organization and how I could get involved with them and unfortunately, for whatever reason, I'm sure this happens to a lot of chapters across the country, but it just kind of dissipated as far as engagement was concerned. So it also was not affiliated with Student Veterans of America which I knew very well working with some of the other Veteran Service Organizations. And I decided to make an introduction between the Office of Military Services here at Mason and Student Veterans of America. Mark McKenna used to be the Director of Chapter Support came over here for a visit. He visited with our director and assistant director here at Mason and it just really took off from there.

**Tim:** Kersten. [Laughter] See? I did it.

**Jared:** KIRsten.

**Tim:** Kirsten.

**Kirsten:** It's alright. You're forgiven.

**Tim:** [Laughter] Yeah thank you!

**Jared:** Get it right.

**Tim:** I know. Dangit. When you were an undergrad, how did you learn about the... Did you start your Veterans group? I can't remember.

**Kirsten:** I helped start it...

**Tim:** ... You helped create it?

**Kirsten:** It was a little... It was in its infancy when I first showed up.

**Tim:** Okay.

**Kirsten:** Very very getting themselves together, you know.

**Tim:** So tell me about the void that you believe you guys were filling by developing that on your campus.

**Kirsten:** Uh sure. So when I started in 2015 of the fall, they had just started like bringing themselves together like Veterans like having meetings and everything. And I think that was one of the biggest things that we discussed, what is the purpose? Why do we want to form a club or an organization on campus? What will we be giving back to the campus? And so over the last three years, what we really decided to develop was we did academic panels. And so our biggest thing was we had these stories, and we all had these different stories and different perspectives that we believe that we can share to the student body and the faculty. And so we did academic panels. We teamed up with different departments. And so we did a women who serve panel. We teamed up with the women's studies department. We did a minorities in the military panel. And each time we have our student Veterans on a panel just discussing these topics and it's like a two-way street between the audience and the student Veterans there. It's been really good just bridging that kind of divide between the civilian and military and then also just educating each other and getting rid of any kind of stereotypes that existed. It was really great. So I know they're continuing to do that now this year and hopefully continue on in the future.

**Tim:** Yeah. You're at Georgetown now?

**Kirsten:** Yes.

**Tim:** Which has a very established Veterans group. So how has it been now coming to a campus where it has a history...

**Kirsten:** Yes.

**Tim:** ...and not only is it established but it has a solid history in the city?

**Kirsten:** So I haven't actually started yet. I start next week, but I have been there for orientation. I've been on campus for a little bit. So I see that there's a pretty big military presence, Veteran and active duty, at Georgetown. It's different but it's great. It's been great so far.

**Tim:** Did you do research on it? Did anybody try reaching out to you when they knew you were coming? I know some schools some campuses are even on top of it where they know someone's coming in. Are you still using some G.I. bill benefits?

**Kirsten:** I have a year left, yes.

**Jared:** Wow, good for you.

**Kirsten:** Yes.

**Tim:** Okay so that's great.

**Kirsten:** Mhm. [Laughter] Thanks.

**Tim:** So they may have known that you were coming. Did they reach out to you? Did you do research on them?

**Kirsten:** The actual Student Veteran?

**Tim:** Yeah, yeah.

**Kirsten:** So actually I don't know if she's still the president or if she's the former president but it was another female marine. So female marine corps is a very small demographic, a very small pool.

**Tim:** Indeed.

**Kirsten:** We ended up finding out about each other like a year ago, and slowly ended up messaging each other and we only just met maybe just a couple weeks ago. So that's really how I got connected with their organization there.

**Tim:** Tell me from SVA's perspective. Someone hits campus, there's no chapter no Veterans group, but there's an interested party. How does SVA advise them? What sort of guidance can you provide to help them get it off the ground with knowing that it's easy for those things to fail right? After a couple months not everybody's into it and stuff like that. What sort of guidance do you guys give not only in how to start one, but how to make sure that it continues to grow and maintains.

**Jared:** Yeah absolutely Tim, I think it's a really good question. Student Veterans of America is really nothing more than a conclave of student Veteran groups nationwide. We've grown since 2008 to over 1500 chapters in all 50 states and four countries overseas, and the unique thing about our model is that we're an affiliated model. So you heard EJ mention that when he first got here there was a Veteran group on campus but they weren't affiliated with the national organization. Some people were critical of that model early on, but I actually think it gives us a whole lot of strength because you know the chapters of Student Veterans of America are, in their own right, wonderful student organizations on their own campus. Each and every one of them are recognized student organizations on their own campus. And they choose to affiliate with the national network of Student Veterans' success all over the country. And so where I think that's actually very cool is that our chapters actually are the ones that choose to affiliate with the national organization which means that the national headquarters we don't dictate to our chapters

what to do. We actually work on their behalf to try to elevate what they're doing, and to try to be supportive. If you're on a campus that has a student organization, affiliating is pretty straightforward. You have to have a few key things. The first is that you have to be a recognized student organization at your current campus. Veterans are returning back to campus all over the country this week, last week, and the upcoming week, and when they're doing so, there are literally on most campuses hundreds of student organizations. As diverse as we are as students, there is a group that has an interest for you on a campus. A Student Veteran organization or an SVA chapter happens to be a grouping of student Veterans, military-connected students. That means that they might be on active duty, they might be in the Guard or Reserves, they might have gotten out of the military already and are now Veterans. They could be dependents on G.I. Bill or they could just be connected to the military through a variety of different ways, too. They might be just a traditional age college student and their high school sweetheart might be deployed right now. You know that has happened, as well. But they come together and form the organization. The second requirement is that they have to be- have a set of governing bylaws which is usually a requirement of being a recognized student organization. They have to have elected officers. So this will most regularly manifest itself as the president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, communications director, etc. And then the fourth requirement is they have to have a member of the faculty or staff on that campus that serves as the chapter advisor.

