

Borne the Battle

Episode # 184

Honoring Vietnam Veterans, MG James T. Jackson

<https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/72171/borne-battle-184-honoring-vietnam-veterans-mg-james-t-jackson/>

(Text Transcript Follows)

[00:00:00] Music

[00:00:09] OPENING MONOLOGUE:

Tanner Iskra (TI): Aw, let's get it. Monday, March 2nd, 2020. Borne the Battle. Brought to you by the Department of Veterans Affairs. The podcast that focuses on inspiring veteran stories and puts a highlight on important resources, offices, and benefits for our veterans. I am your host Marine Corps veteran Tanner Iskra. Hope everyone had a great week outside of podcast land. I saw in a blog on blogs@va.gov [Link] that registration is open today for the 34th Golden Age Games. Anybody, any veteran 55 and over that is receiving VA healthcare can participate up in Madison, Wisconsin. The games are June 22nd through the 27th but registration is open today at www.veteransgoldenagegames.va.gov [Link] veterans golden age games is all one word. I saw that and it reminded me of some of the amazing feats that some veterans accomplished at last year's games that we featured on our social media. So, if you're interested, go register. It looks like a great time.

Couple more ratings this week. No reviews. I need to find another piece of content to hold ransom, I think. I think that might be the next step. Remember the more ratings and reviews not only lets me know how we're doing it as far as bringing you what you want as far as content, the ratings, reviews, and subs give a better chance to climb in the iTunes, Spotify, Stitcher, et cetera. All those ratings, all those algorithms. Which in turn allows us to reach more veterans out in podcast land and gives them a chance to listen in and hear not only the great stories, but the benefits breakdown episodes and the information provided in the news releases. Also, I ask if you are a listener, feel free to share this in any kind of veteran's group on social media that you may have. You know, group chats, Facebook groups, any group that you think of where veterans can, find this information useful.

Speaking of news releases, we don't have any new ones this week. However, as they are released, I'll make sure to get them to you. All right. So, this week we have an Army veteran, Major General, Retired, Jim Jackson. He is the director of the United States Vietnam War Commemoration. It's a national effort directed by Congress, executed by the Department of Defense, to thank those that never got a proper welcome home, our Vietnam veterans.

And he's going to talk about how they go about doing that and how you can take part. Now, while he was in the Army, Major General Jackson served in some iconic units. 82nd Airborne, Second Ranger Battalion, and he also commanded troops in the 1st Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry, and the 3rd and 75th Ranger Regiments. As a civilian, he also took part in Iraq's Coalition Provisional Authority, which was a unique time in Iraq's history. Got to say it was a fascinating conversation, and I can't wait to bring it to you. So, without further ado, I bring to you Army veteran Major General Jim Jackson, Retired. Enjoy.

[00:03:11] Music

[00:03:17] Interview:

(TI): Sir, I really appreciate you doing this. Welcome to Borne the Battle. As you can tell, it's a very spartan operation we have here with- with, you know, welcome to our mobile studio [Laughter].

Jim Jackson (JJ): It's a pleasure to be here [Laughter].

(TI): Major General Jackson, we're gonna start this- this interview like we ask everybody here on Borne the Battle, why did you join the military in the first place? What was that decision for you?

(JJ): Well, it was not so much of a decision as a- just something kind of happened. I was born- I lived in a military family. My father's a 33-year veteran. World War Two and Korea. He never pushed it, but I was exposed to it. When I went to college, got into the ROTC program, enjoyed the courses, so I stayed with it. And then all of a sudden I found out I had to make a decision, and decided to give the military a try, and, the next thing I realized, it was 32 years.

(TI): [Laughter]

(JJ): It was just—

(TI): Just a flash in the pan.

(JJ): I was very fortunate. I got to do the things I wanted to do in the military. Stayed in the light business, jumping out of a lot of perfectly good airplanes.

(TI): [Laughter]

(JJ): And, it was interesting, exciting. I enjoyed some of it. But it was exciting. It kept the interest up, so it was a good thing.

(TI): What- what do you miss the most?

(JJ): I miss the people. I mean, you talk to most folks and they'll tell you the same thing. The- the stuff we did, you could live with some, throw some of it away, you know, some of the BS you get rid of. But the people were always what bring you back, you know, they just bright-eyed, bushy-tailed. They just, the idea of nothing that we can't do. You tell us what you want done, and we'll make it happen. And it just- it's an infectious thing to be around, and, uh, so most veterans will tell you the same thing.

(TI): Absolutely, sir. You mentioned ROTC, and I notice in your bio, you were an ROTC graduate at Kent State. Now, were you a freshman or a senior in 1971? Did you graduate in '71?

(JJ): Uh, I was actually- 70- year 70, I was a junior. That was the year we had the trouble at school.

(TI): Yeah, you were there when—

(JJ): Right.

(TI): During the shooting at Kent State.

(JJ): Right.

(TI): What was that like being an ROTC at that university?

(JJ): Well, in all honesty, it was not much of a big change one way or the other. I mean, we went about our business, people left us alone. I actually worked in a bar right across the street from the university, and everyone knew I was in ROTC, and they just didn't seem to care. I never got treated poorly, and I'd wear the uniform periodically.

