

*Borne the Battle*

*Episode # 241*

Amanda Huffman

<https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/88553/borne-battle-241-air-force-Veteran-amanda-huffman-writer-author-podcast-host/>

(Text Transcript Follows)

**[00:00:00] Music**

**[00:00:04] Opening Monologue:**

**Tanner Iskra (TI):** Oh, let's get it. Monday, May 10th, 2021, Borne the Battle, brought to you by the US Department of Veterans Affairs, the podcast that focuses on inspiring Veterans stories and puts a highlight on important resources, offices, and benefits for our Veterans. I'm your host, Marine Corps Veteran Tanner Iskra. Apple Podcasts, iTunes, Spotify, iHeartRadio, or any one of the hundreds of podcast apps out there. I appreciate you taking the time to tune in and hear what we got going on this week. As of this podcast drop, it is the day after Mother's Day. If you still have the opportunity to, if you didn't at least call or go see your mom or take care of the mother of your children,

**Woman's Voice** "Shame, shame, shame."

**Tanner Iskra (TI):** Please go do so. Shame on you. Go get it done and pay respect to the person that brought you into this world, brought your kids into this world. And if you have a grandmother that's still around, pay attention to her as well. No new ratings or reviews on Apple Podcasts this week. Womp-womp. As you know, more reviews, more ratings do help us get higher in the algorithms and helps the information provided in the podcast, like last week's breakdown on the VA interest rate reduction refinance loan, it helps us get more—it helps us get that information out to more Veterans who are listening in the space. Again, help me to help them. I appreciate you in advance. Speaking of last week's benefits breakdown on the Earl. The first comment they came in on the episodes blog on [blogs.va.gov](https://blogs.va.gov) was from Robert Jones [Link: <https://blogs.va.gov>]. That's a basic, pretty untrackable, anonymous name. I dig it. Robert wrote in and said, "We owe approximately \$107,000 on our home that would probably sell in today's market at about \$275,000. We currently have three and a half interest rate. We currently have a three and a half percent interest rate. Would it be worthwhile to refinance?" Robert, the

only person that has that answer is you, brother. That's not for me to decide as everyone is in different positions financially. You have to take in the factors of your personal finances, the length of your loan, how much you'll save each month, how much your closing costs are, etc. Like my uncle told me when I had a question like this, "Do the math." In Episode 240, John gave great reasons about when to and when not to do a refinance loan and how to go about contacting lenders that you trust and then going back and doing the math before you make that decision. I implore you if you haven't, if you know, if you just read the article, haven't heard the podcast, go and listen to the podcast, which would make sense—which wouldn't make sense for me telling you right now, because that means you haven't heard this one. But anyways, if anybody knows Robert, point out the episode to him and say, "Hey, listen." News releases. It looks like we've been saving up compared to previous weeks. We've got four for you on some pretty important topics. First one says, "For immediate release: Veterans and their families may begin accessing their Department of Veterans Affairs benefits and services on the new and user-friendly it says va.gov website starting on April 30th. Users will be able to access information about VA benefits and services through a single site rather than do multiple locations." I think the last time I was on was on eBenefits. "All benefits related features previously located at eBenefits," there it is, "Web Portal will be available on va.gov. Veterans are encouraged to start logging on into the site using their current digital service log on or creating a new account using id.me. Th eBenefits site," I got to do that myself, "The eBenefits site will remain functional through March 31st, 2022 to give Veterans an opportunity to complete claims started on the platform. After that, va.gov becomes the single source solution to access VA benefits and services online. The US Digital Service worked with thousands of Veterans to test the new and improved va.gov. The department wanted to ensure Veterans deemed the site functional before migrating Veterans' data. To learn more about how to migrate your own login, go to va.gov [Link: <https://www.va.gov/>]." There's also a blog to this release on blogs.va.gov. I linked it to this episode's blog on Vantage Point. Tell your friends and family. If you're already using this method to get under on to your va.gov, no big deal. This doesn't pertain to you. But it does look like eBenefits and all the other ways to log in are going the way of the dodo. This is going to affect a lot of Veterans on how they log in. There's going to be some growing pains, some getting used to, but the full migration had to happen at some point. And once it's all set up, I wish there was a how to video—hint, hint, VA Health—as I got to do it myself. Heck, I got

