

This Week at VA

Episode #50 Timothy Lawson- Marine Veteran, Podcast Host

Hosted by Timothy Lawson and Melissa Heintz

(Text Transcript Follows)

[00:00:00] PSA:

Kids: I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America...

Man 1: We grew up together, we believed in something bigger than ourselves.

Soldiers: I solemnly swear...

Man 1: The military took me to one side of the world and her to the other. And even though she was always the strong one, when we caught up years later, I found out she had fallen on some hard times. It was her call to make but doing it together made all the difference.

Narrator: For Veterans who are homeless or on the brink of homelessness, call 877-424-3838.

[00:00:31] Music

[00:00:40] OPENING MONOLOGUE:

Timothy Lawson (TL): Hello, everyone. Welcome to another episode of *This Week at VA*. This is Episode 50. It's hard to believe that it's been 50 episodes. We've had so many great Veterans come on and share their stories. I'm truly grateful for that. We're going to kick off this week's episode by recognizing Rory Cooper. You may remember Rory from Episode 45 where Rory talked to us about his amazing work and research that has engineered dozens of different wheelchairs and other assistance living devices to help better the lives of our Veterans. Well, Rory was up for a 2017 Samuel J. Heyman Service to America Medal, which is considered

to be one of the highest recognitions offered to public servants. Rory was nominated in the 'Science and Environment' category and he won. We are very excited for him and we actually got an opportunity to catch up with him at the ceremony and his thoughts on receiving this award and his continued service to Veterans.

(Pre-recorded interview with Rory)

Rory Cooper: Uh, it means a lot to receive the- the Sammy's award. Um. I've been helped by so many Veterans over the years and by the VA and to see the VA's recent work recognized is tremendous. But I also hope it's a- a platform to get people to understand- uh- the needs of Veterans and the technology needs, what technology can do. And, hopefully, to- uh- motivate the Veterans to achieve everything that they can. Maximize their- Maximize their abilities, um, and contribu- continue to serve and contribute to society. Uh. That's why I'm in the VA, right? Uh, we want to see Veterans benefit from what we do. We work with Veterans- uh- closely every day. A lot of our team are Veterans themselves, from the Vietnam era to the current era. And- uh- the other thing is that Veterans are very engaged in what we do, through our 'Voice of the Consumer' surveys, to seeing me at- competing with me at the Veterans wheelchair games, or doing research at the Winter Sports Clinic. Um. You know, that's- that's- We live and breathe Veterans and that's why we're there. And, um, you know, that's the most gratifying thing. Like, this summer, you know, we were able to bring with one of the devices we helped create- it's a wheelchair and a bed that work together- to market. And, um, we took it to our Hines VA in Pittsburgh, which is a long-term care facility. And, uh, one of the Veteran's spouses, she saw it in the hospital and she came and talked to us and tried it out. Brought her physician and said, uh, "I'd like to get one of these for my husband. I want to take him home." And he'd been in long-term care for two years and two months later, we were able to get him home. Uh, where else would you serve- If you can't serve in the Army, where else can you serve Veterans better than the VA?

(End of Pre-Recorded Interview with Rory. Return to Tim's Intro)

TL: So, this week's featured interview is going to work a little different than usual. I invited my colleague, Melissa Heintz, to step in and interview me as the guest. I wanted to do something fun and unique for Episode

50, so I decided to flip the microphone around and let you all learn a little bit more about me as a host and as a Marine Corps Veteran. I hope you enjoy.

[00:03:42] Music

[00:03:46] INTERVIEW:

Melissa Heintz (MH): So, this week it's the 50th episode of *This Week at VA* podcast.

TL: Yes.

MH: And usually Tim is in the interviewing chair. But we've decided to switch it up, this time, instead. I'm his colleague. My name is Melissa Heintz and I am going to be interviewing Tim. So—

TL: I'm glad- I'm glad- I'm glad you decided- uh- agreed to do this.

MH: [Laughter]

TL: I, um- You know, I thought in a couple of shows in the past, I've- I've done this where I've flipped it and the audience always- always seems to like it. And more so, I like it. So, like, when I podcast, I want to- I, like, I do stuff that I like.