- (TI): Were you- I mean, did you have to wear the uniform at school sometimes?
- (JJ): Yes, yes. You'd have to- because of the class schedules, there would be classes you'd go to in uniform, and it- it wasn't a big problem. The university was kind of Sleepy Hollow from that perspective. Now, there were some- some protests and some natural things that you have on a college campus. But little surprising what happened there, and it caught a lot of people by surprise. But, I mean, it was just- because Kent is a very small school.
- (TI): Yes.
- (JJ): Small town.
- (TI): MAC is not a big conference, in general.
- (JJ): Well, the school itself, total population at the time was over 30,000. So, it was a big school.
- (TI): Roger.
- (JJ): But small town.
- (TI): Mm.
- (JJ): I mean, it's small town USA. Maybe one stoplight, two stoplights in the town. Bunch of four-way stop signs kind of thing. And so, it- it really wasn't an expected kind of thing to happen. But, you know, we lived through it.
- (TI): Interesting. Very interesting. So, you graduated and went on to have a very long, very distinguished career. Who was either your greatest mentor or your best friend?
- (JJ): Well, it's unusual to have one that did both. But, in some cases that happens. I got- I was privileged to work for some very, very good people who were very successful. More successful than I was in the military. And they took the time to coach and advise. And so, and plus, when I came in, everybody I worked with, everybody who worked for me at the, you know, E6 level, sergeant- staff sergeant level or higher, they were all Vietnam veterans. And so, you- you ran into people that you- you understood these guys had done something that you haven't done yet, and therefore, you paid attention to them.

(TI): Yes, sir.

(JJ): And so, what I'm fond of telling people, look, if- if anything good came out of my years, you could probably attach it to Vietnam veterans, someplace, somehow. But, I- I had a chance to work with some very good people and they've been close friends, even until today. Unfortunately, now we're getting at that age where we're starting to lose a bunch of these people.

(TI): Yes, sir. So, who would you- if you were to name one?

(JJ): Well, if I had to pick one, I just saw him here this last week. Uh, General Buck Kernan we were in and out of the Ranger regiment together, and in the 82nd together at different organizations, but we were- we saw each other periodically. He- he was influential in a variety of things that I did and helped me get into certain jobs. And because of that, that's what allows you in the military to proceed if you take on the difficult jobs, and if you're successful, you'll get promoted. If you don't take on the difficult jobs, you won't.

(TI): Yes, sir.

(JJ): But- so he was involved with that, and I just saw him this last week, and he's not doing real well. But he's hanging in there and we wish him well and hope he recovers from some surgery he's done, and he gets back to doing things that he wants to do.

(TI): Absolutely, sir. Is it- if Buck Kernan taught you one thing, what would that one thing have been?

(JJ): Well, I think it's- it's something we've- we've seen by a variety of people served in the military. And that is, remember who you work with, and remember them when they might need you, and always be there. There's a great- you know, there's a great, uh, little note that General Sherman sent to General Grant at some point in time in the Civil War where he basically said, "I always knew you would be there if I needed you, and you would come to my aid." And I've kept that on my mantle at home, and I look at it every once and a while, and that's kind of the thing. That in the military, if you're working for the right people, you always know they're gonna be there. They're not in your way, but they'll always be there if you really need them, and they'll show up. And that's what I took away.

(TI): Absolutely. 100 percent, sir. Totally agree. You served 32 years, sir. How did retirement come to Major General James Jackson?

(JJ): It just, you know, it was, the timing was right. You know, you- just things fall into place, and you just figure, well, it's time to figure- do something else. And, there's certain things that happen that cause you to go, geez, I guess it's time to move. And, uh, we did that, we were very fortunate in this part of town. And, my kids looked at me, and said, we'll do whatever you want, but we don't want to go to another school.

(TI): Mm.

(JJ): Kind of- that kind of plays into it some, too.

(TI): Yeah, family. It's amazing how much family changes that- those career dynamics, sir. What year was this?

(JJ): Uh, I retired in 2003.

(TI): Roger. And that was out of- here out of DC?

(JJ): Yes, it was.

(TI): What was transition like in '03?

(JJ): Well, I mean, as a two star, I got helped a lot.

(TI): Sure, sure.

(JJ): I didn't- I didn't have that much of a problem. And, again, because I was expecting—

(TI): Wasn't quite the recession yet, either.

(JJ): No.

(TI): Yeah.

(JJ): And, I got out, within a couple weeks I was working, and, uhm, doing something else. And, got a chance to get in the private sector a little bit, and, did some things for them, but it was an interesting time.

(TI): Talk to me about that. You worked for the- or you worked within the Coalition Provincial Authority, which, you know, I think is a very unique time in Iraq's history, not many people know about it, talk about it, discuss it. What role did you play in that?

(JJ): Well, that came about- I was working for a private sector company, and a friend of mine- we were actually talking at a high school football game—

(TI): Interesting [Laughter]

(JJ): And, he said, "You want to go to Iraq with me?" And I looked at him, I said, "You've got to be out of your mind." And I said, well, wait a minute. Before I- okay, now let's back up. What are you talking about? He laid it out for me, I said, well, that sounds interesting. Let me check and see. And so, I got a hold of my company that I was working with, and asked them, would you give me three months sabbatical here? And, they said, yeah, we'll let you go for three months.

(TI): Wow.

(JJ): And so, the intent was to go over and work with the CPA, they were gonna restructure and reorganize, and they wanted to put an operation slash planning organization underneath the CPA. Then General Keith Kellogg was the guy asking me, and I said, sure, I'll come with you. So, we went over, we took a couple uniform guys, active duty people, and we took some other retirees, and we went over there or three months and worked with, uh, Mr. Bremmer, and got a chance to travel around the country and meet some old friends who I knew, you know, and we talked to them and tried to help them out a little bit.