**Tim:** Before we are a part of a chapter, though, we are students, right?

**Jared:** Yeah.

**Tim:** We are students on campus. I remember my first semester I showed up, I went to classes, and I came home. I was I was made aware of America University's Veterans group. I even knew some alum that were part of it, but you know I just really wasn't... 'Eh, whatever. I'm here to do my classes and go.'

**Jared:** Sure.

**Tim:** And then when I finally became part of the group, those became my friends and it wasn't even like the old like 'oh they know what you've been through' but like they just naturally became my friends.

**Jared:** Right.

**Tim:** Because they're peers, right?

**Jared:** Yep.

**Tim:** There's the great meme of Adam Sandler rides in from *Billy Madison* when he's in like 3rd grade or whatever it is like, "This is what it feels like to go to school on the G.I. Bill."

**Jared:** Sure.

**Tim:** Because we're almost 5, almost 10 years elder of the other students. They naturally become your peers and becomes your friend group. It was really it was very comforting to be there. What's... Uh. I don't know if you have any like data or just simply an example or anything of the difference the SVA sees when a student Veteran is not a part of a group versus is part of their chapter, whether that means that they're heavily involved or just somewhat affiliated. Do you have any anything on on just how that benefits the Veteran?

**Jared:** Yeah, no it's it's a great question. So, first and foremost, when student Veterans come back to a college environment, we are what higher education refers to as non-traditional students, right? We're typically over the age of 25. We're more likely than our civilian peers who have never served in the military to be married, to perhaps have children, to have a reason to work full- or part-time, and we're paying our own bills, you know, whether that's your car payment, your insurance, rent or mortgage, those types of things. But I think really one of the things that's amazing about higher education is that as students we are really at our best when a diverse group of us comes together and feels included on a campus. And so where I think the biggest benefit of a peer-based organization is the inclusivity element of it. I mean at SVA as a National Organization, we pride ourselves of being inclusive of Veterans of all era, regardless of when they served. They're very welcome at SVA. Just a couple years ago, there was a student veteran that graduated from the University of Southern California, was a World War 2 Veteran. I think he was 93 years young when he graduated. Still included as much as somebody who got out 6 months ago and is a newly minted Veteran, if you will. But one of the things that's that's really kind of neat about inclusivity is the peer-centricity of a student organization, specifically an SVA chapter. So what we know is that the the number one predictor of success, as measured by 'does a student reach graduation?', is whether or not they have a peer on campus. It's not money, it's not core sequencing, it's not cultural competency. Those things are all important, but if a student has a peer on campus, they are three times more likely to graduate than anything else.

**Tim:** That's amazing.

**Jared:** Number one thing you can give a student Veteran is a peer and the coolest thing about a peer is that it is such an individual definition. That could be if I was a woman, a fellow woman Veteran but it could also just be if you're a student Veteran, it might be a friend of yours from Calculus 3 that is 19 years old and is somebody you associate as a peer. So honestly, to your point, it's



friends, right? And it's this chance to meet friends which forms the basis of a network that creates an affinity structure by which you can leverage in any variety of ways from, you know, never eating dinner alone, to going to a tailgate, to sort of showing up to a guest lecture that might be on campus. Really enriching your student experience.

**Tim:** Yeah. I remember someone telling me there's nothing, like one of the most loneliest moments in life is when you have a meal alone, like by yourself.

**Jared:** Absolutely.

**Tim:** I didn't really think much of that until I went to college because then like you going at lunch and you're like, "would just be kind of nice to have some company, right? Right here." EJ, with everything that we've brought up so far, how does it apply to what you've seen here at George Mason with student Veterans coming into your group and seeing how they benefit from just being a part of that group of people?

**EJ:** It's a great question and I think it's simple and, you know, SVA is changing lives. Our chapter here, Mason Veteran Patriots or MVP for short, is top-notch and the awesome military services are our biggest advocates here. So, you know, all of these things big they play a big role in our experience as a student.

**Tim:** Wonderful. Going back to the Kirsten.

**Jared:** You see? You got it. [Laughter] Nailed it.

**Tim:** I paused.

**Kirsten:** Yeah. [Laughter]

**Tim:** I paused to make sure I was gonna say it right.

**Kirsten:** You got it.

**Tim:** When you were developing it, how did you attract people- other student Veterans to this brand-new group because it was a little bit easier for Georgetown, the FSU's, Syracuse, right? It's easy for these colleges to be like 'look we had this well-established organization.' How was it when you were developing it to be like, "No, seriously, this is going to be a thing. It's going to be great."? How did you get people to buy into it? And did they? How seriously did the people grab onto this idea.