to get a real checkup myself. I'm a little behind on that. Next one says, "For immediate release: As part of Mental Health Month, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs launched 1 Step Today to provide guidance curated by Veterans to inspire them to start on a path toward recovery, well-being and a healthier tomorrow, by taking one step at a time. The new endeavor," the campaign, whatever you want to call it, "features mental health tips and advice from Veterans and for Veterans. In addition, throughout the month of May and beyond, VA encourages Veterans and their families to visit [MakeTheConnection.net/MHM](http://MakeTheConnection.net/MHM) to learn more about mental health resources, sources of support for their mental health journey and treatment options in their communities [Link: [www.maketheconnection.net/MHM](http://www.maketheconnection.net/MHM)]. The web site connects Veterans to video testimonials and real-world advice from Veterans and others." This next news release is also a blog on [blogs.va.gov](http://blogs.va.gov), and it deals with broadening the Veteran eligibility and access to VA home loans. It says, "For immediate release: New changes passed by Congress and signed by the President have expanded Veteran eligibility and access to VA's home loan program. The Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 has three different things to improve access. One, it broadens the timeframe of Veterans qualifying for the Vietnam War era and has been revised to include those who served from November 1, 1955. The previous date was February 28, 1961. Two, it authorizes benefit access for those service members and Veterans mobilized to perform full-time National Guard duty for not less than 90 cumulative days, including at least 30 days consecutive." Number three, Veterans, service members," which is huge by the way." Number three, Veterans, service members, and certain surviving spouses with VA-guaranteed home loans in areas that have been declared major disasters by the President and whose residences have been substantially damaged are now eligible to be charged a first time use funding fee on a new VA-guaranteed loan rather than a subsequent use funding fee." And again, that funding fee is waived if you have a disability rating at a certain percentage with the VA. Check with episode 150 of *Born to the Battle* to learn more about that." The new VA-guaranteed loan must be for the repair or construction of the dwelling and closed within three years of the presidential declaration of the disaster. For more information about the VA Home Loan Program, visit [www.va.gov/housing-assistance/home-loans/](http://www.va.gov/housing-assistance/home-loans/) [Link: [www.va.gov/housing-assistance/home-loans/](http://www.va.gov/housing-assistance/home-loans/)]. In addition, Veterans and service members interested in exploring VA home loan options or applying for a loan are encouraged to contact a mortgage lender

of their choosing.” All right. And the last one says, “For immediate release: As part of the American Rescue Plan, the US Department of Veterans Affairs is accepting applications from Veterans interested in the Veteran Rapid Retraining Assistance Program, also known, “because we love acronyms, “VRRAP. VRRAP gives eligible Veterans who lost their job due to the COVID-19 pandemic access to employment, reeducation, to qualify for a high demand occupation. Veterans interested in VRRAP will receive up to 12 months of tuition and fees and a monthly housing allowance based on the post 9/11 GI Bill rates. A Veteran must meet the following criteria for eligibility: Must be at least 22 years old, but not more than 66 years old; you must be unemployed due to COVID-19 pandemic; must not be eligible for GI Bill or VR Readiness and Employment Benefits; must not be enrolled in a federal or state job program; must not be receiving VA disability compensation because you're unable to work; and you must not be receiving unemployment compensation, including any enhanced benefits under the CARES Act. The program ends 21 months after enactment, and it's limited to the maximum of 17,250 participants. For more information on VRRAP and about participating educational institutions that are participating in VRRAP, go to [www.va.gov/education/other-va-education-benefits/veteran-rapid-retraining-assistance](http://www.va.gov/education/other-va-education-benefits/veteran-rapid-retraining-assistance) [Link: [www.va.gov/education/other-va-education-benefits/veteran-rapid-retraining-assistance](http://www.va.gov/education/other-va-education-benefits/veteran-rapid-retraining-assistance)]. I'll also link this hyperlink and the information provided within it on this podcast episode's blog on [blogs@va.gov](mailto:blogs@va.gov). I'll put the info like this that I go over towards the bottom of the page. That was a long URL. I'll make sure it's in there. All right. So, like I said, at the time of the drop of this episode, yesterday was Mother's Day. So this week's guest is an Air Force Veteran. She's served as a civil engineer. And since she got out, she's become a successful writer. Her blog, [airmantomom.com](http://airmantomom.com) is about transitioning from being an Airman to a full-time mother [Link: [www.airmantomom.com](http://www.airmantomom.com)]. She's written a book “Women of the Military,” which has followed up by a successful podcast of the same name, which is up to 133 episodes at the time of this recording. And now she's got a free guide and a YouTube channel called A Girl's Guide to the Military. So, without further ado, I bring to you Air Force Veteran, Amanda Huffman. Enjoy.

**[00:10:47] Music:**

**[00:10:54] Interview:**

**Tanner Iskra (TI):**

So, you're not on the Peloton or in the gym. It's funny cause every time we speak about linking up beforehand, I'm always

asking if you're working out or you're watching Cops because you're always sound out of breath. But you're always in the gym. You're always working out. That's the stepbrother reference, by the way, for those not in the know.

**Amanda Huffman (AH):** Yeah. It was funny because when you called me the second time, it was like a completely different time. And you were like, "Are you working out again?" And I was like, "Yeah?"

**(TI):** Yeah, it was like a completely different time of the day. It was awesome. It was awesome. Well, it's great to finally get time to sit down and learn more about you. It's like we pass in the hallways in podcast land all the time. You know, fellow podcasters, so it's nice to finally be able to sit down and learn more about you.

**(AH):** Yeah, I'm excited. I'm excited.

**(TI):** Well, the first question we always ask here on Borne the Battle is: where and when did you know that military service was the next step in your life?