(TI): So, operational planning, a- a sense of military strategy?

(JJ): Not military, more so, the execution of- of work in conjunction with the military. Because at that time, the CPA was there, the military was rolled in, there was probably a little bit of misunderstanding of exactly who was in charge. Be it the military, the State Department. But—

(TI): Real- real quick background on the, CPA, what- for those who don't know what the CPA was.

(JJ): The Coalition Provisional Authority that was put- put in to transition from military to back into civilian control—

(TI): Yes, sir.

(JJ): And working with the Iraqis. And so, it was very interesting to work with Mr. Bremmer, go to meetings and sit there and listen to what they were doing, and have to answer questions if someone asked, well what do you think we should do? You know, okay, we'll figure this out.

(TI): Roger.

(JJ): And so, we were working with the police and the military and, of course, the US military, the Iraqi military, and, uhm, all the, uhm, law enforcement agencies that were trying to be rebuilt within the Iraqi structure.

(TI): I- I just think that's an extremely unique time in Iraq's history, extremely unique time in the DODs history, and, not enough has been ever talked about that.

(JJ): Yeah, it was an interesting time, and I'm sure history will peel that thing apart and take a look at it, and I'm sure there's some things that we could have done better, and there's lots of things that we did well, and it should be talked about.

(TI): Yes, yes, sir. Absolutely. So, after that, sir, your bio says that you retired after eight years in the public sector. That- that's a very unique way of putting that. Eight- eight years. How- how did you come to that conclusion, and tell me how you found yourself with the United States American Vietnam War Commemoration? What- which we're at here today. And, ultimately, how- how'd you become its director?

(JJ): Well, in the civilian sector, I was started with one company and then was asked, by again, General Kernan, to come work with them at another company that General Bonno and some other people were running. And I said, okay, let me think about it, and I actually took a pay cut to go work for them, and then, of course, things changed out for the better. But, worked with them until 2012, and the company got bought out for a bigger company and things were changing, and so, it was just—

(TI): The contracting game. It was the contracting game.

(JJ): But it just turned out that- let me help you all out. It's time for me to leave, and you all can, you know, buy me out, do whatever you want to do and I'll- I'll disappear, and that's what we did. So, we- usual shifting or separating.

(TI): DC contracting for the DOD is a very unique industry.

(JJ): It is, and it's nothing something that- not meant for the faint of heart
[Laughter]

(TI): [Laughter]

(JJ): So, to speak.

(TI): So, how'd you get to, uhm, to where you are today, sir?

(JJ): Well, actually, I- my wife ran into General Kicklighter's wife, and she asked what I was doing, she- my wife told her nothing, and, so, I get a call from Mick Kicklighter the next day, "Come see me." So, I went there to see him, he said, "Come work for me." So, I started- I worked, uh, part-time for a while. It was kind of a consultant, travel, speak, and do things like that. And then, when General Kicklighter decide to retire, took a couple months, but the Pentagon called me and said, come on over, we want to talk about this. And, you know, they told me they wanted me to come work for them. I said, well, I didn't really want to work full-time, but—so, five years later, here I am, retiring again. So. But, it's been- it's been great work, and it's, you know, the things we do for veterans makes this job fairly easy. Now, I get the chance to deal with all the headaches of the organization. We, you know, the money parts and the people part, and so forth, and the hiring and- and moving people, move on, replacing them, and so forth. The actual work that we do for the veterans is just, uhm, so valuable and so- just the right thing to do. So, my people enjoy what they're doing.

(TI): Absolutely, sir. It's amazing how wives play a part in our careers, decisions. Just real quick, my wife told me I had an interview with the VA, on Monday. That's how I got the job here. So—

(JJ): I just keep reminding my wife that doing nothing is actually something. So, I'm always doing something, it just- I may not be doing it right now. But, I'm always doing something.

(TI): Forward thinker, sir. Absolutely. How did the commemorations start, and what's it- what's its main purpose?

(JJ): Well, the commemoration began with planning in around 2008. And then, kicked off in 2012 by President Obama down at the wall on Memorial Day. And, just like, for World War II and Korea, the country decided it needed to commemorate service during this time period. And, the- the focus itself, for us, is relatively simple. We've got five objectives that Congress gave us. And, really, the first one, which is talking about finding and recognizing those who served and their families at that time is the one that keeps us the most busy. And it boils down to basically our entire focus on- on service to the nation.

(TI): Yeah.

(JJ): So, we don't get into business of refighting the war. We don't talk about the political aspects of the war; we don't talk about the rightness or wrongness or who won or who lost. We talk about service to the nation, when asked, did they serve, how did they serve, what did they do? And that's what we stay focused on. So, we've actually had very little pushback from even some of the peace organizations at the time, because we tell them, we're not into commemorating the war.

(TI): Yeah.

(JJ): Yeah, we're into commemorating service to the nation.

(TI): Commemorating the servicemembers that- that—

(JJ): Right.

(TI): Took part.

(JJ): And we picked, because the things we do, we were somewhat capable of picking the timeframe, we picked 1 November 1955 to 15 May '75, and those dates are meaningful. And for the audience, 1 November was the date- the earliest date we could find of the setting up of a headquarters totally dedicated to Vietnam. And, it was the direction to change the Military Advisory and Assistance Group Indochina to becoming Vietnam. So, we started with that—

(TI): Roger.