MH: Mhmm.

TL: Like, when I hear some- someone- something happen on a podcast that I like, I'll try to emulate it. If I wish a podcast would do something, I try to see how I can fit it in. And one thing I always tell, like, my podcasters that I enjoy listening to, I'm like, "Put more of yourself out there. Like, you know, like, I want to hear more from you." And I've definitely had some people mention that from this podcast. And, you know, I wanted to do something fun and unique for Episode 50. So, here we are.

MH: And you've had a chance to interview many different Veterans—

TL: Yes.

MH: from the Veteran community, so. But, now, you're a Veteran yourself.

TL: I am.

MH: And so, why don't you tell us a little bit about your time in the military.

TL: Okay. Um, so, it all started when I was in- I was living in Lynden, Washington, which is probably about two hours north of Seattle. I had no- nothing really going on in my life. I had a job at a local greenhouse that I got through my mom's church friend. It was a family-owned business, so I knew that there really wasn't a lot- really wasn't anywhere for me to go, right? All management and all that sort of stuff was, sort of, a family thing. And I needed a career. And I had ended up taking a day drive with a friend of mine from high school, and he had just gotten back from Iraq. And so, he was telling me about, you know, his war stories and stuff like that. So, like any young 20-year-old, I was motivated, right? And 20 seems like it was so late of me to join, right? You know, two years behind a lot of people.

MH: Right.

TL: But I was- I was one of those recruits that made- or one of those poolee's, or whatever you want to call them- that made the recruiter's job easy. I walked in and he just starts selling me on it. And I was like, "No, no, no. I want to join. –

MH: [Laughter]

TL: We'll start working on that."

MH: Right.

TL: Like, "You don't need to sell this to me. I'm not talking to any other branch."

MH: And was your friend a Marine?

TL: Yes. Yeah, so my friend was a- was a Marine. He was in the Marine Corps Reserves.

MH: Mhmm.

TL: He joined right out of high school. He was one of my better friends in high school. And so—

MH: What year was this?

TL: Umm. So, I graduated in 2003. So, this must have been two thousand and... 2005 was when the thought process started, I think. Yeah, May 2006—

MH: Mhmm.

TL: is when I officially joined. I spent my 21st birthday in bootcamp.

MH: Oh wow.

TL: Yeah.

MH: So, no wild and crazy party [Laughter] —

TL: [Laughter] No.

MH: like a normal 21-year-old in America.

TL: No wild and crazy party. No mention of it whatsoever. 'Cause anybody who's been in Marine Corps bootcamp knows that your birthday will be a horrible day if you let the wrong person find out. So, I didn't mention it to anybody.

MH: Right.

TL: Yeah.

MH: And so, after you finished bootcamp—

TL: Yeah.

MH: what types of jobs did you have while you were in the Marine Corps?

TL: So, I enlisted as a 6672 aviation supply specialist, which is a fun way of saying that I ordered airplane parts. But my last week of bootcamp, I remember hearing my drill instructor say the MSG program is the best-kept secret in the Marine Corps and that stuck with me as I was going through the pipeline of training.

MH: And MSG is Marine Security Guard?

TL: That's right. Yeah, Marine Security Guard. And so, when I was at my MOS school to learn how to order airplane parts, I was on the MSG website learning about it. And, like, there was the poster in the classroom with the Marine in his- in his deltas, you know, the delta blues. And they had every country that a Marine was at listed, you know?

MH: Mhmm.

TL: You know, and I'm looking at countries like Brazil and France and Australia and I'm like, "That's what I want to do."

MH: Yeah.

TL: And so, by- Before I even hit the fleet, I knew I wanted to be a Marine Security Guard. And so, that's ultimately what I ended up working up to. I got shipped off to MCAS New River, which is in- near Camp Lejeune in Jacksonville, North Carolina. Jacksonville is not a great place when you're a young, single Marine.

MH: Right.

TL: And so, I was just waiting for my opportunity to get out of there.

MH: Waiting for your opportunity to travel the world.

TL: That's right.