**(AH):** It's kind of a complicated question because it started with September 11th, but it wasn't like a straight line path of like September 11th happened my senior year of high school, but I didn't actually—

**(TI):** Ah, I was a junior.

**(AH):** Yeah. Okay. So, we're pretty close. And I didn't like, see September 11th happened and say, "I want to join the military," but it was when I realized the military existed and that I could join the military. And I guess as a true introvert, I took my time figuring out that that was what I wanted to do. And I—my freshman year of college, so a year later, a bunch of my friends were either enlisting or one person was getting activated through the National Guard to deploy. And then my other friend was doing this officer program. And so, all these people I knew from college were joining the military and I was like, "Hey, let's go check it out." And so, that's when I started looking into ROTC. I originally was going to enlist into the Air Force, but my friend who was doing the officer program took me to lunch and was like,

“Before you enlist, let's talk about what the military is” And that's how I found out about ROTC and joined that way.

**(TI):** Interesting. So, you didn't go to school under ROTC scholarship or anything like that. You actually joined afterwards into ROTC. Where'd you go to school at?

**(AH):** Fresno State in California.

**(TI):** Nice. Heard good things about that place in San Diego. Absolutely. Now, you were an Air Force civil engineer. You deployed with the Army though in 2010, who were you attached to? What unit?

**(AH):** I was part of a provincial reconstruction team. So, we were like our own made-up unit. We weren't attached to, like—I think we must have had somebody who was like our official higher headquarters, but I can't remember what it was. That's how Air Force I am. I hear it might've been the 82nd or it might have—who knows., But we were all like a mix of National Guard soldiers, Reservist soldiers, active-duty Air Force, all shoved together and we made—I think there were 13 PRTs across Afghanistan, and some were Navy and some were Air Force and it was kind of a weird combination.

**(TI):** You just made one Frankenstein unit.

**(AH):** Yes. Yeah, that's—

**(TI):** Gotcha. Gotcha. What was the—so that was towards the reverse surge timeframe. I mean, we were coming out. Were you doing more—I mean, it said reconstruction, but were you doing more building up or tearing down in Afghanistan?

**(AH):** Yeah, they say reconstruct, but yeah, it was building up. Cause there's not anything to reconstruct. It's—we were building these like two story schoolhouse buildings next to these mud huts. It was kind of ridiculous.

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(AH):** Actually, one of the schools that was my favorite school to visit because it was in a safe location and the kids were sitting on the hill, we'd have to climb up to the schoolhouse. And they were

sitting under trees on a hill having classrooms. And once the chalkboards were installed inside of the classroom, we would come in and there would be like the school lesson would be on the board. And so, they were already using the school while they were building it. So, I think most of the schools were used as schools. It's just that the—they made them put electricity in and they didn't have fuel for the generators and they would put water or any liquid in the generator and then be like, "It doesn't work." And I was like, "Yeah, obviously it doesn't work. You can't put water in a generator." And so like, they would ask for a new generator and we're like, "I don't think that's the solution."

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(TI):** So, obviously they have some challenges in maintaining what you guys had built. Did you say—now, you said one was in a good area because it was safer. So, were you building schools in some areas that weren't as safe?

**(AH):** Most of the projects we were doing were in the safer regions. I was in Kapisa which is North of Kabul and east of Bagram. And there was like—it was kind of the Pashtun and—oh, you're making me think back. The Pashtuns were in the south. And then I can't remember the group in the North, but the group in the North, I think they were Tajik, were more friendly towards Americans. And so, when we would go to the south, we could just drive straight down, but that was too dangerous. So, we would drive to Bagram, go to Kabul, and then come up through Kabul 'cause it was safer. And then we would go to a certain point and be like, "Okay, we're too far north. Now, the bad guys are coming," and we'd come back. And so, it was kind of like a weird set up of the way that the province was set up. And it was a really tiny province. It was only the size of Rhode Island, but we would take like these wild journeys to try and get to the different parts.

**(TI):** Interesting. While you were in, give me either a best friend or your greatest mentor.

**(AH):** Well, my best friends from my deployment, I'm still friends with today. And the one of them was on the PRT with me. She was at the other civil engineer and I was really lucky because I got to

deploy with another female civil engineer. And so, when I talk on my podcast to women about being lonely on their deployment, I was like, “Oh, my best friend was sitting across from me and we got to hang out all the time.” And we even got separated because she would go on mission. So, it wasn't even like we're together all the time so that we would get sick of each other. But, there were two other people, the person who did the finance at Bagram, he became friends with us and another Intel officer from another PRT. And the four of us are still friends and we often talk about—our deployment was really difficult with all the, like you said, like a Frankenstein teamwork where commanders got fired and there was a lot of infighting. And so, the deployment was really difficult for a lot of different reasons, but we always talk about like, “It was worth it because we got our friendship out of this,” and—

**(TI):** Yeah.

**(AH):** Yeah.

**(TI):** Very cool.

**(AH):** We've met up at Disneyland and other places around the country.

**(TI):** Oh, so after you've been out you guys have linked up?

**(AH):** Mh-hm. Yeah, we have a group text message chat that we use regularly and yeah.

**(TI):** You always keep in touch. That's good. That's good. So, when did you leave active duty? What year?

**(AH):** 2013.

**(TI):** 2013. Now, the book that came out a couple of years ago, I started seeing you featured in many places. One of those was Fox Business Mornings with Maria. I pull it up again while I was doing the research for this interview. And there it was, you talked about you knowing that you were going to get out when you knew that, you know, in six months after your child was born, you're going to have to deploy again.

