

Informed & Engaged - Ep. 20 (English)

[00:02:03] Good afternoon and welcome to this week's Nightlife Informed and Engaged. So I'm LaSharah Bunting, director of journalism, a Knight Foundation. At this time in history, it is crucial that journalism have more veteran voices. While about seven percent of Americans have served in the armed forces, only about two percent of journalists are veterans. The industry can and should do more to create a pathway for veterans looking to continue the life of service through journalism and to ensure the stories of veterans and military affairs are better represented in the media. Today, we're joined by three outstanding veterans who are making significant contributions in journalism. Zach Baddorf, executive director and founder of Military Veterans in Journalism, an organization recently founded to get more veterans in newsrooms. Priya Sridhar, a political reporter for NBC seven in San Diego, and Thomas Brennan, executive director of The Warhorse, the nonprofit news organization educating the public on military service war and its impact. This is going to be a great discussion, and for those watching, please submit your questions on the platform you're using to watch us on Twitter. Please use the hashtag knight live. We hope to get to a few of your questions toward the end. First, I want to personally thank each of you for taking time to join us for this important conversation. So let's dove in, guys. So at the start, I shared the statistic. Two percent of journalists working in newsrooms today are veterans. I would love to hear really from each of you. What do you think are the biggest barriers for veterans who are seeking to break into journalism? Zack, I'll start with you.

[00:03:57] Thank you and I appreciate you leading this conversation and the support of the Knight Foundation for our efforts. It's been really transformational.

[00:04:04] So I was in the military and I got out and I'll just share a simple anecdote to demonstrate the need for more knowledge about journalism and what media can support that effort. So I applied for a job with The New York Times for that application to help identify just people that I see that as a strength. But when they brought me in for interview, one of the folks asked me to detail my disability is not physical. So basically what they were doing was asking for. It's not only intrusive, it's probably an illegal question. There is a nuance there. They were I'm proud of my accomplishments and my service despite the challenges that resulted from it. At the same time, there's some shame in the labels and stereotypes that come from. Issues, but more than anything, I think what that indicates is a culture of that's that's really ignorant about the country, ignorant about veterans, and for that matter of people with disabilities. To be frank, it also speaks about coastal BDM that don't always go to fancy schools that don't always they're not always able to afford to live in a city like New York or an internship. So it's a classic class issue there, too. And the military doesn't set its servicemembers up for success in the transition. So there's a lot of systemic challenges that I think we are basically working to overcome. And the result is that, as you mentioned, veterans are vastly underrepresented in newsrooms. And I remember speaking with the head of the national news outlet who struggled to name three people on his staff, would serve in the military. I mean, frankly, it's pathetic. It's it's a systemic challenge that needs to be addressed. And if I wasn't if I was producing journalism today, I would be very reticent to bring this to light because I would have to be making money and living. And I think it's my obligation now as somebody to call out periodic inadequacies and to work with outlets like The Times to come up with ways to do opportunities and remedy some of these issues. So that's what we're doing among our veterans in journalism. We're creating opportunities through fellowships, making these sort of things economically feasible, mentorship, career development events. And again, we couldn't do this without the support.

[00:06:41] And we commend you for stepping up to ensure that newsrooms address the systemic issues that you talk about that plague the industry prison, I'd love to hear some of your thoughts about maybe what do you think are the biggest barriers?

[00:06:59] Yeah, I mean, I think journalism is inherently difficult career path to navigate. I had more of an unconventional story as far as how I got involved in journalism and then also the military. I was a journalist first and then I joined the military only about five years ago.

[00:07:15] And I'm actually serving as a public affairs officer in the Navy Reserve. And what I realized really quickly being in the military is that a lot of these people in that military occupational specialty have a lot of the skill sets that we need in newsrooms. They know how to shoot and edit video. They know how to conduct interviews. They know how to write stories. And like you mentioned in the beginning, they have a desire to serve their communities, which is the same skill set and the same desires that we have as journalists. And so when I talk to a lot of the young folks about what they were thinking about doing with their lives when they got off of active duty, a lot of them hadn't necessarily thought about what skills they've learned in the military and how that could be translated into a civilian occupation. And the more they heard about journalism as a career path, they thought maybe this is something that I might be interested in. But I think for me, specifically landing a lot of the various jobs that I've had throughout my career, it involves a lot of networking and knowing people at the organization, at the different news organizations that you might be interested in applying to and working for, like I said. And I think that's kind of the brilliant thing about NABJ. I found out about them scouring social media and I reached out to them to learn more about their mission.

