EPISODE DATE:  5/28/12

EPISODE NAME:  A Memorial Day Tribute to Vermont’s Fallen Soldiers and Veterans by the students at Norwich University

Good afternoon I'm Judy Simpson and thanks for joining us on this Memorial Day, for a special half-hour edition of Across the Fence. This is a day to remember the men and women who have died serving our country. The Norwich University students have produced a documentary that honors some of our fallen soldiers. That video also studies three adjustments that factions have to make when they return from combat. Many of the on-camera interviews are with the trainees from Norwich University and many of the student producers of the documentary have or will be deployed.

Situations happen on a daily basis but the tougher ones are when people you know are killed. It happened.

It was pretty devastating force all because just two weeks in Iraq and we already had our first loss and a lot of us thought this is going to happen once a month are losing more.

I remember before I stepped into my tent I heard that my bed buddy was the one that got hit with mortar. I just remember freezing. It felt like my world had just come to a crashing halt.

This Bradley attack happened while we're doing a mission in southern Tambien and the five men that perished in the vehicle were from the Pennsylvania National Guard. They were part of our team there are no visible remnants of soldiers inside the vehicle. You can see inside the vehicle and you know for a while there was some hope maybe these five guys weren't in there maybe there somewhere else.

You're not making it out unless somebody pulls it out. Once that vehicle catches fire it's not safe for anybody to go. It's not even heroic to try to go back in the vehicle.

Tune out one thing and worry about another at same time. It wasn't like I was being cold-hearted but to complete the mission we had to drive on which was very difficult.

You kind of lose touch with reality almost. You're there and everything there seems like it's the real world and it's not.
By convincing myself that people are going to die and telling us so constantly as I leave the wire today I might not come back for the guy to my left or right might not come back. We might take somebody's life that's just our person we do with it as a lot of people out there. Some people are completely different. That do not want to admit that there in the job of taking lives than all actuality that's what it is.

The first car bomb drove in. Pulled up door to door with us and blew up. From that I did not get too much I got hit in the face with the windshield from the 5 ton., Face cut up a little bit. When I looked at my buddy and sought he had a piece of shrapnel sticking in his jaw I said how about we go see the medics? Who went back to see the medics they're taking care of him in the second one drove in and blew up and that's the one that broke my leg. I had a compound fracture of mine to be and to be a just about my ankle.

That's when Tom one on the roof is actually in such a hurry to grab someone else's weapon which is quintessential Tom bill in Medicare and new thing that ever run around with a machine gun or antitank missile. He ran to the rooftop and some were in the firefight he was hit. He died immediately. We started doing chest compressions. But we couldn't get 'em back.

You've heard this loud explosion and rocked my truck and I was like 40 m ahead of them. I stopped the truck and looked over his lieutenant now by looked at Sargent Matheson and I asked if red five saw that which was a tent to his truck and he loudly goes that was five. We get out of the truck looked back and saw half the truck and nothing else.

When the news came that lieutenant Dooley’s crew had been hit the came to me as a total shock. I said no this can't happen. This is huge few such an influential guy he so well liked this is going to be devastating this is going to hurt this battalion.

I was blown up by my last mission crews June 1 2006. Three much the end of our tour our replacements had shown up. We're rolling by the police station in this white station wagon comes driving down the road. Just like hundreds of them before and it was probably 5 to 8 feet from me when it detonated. I asked what the hell's wrong why you look at me that I like because you're supposed to be dead

I was there almost five months six months in the day after thanksgiving I got blown up in and IED a paralyzed from about the chest down. It was around 1000 pounds so to do what it did to the vehicle I was in it had to be big.

We flew into Ireland because we had to refuel and my commanding officer let all of us have two beers. They open up one shop there in the Airport that was open and all those waited in line for 2 1/2 hours to get two beers.

We flew into bank or main I think it was June 19 or 18th of 2006 and my eyes really hurt me when we flew in because I wasn't used to seeing that much green.

Those focus on the future as focused on getting back to my family I want to to get out of there as fast as I could I didn't want that probably knew all kinds of counseling and all kinds of help.

Telling the Dr. and fine I don't have a problem but in my head relive certain things that happened but I didn't want to stay there so I shrugged it off and was like I'll be fine. I hope that when I get home things would fall into place. I was very glad to be home and as bad as family over in a way. Some ways it was like the best hear a life and in many years and was the worst year in my life.
Coming home was of course a little awkward because it seemed like nothing had changed for people back home when it fell like to it and change for me. There were a little adjustments you had to make. I for the longest time would wonder were my m4 was I'd be like daily this someone.