**(AH):** Yep.

**(TI):** Was starting a family, was that obviously—that was obviously a major reason for leaving. Were there any other factors that helped you make that decision?

**(AH):** The other factor is my husband is still active duty. And so, we were a dual military and we've been dual military for six years. And we spent a lot of time apart. I mean, there was the—

**(TI):** Yeah, it's tough.

**(AH):** Yeah, the deployment was a year, but then when I moved back or when I got to come home from the deployment, he had already moved to Ohio and I went back to New Mexico. And it was only by my former commander, Colonel Knutson who had—he was dual military, so he had worked the system so that I could get stationed with my husband when I got home from the deployment. And so, we knew with being dual military, there was a lot of sacrifice required. And I felt like at some point at maybe like the 10 or the 15-year point, the military would be like, "Okay, you're going to Texas and he's going to Virginia." And I was like, "I just can't imagine all the sacrifices of deploying and all the things that our kids would have to go through. And then get to that point where you still have like five years till retirement and not be able to be stationed together." And so, I was like, the deployment thing was a big thing, but then the whole dual military thing was another big piece of it too.

**(TI):** Yeah, you were thinking ahead. Yeah, no, you should see that the Marine Corps, they don't like to spend money. Cause I know there is that family separation pay. They don't like to spend money. So, the most, you would be a part would be 50 miles. But you'd get like a lot of people do a Lejeune and Cherry Point, and then they get a place in, like, Swansboro that is like in between. But it sounds like the Air Force, you know, they're e flushed, so that's tough, honestly. Now, you and I have both had Graciela Tiscareño-Sato on our podcasts. And she talked about the same thing she asked and was mentored on the same subject that you're talking about - deploying shortly after having a child. And she was mentored about that. On your podcast, you've had many different women that have served different services, ranks, places in their lives. Have you asked a fellow women Veteran how they were able to deploy shortly after giving birth? That

same thing that you were concerned about and how did they answer that?

**(AH):** Yeah. So, I've touched on that because I find that fascinating to hear their story and why they did it. And what I find most often is that they're not really—either they're not in a situation to think about it because they've already signed up and, like, maybe they're two years into their commitment and they have six years or four years to go or two years ago. And so, there's not really, like, they don't really think about it because there's not really an option. Or they're a single parent and this is how they pay the bills. And so, they have to keep their job. And so, they do it. I've heard, a lot of the times when they talk about having to say goodbye to their kids, multiple moms have been like, “We drove up to either their mom or their spouse or whoever the child is going to be watched by.” And they would just drop off the kid and drive away. And they were like, “I couldn't even say goodbye because it was so hard. And I just did what I had to do.”

**(TI):** Wow! Did anyone talk about, like, ways that they mitigated it? Maybe on deployment? Did they think about it on deployment? How did they focus on the mission and not their child?

**(AH):** I think they, from what I've heard they were—either they deployed long enough ago that there wasn't really communication. So, it wasn't really that easy to communicate back with their kids. And so, that made it easier cause they're so busy with whatever they're doing, but with social media and even from when I deployed in 2010 where we didn't have Wi-Fi and now you can have Wi-Fi and FaceTime in your room. And one of the moms I talked to, like, she was at Parent-Teacher Conferences and she was able to find a way to stay involved in her daughter's life, even though she was—

**(TI):** That's crazy.

**(AH):** Right?! And so, hope the admin, like, technology has changed how it is. I mean, even thinking about when my husband went active duty before me because he graduated college a year before me. And we talked on the phone every night for like 15, 20 minutes, an hour, depending on what was going on. But, like, I didn't see him for months at a time. And now he goes, TDY for

a week—I mean, COVID, he doesn't go TDY, but before, he'd go TDY for a week and we would FaceTime him. And, like, sometimes he would be on the phone while my son was going to sleep, and they were FaceTiming just because he wanted to see his dad when he was going to sleep. And that's changed everything. And how deployments are and it's—yeah.

**(TI):** Yeah. My last “deployment” to Romania, my wife would—like, we would FaceTime, but she would, like, just watch me fall asleep.

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(TI):** Like, you're there. You're in your room. All right. But I say it all the time, hats off to those that maintain a family or are able to go 20 or more years and maintain that family in the military. It's an incredible feat because, you know, like, you know, the divorce rate is always super high in the military, always super high, you know. So, it's just an incredible feat. So, hats off. Now, correct me if I'm wrong, like you said, your husband now—your husband is still active duty. What's he do?

**(AH):** I don't know.

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(TI):** Y'all have been married how many years?

**(AH):** Well, my husband, actually, he just got accepted into the Space Force. So, he does space things. But he does something to do with, like, helping build satellites and I know, like, I mean, we watch a lot of launches for SpaceX and we're all about the Space Force, but we don't—I think from when we were active duty, we both never really talked about his job. And as a military spouse, I'm—people will be like, “What's your husband do?” And that's usually my answer, “Oh, I don't know. I don't really pay attention,” because a lot of military spouses think that they need to know what their husband does or their wife, and they'll, like, know everything. And I'm like, “Eh.”