[00:08:34] And once I heard about that, I felt really compelled to sign on to to what they were doing, because I think they're creating a smaller world where people who have had similar experiences to them can mentor and guide them and use their network of people that they know to help guide them in the right direction about how do you build a portfolio of work? A lot of the things that these guys are doing in the military, you can use those as examples of your writing and your storytelling abilities. So I think sometimes it's just a matter of figuring out what your skills are and then how to market them to potential employers in the civilian world.

[00:09:20] Absolutely. That's a great that's a very good point, Thomas, just your thoughts on that, that same question, biggest barriers.

[00:09:28] I think one of the biggest barriers for me especially was not having any mentors and being afraid to reach out to people that I thought could mentor me. When I was getting medically retired back into 2011, part of a therapy was writing. And I wrote a letter to the journalist who had actually covered me being wounded in Afghanistan and. Ultimately, I reached out to the editor that he had worked with at The New York Times for help on just putting commas. I'm still to this day horrible with grammar, and he is still a friend of mine to this day. He is arguably the reason why I continued writing and pursuing journalism and eventually publishing a bunch of stories with the Atwar blog. At the time, I thought that what the Atwar blog was doing at the Times was incredible. It started many careers in journalism myself. John Esmé, Tim Given's Neff. I mean, the list goes on and on of post 9/11 veterans that that got their start at at the Atwar blog at The New York Times because they made a commitment to giving veterans of Jim Dow who helped found it, really saw the value in what veterans could bring to journalism. But a lot of people don't realize the

The New York Times shut down, who are arguably the most profitable newspaper out there right now, shut down their Awar blog this year. And I think that just shows the broader commitment and how it's just easily disposable for newsrooms when it comes to veterans and military families. Similarly, the Post Washington Post used to have a blog called the Check Point blog when war and veterans issues weren't a shiny object anymore, that that got put off to the wayside. So I think that the lack of a visible commitment to accurately covering military and veteran affairs and ensuring that there's insight on the staff from people who have worn the uniform or have lived close to the uniform, is arguably the largest barrier because it makes people afraid to approach the newsroom and become a part of it.

[00:12:01] Absolutely. Well, Thomas, I know I wanted to sort of point to your organization, it seems like a good place to talk about the work that you're doing. So the War Horse, which is also a night funded news organization, you have published some really impactful journalism, including a recently released investigation on how the culture of the Marine Corps silenced a victim of sexual assault. And also there was a recent follow up published today. I also want to point to a really excellent first person narrative from a National Guardsman sharing his thoughts and experiences from being at the insurrection at the Capitol Capital. As I was reading those pieces, I noticed that there was a lot of depth and nuance in the stories that presumably is driven by the fact that there are veterans who are conceiving these stories, who are editing these stories, were writing these stories. Talk a little bit about the work that you guys are doing and how you're contributing to increasing or creating a better narrative and a more clear, nuanced narrative of military.

[00:13:19] Sure, I like to think that the war horse is is complementary, not competition, military to military times, other but other military focused newsrooms do a great job of breaking news opinion. We we like to focus on on long form and investigative reporting, which we feel is greatly missing from the national conversation. There's a lot of our reporting focuses on on failed accountability in the military. The headlines today showed that extremism and racism are at any level is unacceptable, but it's a completely unacceptable levels to where they're putting operational pauses on on on the armed forces. We truly try to focus on the you know, the more systemic issues like what cockapoo is facing right now where the military has acknowledged time and time again that she's mentally ill. That even approved her for medical retirement. But now she's involved in a court martial hearing that, to say the least, is is being conducted without really any professionalism or respect for her as a defendant on the untold stories where there can there can be positive social impact for service members and their families.

[00:14:42] And have you guys worked as a news organization with other sort of more mainstream press short you?