MH: [Chuckles]

TL: Yeah, exactly. And I was- [Clears throat] They were sending- So, I primarily worked with the V-22 Osprey. When I say 'worked', I mean, like, I ordered their parts, right?

MH: Mhmm.

TL: And they're- They were sending- 2008- they were sending Ospreys to combat for the first time. And so, I volunteered to go on a deployment but they decided that- I was in MALS-26- they decided to take Marines only from MALS-29. So, I was not selected. And as soon as that decision was made, I started putting in my MSG package.

MH: And so, where did you go while you were a Marine Security Guard? What countries? What embassies?

TL: Yeah. Algiers, Algeria was my first post. A fun story: when you- when we graduated at the school house, they had brought everybody into the classroom to let us know where we were going for our first post. And they, like, they made it this big show, right? You'd stand up, you would say where you were hoping to go and then they would give you the harsh reality where you were actually going. [Laughter]

MH: [Laughter] You're going to... Africa. [Laughter]

TL: [Laughter] Yeah and that's usually what happened.

MH: Yeah.

TL: I mean, that's what happened for me.

MH: Right.

TL: You know, I stood up, and I said, "I want to go anywhere but Canada."
Right?

MH: Right.

TL: I didn't join this program to go north of the border. And he laughed. He was like, "Great because you're going to Algiers." And I remember in my head thinking, 'Where the heck is Algiers?' [Laughter] I was that ignorant- uh- young man who- My geography was so bad, I did not- I hadn't even heard of this country before, right? Algiers being the city, of course. And so, as soon as we were done, I sprinted for the map to find Algeria. And then saw that it was in North Africa and then was like, "Alright. This is how my tour is starting." And from there, it went on to Moscow, Russia. And then, I spent my last year in Lima, Peru.

MH: And what was your favorite post?

TL: Moscow.

MH: Moscow.

TL: Yeah. I mean, I was- It was an experience like no other. It was surreal standing in Red Square. You're seeing so much history around you. Russia is just a different place. You know, like, cultural-wise, and- Yeah. It was- I had some of the more closest friends there. And Russia, my time in Moscow, has influenced my current life the most.

MH: Mhmm.

TL: So, I'm probably biased a little bit in that way, too.

MH: So, throughout all the countries that you traveled to, is there something that stands out to you that sums up your time in the Marine Corps?

TL: Umm.

MH: I mean, because not a lot of Marines have the same type of career that you had—

TL: It's true.

MH: in the Marine Corps.

TL: It's true. There's, um- Yeah. MSG duty is very different from a lot of different parts of the Marine Corps. And a lot of Marines get to deploy, a lot of Marines get to go to different places that we don't expect Marines to be, but the MSG program is the only one that's putting a Marine in just about every country in the world. Um. Story from those travels... You know, it's funny. I ask this question- A few are probably rolling their eyes. Like, you ask this question all the time, like [Laughter]—

MH: Right.

TL: And I was thinking today, 'What is a good story?' From my time overseas, I think- I don't know if this will be entertaining or not but it's one that I find funny. You know, we were hanging out at the Marine house in Moscow and our- the Marine house was on the same compound as the embassy. And we got the call to respond to the embassy. And so, you know, we don't know what's going on yet. We just got the call to respond, we're getting ready, and then we find that the power is out at the embassy. And so, we run over there and we take our positions. I'm sitting there. I'm probably on, like, the- I don't know- the fifth or sixth, seventh floor, something midway up the building. And I look across the street and there is still power across the street. [Laughter] The Russians were just messing with us.

MH: Oh my Gosh! [Laughter]

TL: Presumably.

MH: Right.

TL: That's not an official statement. I can't say that that's what was happening. But that's the first thought that came to mind was, "Oh, 'just' the embassy. Just our block has lost power." The buildings around- Every building that I could see at that point all still had power.