(JJ): And said that's the first date. And then the second date, the end date, was- the war actually terminated end of April '75. When the last elements of the US came out of Vietnam. But, because of the Mayaguez event that took place, early May, and there were some people killed on that event, and they were authorized to be put on the wall, their names are on the wall, we elected to just slip it to 15 May, so we didn't create a conundrum here that- that might have arose.

(TI): Yeah.

(JJ): And everybody understands. And so, we're recognizing all who served during that time period, regardless of where they served. Because, the average soldier, sailor, airman, Marine, didn't get the choice of where they were gonna serve. They went—

(TI): You never do.

(JJ): Yeah. And so, we- we basically recognize all who served during that time. And, while we understand that some served in a combat zone, and there's- there's a difference. But all raised their arms and- and took an oath, and accepted the challenge and accepted the risk, and so, they all deserve to be recognized.

(TI): Absolutely, sir. 100 percent. So, this is pretty much a Congressional, almost commission, executed through the DOD, if we're to—

(JJ): It is. Authorized by Congress, and it's to be executed by the Department of Defense, and so, we work, uh, while we work for the Secretary, as everybody does, there's a couple layers between us.

(TI): Roger that.

(JJ): Obviously.

(TI): Roger that. How are you executing that directive? Uhm, in what ways are you executing this- this purpose? How are you reaching out and getting it done?

(JJ): Well, first of all, we got the five objectives, and so, we stay focused on those. And in fact, it might be- if you asked one of my people, I hope what they would tell you, is, we have a singular focus. And that is, the veteran. It's the veteran, it's the veteran, it's the veteran. And the reason for that is, it keeps you focused, and families are connected, so you roll them in, and the other organizations that supported them during Vietnam, other government agencies and so forth, allies and so forth, and so it all is connected.

(TI): Yeah.

(JJ): But again, if we stay focused on the veteran, we can't go too far wrong. But the original plan was to basically build this thing in a hometown centric program. And, get America to thank its veterans. And so, we reached out to ask organizations across the country to join us as commemorative partners. And to date, we've had as many as 11,800.

(TI): Oh my gosh.

(JJ): Now, some have come and gone. Some are still with us, and some do better than others. The reason I throw that total number out, is because it gives you a frame of reference of- of commitment across the country of those who have signed up to help us do what we're asking them to do, which is to find your veterans, recognize them for service for those who

served during that time, and to make some degree of- of correction to the way they were treated when they came home 50 years ago.

(TI): How can you be a commemorative partner? Is it- are these private organizations? Are these VSOs? Are these city governments? I know the VA's a partner, how and who can become a commemorative partner to what you're doing?

(JJ): Well, you can- you can become a partner- any organization across the country- if you're a bona fide organization, meaning you've got some kind of charter, you have the tax code, whatever it may be, you can become a commemorative partner. You have to then agree to support the effort by either conducting events, or supporting others who do events, or some kind of activity that would be beneficial to us in a way of, you know, sharing the message, getting the word out and so forth. And the easiest way to become a partner is just, visit our website, which is vietnamwar50th- that's five-zero-t-h, .com [Link: www.vietnamwar50th.com] and there's a section- a place there, you can go to find out how to become a partner and sign up. The process isn't hard, we just ask for three points of contact so we can reach you. We ask for no funding, in fact, all the—

(TI): Oh, wow.

(JJ): Work that is done- that all the materials that we provide to partners in the- in the support of conducting events where they would reach and thank these veterans is done for free. We- we're budgeted by DOD, and we ship the stuff to them directly.

(TI): Wow.

(JJ): And they get to use that stuff for free. But, becoming a partner's fairly easy. You just have to commit to, you know, participate with us, and work with us. And again, stay focused on the veteran and find ways to- to find them and thank them and support them out there in the field.

(TI): That's awesome. What are some of these- you talked about commemorative partner events? What are some of these events look like? What are—

(JJ): Well, they- they range from small to large. The smallest is a single individual. Someone finding a veteran and thanking them and presenting them with a pin, shaking their hand, and welcoming them home. That's as small as you can get, one person. I've been to events where you have

thousands who show up, over a period of days. Events that have traveling walls that participate will get visitors over days, over a week. And, you will walk away having touched over thousands of people. Uh, so it's- it depends on the organization, how they want to do it. The only thing we ask is that the events be done with a degree of, uh, recognition that this has to be a solemn event, has to be dignified, and it has to be done in a way to offer the nation's gratitude to these veterans who did not get it before, when they came home.

(TI): I- I completely agree with that sentiment, you said it before. And, I've talked to a lot of Vietnam veterans on this show, and if you go through the archives you can check it out if you're listening to this right now. But I always look at my service, in Iraq and Afghanistan, how we were treated when we came home. The pendulum swung 180 degrees. And I think it was because, and I think if anybody in Vietnam is listening to this, because of how Vietnam veterans were treated.

(JJ): Yeah, I think- one of the things we find as we travel around is, one of the most aggressive groups that are out there trying to make sure the vets coming home today are properly treated, are the Vietnam veterans. And when you talk to 'em, and they'll be very upfront with you, what happened to them will never happen again, and they're- they took- took it on as a chore, and they're doing it. And so, but they're helping out.

(TI): I almost see it as a- as a cross that they bear- they bore for us.

(JJ): Right.

(TI): You know, and I- I can't- I can't thank them enough.

(JJ): The neat thing- the neat thing we see as we travel around the country, is that attitude. That it's completely shifted. The American people understand that what was done to these veterans was- was wrong and needed to be fixed. And so, they're looking for the opportunity, and so, in many ways, what we provide them is the opportunity—

(TI): Is that opportunity, yeah.