[00:14:53] Some of the things that we've done involve a multimedia project with Vanity Fair that focused on a Medal of Honor recipient who jumped on a grenade and survived. There's other big name partnerships and projects that we've worked on, but some of the things that people don't know are that we also work to support local newsrooms or local, especially local nonprofit newsrooms who are working on ambitious military reporting projects. Inside climate news is one that we frequently help. They published a big package with that. It was CBS on climate change and heat injuries. Didn't do we enjoy serving as advisers because we recognize that there is that lack of that lack of the veteran and military family experience in newsrooms around the country. So until that's until veterans and military families are better represented, Warhorses is here as a resource for newsrooms working on those projects and who don't know where to go.

[00:15:52] That's excellent. Excellent. And I encourage people to go to the website and read some of the journalism. It really is. It's really great. Stack, you know, I you talked a little bit about military veterans in journalism, Nate, is we announced our investment in that back in the fall. Very proud to support that. And also the sort of origin story. Right. What encouraged you to to to move into that? I would love to hear what have been some of the success stories. Thomas talked a little bit about mentorship. Right. And the importance of having that as you're making that transition. What are some really just good examples of how your organization has been able to help both veterans and even newsrooms who are seeking to bring in more veterans?

[00:16:43] Yeah, great question. Thank you. We are really proud of the partnerships that we've been able to build since we founded the organization. For example, The Washington Post just announced military veteran thanks to we have a great pipeline of folks just chomping at the bit and ready to jump into journalism. And so we're very proud that they've been working with us on that. NPR as well, dedicated a spot in their internship program is typically for a veteran who's done amazing work with them. We have a video journalism workshop ongoing right now in partnership with the Walton Family Foundation, Fujifilm, Mississippi and the professor at Columbia University. So we are really excited to be working with a lot of different organizations who are dedicated to supporting the veteran community and diversifying journalism through involving and including veterans. The big the big reason for it is we are underrepresented. We want to bring those things, these different opportunities to our community. So if we have a mentorship program, we have internships and fellowships. Like I mentioned, we had various career development events. And it's just been really amazing to be able to see our community grow. We have about 400 some members now there across the country and they are as diverse as the veteran population is. And yeah, it's just it's been a growing experience for us. We're very proud to be doing this.

[00:18:16] And so for those people who are watching, who are veterans eager to get into journalism or know someone, should they how do they become a member who's eligible?

[00:18:28] It's pretty simple and gotten big network because our website people can go and sign up. You don't actually have to be a journalist at the moment. You could be somebody who is aspiring to work in journalism. You work with most of our members, our early career. They're just looking to break into the door, you know, get get through. And yeah, we welcome everybody who's interested and we're there to support.

[00:18:56] Yeah, yeah, so I you talked a little bit about this at the top, but I'm going to ask a journalist to talk about themselves because I know can be an uncomfortable thing. But you have such an interesting journey, right? You first worked as a journalist and then decided to join the Navy Reserve. I would love to hear about that journey and how maybe that is approaching it in that way. Made you a stronger journalist.

[00:19:25] Yeah, so it was pretty random, I guess it was through one of my friends who I went to college with, he was enlisted in the Marine Corps when we were in college, and then he became a Navy officer.

[00:19:36] He introduced me to this program called the Direct Commission Officer Program in the Navy, where they essentially try to recruit people from different professional backgrounds to sort of augment the skill set that they have in the Navy. And so he had mentioned to me that they're looking for public affairs officers and for a lot of the same