And that, you know, it was one of those things that was like- that, sort of, made me realize, like- It was a very, like, that wouldn't happen other places. Like, Algiers was a- is a physical threat that we didn't really ever have to face because the Algerian government was really good about helping buffer that. Peru there was no threats whatsoever, other than, like, natural disaster or, you know, like a fire. [Chuckle] You know? And so, Moscow was where everyday my job mattered and every day, like, I was doing something to protect the embassy, the people, the information, access, all that sort of stuff. And, like, I could definitely feel my contribution every day. And that experience of just sitting there and realizing, "Man, this is so Russia." You know? Like, "The Russian's messing with the Americans." You know? There's more stories like that that I'll save for another day.

MH: You know, you served your time in the Marine Security Guard. Was there a time after that that you decided, you know, you were ready to move on to something else?

TL: Yeah. So, I imagine this is still true now but, at least, when I was in, the MSG program had the worst attrition rates- or the highest attrition rates in the Marine Corps because, you know, Marines go, they get some really amazing, different experience- professional experience- overseas. And it's difficult to want to go back, right? It's only a three-year tour, you can't extend. You're not supposed—

MH: Mmm.

TL: You can- I was offered an extension for one more year but I didn't take it. But it's not, like- It doesn't become your job.

MH: You can't spend your whole career—

TL: Exactly.

MH: as an MSG.

TL: You know, you can come back as a deck commander, something like that. But you still have to go back to the fleet. I didn't want to go back

to ordering airplane parts. Like, you know, I had letters of recommendation from ambassadors ready to go. Like, I knew that I was ready for success. At least, I thought so. [Laughter]

MH: [Laughter]

TL: Let me clarify, I thought I was ready.

MH: [Laughter]

TL: In setup. And so, I knew I wanted to get out and, you know, MSG program- like any part of the military- it had its ups- its pros and its cons. And its cons had worn me down enough that I didn't really want to stick around in the military anymore, anyway, so. Yeah. That prompted my decision to get out. I had ten days to- because I'm in another country.

MH: Mhmm.

TL: I'm not at a military base to start processing out.

MH: Right.

TL: And so, it was- So, I got- I think I got back to Quantico with maybe, like, seven days to, like, get through everything. So, like, I didn't actually get full dental. I didn't get—

MH: Wow.

TL: Because, like, I would get- I would go to, like, check out and, like, "What do you need? You need, like, another-" I remember I got my teeth cleaned and he was like, "You need some- You need some work done." and I was like, "Okay." And we scheduled it for the morning before I was supposed to leave and then it got cancelled. And so, I separated without finishing my dental, you know. And I'm sure I could have finished it somewhere else, but, you know, that was how short of a time I had. But, yeah. I processed out and ended up on a plane back to the west coast and then started civilian life.

MH: That's a pretty quick transition from—

TL: Yeah.

MH: you know, going- serving in the military to getting out so quickly. Like—

TL: Yep.

MH: Did you even have any time to process, like, what was happening?

TL: Yeah. Well, so. I mean, I had already started- One thing that was good, the first sergeant that was in charge of our region down in Peru- in South America- was really great, was really proactive. You know, they knew. If MSG's wanted to get off the program or even get out of the Marine Corps, they were going to. And so, we had a long conversation about what to do afterwards, and stuff like that. So, I felt mentally prepared. I knew what I was trying to do. Go back to school, get a job, and stuff like that. The execution wasn't perfect but I think I was ready.

MH: So, did you find any challenges after you separated? Transitioning back into civilian life? When you became a student?

TL: Yeah. So, I was a perpetual student for a while in that I was taking online courses when I was in the military and when I got out, I started doing online courses with Penn State. And then, I finally moved to DC and I transferred to American University. American University took a fraction of my credits from the online courses. So, I was pretty much starting all over after had starting- started college already. So, that was a difficult- It was a long process to finally feel like I was, like, really getting somewhere on my degree. I spent a year in California before moving out to DC. You know, when we talk about Veterans facing an emotional crisis when they get out, and mine was kind of prolonged. Like, I look back and I noticed that I was disturbed a little bit in that first year. But it wasn't until year two that I started recognizing—

MH: Mhmm.