**Kirsten:** How...? Like Veterans...

**Tim:** Yeah, yeah.

**Kirsten:** ...grab onto this idea? Honestly, I think it goes back to like what you all are talking about right now: friend group. I think it's a human nature that everybody wants to be part of a community. I think before that we had all these... We are a different age, like most of us are 25 or older. We had all these like older students like walking around without that kind of like community, and kind of lacked that family, lacked that friend group. I think was really easy to just start off with that and just be like, "Hey do you just wanna hang out with us? You want to go grab drinks?" We started bonding like really on a friend level first. I think that's really once you start talking to them, it's kind of like okay well how can we elevate this to the next level? Like we have all these stories and people are interested in us. Once we found out all the great things that SVA was doing throughout the country and what all the chapters are doing, we're like, "Oh we could do that, too." And so it kind of give us a standard to like strive towards as far as like what we wanted to implement at our campus and our college and everything. But, yeah, but I think it all started with just like becoming friends with each other. I think that's human nature that everybody wanted to find a community.

**Tim:** Yeah.

**Jared:** Could I ask a question, too?

**Tim:** Yeah go ahead.

**Jared:** Kirsten specifically about the Jaspers? Right?

**Kirsten:** Yes, Jaspers, yes. Woo!

**Jared:** Do I remember that correctly? So you guys do do a trip that sort of happens at a certain time of year.

**Kirsten:** Yes.

**Jared:** I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about that because I think it's unique to creating friendships.

**Kirsten:** So that was a really key element to Manhattan College that they have the Warriors at Ease program. So that started in maybe like a semester before me. So it was really brand new when I came in still. So at Manhattan College you have to take I think there's like three religion classes that every student needs to take? So that like first religion course, Dr Steven Kaplan, decided to make a program basically where he took the Veterans that were in that like religion like 100/161, whatever it was, took the Veterans that were in that course and brought them down to a yoga retreat in the Bahamas as part of like... In the

middle of the semester. So the rest of the students in the class would go to lectures around New York City and on campus and everything to do their final paper. But he took the Veterans in the class and then he brought them on this trip to the Bahamas and at this yoga retreat it was basically learning stress management skills and that was like initially what he wanted to do with the program, but it ended up being greater than that because it bonded the incoming class of Veterans every year. So it was great. Like one, you're in the Bahamas. [Laughter] Two, you're learning about yoga and stress management, but then three, I was fresh out of the Marine Corps at that point, like 3 months out, and now I'm like back and I'm overseas again with a bunch of Marines like there's like 10 of us up there. There was a lot of reasons why that that program was so successful. Not just the skills that we learned, and not just the fact that it was the Caribbean, but the fact that we were able to bond like outside of our comfort zone...

**Tim:** Yeah.

**Kirsten:** ...kinda thing. It was very beneficial and bonded everybody for the rest of the time that we were there.

**Tim:** Yeah. You were an MSG right?

**Kirsten:** Yes I was.

**Tim:** Yeah bet that was a much different overseas experience than..

**Kirsten:** I mean I was also stationed in Barbados in my third year.

**Tim:** [Laughter] Never mind, never mind.

**Kirsten:** I mean...

**Tim:** She's like, "Oh man, we're going back there."

**Kirsten:** There's similarities. In the Marine Corps, it was a very different world. Yeah of course, yeah.

**Tim:** Yeah. EJ what sort of approaches does George Mason's group take into what we're talking about as bonding? Anything... It's difficult in the Washington DC-area it's difficult to get anybody's schedules to align in a way to be able to do things, but do you guys attempt anything in creating events or just social activities where you guys can bond and just sort of build that camaraderie?

**EJ:** Good question. We actually host a ton of events. We have found, and especially in our nation's capital here, that community and leading from the front is a great way to bond as a team. We've lead service projects all around

the area. We have one coming up actually for a 9/11 remembrance project at a local VFW post that supports the chapter a lot. We have some more projects coming up in the future in November, as well. So we found that service is a great way. It's a great way to give back and to recognize that, you know, we're a team still and we can accomplish great things. We also host monthly meetings where we bring in corporate sponsors to come and share information about different employment opportunities. They bring pizza, which is nice. They bring sodas and everything. So we have that and then we just we take the second half of the meeting to go over our agenda, whatever that may be. We've done it on other events, too. Like, you know we actually, through SVA, partnered with Focus Features to screen *The Darkest Hour* which was a great experience for us. We were able to raise some money, too, which went right into our NATCON fund which is another team event that we're looking forward to going to here in January. I know Jared could talk a lot more about that.

**Tim:** Yo, you going to NATCON?

**EJ:** Absolutely.

**Tim:** Yeah, I'll be there.

**EJ:** [Laughter] Great. Yeah, well we'll see you there.

**Tim:** Yeah. There will be a session on the podcast. I expect to see you in the audience in there championing for VA digital products. [Laughter]

**Jared:** I will be there and, likewise, shameless plug here, but our chapter is leading an action lab that was just approved to..