reasons that the military also has to engage with the media on a regular basis, whether that's trying to promote certain things that they're doing or to answer questions about newsworthy events. In the last year, we saw just here in San Diego, we saw the Bornholm rishard, which was a ship that got caught on fire. We saw the court martial trial of Eddie Gallagher, who was accused of he was a Navy SEAL chief who was accused of war crimes. We saw the Roosevelt, which was a carrier that left from here in San Diego. It was home ported here in San Diego that had a number of covid cases. So in those instances, the military needs people who can engage with the media and answer questions. So it was interesting because I was essentially recruited into the Navy to help in those efforts. And what I realized pretty quickly was that, like you mentioned, it was enhancing my own reporting and just broadening my horizons as far as the kinds of people that I was interacting with. And it definitely made my view on the world change. Prior to living here in San Diego, I had lived in San Antonio, which is another big military city. There is army bases there, Air Force bases as well here in San Diego. It's a big Navy and Marine Corps town. But just interacting with those people on a regular basis through my drill weekends and then also meeting their friends, they introduced me to a lot of issues that concern them, whether that was housing or finding a job as a military spouse. And I think especially when you're working in a news organization where a lot of your audience is active duty, military or veterans, there are particular things that are of concern to them that I think the media, we have a duty and an obligation to report on those issues. I also think is kind of mentioned that it's important to have veterans in newsrooms, especially where there's a huge military and veteran audience, because you have people who are going to be able to scrutinize your stories at a completely different level than perhaps if it was just a civilian population. So I mentioned today that one of the big stories that we're seeing all across national media is the fact that the defense secretary said they wanted to do sort of a 60 day pause to look into potential extreme extremism within military ranks. And we're seeing a lot of conversations happen after the insurrection on Capitol Hill about the number of veterans who might have been involved in the insurrection and why that might be. And so I think especially when you're having those kinds of editorial conversations in newsrooms, it's important to have the military perspective and someone who maybe wore the uniform, who was on the inside, who can maybe give better insight as to what they think some of those issues are.

[00:22:54] That's great. You bring up a really good chance that I just for that, I mean, I think Brianna makes an excellent point.

[00:23:02] And I think sometimes people can view veterans as sort of being subservient to them and they maybe they want to make good journalist because they're just going to tow the company line. In fact, I mean, I would say it's just been the opposite in my experience. Many veterans who have I mean, a lot of my reporting has been very challenging and very challenging government respect, as I'm sure it's the same for both. And so I think when you when you bring a veteran into a newsroom, you're getting that objectivity and the neutrality and you're getting a lot of questions. And they really know the right questions to ask because they've been inside the government. They know what questions are really getting into that is that informed skepticism is really going to inform their report.

[00:23:46] That's a really good point. What other skills do you think that maybe you all learned in the military that give you an edge over other journalists? Right. And in what that question also sort of in part making a case to news organizations that this is what you need and this is why you need us.

[00:24:09] I mean, so one thing I'll say also is that I think a lot of civilians sometimes when they look at the military, it seems really big and nontransparent.

[00:24:19] And there are so many acronyms and it's like you're listening to a foreign language. And I've talked about this with Zack a lot that, you know, if you don't know how to navigate that as a reporter, it can be extremely intimidating. So for me, especially now that I'm on the inside of the military, I'm I'm learning so much on a daily basis as far as what do certain what certain terms mean. And we've had these discussions a lot. We hear oftentimes when we're watching news events that someone had military training. Well, I think it's important as a reporter to ask what kind of military training that is or we've had conversations about the terminology, a decorated veteran. What what does that mean? What does what kind of awards have they won? What kind of deployments were they on? Were they actually involved in combat? What was their job in the military? Because there is a wide variety of jobs. And so I think even being able to decipher all of those different acronyms and ask the right questions and not be afraid of saying to the public affairs officer, perhaps that you're interacting with as a reporter, that I might need a different subject matter expert to help me understand this better. I think it just makes the reporting more nuanced, like you were saying. And that's what a journalist's job is, right, is to be able to explain complicated subject matter to the masses.

[00:25:52] So you touched a little bit on sort of this notion of sort of issues and quality of coverage. And Thomas, I'd love for you to talk a little bit about, given all that's going on in the world, like, lost everything. Right. There's a million things. Where do you think the mainstream media is missing the story? What are the things that they need to be looking at from the military?

[00:26:21] So I personally believe that reporters get focused in too much on an individual instance or a single case instead of taking a step back and recognizing that military bases are separated all throughout the world, which with increasing news deserts, makes it harder for news of any issues to travel. So I think that.

[00:26:53] You know, looking at the.