**(TI):** Now, see I always heard it differently. All the spouses I knew, they didn't know what their husband did, and they were blissfully ignorant of it. And they were just like, “Oh, he's in the military”, you know. But for you, I was like, “Okay, you're a Veteran. You

served. You were in the Air Force. You have to—maybe what's his MOS.” And it was, you know, whatever.

**(AH):** I know all those things. Yeah.

**(TI):** Yeah, so.

**(AH):** I mean, I think I know more of the, like, when his promotion board is and, like, what awards are important and, like, weird details like that.

**(TI):** But his job? Meh. Gotcha. Very good. Very good. Very good. It's funny. It's hilarious. I love it. You were in for how many years?

**(AH):** Six years.

**(TI):** Six. Six. What is one thing about the military—the female military experience that male Veterans should know or be cognizant about?

**(AH):** So, I think when I was active duty, I don't think I noticed it as much of how hard it was to be a woman in the military. But when I left the military, people were really quick to dismiss my service and I'm married to someone who's in the military. And so, at first I thought like, “Maybe I'm just crazy,” but then they would, like, get really excited to talk to him. I would be like, “Oh, I was in the military.” And they'd be like, “Oh, that's nice.” And then they would be like, “What did you do?” to my husband standing right next to me. And I'm like, “No, like I have a cooler story.”

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(AH):** So, now he has the cooler story cause he's going to the Space Force. But at the time, like he hadn't deployed, and he couldn't really talk a lot about what he did. And so, it was just kind of interesting how people would just be like—they would just assume that because I was a woman that I didn't have a story to tell. So, I think that's, like—the way that people react to women as Veterans and probably even service members, but I didn't notice it as much on active duty. But when I say, “I'm a Veteran.” People were like, “Oh, well, what'd you do?” I'm like when they find out my husband was in the service, they were like, “Oh, that's so cool!” You know? Like, I don't know. I feel like they don't really ask what you do. They just kind of assume what you did,

or they make a comment like, “Oh, were you a secretary? Oh, what did you like?” You know, stuff like that that makes it so that people just get tired of saying, “No, I'm a Veteran,” because they have to defend that their service is worth—I don't know. It's just a little complicated.

**(TI):** No, no, it's very interesting. Interesting. And it's good to hear that. It's definitely good to hear that. In my research, I heard that you saying that going to Afghanistan, you thought that going over there was going to be the hardest thing that you ever did, but it wasn't. Now, I honestly didn't get to hear the rest of your presentation. I saw the YouTube video. I looked at, like, the 53 minutes. I was like, “Okay, that was a good nugget, I'm going to ask her about it.”

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(TI):** But that part resonated because I did want to know more. I'm assuming it was motherhood is where you were going with that?

**(AH):** Yep.

**(TI):** Okay, great. And all that went with that? Why did you say that? Yeah, let's hear it.

**(AH):** I think it was motherhood and transitioning cause I did both things at the same time. Not a good plan.

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(TI):** Gotcha. Gotcha.

**(AH):** I transitioned out of the military when my son was four months old. And I thought that it was going to be so easy because I was like, “Oh, being in the military is hard.” And even when I gave birth to my son, my mom asked me how I was doing. Then I was like, “I got this. I went to Afghanistan, no big deal.” And then people make birth like it's a really big deal, which it is, but then you still have the child with you. And they don't do what you expect or at least they didn't do what I expected. And I—

**(TI):** What did you expect and what happened?

**(AH):** I haven't—I expected that my kid would sleep and that—

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(AH):** And, like when people would tell me about how I wouldn't sleep, I was like, "People must be crazy. You can't live like that." And then I found out, no, they're not crazy, but it's really what happened. And I just expected that, like, I could get my kids to nap and get them on a schedule and that everything that—life was just going to be easy. Because I'd have all this free time because my kid would sleep all the time and then he didn't sleep at all.

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(TI):** Gotcha.

**(AH):** And I just felt like a failure. That was, like, my biggest struggle was having to deal with being, like, a perfectionist and then a Type A personality. And then when he didn't do what the book said, because he was a person and not a book, I would say, "Oh, you're a failure, Amanda, because he didn't do X, Y, D—Z." And instead of looking at him as, like, a person and the difference between my first son and my second son was, like, my first son, I was, like, trying to control him to, like, fit into what I thought he needed to be and what would make me feel like I had accomplished. And with my second son, I was able to let go of that control and enjoy motherhood in a way that I didn't the first time.

**(TI):** Interesting that you said failure.

**(AH):** Oh, yeah.

**(TI):** That it didn't go the way that you—it didn't go the way you thought it was the book said. How did you get over that? How did you mitigate that? How did you push through that and understand that it's a person not a book? And you got to be adaptable and this is life and there's joy in it as well. How did you get to that point from, I'm a failure and life is terrible?