Lines I cannot stand them. I don't know why but it got really bad after. Still to this day it's a horrible thing for me standing in line.

I don't really like crowds because I don't have control I lose some control if there are too many people around.

It was deftly different was driving. They're always looking on the sides of the road for mounds of dirt it’s crazy.

Calling stuff out in the road that I saw this like a tire a bag of trash call the guy out on the roof. She's like where you doing? I'm calling out all the bad stuff on the road. And she's like don't do that are scaring me and I was like I'm sorry it's a force of habit.

Your sleep patterns are thrown off for obvious reasons and just learning how not every noise in your house is something bad. I get the middle the night and I know a lot of guys to do this and get up the middle the night walk around your whole house some guys walk around the outside and then go back to sleep.

Everything you do we get back you are kind of wired for sound noticing everything. A lot of the Jones issues I have I see a lot of things. I'm overly vigilant about who's around me what's going on and stuff like that maybe it's a good thing maybe it's not.

I really don't think that will ever leave you once are conditioned response like Pavlov’s dog except the bowl food is an artillery can and going off you know?

I think post-traumatic stress covers a lot of things it's not just acting irrationally or reacting. I think it's just a positive the integration is back into the general populace.

Every day I have thoughts of some of the crazy stuff that has happened to me the things I've seen and you just deal with it well or you don't.

Sometimes the body finds ways of doing with that you don't let it out and talk about it that can come out in various ways.

I think to some degree everyone that comes back as PTSD it's just how bad does it affect you. I don't even know if you call a PTSD as much as you call it bad memories.

I don't know why they call it PTSD maybe it's me being defensive about it but I think any person close to one area where their life is in jeopardy and there are environmental cues when you're being shot at or there's artillery going off.

They did experience a lot of track things. I found a lot of people do compartmentalize it. This section there they put it there and keep it there they bring in only for select people.

A few of my friends I'm not going to name any names but a few people I know they're still curled up in a bottle. One of my friends made some really bad choices when it came back.
Their upset about the people that we lost and they're trying to drown the sorrow that they can drink with Jim or Joe who ever. The trying to feel numb I've heard that in the 8000 VA things I've been to.

I was being treated for PTSD I went through and cast to be a casualty assistance officer. The soldier that had passed away took his own life the world was collapsing down on him and he was bearing a lot of problems. I think a lot of people are aware of that and notice that but it's hard to check in with somebody and they say I'm good and everything's good I'll get through it.

Alcohol is a huge contributor to that sort of a rational spontaneous action but the fact that you don't go from being a little bummed out to looking down a 45 because you had two beers. You find out that they committed suicide last night. You're just hanging out with that person just talking with them in your mind their way stronger than you are what does this say about you. If you share that much in common is a really what you want for yourself?

We can relate and we can talk to each other.

Our jokes are little more serious than regular civilian people like your jokes.

I think when people you're a stock that way they think we may need help psychological help. They think we have PTSD they feel that you came from combat see you must have PTSD because we talk like that that's were used to doing.

It's a coping mechanism we all go through if you see something really bad you're going to find humor in it to deal with it.

Don't #*(%!*^@ videotape me.

As you can see everyone is in a bright and cheerful mood this morning

I'm very crude about my injury. I make jokes about of all the time you have to. If I can laugh about it that can?

Sometimes it's fun you get somebody that goes how are you doing how are things? And you tell the man I wish it to be back there killing people again. You just mess with them 'cause come on really?

Sometimes I do say things intentionally. Sometimes I'll say them so people will leave me alone. It'll be my bug spray all say it the give me a look like what? And a walk away and I'll never see them again and am perfectly fine with that.

Usually we do not want to talk about that. Real life experiences specially to strangers so we keep the bottled up.

I don't talk too much about what I did over there. To have and a version and b version. The day version save happy story and the version as the nitty-gritty.

A lot of people ask me what it's like over there that I know they don't really understand what I say to film it's really hot and they like the and they don't pursue it after that. Even if you try to explain until never grasped the concept of death for the death of your friends or your death or the death of the enemy.

There's no real reason to pry. Them a private person not that private but I appreciate when someone gives me the opportunity to express of them more than when people push.
I say what people mostly need to know which is don't ask that trains how many people you killed.

There's some intrigue about someone who's taken someone else's life that when you're in the military you realize it's not as cool has everyone thinks it is. You have to make the decision to take someone else's life that's a very personal thing and you have to justify to yourself your duty to your country and the nation.

But the simple reality of it is when you pull the trigger a bullet goes out of a barrel you cannot take it back. It doesn't matter what you pointed at its there it's real.