[00:26:56] I'm going to a and figure out your question, the you know what what are the the sort of issues that you think that news organizations are missing, the sort of stories that you know, I think it's I think it's that a lot of the issues that are represented at one that you're seeing at one base are actually more broadly representative of the issues that the military and the Defense Department are facing, i.e., you'll see reporting that focuses on in the past at the VA, they focused on Phenix and that being a problem area when really the scandal was that the VA networks across the entire country were facing that same issue.

[00:27:45] I think that part of why these stories aren't aren't looked at is more broader systemic issues. Is that because just like inside of newsrooms, the broader civilian public is disconnected from veterans and military families? And part of why there's such a broad misunderstanding of the issues that we face is because we aren't represented in newsrooms and we're not informing the public. So I think that we're in this predicament that we're in and people are covering the stories the way that they are because veterans have never been able to say never, but they're not represented in newsrooms the way that they should be.

[00:28:24] Which goes back to the point of look at the systemic issue, like don't look at Fort Hood as a singular instance and think that the problem is only limited to that geographic location.

[00:28:36] Yeah, and I if I would love to jump off that point, it seems like right now, obviously we're facing in the journalism world a little bit of a credibility problem.

[00:28:48] You look at those Pew Research reports and it seems like trust in the media is at an all time low. And I think one of the issues is just like the military, where there are still many people in the United States who haven't even encountered someone who wears a uniform. And that seems like a really foreign concept to them. Those are the same problems that journalists wear. A lot of these people who say that they don't trust the media, they don't know if they realize they've never met a journalist, they've never spoken to a journalist. And so I think like most things in the world, including politics, when you have more representation, it helps build credibility. And I think that when there are veterans on the inside of the newsroom, you're able to find that common bond and you are inherently going to trust them more. And I think it's always been really bizarre to me that it seems like there has been somewhat of an adversarial relationship between the military and journalists. A lot of military folks I talked to say they don't like the way that the military is covered on news organizations because it feels as though they only zero in on extremely rare occurrences, a bad apples. And those are the portraits that are being played on on our televisions at home. And so I think if we do a better job as journalists of covering all aspects of the military and we have journalists, journalists who are hired or veterans who are in the newsrooms who are telling the stories, that's going to help build up a better relationship between journalists and the military, too.

[00:30:28] Absolutely. If I could build on that. I mean, the the the level of combativeness that I receive as a journalist sometimes from public affairs officers in the military, there was I think it was maybe a few years ago now, the first woman, infantry officer, graduated infantry officer school in the Marine Corps. I pitched doing a profile on her because it's an incredible accomplishment. I'm a fellow infantryman or I'm a fellow infantry Marine, and I wanted to capture that moment in time. And it was treated like I was writing and it was treated as if it was an expose. And I was exploring all different kinds of wrongdoing and whatnot. But I agree, if they if they provided more access, I think that the reporting would be more thorough and it would more more broadly accurately reflect the true military experience. But because they restrict access so much, especially when you don't know about the military or how to push back on that restriction, it complicates people's ability to cover the subject accurately and fairly, for that matter.

[00:31:44] And I think actually military veterans bring a lot to the table when it comes to that because they are going to have contacts within the government. They are going to know how to navigate that system, as you said. And certainly in my reporting, I was able to pull a lot of strings basically behind the scenes to be able to get access to get information and have a plethora of sources, by the way, both on and off the record.

[00:32:12] That's great. That is great. So I think we have to sort of go back a little bit, right? Journalism, education, maybe you come out of the service and you're and you think, let me go to school, let me get a B.A. or or a grad degree in journalism. What role can journalism education play here in helping to to bring more veterans into the industry? I'll start with the I'll start with the Zaks, since I know there's some work with in the day.

[00:32:54] Yeah, we're developing partnerships with some schools. Some of them are working to provide training, provide that educational opportunity for to leave some with some despot's and skills at the end of the day. Others we're developing fellowships and those are still in the pipeline. So hopefully some good news in the coming months. I think there's a lot of ways that journalism, journalism schools and other educational institutions can get involved in support. And broadly speaking, they've been very supportive of getting more vets in the programs. It's tough. Some veterans are coming out of the military at different stages in their life and may not be able to study full time. Others are going to be able to go and live off of base housing provided by the Veterans Affairs. So it really depends on every veterans path is going to be different. And I think part of the challenge for these institutions is thinking about the different types of veterans that are out there and ways that they can support them. It's there's no easy fix for this, that's for sure.