**Kirsten:** Oh, congrats.

**Jared:** Thank you very much... it's basically about why every SVA chapter should lead on campus through service.

**Tim:** Yeah absolutely. I might sit on that one.

**Jared:** Nice.

**Tim:** Very well. Something that hasn't come up yet in the handful of podcasts that we've done surrounding SVA is including non-Veterans into the group. I know at American, we were saturated- it's not meant to be insulting- but like we had a lot of ROTC members in there, we had a lot of dependents who were going out of their family's G.I. Bill. And there was a lot of push back from a couple people within the group, right? There's always going to be a handful that think it should be a Veterans' group but our our group was better when

we started, not only including them, but offering them positions on the board. We got stuff done quicker because they know the intricacies of the campus. They know who the people to talk to are, right? I'm curious- and I want to hear from all of you. We will start, we'll just go down the line on do you have that involvement from ROTC students, dependents, other people that are just interested in being part of the Veterans group and how do you include them?

**EJ:** It's a great question. We... we definitely have the buy-in from ROTC here at Mason from Student Government, you know, from other student groups that we work with and engage with on different events here on campus. We also bring in a ton of partnerships with the Veterans' Service Organization community to really throw in a ton of support and whatever somebody needs. We're just like a resource hub and we we are definitely all-inclusive and our main charge is to bring the traditional college experience for the non-traditional student.

**Tim:** Very well. Kirsten?

**Kirsten:** This was also a discussion because we were building up our organization over the last few years and this was a conversation that we had. Some Veterans didn't really like the idea at first but, no, absolutely it should be inclusive to... That was the whole point. Like I said like it's human nature to want to be a part of a community, but then once you get that community, you can't isolate that community from everybody else. The more you're bringing in people, the better. A year ago was when we got the Veteran Resource Center finally on campus like a little lounge and once we got the lounge, like a space on campus, we had a lot of the civilian students- I hate saying it like that-but a lot of civilian students coming in and hanging out with us. We welcomed them like come on in like we have a TV in here. We're all hanging out between classes and that's better. Honestly, we learn from each other. It's a two-way street. Like I always try to push that. Like we're not better than them because we served. We all volunteer to serve, like it's a two way street here. I try to grill that into every Veteran's head that I talk to. Because I think it's like really important, honestly.

**EJ:** And if I may add, one thing.

**Tim:** Go ahead.

**EJ:** I just thought of this, Kristen, when you were speaking, but for our first year we had a non-Veteran as our VP.

**Tim:** Yeah.

**EJ:** She was a strong supporter of our organization, and we did a lot of work. We think that is a good way to add some leadership opportunities into students

who just want to connect with the military, and connect the population of their campus.

**Tim:** Yeah. Absolutely. Jared both the experience you had at your campuses and then SVA's guidance on anything that you help with guiding chapters that are curious.

**Jared:** For sure. I mean the thing I keep hearing reiterated over and over again is inclusivity, right? And if we look at the modern American college campus nationwide, inclusivity is exactly what we're trying to have conversations about. Look at the top corporations in America. Diversity and inclusion is the language that they use. And so a word that I wish we didn't really have in our lexicon is trying to create things like 'military-friendly', 'Veteran-friendly'. I don't really know what that means, right? [Tim Laughter] I mean for me it's sort of like, 'thank you for your service'. That's more of a conversation ender than it is a conversation starter.

**Tim:** Yeah.

**Jared:** And so the thing that we kind of strive for, not just at Student Veterans of America, but as student Veterans in America is the opportunity to have Veteran and military inclusivity and so the ability to be included on campus means not being exclusionary of anyone on campus. In the early days of SVA, some ten years ago, this was a big debate by chapter leaders all over the country. Can we, or should we, have non-Veterans be part of our organization? And the simple reality is that we're all made better the more diverse our experiences are. I mean I think there's that great quote: 'if we're all thinking alike then we're probably all wrong'. I think was also said by like a four-star general, right, but still the thought process aligns pretty well. As far as guidance from the national headquarters, you know we we strive to create inclusive environment where Veterans, military dependents, future military leaders (i.e. ROTC members), and supporters have a chance to sort of come together around the common shared understanding that we want to create inclusive environments to really do good or leave things better than we found them. So the thing I keep hearing from Kirsten or from EJ is that like the things that we're doing: we're leading where we're having that servant's heart lead in front of us and we're trying to bring everyone together to leave things better than we found them. Whether that's for new students that come onto campus to make sure that some of the frustration points of being the new guy in a class, or gal, and a campus event doesn't feel totally like the sort of new person syndrome, but then also, too, just making sure that we all come together. In my own personal experience both in my undergrad at Florida State and in my graduate program at Syracuse University we had some great experiences with the civilian students at Florida State, very specifically. We got heavily involved in the Greek community. So these are the on-campus service fraternities, traditional fraternities and sororities on campus and we found

ourselves joining their community service projects or their events or socials. What we really found ourselves doing is feeling less like the *Billy Madison* picture that you described, right? The more we got to know the other students on campus and sort of take the blinders off to our Veteran experience, the more we started to make friends and, dare I say, start networking because networking starts while you're still on campus because you got to figure out, hey. I mean we all know the best professor to take for certain class unless the way that you register for classes is when they come open on the internet and you just go 'OK I need a 300-level class in math here it is'. Right? But you want to talk and say, 'Hey, Professor Smith is actually- they follow the syllabus, they keep the course on track, and you know what? They really do encourage conversation.' That sounds a little bit better. Maybe Professor Jones has something else going on that I might be appealed to. We learn this by talking to each other and the chance that we can talk to our traditional student counterparts really helps us feel included. The other thing, too, is this is the first in American history where only one and three college students state that they know a Veteran firsthand. Meaning they are not likely to have anyone in their family that served in the military, shoot, they probably have nobody in their neighborhood that served in the military. So if we talk about the ability to bridge the civilian-military divide, a strong SVA chapter that is inclusive of anyone, that is supportive of the military Veteran or otherwise has that opportunity to make sure that America understands who their military-connected population is at a really common shared experience, right? Higher education.