(JJ): And- and we give 'em the, kind of the, uh, little bit of emphasis to- to make that happen, and then support 'em in the process. And, more times than not, we are thanked for allowing them to do this, as opposed to us thanking them for what they do. And so, in all honesty, our chore, when we travel now, is not so much to thank veterans. We're there to thank those who are thanking veterans.

- (TI): Roger.
- (JJ): And trying to encourage more activity, and, it's great to watch these veterans being thanked by those people who live with them, in- in their communities, because they stay there all the time. We travel home, we come back. But those people stay there, and so they'll see them day to day as they move around their communities.
- (TI): Absolutely, sir. Now- now you're the organization that does the pins, correct?
- (JJ): Correct.
- (TI): So, for those that don't know, when you find a Vietnam veteran, you pin 'em. Let me tell you, I, you know, we were given pins to give out, because we're commemorative partners, and our outreach team gave us pins. Probably one of the most emotional things that I've ever done in my post-military service life, was pin a Vietnam veteran. To me, it looks very small and very insignificant to me. But when I put it in his hand, I can tell that it meant the world to him.
- (JJ): The pin is small, but the country's gratitude that is attached to that is- is what's big. And you will find veterans that have a wide range of emotions. Some will be very stoic and will accept it and move on. Others get visibly, emotionally involved. And, you can see the value of it. I think, from my perspective, I think what we see when this happens is a recognition that the time spent in uniform for that veteran, be it, two years as a draftee or 30 years as a retiree, they view that time as, a portion of it was lost, because it- the country wasn't behind 'em. And when you thank them for what they did, and you share that moment with them, what you see is recognition that their time in uniform was a value to this country. And- and therefore, they need to understand that nothing was wasted, it was time well spent, and they feel good about that.
- (TI): I didn't think I'd see it, but I saw it right in his eyes when I did that.
- (JJ): Sure.
- (TI): Absolutely.
- (JJ): It's not hard to see, it happens, and it happens all the time when you give them these things. And some more so than others. And again, people are

different. But, a lot of them, Vietnam and service during that time, may have been the major seminal point in their life, and—

(TI): Which is the same for many of us veterans.

(JJ): Right.

(TI): Yeah.

(JJ): And so, recalling that in a positive light, as opposed to the way they left it when they came home, as somewhat negative, means a lot to them.

(TI): I love that. Absolutely love what that symbolism behind that pin means. Now you've got the big 50th anniversary coming up, here in Arlington, right? Correct? Or on the wall. What's planned? What have you guys got planned, what's going on?

(JJ): Well, the- because the war had no official start date, we're in the 50th anniversary period, as we call it.

(TI): Roger.

(JJ): Which goes across the gambit of the war. And so, if you subtract 50 years from now, you're- you're back to, uh, 1970. And the war was still going on at that time. And so, we- we've just gone through Tet, '68, here a couple years ago. And, we- we had a lot of discussions about those kinds of things. But we chose not to focus on that, because, again, we're not focused on the war, we're focused on service. But as we close up into 2023, we're planning to do a big event here in Washington, D.C. where we can kind of gather the forces, so to speak, and see if we can bring something to bear here in the nation's capital, and hope that some of the leadership will attend and participate with it, so, we're in the planning phases right now, and- and what I've done is kicked it off, with the intent of having set aside the money so we can help pay for it, so forth. But, yeah. Plans still in place, we're starting to build them and make them go, but it should be a nice time.

(TI): Roger that. How many partners have signed up?

(JJ): Well, the partners are all signed up. They signed up—

(TI): Oh, wow.

(JJ): So- so, they'll be there. The problem is how we'll get them and which ones. But, we've got, again, we've got some very, very interesting

partners here in town that will certainly participate. We expect the VA will be there.

(TI): Absolutely.

(JJ): We've got organizations, Daughters of the American Revolution, who have been involved with this from the very beginning. And, they have thousands of organizations across the country. Their chapters that have signed up with us.

(TI): I have not heard about the DAR since I was in sixth grade. I was one of their DAR recipients.

(JJ): Well, wonderful organization. In fact, I just met with the new president general here, just a week and a half ago. And, they've recommitted their efforts to help us out. The other interesting fact is we've got all 50 states. The governors have all signed up. Uh, all six territories. And we've got not only the governors, we have the state VA directors and we have their adjutant generals have agreed to help us, too.

(TI): That's great.

(JJ): So, across the country, we reach out and touch them periodically. Especially around 29 March, which is our special day that President Trump signed into law, which is National Vietnam War Veterans Day. And so, that is a big day for us. And we lay wreaths at the wall every year, and we're hoping to get some senior leadership to help us do that this year.

(TI): You know, doing social media for the VA, I can tell you, that is probably the third most popular day on our social media channels. On all of them. You have- of course you have Vietnam- or, of course you have Memorial Day and Veterans Day. But, the Vietnam recognition day- what's the proper—

(JJ): Yeah, it's the recognition day. It's not a holiday—

(TI): No.

(JJ): It's meant to recognize service.

(TI): Yeah. But that day is easily the third most popular thing when we get activity. You were talking about the state VAs, territories. You also got a lot of expats in different countries. Lot of Vietnam veterans that are no expats. They live overseas. Have you been able to reach that population, as well?

(JJ): Not quite as well as within the country itself, here.

(TI): Naturally.