[00:34:09] Any thoughts from you guys, Thomas Perry, on this issue?

[00:34:13] I personally have only ever experienced Columbia's involvement of veterans, and from what I witnessed, it seems to be a great model.

[00:34:24] I'm not really aware of what other newsrooms or what other journalism schools.

[00:34:32] I mean, I think the best education sometimes can be just hands on getting those internships and those fellowships. And I think that's why NABJ is doing a great job of trying to link veterans who have an interest or maybe they have the skill set to getting hands on experience actually in the field.

[00:34:50] And I think once you see how newsrooms work on a daily basis, that can really give you a sense of what your potential role could be in the industry moving forward.

[00:35:02] That's great. That's great. I mean, really, there's a lot of opportunities for newsrooms, for journalism schools, for even journalism support organizations, which we haven't really quite talked about, to really step in organizations like Institute for a Non Profit News. I know the National Association for Hispanic Journalists and others have helped in this in this issue. So so I think there is a lot of opportunity there.

[00:35:34] And if any of you want to speak on that in particular, I think that with Warhorse in particular and I think that among other single subject newsrooms, there's a real opportunity to engage with the audiences that we serve and doing this. But we host writing seminars that are meant for people, the veterans and military family members that are coming to writing.

[00:35:55] They may have an interest in journalism, they may not, but that they're meant to make news and journalism more approachable for people who might be hesitant about a way to get involved and whether or not their story has any power. So I think that trainings and being able to pull back the curtain on on what newsrooms are doing to everybody here is talk about we need to restore trust in news. And I think that we have access as journalists. And part of what we can do is share that access with the communities that we serve so that we're representing them even better. So I'm always a big advocate for for trainings and teaching people what we know so they can understand the news landscape better.

[00:36:43] I'll say one thing really quickly, too. I get this question all the time about how to find mentors. And it's you can look up the news organizations in the town that you live in.

[00:36:55] And usually most of the reporters have their biographies on the news stations website. So don't be afraid to read those and reach out most of the time. Our emails are right in our biographies and we love hearing from viewers. We love getting tips. And I mean, the thing about this industry is you have to be so passionate about it to survive. So most of us love talking about news and we love hearing from aspiring journalists or if you have a story and you like a reporter to pursue it. The other thing I will say is that in a lot of the markets where there is a heavy concentration of active duty military or veterans, a lot of the news organizations will have a dedicated military reporter at their local newspaper or at the local TV channels that serve that community. So if you have a military story and you want the local reporter to pursue it, just reach out directly to them.

[00:37:53] And I bet most of them will respond to you.

[00:37:59] Yes, I would absolutely agree with that. The only I believe the reason why I got into journalism was because I was willing to just ask for help that first time and to reach out to a journalist exactly like you're saying.

[00:38:11] So I would I stand behind your advice as well.

[00:38:17] If I could just say one quick thing is that a military veterans in journalism, we love creating partnerships and working with newsrooms, educational institutions, other nonprofits to support the veteran community and love to hear from other folks who might be.

[00:38:35] Mm hmm.

[00:38:37] So so let's thank you for all of that. Those are really great tips and ideas and advice. We're going to go to. We have a question from Twitter. So the Institute of Justice just killed Skoda's case. Supreme Court case for a vet assaulted unprovoked on camera by a VA hospital. Police say they say the vet himself was a law enforcement officer and he wants to hold police accountable. Can't seem to get media attention. How what is the best way to reach veteran reporters? Maybe not even just this incident, but others who are trying to reach out specifically?

[00:39:23] Thomas might be a good person to talk to about their place.

[00:39:27] I mean, honestly, when I I would think the most successful emails that I receive that really kind of piqued my interest on on an investigation. Lay out some of the facts and the evidence. I mean, if there's a video, you can see it. Is there are there documents? Documents are our sources. So coming to a reporter with some of the work done or at least an idea of what you think the story is, is always a good way to get interest? I think. And I think that works for local and national news organizations and journalists as well. The three four page email or it's tough to get through. It doesn't mean it doesn't mean it makes it less of a story. But if you're able to be succinct and help explain why it matters what that the warhorse, you know, we're we're proud that we fact check everything that we publish heavily. So if you have documents and stuff, it always, always, always helps.