**Tim:** So I think that's a great segue into the experience in the classroom.

**Jared:** Sure.

**Tim:** Because, like you said, it may not be the *Billy Madison* picture, but there's definitely disparity between yourself and the traditional student that's in there.

**Jared:** Sure.

**Tim:** At American University, I was in the School of Communications. I very rarely dealt with the situation where, like, as the Veteran I was called upon for any given reason, but I know a lot of my friends that were in the School of International Service that came up a lot, right? As you're talking about global and international issues and stuff it just, you know? Kirsten we'll start with you since he decided to push your shoulder a little bit there. I think he's volunteering you for this.

**Kirsten:** Yeah. Volun-told.

**Tim:** Do you have an experience where you were spotlighted, either in a positive or negative sense, in the classroom because of your service and because of your your global experience?

**Kirsten:** When I was in the Marine Corps like I was in for a little under six years five of those six years I was abroad, and then I got out and I started Manhattan College like three months later. It wasn't only just like transitioning out of the military. It was culture shock coming back to America. Thank God I chose New York City like I love DC and this area, but like you need to come to a city when you are overseas that long.

**Tim:** Sure.

**Kirsten:** But my first class was global issues and I had one other Marine in there with me who had been there like a semester longer than me and it came up all the time. Me and him both had different experiences overseas. Like, obviously I was at the embassies. I think he was with the squadron, but it came up all the time and our perspectives didn't always- we didn't always share the same opinion. We weren't like the token I wasn't the token marine and in there, saying what I thought and then that's what everybody thought the military thought. There was two of us in there and we didn't always agree. And so that was even better. That way, there was no generalizing with what we- how we perceive things but yeah but global issues it comes up all the time. They just, I mean there was some students that had some study abroad experience and that was great, too. Very different experience, though, and obviously at the embassies I was seeing diplomacy like firsthand. I was security at the embassies but I was seeing the diplomacy from the Foreign Service firsthand and so I think I had a really unique take on some things. It was just it was just different with different experience. I was even more invested in what we were learning in the classroom because I was even more interested like, 'Oh that's why that was happening in that part of the world when I was there,' and, 'Oh, yeah I remember that happening because I *was* there for that. Like, I remember the tsunami in Japan because I was there when the...

**Tim:** Yeah.

**Kirsten:** ...tsunami happened.' All these things for a global issues and then I was in school for government international studies so it came up all the time in all my classes.

**Tim:** Yeah. Did you ever have a moment, and this only happened once that I am aware of while I was at American, but did you ever have an issue with a professor with them making any slights against military service during their class period? There was one instance we had at American where there was a professor that wouldn't be direct at it, but anybody who paid attention could tell that they were there was some shade being thrown towards, you know,



the Veterans that were in it. I think it was sort of to counter some of the, 'Well I've been around, I know I'm talking about'-ness, but sometimes it was a little too premature. Did you experience anything like that?

**Kirsten:** I remember there was one time that a professor was kind of suggesting that if the government like if the federal government or like if there's too much military in policy, like in politics or in the White House or whatever administration, that we would be more driven to war. He didn't say it like directly but he definitely alluded to it and when you allude to it, I kind of challenge that because I feel like it's the opposite because I don't think those things are opposite ends of the spectrum. I think they are collaborative and so in the classroom is it kind of like... I think that might be a misconception of with a lot of people. That they think it's like the opposite ends of the spectrum...

**Tim:** Sure.

**Kirsten:** ...and he kind of alluded to that and then I corrected him, and said I said, "Nah I don't think that's true. You're wrong." [Laughter]

**Tim:** [Laughter] EJ any experiences like either with yourself or with other student Veterans at George Mason?

**EJ:** You know it's interesting, Tim, because I'm also in the School of Communication here at George Mason University so, you know, I don't know. We do talk a lot about current events and everything but, correct me if I'm wrong, Jared. This might have been said by SVA at a certain point but "Students first, Veterans always." is that correct?

**Jared:** Absolutely.

**EJ:** OK. So that's kind of how I actually have been, you know, operating here on campus. If I go to class, I I don't try to highlight the fact that I'm a student vet, but if someone asks me, I'm proud to talk about it. I just, you know, engage as a student in the class and I don't really see a lot of negativity here at George Mason. You know, we we also are one of the most diverse universities in the country so, you know, we definitely understand that people are coming from all walks of life here and you don't see a lot of negativity, you know, towards Veterans here.

**Tim:** Sure. I had a communications professor who- it was for a broadcast class- and whenever there was a word that was commonly mispronounced, she always let me know when Veterans typically mispronounced it. It only happened like two or three times but like she be like, "It's actually ee-rock (Iraq) and Veterans often get that wrong", and I'm like so does half the people at American University [Laughter] and this is considered a global campus, right?