**(AH):** So, it's actually in the video that you watched, but I got pregnant again with my second son and I didn't know how much I was hurting inside. And then I got pregnant with my son and I was so excited. Like, once I saw that I was pregnant, I was so excited

that I was going to be a mom again. And then, I was also so terrified because of miscarriage and that I would lose him. And the whole time that my second son was growing inside of me, I realized not only how much I loved this baby who was growing inside of me, but also my first son, because, like, if I have so much love for this person who wasn't even born yet, I knew it was coming from my oldest son and how I learned to be a mom and how he changed me. And so, it was kind of an interesting—it's kind of, like, weird to think about that. My second son was what helped me learn how to be a mom when he was growing inside me, but he really showed me before he was born how much I did love my son and how much of a good mom I was and how much I cared for him.

**(TI):** Interesting. That's wild.

**(AH):** Yeah.

**(TI):** I mean—okay. So, you gave me the, you know, when it happened, but how does that manifest in that?

**(AH):** I don't really—I don't know. That's, like—and now it's been so long. I can't—I just wrote a blog post a while ago and it was called “Dear Second Baby” and it was all about how he showed me how to love or that I did love my oldest son, I just had this, like, overwhelming weight of failure that I didn't love my son enough. That I didn't do enough. And that I didn't—and then when I got pregnant and I was so excited and I had so much love for this baby who wasn't even here yet, it just kind of like woke me up to the fact that I did actually really love my son and that I was—and I didn't need to be the perfect mom. It just allowed me to give myself grace.

**(TI):** Very good. Talk about blogging, [airmantomom.com](http://airmantomom.com) [Link: [airmantomom.com](http://airmantomom.com)]. Did the website and blogging come before the book and the podcast?

**(AH):** Yes. Yes, long before.

**(TI):** What prompted you to start writing and then to eventually pursue it as a career?

**(AH):** I was struggling as being a new mom. And I was following this mom blogger, who was doing this thing where you write for five minutes once a week and she would throw out a prompt word of like sun or travel or whatever. And then you would write for five minutes and there was this community of women who would write—everyone would write together and then we would all share our blogs. And so, that's how I started blogging was by writing for that five minutes once a week. And then I just started to build this community with other women, and I didn't feel so alone. And I had no idea what I was doing, and my blog was all over the place. And through that journey, I discovered a love for hearing the stories of military women. And that's how the book and the podcast came about.

**(TI):** Hmm. Feeling alone. When did you start feeling alone?

**(AH):** Probably right after I left the military because I went from being at work, surrounded by people and then—I didn't include this, but my husband went to a training for two months when my son was two months old. So, as I was transitioning out of the military, he was gone, and I was alone. And then I got out of the military and he was back, but then I was home alone at work, and then he was gone all day and I just—I didn't really have any friends and I didn't know any other moms that were in the same stage of life. And I just felt really lonely.

**(TI):** So, the writing really helped out with that. So, you went and transitioned from being in the office every day, being in a working environment everyday surrounded by people having that interaction to motherhood. And then two months out of that motherhood alone while your husband was gone. Gotcha. Gotcha. Very good. Very good. You also host the Women and Military podcast. Much like I told Ben Killoy when he came on, niche topics—or neesh, nitch? I don't even know which one—which way you say that.

**(AH):** Neesh.

**(TI):** Ah, okay. I'll get the advice on the writer. Topics, you know, niche topics are a great way to start podcasts. I'm just not in—I wasn't in his niche right now. I'm not in your niche right now. So, I don't listen to either one, you know, at all. I think I'll eventually

when I become a father, I'll probably listen to Ben a little bit. And then, you know, when I want to make my wife happy, I'll probably listen to yours a little bit. What topics do you cover? Is it active duty? Is it Veterans? Is it used for both? Is it all the above? Is there something that you cover that I don't know about? What would you cover on the podcast?

**(AH):** So, I always start with: why did you decide to join the military? And you can—

**(TI):** Very good.

**(AH):** Yeah. A great question.

**(TI):** Right? A good question for a military Veteran podcast. Very good.

**(AH):** And I don't—you can be a Veteran, or you can be on active duty. Some people don't feel comfortable being on the show while they're still in the military. And so, they're not on the show, but some people do. And so, I've had both Veterans and active duty or Reservists or National Guardsmen or women, whatever you say. But I don't really discriminate besides woman Veteran. And then we just go through their military story about the things that they've covered, and they answer a few questions beforehand. So, based on their answers, I know where to take the interview and what questions to ask. But we've covered topics from sexual assault and rape to deployments. Being a mom in the military. Being a woman in the military and transitioning, and we cover transitioning a lot. And also, being a military spouse and being a Veteran is a common topic because there's a lot of women Veterans who are military spouses, but we just cover it all. And I like that I get to hear stories from present day and from as far back, I think as well as World War II is the far back, I've gone. And I just get to hear all these stories. And what you probably don't know is my last question is what advice would you give to a young woman considering the military? So, a lot of my listeners are women who are looking to join the military.

**(TI):** Interesting.

**(AH):** And that's where my new passion lies. I just started a YouTube channel called "A Girl's Guide to the Military" to help women who are joining the military.

**(TI):** Very good. Very good. As a woman Veteran, what, you know, what is one thing that you learned from your own community that you didn't know before embarking on this journey?