TL: like, “Oh man. I’m in a bad space. Like, I’m not dealing with this transition well.” You know, my relationship changes, and school changes, geography changes. You know, year two came with a lot of change. And that’s when- You know, DC’s not a- DC’s not a cheap city to live in, either, right? So, I’m trying to do all this on a G.I. Bill budget- which the G.I. Bill provides a lot of benefits- but, you know, your housing allowance only goes so far in a city this expensive. So, you know, financial- I had financial challenges. So, you know, looking back, that first year was just sort of- I just sort of existed. I got through life; I was enjoying it. Second year was when those challenges came and they came hard.

MH: And what was it that helped bring you back to find a purpose in what you were doing? And what were you studying? And what were some of the projects that you worked on while you were—

TL: Yeah

MH: at American University?

TL: Yeah. So, I was a [Clears throat] broadcast journalism student, which is- which was a decision I made after- I was recording a podcast and I was, like, “Ehh.” I was originally pursuing psychology. I recorded a podcast- I was podcasting and I was, like, “Man, I shouldn’t be doing psychology. I’m not really that interested in it.” And then, I was like, “Oh, snap, I should be doing this.” And so, I looked- talked to a counselor. Broadcast journalism is what we came up with. And yeah, I was so- I was that Veteran that felt like I was wasting my time in school. Especially in the first year and a half when I was doing, like, electives and they were forcing me to take chemistry, and stuff like that. And, you know, I was- I mean, you can ask my wife. I was, just- I was an unpleasant human being to be around during those years because I was so disgruntled about wasting my time with this stuff, that I- You know, it was interesting, but I knew that it really wasn’t going to contribute to my career. And so, to past the time, I started- [Sound of sirens] Oh, yep, sirens and such. Eh, probably not so bad.

MH: Do you think? Okay.

TL: Yep. Um. And so, to pass the time, to continue being productive, to build my resume, to build value in my life- 'cause I didn't think that school was doing it for me- I started becoming a serial podcaster. And I was doing *Veteran Empire* at the time, *Tim and Brina's Bromantic Comedy* with one of my friends. I launched the *One Too Many Veteran Suicide* project, which is probably, you know, what a lot of the Veteran space knows me for the most. And I handled *Tim and Derek Do What They Want*; *Mighty, Mighty Marson House*; *Fuel for Warriors*. Like, all these podcasts- Serial podcaster.

MH: Mmm. That's when Podcast Tim was born [Laughter].

TL: Yep. 2012 was when I did my first podcast, called *A Couple Good Ideas* that I did with a friend of mine. And from then, I think I may have conceptualized, started, and stopped at least a dozen podcasts. And that's what I did to, you know, to build reputation. You know, I knew- I knew that I was going to graduate on the other side of 30 and I didn't want school to, really, only be the only thing that was taking my time there. I didn't want a part-time job, either, because I didn't think that a part-time job was going to really contribute to a future career, either. I didn't know how to work the internship game. I mean, I wasn't- You know, I didn't really learn about the values of internships until I got to DC, even though I knew tons of them when I was overseas. I didn't really understand how they worked or what their value was until I got here. And so, I didn't know how to work that game yet. And so, I just initiated a bunch of different projects and what stick, or, what was able to stick I kept up with; what wasn't, I just discarded. And it's turned into quite the- quite the interesting living resume.

MH: And so, the result of all of the work that you've done with your podcast eventually led to where you are today, and that's working here at the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

TL: Yes! Yeah, I was really fortunate that, you know, this opening was- that the job that I have now was opening as I was getting close to graduation. And, you know, our director was impressed with that living resume that I saw. And VA, as a whole, decided that they were going to

take a chance on Tim Lawson. And here I am today. And, you know, I tell people this all the time when they ask me what I'm doing- especially people who haven't seen me for a little while- I tell them that I do digital media for Veterans' Affairs and a lot of them are, like, "Oh, that makes sense." [Laughter]

MH: [Chuckle] It's a perfect fit.

TL: Yeah. And, you know, I describe to people it's the perfect intersection of what I'm good at doing and what I like doing, which is something that very few people can say about their career. You know, even people that like their jobs, maybe it's not what they feel like they're best at. Or, you know, even if they're at a job where they're doing- that they do well at it, maybe they don't enjoy it as much, you know. But, like, I mean. Man, if you pulled up a graph and lined those two things up, it's almost a perfect intersection. I'm really grateful.