And like she did that at least two or three times. I just went with it... Because she wasn't wrong, right? I was like, "You're not saying that to any other demographic in the room. You're only pointing that out to..." And it's interesting when that happens. And I was like you. I'm sure some guys going in there with like they're like "tacti-cool" like outfits, and..

**Jared:** Tac-ti-cool. [Laughter]

**Kirsten:** Gear?

**Tim:** Yeah. [Laughter] But you know they ask you, "Oh how do you know that?" or "How are you so familiar with that?". Well I lived there, right? They are always like, "Oh were you visiting Moscow?" No I lived there for a year, and then they're like "Oh well why were you there for...?" and that raises plenty of questions, but... [Laughter] ... sooner or later they find out you're a Veteran and sometimes it's difficult for them to look past that label, right?

**Jared:** Sure.

**Tim:** And like I said sometimes it's intent versus impact; a lot of times they go to you for perspective without realizing they're only ever going to you for that perspective. Jared, SVA's guidance on if there's ever, I am sure you guys here about issues on campuses...

**Jared:** Sure.

**Tim:** ...of either problems with other students or professors. How do you advise chapters to handle that?

**Jared:** Yeah so in the early days of Student Veterans of America honestly, Tim, it was it was a lot more common, you know. That was that was the days of we were just sort of even even prior to having the post 9/11 G.I. Bill up and running. Before forever G.I. Bill, we were still in the Montgomery G.I. Bill. We sort of have been at war for a long time now, but back in 2006, 2007, 2008, we were just starting to return home the generation who would come in either just before September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 or had run to enlist or join just shortly after September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. It was it was an influx of Veterans. It has sort of evened out now and I think higher education has gotten very used to the fact that Veterans are on campus. That there is student Veterans not only involved on campus, but in all of their classrooms. So it happens a lot less. Guidance is pretty straightforward. In the instances where it where it is happening. I mean, I think much in the same way that Kirsten and EJ mentioned it. It's sort of address it, have the conversation, in the same way that you did, Tim. But it comes down to your own comfort level, right, because you had the one professor that was sort of snide remark of what 'and Veterans often

mispronounced [Tim Laughter] hoorah.' Right? It's like "Well, great. Thanks, I appreciate that."

**Tim:** Yeah.

**Jared:** Noted. It's kind of up to the individual at first but if you feel wrong or slighted, you know, often one of the best places to start is if your campus does have an on-campus vet resource center or you've got somebody that might be the vet center director, that sort of thing. Being able to talk to a professional on campus is often a really good place to start. Additionally, too, if you Google- anyone can do this- on your campus 'I feel I've been wronged at such-and-such University', you will see a myriad of resources pop right up where you can file a formal complaint if you need to. But you can even do things where often Student Government Associations or SGAs on campuses have arbitration that you can go through. You can have a student Arbiter where you can follow a process that way but it is complicated, it is confusing and our chapter leaders from around the country can always contact us at the Student Veterans of America National headquarters in Washington DC. And we can talk them through because every instance is usually unique and we can help advise to the best of our ability through that process.

**Tim:** Yeah. Man, we have cruised through these topics and everybody's nailing their answers. I love it. We have time for one or two more questions. Is there anybody in the room that wants something discussed? You can either ask the ask the group or oh you got something what do you got?

**EJ:** Oh just some talking points here...

**Tim:** Oh ok.

**EJ:** Since we had extra time.

**Tim:** Oh you can. I like that. [Laughter]

**Jared:** The communications major. [Laughter] Here we go.

**Tim:** Alright, EJ. What do you got for us?

**EJ:** We have a question in the room, actually.

**Jennifer:** Discuss from an institutional standpoint the conversations we had last year with not recreating the wheel on campus, align yourself with already prepositioned events on campus. For instance, our September 11<sup>th</sup> Day of Service. Things that are innate to that environment where you can build synergies with something already in place?

- Tim:** Yeah so to get it on the recording, the topic is aligning yourself with other things going on around campus and not either recreating the wheel or separating yourself through your own initiatives. A lot of times you see that, especially around Memorial Day or Veterans Day, where the Veterans group feel like they should be doing their own thing, and often forget that their university will have already something in place that they can help just enhance and make better. EJ, I will let you run with that.
- EJ:** Thank you for that question. Jennifer's the Director of Office of Military Services here, I appreciate that. So, yeah, a great example of that in our chapter here is that we wanted to throw a 9/11 day of service and we weren't sure what we were going to do, but we aligned ourselves with the Mason Nation 9/11 Day of Service planning committee. We joined that, we joined the Mason service console, we worked with students and we set up some projects alongside our fellow students here at Mason to have a successful day here at the University and we're also going to be going out in, you know, outside of campus to do something extra but..
- Jennifer:** We won an award.
- EJ:** ...We won an award as well, for our Operation Legacy which took place in the spring semester and that was with Travis Manion Foundation Wounded Warrior Project, the mission continues. Student Veterans of America was obviously a huge supporter and we had the director of programs coming in and speak at that event. And so we won an award for that because it was a big collaboration alongside George Mason. We worked with student government on that and the organization that we supported that is actually a bunch of high school teachers at Mount Vernon High School in Alexandria which is the same county that Mason falls in. We are all George Mason alum and they, you know, are helping kids at the school to have increased access to food. And so we went and we rebuilt, reinvigorated their community garden which is actually also a distribution center for their nonprofit, A Place to Stand. So we won an award which we really appreciated and it highlighted exactly what Jennifer mentioned which is when you work alongside the university and you find ways to collaborate, you know, it's it's better for everybody.
- Tim:** Word. Kirsten do you have anything? In Manhattan did you guys find yourself having to sort of grass roots your own events or were there opportunities on campus to partner up?
- Kirsten:** So with the panels, we ended up partnering up with the departments. So they do lectures anyways, the departments. So we kind of partnered up with them in that way and by doing that, we kind of brought in different groups of students each time. So we would bring in the engineering students sometimes and sometimes it'd be the business students and so and that way we kind of

built our network out just by reaching out to different departments in academia.