**(AH):** So, it's kind of a weird answer cause I'm a weird person. We'll just go with that.

**(TI):** All right. Hey everybody's got a little weird in some form or fashion. It's all good.

**(AH):** But as a woman Veteran, the thing that I learned, especially you've mentioned Ben Colloy was Ben and I had a lunch that I talk about. He makes fun of me 'cause I talk about it all the time, but we had lunch together and it was just a normal lunch, but we started talking about transition and he was saying stuff that I was thinking in my head, and I was like, "I am not so different from my Veteran brothers because I'm a woman. Like, transition was hard for him. He struggled with a lot of the same emotions and it was—" I talk about it so much because it was so life changing because before that conversation, which happened in 2019, I thought I'm a woman Veteran. I don't belong in the Veteran community. And then I realized I was dead wrong and that the Veteran community needs women and they support women. And we can both help each other in a way that I never expected.

**(TI):** Well, there's that common word Veteran, you know, it's the same. Everyone shares that same story to transition, trust me. It's funny because I did see that episode. I saw that you—I noticed that you both did an episode on the Military Veteran Dad podcast where you were a guest. And Ben's done that a couple of times. He's had women Veterans on his podcast, and it did make me stop and take notice because you're the military mom podcast. He's the military dad podcast. Definitely made me stop and take notice. What did you guys talk about?

**(AH):** We actually talked a lot about me being a military spouse and how to support—how the husbands can support, dads can support their wives as a military spouse. Especially because I'm a Veteran. And so, I—the hard thing about being a Veteran and

military spouse is that you understand, like, why the military does the dumb stuff that it does, but then it doesn't change the fact that it's still really hard to be the one either left behind because of a deployment or a TDY. Or having to figure out childcare because your husband has a job thing that he has to do. Speaking of you mentioned the interview for Fox Business, he—I told my husband about it. I was really excited, and he wasn't supposed to be working. And then they were—they move something back a week and he came home, and he was like, “I have so sorry this got moved.” And I was, like, trying to figure out how to make it work. And then they moved it again cause, you know, the military likes to make it, but it was so frustrating because, like, I knew it had nothing to do with him, but I was like, “Do you know how mad this makes me?!”

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(AH):** So, we just talked about, like, how to support your spouse when you're in the military and even after transition because I could talk about transitioning out and how difficult that is.

**(TI):** Gotcha. Gotcha. Yeah, he was probably like, “But, honey! I can't do anything about it!”

**(AH):** He didn't have to say that. I knew that, but I was, like, “I'm still mad!”

**(Both):** [Laughter]

**(TI):** Well, I'm glad it worked out. I'm glad it definitely worked out. Is there a Veteran non-profit or a Veteran in the community whom you've worked with or you've, you know, that you'd like to mention?

**(AH):** I really like Women Veteran Alliance. They are in California. There—Melissa Washington is doing a lot of great things for women Veterans and she's having a conference in October, I think it is, as long as COVID makes that happen. But she's just doing a lot of stuff to give back to women Veterans and provide resources and build community among women Veterans.

**(TI):** I miss the FaceTime conferences.

**(AH):** Yeah, met too.

**(TI):** Big time. And I, you know, I like to do what's called a roundup. I would stick a microphone just on a table and I'm like, hey, I grabbed like 10 people. And I'm like, "Hey, what'd you learn here?" It was always a good way to gauge from the community what they learned at a certain conference or something like that.

**(AH):** Yeah.

**(TI):** I miss that. Amanda, what's one thing that you learned during your time in the military that you apply to what you do today?

**(AH):** So, my favorite quote comes from my second commander, who was Colonel Knutson, who I already mentioned. And he told me before I deployed that when you come to a great chasm in life: "Jump. It's not that far." And that deployment or that quote helped me through my deployment because the military told me to do things. And I was like, "I don't think you picked the right person," but I didn't have a choice. They were like, "Nope, we picked the right person. You're going." And so, I would just remember that quote, especially like the first time I went off base for the mission to go off—to go outside the wire and just different times. And with my business, I use that quote a lot when I'm going to try something new or when I'm going to hit publish and I don't really want to. And so, that's the quote that I use a lot.

**(TI):** Good. Good. That's a good one. Is there anything that I've missed or haven't asked. Anything is important to share?

**(AH):** I think it's important for Veterans to know how important their story is. And my motto for the podcast is your story matters. And we need to tell our stories, so that the world knows what we've done. Especially for women.

**(TI):** 100% agree with you. 100%.

**(AH):** Yeah. Especially cause women Veterans' stories for so long weren't told, like, the history of the women in World War II, people didn't know. And even when I was taking my ROTC classes, I didn't know any history related to women. And so, we need to tell our stories because it normalizes us to the civilian population because they can understand better when we share our stories. And then it also adds to history because when we're

gone, people won't know really what happened unless they have our stories.

**[00:46:14] Music**

**[00:46:17] PSA:**

**Narrator:**

There are nearly two million women Veterans who served and deserve the best care anywhere. VA is dedicated to meeting the unique needs of all women Veterans. VA offers comprehensive primary care, specialty care, mental health care, and women's health specialty care such as breast and gynecological care, maternity care, and infertility treatments. At each VA Medical Center nationwide, a Women Veterans Program Manager is available to advise, advocate, and coordinate care for women Veterans. Women Veterans who are interested in receiving care at VA should call the Women Veterans Call Center at 855-VAWomen, or 855-829-6636, or contact the nearest VA Medical Center and ask for the Women Veterans Program Manager. For more information about benefits and other services for women Veterans, visit [www.va.gov/womenvet](http://www.va.gov/womenvet) [Link: [va.gov/womenvet](http://va.gov/womenvet)].