MH: So, what are some of the thing that you've done while you've been here at VA that stick out in your mind or- You know, whether it be an event you were able to attend or cover, or an interview that you were able to have on your podcast?

TL: Yeah. So, I think- So, you and I have both- We split interviews on secretaries on this podcast. And I think it's cool that in the first- and that it just worked out with the administration change- but in the first, I think, 20 episodes, we ended up having two VA secretaries on the podcast—

MH: Right.

TL: right? So, that was cool. Bill Rausch was a great interview. He just stands out because he's a- he became a fan favorite. He's the one people always comment on. You know, we're working on an interview with Sebastian Junger, which will be the first non-Vet- other than Secretary Shulkin- to be on the podcast. And I think he provides a lot of insights to the Veteran space, so I think there's a lot of value there. The podcast itself has been a really interesting journey. I think that the work that you and I did when we were in Pearl Harbor definitely stands out.

MH: Definitely.

TL: We got- what? Six, seven, eight different interviews with different people in a span of a week?

MH: Yeah.

TL: Most of them Pearl Harbor survivors. And that was—

MH: That was the 75th anniversary, so they had a week of events.

TL: Yeah.

MH: So, we were jumping from one event to another.

TL: Yeah. So, that was really- I mean, talking to Pearl Harbor survivors will humble the crap out of anybody. Not only because it's like, "Aw, man, you've gone through so much," but to talk about it so nonchalantly. It's like, I can't.

MH: "This is what I did that day."

TL: Yeah, you know, like, "Ah, I missed breakfast [Laughter]—

MH: Right?

TL: that day."

MH: Right.

TL: You know? Like Uncle Al talking about how he missed—

MH: Yes!

TL: breakfast that day. Um, so it was—

MH: And Uncle Al was one- on one of the first versions of the- episodes of the podcast—

TL: Yes.

MH: right?

TL: Yep. So, yep. For one of the- When we were in Hawaii, we had- his interview, I thought, went really well and I was- I needed a podcast interview and I was, like, “Well, I’m just going to use this one.” ‘Cause it was entertaining. It was super insightful with him talking about that day and moving on in his career and stuff like that. So, if you’re listening and you haven’t listened to- what was it? Alfred Rodriguez is the name on it.

MH: Right.

TL: Yep.

MH: Is there anything else that you want me to talk about before I kind of transition? Like, we talked about the podcast. We talked about—

TL: Yeah.

MH: your time as a student. Like—

TL: I think, um- You know, I think one thing that, you know, I was really- I was a VA critic before I came here, right? Like, I was ‘that’ student that was on the G.I. Bill call hotline for half an hour, you know, wanting to throw my phone because, you know, I’d been on hold for so long and then my call drops, you know? You know, I think one big misconception that’s made is that we all think that VA is, you know, is great. There- That we don’t understand the- I came in here having plenty of criticisms about VA. And that’s part of the reason why I wanted the job, was to contribute- and however I could- to the transformation of VA, to the perception of the VA. To make sure that VA recognized its shortcomings while also getting recognition for where it was doing well. And I think that’s one thing I’ve really enjoyed about working in public affairs,

especially on the digital media engagement team, is we get to tell the fun- we get to tell the good stories, and we also get to have- You know, we've talked to Veterans that are, like, "Yeah. No, the VA, you know, has done this to me," and 'this' being, you know, an unfortunate event. And, you know, we've gotten to help a lot of Veteran's to better understand their benefits and- You know, so, that's been a really- that's been a really interesting endeavor and working at VA. And I've really appreciated the opportunity to represent VA in that way.

MH: Is there a certain skillset that you learned while you were in the military that you think translates over to the work that you do today? And, like, talking- you've talked to so many Veteran—

TL: Yeah.

MH: you'd have to be able to relate to them at some point, right?