**Tim:** Sure. One thing I appreciated at American is we had such a good relationship with the school that if they didn't have something going on, if it was military- or Veteran-related, they would come to us to help...

**Jared:** Oh great.

**Tim:** ... to help organize it, so they they knew that if they had a void to fill, they knew which which group, which demographic, which club to go to to make sure that that was happening in the right way so a Memorial Day event, 9/11 and stuff like that. EJ we got time for one more topic. What do you got? Make it good.

**EJ:** Then I have to mention SVA's Leadership Institute because I was lucky enough to be a part of that last year. It was incredible. We went to Dallas. I was mentored personally by Barret Bogue staff member at SVA and actually a former Deputy Secretary of the VA which was Sloane Gibson was there in the room, as well, and we were mentored for 3 days. We had an opportunity to meet former President Bush. And just, you know, learn about leadership and learn about all kinds of different things which was was pretty remarkable. In this year, I'm proud to say that Mason Veteran Patriots is going to be sending two chapter members to the Leadership Institute which is going to be here in Washington DC this time. So excited to hear about that but, yeah, I figured I'd mention that.

**Jared:** And they're both in the room, I just noticed.

**EJ:** They are both in the room.

**Tim:** Yeah. Very well. I like that. I like George Mason Veterans doing things. That's awesome. We had Jess Houghton from American...

**Jared:** Sure thing.

**Tim:** ...did a leadership institute while I was president...

**Jared:** She did.

**Tim:** ...at America University. Kirsten have you done a Leadership Institute?

**Kirsten:** I was there last year.

**Tim:** Oh OK. What was your experience?

**Kirsten:** It was great. I mean, I got a huge network of a hundred motivators there in Dallas...

**Tim:** MOTIVATORS!

**Jared:** Yeah man!

**Kirsten:** ...every person I met was just so impressive. Every student Veteran I met. It was just constant imposter syndrome when I was there but it was it was awesome it was it was a great experience. So yeah, I'm looking I'm looking forward to hear how everybody has a- what kind of time they have this year. I'm sure it will be great.

**Jared:** Well we're bringing the Leadership Institute to Washington DC this year so you're welcome to come back as alumni and just hang out. Pay for your own food, though. [Laughter]

**Tim:** It's funny that you said motivator because when Jess Houghton came back, man she got me in line so...

**Jared:** Sure.

**Tim:** ...fast. [Laughter] I tried canceling a meeting because I wasn't feeling right. [Laughter] I was feeling a little under the weather, and she was like, "No this is too late to cancel the meeting now." [Laughter] It was her post-Leadership Institute motivation [Laughter] that was like "No this is how we are doing things."

**Kirsten:** Gets you high. [Laughter]

**Tim:** Yeah, that's right.

**Kirsten:** Yeah, absolutely.

**Jared:** I always love when a sailor tells a marine what to do. [Laughter] That's my favorite moment. [Laughter]

**Tim:** Yeah well that was definitely a moment when that happened for sure. [Laughter] Very well. So plug the leadership... Do people have time to apply?

**Jared:** The Leadership Institute happens once a year and it is quite literally the top 100 SVA chapter leaders from all across the United States so the application is closed. It will be hosted this September in Washington DC. So we got a few surprises that I won't list, but the application is often open every year at our next major event... Would be the Student Veterans of America National

Conference or SVA's NATCON, for short, which will be in Orlando, Florida this upcoming January.

**Tim:** That's right. I will be there. EJ, you'll be there?

**EJ:** I'll be there, as well.

**Tim:** Kirsten you going?

**Kirsten:** I'll probably be there. [Laughter]

**Tim:** Alright. Jared you're maybe or you probably going to go?

**Jared:** I am going to be there.

**Tim:** OK.

**Jared:** I will be there.

**Tim:** Very well.

**Jared:** Or I am terrible at my job. [Laughter] I will be there.

**Tim:** Very well. Alright, well I am Tim. EJ, Kirsten... Kirsten. I was looking and like, 'Oh I messed it up!'

**Jared:** I want to see if he can do your last name.

**Kirsten:** Yeah what's my last name? [Laughter]

**Tim:** No. I have been on purpose been...

**Jared:** Ba-ta-chi-o.

**Kirsten:** Yeah!

**Tim:** Ba-ta-chi-o.

**Jared:** Yeah!

**Tim:** Yeah. I think she told me whenever I first met her she told me it's like, "pistachio".

**Kirsten:** Yeah it is. [Laughter]

**Tim:** I was like, "You definitely said that line three thousand times in your life."

**Kirsten:** I know.

**Jared:** That's like the most cheesy networking thing, though, right?

**Kirsten:** Yes, sir.

**Jared:** You know find that one little thing...

**Kirsten:** [Laughter] My grandfather used to get pistachio. [inaudible]

**Jared:** Right.

**Tim:** It's Lawson. It's like Dawson with an L. They're like "No, Lawson's fine. Yeah we know how to say your name."

**Jared:** Timothy Dawson's Creek.

**Tim:** Yeah that's right. [Laughter] Alright yeah well thank you so much for joining me, and thank you to the people in the room for hanging out during this live recording of *Borne the Battle* and I'm sure I will partner up with SVA again in the future. We will be at NatCon doing a presentation and more podcast recordings. So thank you for everybody who was involved.