**[00:47:15] Music**

**[00:47:21] Closing Monologue:**

**(TI):**

I want to thank Amanda for taking her time to come on Borne the Battle. You can also find more about Amanda's story at [airmantomom.com/airman-to-mom](http://airmantomom.com/airman-to-mom) [Link: [airmantomom.com/airman-to-mom](http://airmantomom.com/airman-to-mom)]. This week's Borne the Battle Veteran of the week was provided by VA's Veteran of the Day program. Every day our Digital Media Team honors a Veteran with a short write up on all of our social media platforms and on [blogs.va.gov](http://blogs.va.gov). You can submit your own Veteran of the Day by emailing a photo or two and a short write up to [newmedia@va.gov](mailto:newmedia@va.gov). Romus "RV" Burgin was born in Jewett, Texas in 1922. He joined the Marines three days after his birthday on November 13th, 1942. After he completed bootcamp at Camp Elliott in San Diego, Burgin began his training as a mortar man. He started with the 9th Replacement Battalion before moving to K-Company, 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines, 1st Marine Division. Burgin first went to Melbourne, Australia for pre-deployment training where he met his wife, Florence. After

Melbourne, Burgin went to New Guinea for three months where he continued his training and whereas unit received additional recruits. He left New Guinea on May 4th, 1943, serving as a gunner with the 5th Marine Division on the first day of combat in the Battle of New Britain. Burgin then deployed to Peleliu and Okinawa, Japan for 30 days to fight against the Japanese Army. During this time, he was promoted to sergeant. On May 2nd, 1945, Burgin received a Bronze Star for destroying a Japanese machine gun emplacement that had prevented his company from advancing their position. During the Battle of Okinawa, enemy fire from a machine gun nest wounded him in the leg. He went to a field hospital and recovered for about 20 days. Burgin returned to K-Company and remained a part of the company until the battle was over. He served in northern Okinawa until the end of the war. And on October 16th, 1945. Burgin took USS Lavaca to California, where he began where he began to transition into civilian life. After he retired from the Marine Corps, Burgin worked at a Dallas post office as a substitute carrier and tenant. At the age of 80, he co-authored the book "Islands of the Damned: A Marine at War in the Pacific with William Marvel." He was also depicted in the HBO series "The Pacific" for his actions in the battle of New Britain, Peleliu and Okinawa during the Pacific campaign. Unfortunately, Romus Burgin passed away on April 6th, 2019 at the age of 96. Marine Veteran Romus "RV" Burgin, we honor his service. Hey, that's it for this week's episode. If you yourself would like to nominate a Borne the Battle Veteran of the Week, you can just send an email to [podcast@va.gov](mailto:podcast@va.gov) include a short writeup and let us know why you'd like to see him or her as the Borne the Battle of Veteran of the Week. And if you liked this podcast episode, hit the subscribe button. We're on iTunes, Spotify, Google Podcast, iHeart Radio, pretty much any podcasting app known to phone, computer, tablet, or man. For more stories on Veterans and Veteran benefits, check out our website [blog@va.gov](http://blog@va.gov), and follow the VA on social media: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, RallyPoint, LinkedIn, Pinterest. DptVetAffairs, US Department of Veterans Affairs, no matter the social media, you can always find us with that blue check mark. And as always, I'm reminded by people smarter than me to remind you that the Department of Veterans Affairs does not endorse or officially sanction any

entities that may be discussed on this podcast nor media and nor any immediate products or services they may provide. I say that because the song you're hearing now is called "Machine Gunner," which is courtesy of the nonprofit Operation Song. And it was written by Marine Veteran Mick McElhenny, Nashville songwriter Jason Sever, and Mykal Duncan. Thank you again for listening, and we'll see you right here next week. Take care.

**[00:51:52] Music**

**[00:52:51] Bonus:**

**(AH):** I really love Disney. I don't know if you know that, but I'm a crazy Disney person. I'll admit it.

**(TI):** You and Ben have that in common. He talks about Frozen all the time.

**(AH):** Oh yeah. Well, he's a different kind of Disney person 'cause he likes—well, I like all things Disney, but I really love the parks. When we lived in California, I signed up for a half marathon before I was pregnant with my second son and then I got pregnant. So, I ran a half marathon at Disneyland with my second son while I was like six months pregnant. And my friend who trained with me, she said it was so fun to run with me because people would see me running, and I was noticeably pregnant, and they would always do a double take. And so, that was really fun. After the race was over, my one friend was like, "Oh, were you struggling to keep up with Lindsey?" And I was like, "No, I'm pretty sure she was struggling to keep up with me." So, that was a really fun, crazy adventure. But yeah, I love Disney. I don't really run anymore, but I'd probably do it for a Disney race.

(Text Transcript Ends)