For me it wasn't something I want to do it was something I had to do to survive. I think the difference is some people think murderers want to kill them for soldiers that's not something we want to do. By all means it's a last thing we want to do is take somebody's life.

Somebody asked did you kill anybody over there? Why is that important what you need to know that does that change the way you think of me? To look at me as a monster if the answer's yes?

I think anything else if you bottle it up and bottle it up there's only so much you can bottle and it's going to explode in a good way or bad way usually a bad way.

As far as yelling at people and feeling sorry for feeling bad about it I do not have that problem. If they upset me I would blast them and move about my day and not even be affect about it. I won't even remembered happening.

I've always been a very tick tock person this and then that. If this doesn't give me that we're going to have issues and it's not an unreasonable expectation did hear the tick and then to talk. If I want to flip out on a flip out on a billion reasons I didn't have to go to Iraq to do that.

They know your Marie Nancy you flip out then of course that's what they're going to think.

Not to be judgmental that your waiter that are restaurant man and a pretend to be a life coach on me. Don't pity me I know where I am going I know what I'm doing. It's for people like you say you don't have to go.

People generally that haven't been in a war zone you do not understand the concept of laying down your life for someone else or having to do an act of completely selfless service. Till you go and deploy you really have to think about those things. I think a lot of people e that haven't had to sit there and say hey if this goes down tomorrow what am I going to do for this guy next to me that I just met six months ago but we're so close that you couldn't pry us apart.

I don't want to see our sacrifices be for nothing. The guys that suffered and died or were wounded and continue to suffer to think that those sacrifices might be for nothing if we take an immediate withdraw. That would be the most horrible disservice you could do to our nation's military.

The worst thing about all this stuff is forgetting. You wake up and you don't remember somebody's name. At least I'll never forget these guys’ names the matter what happens all never forget their names and that's really important to me. This is how I commemorated my guys. This is Corporal Scott Vincent. This is Josh Welthong. Those are the first two guys that got hit on the vehicle IED. This is lance Corporal Krieger he's a vehicle driver for the second vehicle. This is humans he was a guy that died in the third vehicle inside. This is Dory the guy that got hit in the head. This is hunt the driver. This is Corporal Lawrence he had a baby two days after he died and this is angle the mechanic.
I really do not feel guilty for surviving. If it's your time to go it's your time to go.

I just want to live a normal life because they cannot. If I can do as much as I can in between that would be great but they're my driving force to actually be something.

I think the main thing that people should know about veterans is that their human just like everybody else it's just that they have experience something that is uncommon to society.

People come up and thanked me for my service and it's an awkward moment. I always say no sweat that's my answer no sweat. It's what I want to do.

That's probably one of the most recycled things that I've encountered somebody walking up to me shaking my hand based on what I'm wearing and after a while they figure out what I've done.

I think am going to try to separate myself from it a little bit just because I don't like being defined in that way.

I do believe it's going to be something their lives of many forever because every time you mention that you're a veteran questions always come up.

It's extremely frustrating when they act differently around me because am not any different than I was before I am just a couple feet shorter.

How it changed I don't know if I could define it and put my finger on it. Certainly a little less innocent and I felt like my eyes were open wider I have a truer understanding for what war is.

I feel more passionately about things. If a grip on to something if I get onto an idea I cannot let it go no matter what happens.

I tell people if I were to win the lottery right now I become a billionaire I would stay in the marine core and I would stay in the infantry and risk my life every day even though I was a billionaire.

I wanted to be there I wanted very much to be there and there's no place in the whole world I would rather have been and I stand by that.

We did what we were supposed to do we fulfilled our duty to our nation.

It takes a tremendous amount is sacrificed for every soldier that goes over there. Soldier marine airman sailor that goes over there. Has tremendous sacrifice on their family members and their community and employers. Active duty National Guard reserve.

I get a little more emotional about my country the freedoms we have how much I love to live here. The things you do as Americans mostly as far as negative stuff that's baggage and just soldier on let that stuff and let it be.

It was a long journey but it's been well worth it. It was painful to start it was a lot of work a lot a reading a lot of writing dealing and experiencing and reliving traumatic events. Before all a sudden it could be a smell a sound a site it could be a memory a voice something could put me in a different world really quickly and not be able to deal with that were cope with it and move on I need to think positively about it.
I guess by talking about it it helps us get some closure but I don't think we'll ever have closure because it's always in your mind.

I definitely feel like I've earned my place here in the United States as American. Hopefully I have earned it for somebody else.

Let us live our lives and go on. Let us be people.

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