**EJ:** Yeah thank you very much for joining us here at Mason, too. We really appreciate that.

**Kirsten:** Thanks for having me.

**Tim:** [Laughter] You're welcome, you're welcome.

**Jared and Tim:** Yeah yeah yeah! [Laughter][Clapping]

[00:48:58] Music

### **[00:49:03] 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.

[00:49:33] Music



## [00:49:36] CLOSING MONOLOGUE:

**Tim:**

Again, big thanks to George Mason University for hosting us. It was a really really great time. This was recorded probably two or three weeks ago. About three weeks ago, I think. We recorded in a conference room that was provided; we had a small audience there watching us record. It was live-streamed from Student Veterans of America's Facebook page. So if you're interested at all in seeing the visuals on and watching us have that conversation, you can find it in the video section at Student Veterans of America's Facebook page. We mentioned NATCON in the discussion. If that's something that you or your local chapter is interested in, it looks like early bird registration for NATCON is open. [StudentVeterans.org](http://StudentVeterans.org) [Link to Student Veterans of America Website] is their website. I am endorsing this not only as a partner- they're a great partner for VA and how they service student Veterans and those that are exercising their G.I. Bill benefits- but I was also once a student Veteran and I've gone to their NATCON as a student Veteran and there's a lot of great information. There's a lot of connections to be made and for those of you that have heard my story- I think I've mentioned it at least, told it at least once in his podcast- the job that I currently hold with the Department of Veterans Affairs it can be traced back to a NATCON appearance back in 2016 when I reconnected with a friend there. So NATCON holds a special place in my heart and it's extremely valuable for chapters and student Veterans alike. The bonus on that is I will be at this upcoming NATCON talking to student Veterans and student Veteran chapters and clubs about how they can use VA digital media products to best tell their stories. We're going to talk about the podcast, we're going to talk about Veteran of the Day, and we're going to talk about submitting blog submissions. We're going to talk about submitting photos for Instagram, possibly. We're going to talk about all of the platforms that VA has and how student Veterans can use those, how they can contribute to those to tell the story of what's going on inside their lives, inside their chapters, and on their campus. So if NATCON didn't already seem cool enough, there's even more reason to go.

This week's Medal of Honor citation reading is in honor of Friday's Prisoner-of-War/MIA recognition day. September 21st is POW/MIA day, and so this week's Medal of Honor citation reading is in recognition of a Veteran who served and was a prisoner of war at some point. This citation is for Donald Cook. Service is US Marine Corps, rank of Colonel. Division was Naval advisor group military assistance command. Conflict is the Vietnam War. Year of Honor: 1964. Citation reads: "For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while interned as a Prisoner of War by the Viet Cong in the Republic of Vietnam during the period from 31 December 1964 to 8 December 1967. Despite the fact that by so doing he would bring about harsher treatment for himself, Col. Cook established himself as the senior prisoner, even though in actuality he was not. Repeatedly assuming more than his share of the manual labor in order that the other Prisoners of

War would improve the state of their health, Col. Cook willingly and unselfishly put the interests of his comrades before that of his own well-being and, eventually, his life. Giving more needy men his medicine and drug allowance while constantly nursing them, he risked infection from contagious diseases while in a rapidly deteriorating state of health. This unselfish and exemplary conduct, coupled with his refusal to stray even the slightest from the Code of Conduct, earned him the deepest respect from not only his fellow prisoners, but his captors as well. Rather than negotiate for his own release or better treatment, he steadfastly frustrated attempts by the Viet Cong to break his indomitable spirit, and passed this same resolve on to the men with whose well-being he so closely associated himself. Knowing his refusals would prevent his release prior to the end of the war, and also knowing his chances for prolonged survival would be small in the event of continued refusal, he chose nevertheless to adhere to the Code of Conduct far above that which could be expected. His personal valor and exceptional spirit of loyalty in the face of almost certain death reflected the highest credit upon Col. Cook, the Marine Corps, and the United States Naval Service." We honor his service.

That does it for this week's episode. Thank you for everybody for taking the time to listen. I know there's a lot of options out there for entertainment so I do appreciate you taking the time to listen to me and these Veterans discuss the importance of sharing our service, sharing our transition, sharing our current vocation, and how we are contributing not only to the Veteran space in their Veteran Community but our communities everywhere. You can follow us on Twitter [Link to Twitter page: <https://twitter.com/deptvetaffairs?lang=en>] and on Instagram [Link to Instagram page: <https://www.instagram.com/deptvetaffairs/?hl=en>] at @DeptVetAffairs for more stories and images from our community. I'm Timothy Lawson, signing off.

[00:55:38] Music