[00:40:43] Absolutely. So we have another question and I oh, this is a really good one. How has the government's treatment of veterans impacted your motivation to do your work? And how does that treatment create obstacles for veterans trying to tell their story?

[00:41:02] I'll start with you, Maria.

[00:41:04] Yeah, so, I mean, I think one of the fundamental things that most journalists say about why we got into this business is to try to give a voice to the voiceless.

[00:41:14] And I'm not saying that veterans are voiceless, but trying to report on stories that people perhaps might not be paying any attention to. And I think especially when there's ever any examples of injustice and we see it a lot, unfortunately, in stories about the veteran population who have risked everything for our country, not perhaps getting adequate treatment when they're coming back or having difficulties navigating perhaps the VA system or the health care system. Yeah, those are particularly noteworthy. And I think it's a journalist's job, right, to make sure that those systems that the government has put in place are working the way that they're supposed to work. And so, I mean, I've done several stories like that in Texas and a few here in California. And I think they're important stories to tell. I would say one of the biggest challenges in covering stories about veterans in the military is oftentimes their reluctance to talk. And it seems like it's sort of ingrained in the military culture to be skeptical of what a journalist's intentions are. Even if we might not have any particular motivations, we're simply just looking into something or investigating something. And we want to see what the truth is like. How is this actually trickling down on the ground when a real person walks through the doors of that building? Or are they getting what the government intended them to get? So, I mean, I think those stories are absolutely, really important. And again, just like everything else, if you have personal experience with the system, whether it's through you or a family member or friend, then you're probably more in tune to cover stories like that because you're hearing about it firsthand.

[00:43:09] I think for me, the a lot of my reporting centers on on mental health and how poorly it's addressed in the military and veteran community. I didn't have a good exit from the Marine Corps. I still love the Marine Corps. But, you know, when I went through the medical retirement process, I got dragged through the mud. And it was an experience that drove me to my suicide attempt the day before the day of my medical retirement.

[00:43:39] So I think that for for me, stories about mental health failures and knowing one of the first things that you're taught as a leader in the Marine Corps, at least, is to to look out for the welfare of your Marines. And I think there's no more fundamental way to ensure that somebody is combat effective than than to make sure that they're that they're psychologically well. So whether it's I'm working on a story about the Army failing to address the mental health of a soldier who became a terrorist.

[00:44:18] I'm looking at we're looking at sexual assault stories that involve failure to address mental health problems.

[00:44:25] I think that my personal experiences and then watching others be treated that way is is really a lot of what drives my work, because we can do better if leadership want to want to do better and. Yeah, we can just do better and in a way, for me, having been the explosion robbed me of my career in the Marine Corps, but journalism allows me the opportunity to keep looking out for Marines the way that I got to do when I was still in uniform.

[00:45:08] Wow, that's powerful. Thank you for sharing that, Thomas.

[00:45:15] Zach, any thoughts on this?

[00:45:18] I drew from my experience most recently, I reported and lived in the Central African Republic and I was reporting a lot of US military there, a lot on US engagement and other international engagement. And so a lot of my reporting in my career has been on foreign affairs, foreign policy and looking very critically at the United States and its role in the world. And so for me personally, a lot of what I call upon from my own military service in my time in the military and that time overseas and thinking about our role in the world. So it's it's absolutely shaped how I look at this and how I've done the reporting.

[00:46:09] Thank you. Thank you, Zakarya Thomas, for the work that you do in journalism, for your news organizations, for your organizations, the service that you've given to our country, and also the service that you give to the industry and for the citizens and keeping us so well informed. We are grateful for all that. So thank you for joining us today, everyone. You know, I'm so I'm so pleased to be able to bring this these stories, the work of these amazing people here to everyone watching each of you is doing important work to lift up the cause of bringing more veterans in journalism and sharing their stories are properly told. So, again, thank you. So everyone watching. Please join us at the same time next Thursday for an episode of Discovery with a conversation led by night, our team. Thank you for watching.