(JJ): But we do have some. I mean, we- we've touched organizations out in the Far East. We've touched organizations in Europe. And, periodically, you know, they'll pop up and we'll support them. The military exchange system and the military commissary system is on board. And of course, they have stores and facilities across the country, and they participate with us. Especially around 29 March. And so, they'll help us do that, too.

(TI): That's great, that's great. Now, the one and- the big one coming up in Arlington isn't the only event. I'm sure—

(JJ): I suspect- I can pretty much tell you here because we've set a pattern across the years here. That every state in the union, and the six territories will do something around 29 March. Now it's plus or minus a couple days, depending on schedules. This year it falls on a Sunday, so, some people will do it on a weekday when they can get more of a crowd.

(TI): Sure.

(JJ): But we expect to have to support all states, all territories, and we've got a program to ship materials beginning here real soon.

(TI): You guys have a running tally of how many events you guys have done? Has the commemoration done or been partnered with?

(JJ): Again, we don't do this- the events, we support 'em.

(TI): Absolutely.

(JJ): Facilitate the partners. We have supported over 18,000 events across the country so far.

(TI): That's amazing. That's a lot. That's- wow. Outstanding.

(JJ): The only- the only problem associated with that is right now, is out of the number of vets who served during that time period who are still alive, which is somewhere above six million, plus or minus a few. We're losing them at a rate in excess of 500 a day.

(TI): Yeah.

(JJ): And, so, rough math, if you do that, you're roughly 200,000 a year you're gonna lose.

(TI): Yes, sir.

(JJ): And, so, my message to my people, and- and as we travel, is to remind folks that it'd be a terrible travesty to have a veteran pass away, never having received the gratitude of their nation for what they did. And so, we're trying very hard to- to reach those people. We've got a program in place right now where we're trying to inform and elicit support to reach the veterans that are hard to find those who can't come to an event. Who are either in a VA hospital, a clinic, a center, or in hospice care, or just at home. People know where they are. Veterans know veterans. In fact, one of the things I ask veterans when I speak to an audience. I- I tell them, every veteran here today knows veterans who are not here. Help us find those veterans. Help them, encourage them to come to events. Because that's the way we'll meet them, we'll reach them, encourage them, make them come to these events so we get the- we allow the country the opportunity to share the gratitude for what they did years ago, which has been lost to these people years ago.

(TI): Absolutely. Well, hopefully we can recapture it. When does this end? Is there a time limit on this commemoration? How do you know when the mission is complete?

(JJ): Well, technically, we go, by presidential proclamation, to Veterans Day 2025.

(TI): Roger.

(JJ): I would imagine our funding will probably run out somewhere around the end of that fiscal year, September beforehand. So, we suspect that will probably be the last time. Now, the key thing to remember, though, is, while the commemoration may go away, it's- the country should never stop thanking their veterans.

(TI): Absolutely.

(JJ): And so, that should continue forever. And, I'm sure it will. But, we- we judge our success based upon the numbers of veterans we run into, and we- we contribute to connecting with. So, we're about 2.6 million, now, today. That we can substantiate that we got some reasonably good, hard data that we've connected with. There may be more, but, hard data, about 2.6. And so, by the time we end, that- the gross number of- of veterans still living who served in that time will be in the five million range. So, we're looking to try and tack on another million or so with that

2.6. And then, understanding that there will be some that we just never get. For whatever reason, there is- there are veterans there that were told when they came home to go away. And just, we don't want to know what you did. Go away.

(TI): Yeah.

(JJ): They're- they're doing exactly what the country asked them to do at that time. We're trying to find them and ask them to come back out and give the country the opportunity and make amends.

(TI): That's great. Now, sir, you joined active duty relatively late or towards the end of Vietnam. You're now the director of this commemoration. What's it mean to you, you know, you had a lot of mentors that- that came through the war. What's it mean to you to be able to have the ability to somehow give back to that generation?

(JJ): Well, I- I think it's the same thing all our partners feel. There- there's a tremendous void here in many of these people's lives that- they never got the pat on the back they deserved, and they- they earned. I mean, they- this isn't something given to them free. They earned this based on what they did.

(TI): Absolutely.

(JJ): And, the country owes it to 'em. And, so, being able to facilitate that happening is- is a fairly- it's very worthwhile, and it makes you feel good. When I get to travel and get to meet the veterans and stand there and present pins or participate with whatever dignitary might be there presenting pins. I get a chance to look in their eyes. And, it's a very rare veteran who doesn't care about that. And, we have run into a few who are disgruntled, and that's o- that's a part of life. But the vast majority are- are very appreciative of the work that's being done. And, of course, you know, they thank us a lot and my retort is always, no, you all earned this. This is not something we deserve thanks for, this is- was owed to you years ago, we're just a little late getting it done. But they all take it in stride. Most of them- the vast majority, 99.9 percent of them are right on board. And they say, thanks for what we're doing. And, so, that goes a long way, and it makes us just try to renew our efforts every day and do a little bit more.

(TI): Very good, sir. Sir, is there anything that you learned in service that you apply to what you do today?

(JJ): Well, I- I'm not sure you could boil it down to one single thing.

(TI): Sure.

(JJ): It- it's, again, it's- if you don't take care of your people, you're never gonna get your mission done. And if you understand that the two things that drive us, beaten into our heads as we were young- young people coming in the military. Is, you gotta accomplish your mission and take care of your people. Well, you can't do one of those and not do the other. And so, they both go together. And so, taking care of people is an inherent responsibility of the military. We need the military. We're gonna need it in years to come. The world is not gonna turn over a leaf and become a peaceful place everywhere, and the US military will be asked to perform again someplace else. In fact, one of my- some- sometimes I open up with reminding people that no generation of Americans has not had the opportunity to serve their country in time of war. Every generation has been confronted with that. And that will probably continue. And, in order to have those Americans who are willing to stand up and do that, you have to take care of those who have done it before.