TL: Yeah. So, that's actually- What I got from the military was- You know, this was- I'm glad you asked me this question because this is one of the favorites from my podcast. It's- I learned how to interact with Veterans because of the commonality that we have. The common experience that we had in the military, right? And, you know, a lot of- You know, it's really easy to say, like, "Oh, I'm more disciplined, I'm on time, I have leadership." And, yeah, all that stuff's great. But one of the reasons why my- One of my first podcasts that did really well was *Veteran Empire*. And the reason why that did so well is I was contacting Veteran after Veteran after Veteran, and it didn't matter if they were someone that no one had heard of that, you know, that a friend recommended, or if they were Tim Kennedy, or someone that was on TV, and, you know, stuff like that. I came to them as a Veteran, wanting to talk about that common experience, and wanted to share it with our community. And that always got a 'yes'. The few times where I got a 'no' it was because they just couldn't handle it- couldn't handle it on the calendar or, you know- And who knows? They could have been blowing smoke. But it was always, like, some reason- It was, like- I never got ignored- or I rarely got ignored. And there was always some reasonable- And when I say 'always', like, the three times that someone said 'no' was, like, a reasonable, like, "Ok, that makes sense on why that's not going to

happen.” But, yeah. Just learning how to talk to Veterans and building that connection is what I’ve gotten from my military experience.

MH: And with all the Veterans that you’ve talked to, you know, and have met over the course of your, you know, career, is there anybody that you’re excited about right now? What excites you about the Veteran community?

TL: So, it’s- it’s funny. [Laughter] I love asking this question, too. And it’s so unfair because every time I ask it, I know- I think to myself, “If I had to answer this—

MH: You knew the answer?

TL: I wouldn’t know how to answer.”

MH: Oh!

TL: I’d be, like, “Man, how do you even choose?” You know?

MH: Right.

TL: I think what- I think Student Veterans of America, as an organization, is doing amazing things. The way they’ve really- You know, being a student Veteran on campus is a huge challenge. And just in a short few years that I’ve gotten to know them and seen their work, they’ve helped make being a Veteran on campus a more pleasant experience, a more productive experience. And, you know, one that Veterans- Getting Veterans excited about being a part of their campus community versus being like I was my first year of college when I would show up, go to class, and just leave right away and not even say a word to anybody the whole time. Specific Veterans? Max Uriarte, the creator of Terminal Lance. You know, what he does is really cool. You know, he wrote the graphic novel, White Donkey, which did really well. Him and Paul Szoldra finally started a podcast called *After Action*, I think. And, you know, those two personalities do well on a podcast. It’s really cool to see how well he contributes to the Veteran space, talks to the Veteran space, but still is his own Veteran, right? You can tell he’s still

his own- He's himself and he doesn't let, you know, his popularity influence that. At least, it doesn't seem like that. And then, of course, Team Rubicon is one of my favorite organizations ever. Not just because, you know, the work they do is great but the platform, the opportunity that they've given Veterans to find their renewed purpose and to start serving their community again, I think, is huge. And, you know, on that note, like, Team RWB, Mission Continues, Give an Hour. All of that stuff, all those organizations, are great in that way, too. But—

MH: There's so much.

TL: There's so much.

MH: Veterans are contributing back to society, you know—

TL: Yeah.

MH: after they've left the military and I think that's something that defines—

TL: Yeah.

MH: their service.

TL: Kirstie- Kirstie or Kristie? Kirstie? Kirstie. Kirstie Ennis, who's an amputee. She was on ESPN's body issue—

MH: Right.

TL: rock climbing. She's trying to climb all Seven Summits, which is—

MH: I—

TL: I mean- It's cool on its own.

MH: [Laughter] Yeah.

TL: You know, then you consider, just, the unique challenges that she has. Yeah, I could go on and on and on.

MH: [Laughter]

TL: Umm. Yeah.

MH: So, why don't we end on this?

TL: Okay.

MH: You know, you've had a chance to interview so many Veterans on your podcast.

TL: Yes.

MH: Is there something that you- you'd like to tell to your viewers?