(TI): Yes, sir.

(JJ): And they need to understand they're not gonna be left behind. And so, we're kind of cleaning up the battlefield here. Uh, 50 years afterwards. And, we're making amends and I think it's a noteworthy thing. It's a good thing to do. The country feels good about it, at least from my perspective. The people I talk to out in flyover country USA. In- in small towns and everywhere else we go. They want to do this. And so, that's what- what I walk away with. That if you're gonna- you want a military, you better take care of it. And you better take care of those who served before. Because, those who are currently serving or thinking about serving aren't gonna join an organization that turns it's back on its people. Look, we're gonna help you recruit, if you take care of a Vietnam veteran, guess what? That Vietnam veteran is granddad today.

(TI): Yes, sir.

(JJ): And who are the most influential of the young to join the military? It's probably grandparents and parents. So, by taking care of the grandparents and the parents, we're ensuring that the next generation of soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marine, Coast Guard's been in- that in our line of work, will be there.

(TI): So, if I'm gonna boil that down, sir. Uh, the one thing you learned in service- one thing that you learned in service was take care of your people. You're still doing that, at a very much larger scale [Laughter]

(JJ): [Laughter] We got a lot of people to take care of. But it's fun doing it. And, what's really neat is watching them react to what we're doing. The positive nature of the Vietnam veteran. Not being bitter, but, accepting the fact that the country was just a little late.

(TI): Yeah.

(JJ): But they're willing to accept now, and they're moving on. And what's really neat is walking around airports and seeing more ballcaps, jackets, and shirts that say I'm a Vietnam Veteran. Years ago, in fact I had a conversation with a Vietnam veteran at an event up in Connecticut. And I asked him, did you wear that cap ten years ago? And he said no. But he's wearing it today. And he's proud of it. He's proud of his service. And that is what's worthwhile.

(TI): Sir, is there- and I know you have over 11,000 partners- is there a veteran in the veteran community, or a nonprofit that you see as a good example for others to emulate?

(JJ): First of all, the VA. The VA has yeoman's work with us and supported us and help us connect to veterans. And so, I encourage all the veterans to get to know your VA at the community level, the county, state level and- and be involved. Uh, they need to hear from you, not only when bad things happen, but also good things. We've got the DAR, who is right here in town with us, who have been with us very early on, and these ladies are just tremendous in what they do for us. They have such a service-oriented perspective on their- their organization that they thank us when we call them and ask them to meet a single veteran and present a pin.

(TI): Oh, wow.

(JJ): And so, they'll do that for us, and they'll participate at events whenever they're asked. Congress has come on board. They gave us the mission, they authorized it, they gave us the objectives. We have well over 130 congressional offices that have signed up to be partners. And so, these members are out there doing that, too. We go to events with them, and they do a great job. It's a nonpartisan event, it's done totally with focus on service and thanking the veterans. And, it's a wonderful job.

(TI): Very good.

(JJ): In fact, I'll give you a story. I went to one up in- in Frederick, Maryland. There was a family there at one of the events whose- they lost their son. The mother and sister was there. The message got to me that they never received the Purple Heart that killed that young man. And, so, I came back home, made one phone call to the Pentagon, fortunately got ahold of the right person, who said, let me work it, I'll get back to you. Within a couple weeks, I had a new medal and new set of orders cut. I called back up to Maryland. The county commissioner up there set up a special event at the courthouse. I delivered the medal, they presented it on behalf of the United States Army to this family.

(TI): Wow.

(JJ): And it was just- it's just such a neat thing to do and be able to do just because we- we can make those things happen. The- the last group I would- I would tell people to think about are all the veteran service organizations. They're- they're all there. And they're all involved, and they're all participating. Many of their groups do- do this work for us. And, they need help. They need to renew their membership, they need the young veterans to join and be part of it, so they can help us recognize the old veterans. And, uhm, and that's happening, but I guess that would be a plug. If you're thinking about it, get back involved. Get into the community and be part of the solution as opposed to part of the problem.

(TI): Roger that, sir. General Jackson, is there anything else that I may have missed or haven't thought of that- that you think it's important to share, uh, for those listening?

(JJ): Well, I guess, uh, the last thing I would mention is, if you're interested, go to our website. Again, I'll give it to you. It's vietnamwar50th.com [Link: www.vietnamwar50th.com]. Uh, take a look. It- it's actually a new website, it's taken us a while to get it done, but we're pretty proud of it. Go see it. Take a look at it. Get involved in your local area. If you go to our website, you can actually take a look. We've got a map that will show you events that are gonna happen in your area. Find out. If you're talking to your VSOs in your local area, they probably know which events are going on. Go to one of the events, be part of the crowd that gets a chance to thank these veterans. And, shake their hands and let them know that what they did was appreciated, and, uh, their time and service was valuable to the nation.

[00:46:24] Music

[00:46:32] PSA:

- Man 1:** We served our country like those before us.
- Man 2:** You know, it was a dangerous area, all of Vietnam was dangerous.
- Man 3:** The carnage of war left an indelible mark on me.
- Man 1:** We came back and built lives. As time went on, we faced new challenges and found support to handle them.
- Man 3:** I went to the VA, talked to my doctor.
- Man 4:** I started doing groups, I started doing one on one counseling.
- Man 1:** At maketheconnection.net [Link: <https://maketheconnection.net/>] you can hear our stories and find tools and services available to you.