TL: Yeah. These conversations are real. And what I mean by that is, some of- I guess you could presume that some of the organization leaders do come with a little bit of a filter because they have their own constituents that they need to consider. But even, you know- I'm trying to think of who those are. You know, it's this- VA Secretaries aside- you know, Joe Chenelly, Bill Rausch, Jared Lyon. Dee McWilliams who was president- or, I think she still is President- of the Women's Memorial. You know, these people that are- that lead, that are leaders of their organizations still came on the podcast and told a very real story. Joe Chenelly talked about, you know, his mother's- his mother died by suicide. Bill Rausch talked about how, you know, how his Bronze Star is both a symbol of pride and struggle. Like, he- You know, sometimes he feels like he didn't do enough, even though he was recognized in that way. You know, Jared Lyon talking about being a Vet- being a student Veteran and going through that growth and really empathizing with that. Dee McWilliams talking about being across the street when the plane hit the Pentagon on 9/11. You know? Like, these stories are so real. And I think a lot, I think- I'm sure there's people that may think because we're a department-level organization that there's, you know, bureaucracy involved in this and there's not. You know, Veterans come

on the show, we talk about real life experiences in the military, after the military, and elsewhere. None of it's filtered. You know, I- The only thing I've ever edited out of an interview is myself rambling. [Laughter]

MH: [Laughter]

TL: You know, or- You know, like, if there's, like, you know, technical issues that have to come out. But content never gets removed.

MH: Mhmm.

TL: And so, that's definitely something I want the audience to know is, you know, what these Veterans are sharing is real.

MH: I do realize that I called your podcast listeners, 'viewers'. [Laughter]

TL: [Laughter]

MH: And that's what happens when you work, you know, in video production and—

TL: Yep.

MH: all that.

TL: Yep.

MH: But thank you, Tim, for allowing *me* to interview *you* on your podcast. And I think we did a pretty good job of not going off topic and talking about—

TL: [Laughter]

MH: "Game of Thrones" because that's what we do all the time. [Laughter]

TL: Yep. Jaime Lannister is going to get it all.

MH: Yeah?

TL: No, I'm kidding. But, no—

MH: [Laughter]

TL: Melissa, thank you for agreeing to do this. It's always fun to be on this side of the microphone.

MH: Definitely.

TL: And so, it's, um- I'm glad I got the opportunity to do it for my listenership here.

MH: Alright, thanks Tim.

TL: Thank you!

[00:33:18] Music

[00:33:19] 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 could 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.

[00:33:48] Music

[00:33:51] CLOSING MONOLOGUE:

TL: Earlier this week, I published a blog on Vantage Point about how I'm pursuing therapy while I'm in a good place in my life [Link to blog post: <https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/41716/i-decided-to-seek-therapy/>].

I want to suggest a great resource for counseling and mentorship that VA offers to Veterans and that is the Vet Center program. Vet Centers are generally smaller venues that offer counseling, therapy groups, mentorship, and other mental and emotional health benefits to combat Veterans, MST survivors, and others. They're often also mobile units. You'll see them. They'll pull in areas of crisis. To find a Vet Center near you, or to see if you qualify, visit [VetCenter.VA.gov](https://www.vetcenter.va.gov) [Link to VA's Vet Center website].

Today's Veteran of the Day is Navy Veteran, John O. Adams. John served during World War II, from 1940-1946. John was stationed in Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, he was deployed to the Pacific Theater and fought on the Solomon Islands during the Battle of Guadalcanal. After being honorably discharged, John attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and received a degree in engineering. While he was a student at MIT, John was a record-breaking Hammer Thrower and was only three-quarters of an inch away from competing in the Olympics. John passed away on January 31, 2010. We honor his service. [Link to John's Veteran of the Day write-up: <https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/41740/navy-veteran-john-o-adams/>] To nominate your own Veteran of the Day, visit [blogs.VA.gov](https://www.blogs.va.gov) [Link to VA blog page]. That wraps up Episode 50. We're so excited to hit this milestone. I look forward to giving you 50 more episodes of great interviews and stories from these Veterans. Be sure to visit our VAntage Point blog at [blogs.VA.gov](https://www.blogs.va.gov) [Link to VA blog page] to read more stories from our community. I'm Timothy Lawson, signing off.

[00:35:35] Music

(Text Transcript Ends)