[00:47:01] Music

[00:47:05] Closing Monologue:

(TI): I want to thank the good major general for his time to sit down with us. For more information on the 50th War Commemoration, visit www.vietnamwar50th.com [Link]. They have an events tab and you can see everything that is planned on or around the March 28th and 29th. I searched in and around DC and in addition to the wall, there are all kinds of stuff planned.

Our Borne the Battle Veteran of the Week comes by way of our Veteran of the Day campaign. Every day, our Veteran of the Day program honors a veteran on our social media channels by telling that veteran's story. If you haven't seen it, check them out. They post every day around noon. This week's Borne the Battle Veteran of the Week is Army veteran James Matthews. James Matthews was born in 1949 along the eastern shore of Nassawadox- Nassawadox, Virginia. I hope I said that right. He and his three siblings grew up in a military family. His father and three of his uncles all served, each in different capacities. After graduating high school and looking for a change, Matthews joined the Army. Matthews went to basic training at Fort Bragg, North Carolina for eight weeks, and then completed his eight-week advanced infantry training at Fort Polk, Louisiana. James said at the time, Fort Polk was considered the training ground for Vietnam. They called it little Vietnam or Tigerland. Anybody that went there, you knew you were going to Vietnam. While at Fort Polk, Matthews volunteered to go airborne. Not knowing what- not knowing what it all entailed. After training, he headed to base camp. I'm just going to spell it. P-H-U-O-C-V-I-N-H. Vietnam. Where he patrolled and

went on search and destroy missions. Matthews was shot several times in the jungle. He sustained injuries to the stomach, hips, arm, and hand. He traveled stateside to recover which ultimately took him two years. Matthew's received two Purple Heart medals during his time in Vietnam. Though he lost the use of his left leg, Matthews persevered and went on to study electronics in New York City. Soon thereafter, he became an apprentice for a NASA engineering program in Wallops Island, Virginia. James, thank you for your service.

That's it for this week's episode of Borne the Battle. If you yourself would like to nominate a Borne the Battle Veteran of the Week, you can. Just email us at podcast@va.gov, include a short writeup and let us know why you would like to see him or her as the Borne the Battle Veteran of the Week.

For more stories on veterans and veteran benefits, check out our website, blogs.va.gov [Link: <https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/>] and follow the VA on social media. Twitter [Link to VA's twitter page: https://twitter.com/DeptVetAffairs?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwca], Instagram [Link to VA's Instagram page: <https://www.instagram.com/deptvetaffairs/?hl=en>], Facebook [Link to VA's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/VeteransAffairs>], YouTube [Link to VA's YouTube page: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCBvOzPLm_bzjtpX-Htstp2vw], RallyPoint [Link: <https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/56052/question-rallypoint-great-place-start/>]. Deptvetaffairs. US Department of Veterans Affairs. No matter the social media, you can always find us with that blue checkmark. Thank you for listening and we'll see you right here next week. Take care.

[00:50:09] Music

[00:50:39] Outro:

(JJ): On- on one of my trips, I was down at Fort Benning, meeting with a reunion group from a battalion that was formed at Benning, went to Vietnam. And there were five families there that were represented. And, they were all siblings, so, it's brothers and sisters. And, we were making the first pres- it was the first presentation I made, of pins that we give to family members. Specifically, in this case, of those- the immediate family of members who are on the wall here in D.C. And so, I'm talking to 'em, and I decided I would talk a little bit about the veteran who died, and their name, rank, what unit they were in, and some of the circumstances and when they died. And I kind of went into it thinking, well, it's been 50

years, this- this- wounds heal, and so forth. But I looked over at some of the families, and I noticed they were, to a person, they were tearing up and they were getting emotional. Well, I finished my presentation and we- we gave- they all thanked us and everything. And I start thinking about it, and what dawned on me, was, when you look at a family and they talk about Bobby, Jimmy, you know, Fred or whoever it is who passed away back then, that's when their clock stopped. They think of their loved ones as they saw them last. That was yesterday. In their heads, it was just a day ago when they left, and they went overseas. And so, that had a significant impact on me, and so, I- I approach it a little differently now, and I- I make sure I'm very much aware of what it means to the families. We present pins to the families of the Missing in Action, who are still waiting for accountability. And when you present this pin to someone who lost a father or a brother and you ask 'em, you know, what they were like when they said goodbye, you watch 'em, you know, get emotionally involved. Because again, it was yesterday for them. They remember, you know, Johnny never grew up. Johnny is still that 18, 19, 20-year-old brother who left. And they've never aged a day beyond that for them. And, that is really important. We've been able to connect to 444 of the former POWs and present them with pins and certificates. And, that's probably the majority of those who came home of the 600 plus that came home that are still able to get out and we're able to connect with 'em. And we work through the POW organizations to do that. So, it's important to recognize not only the veteran, but also the families. We've got a program for that, and we provide all these materials free of charge. Partners- our partners can request those for free. We send them to 'em. We get the certificate signed and they can present them, and by virtue of the certificates, you personalize the small pin that we give you. And, it's just a small pin. It can be worn, or it can go in a shadowbox. And, it's important. In fact, I got one lady up in the Pentagon, who reminds me that she wears her father's pin that we gave him, and, you know, she's not a veteran, but it's her pin now and she wears it to honor her father, and she shows it to me every time I go up there.

(Text Transcript Ends)