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To Cope with PTSD, One Veteran Focuses on Passion for Outdoor Living, Entrepreneurship

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VVS04E03

Host Intro:

Airborne Outfitters is a company that makes camping supplies. The business was founded by Air Force veteran Jason Evatt of Beavercreek. Today on Veterans' Voices, we hear the story of how entrepreneurship was the answer to one veteran's PTSD.

Host Outro:

That was Air Force veteran Jason Evatt who founded the camping supply company Airborne Outfitters. This story was produced by Navy veteran and Wright State University student, Jeremy Tkach of Dayton. Veterans' Voices is produced in collaboration with the Military and Veterans Center at Wright State University. This series is supported by Wright-Patt Credit Union.

Photo: Airborne Outfitters is a veteran-owned and operated camping supply company. Photo courtesy of Jason Evatt.

Transcription:

Jason Evatt: One day, three of my NCOs (non-commissioned officers) grabbed me. We were monkeying around, but they ended up taping me and tying me to a big pushcart that we used to put parachutes on. So they wheel me outside and I figured they were just going to leave me out there and let me be cold for a minute. But what they actually did was take turns waterboarding me. I had no idea what that was. I just knew it was the scariest thing I ever experienced in my life. It shook me. I tried to play it off afterwards, but I was a wreck.

I'm a year and a half in the military and I don't know what's right what's wrong. I know what feels right and wrong, and whatever. Anyway, fast forward to 2014 and I was struggling. I talked to my commander and said, "I need to go get some help." I went and talked to a psychologist and two weeks and two hundred questions later, she diagnosed me with PTSD. But there's deployments to the Middle East and a lot of stuff that kind of added up.

Anyway, I'd get off work at the end of the day and I'd go home and I wouldn't have something to occupy my time. I do not do well with idle hands, so I looked at what else can I do in addition to work so that I'm not going to have to think about things after work when I have down time.

The think I always went back to was where's my passion. My passion is in the outdoors. I said, you know what I'm going to go to the library. And I went to the library every day and checked out an entrepreneurial book, and I read like twelve books in twenty-two days, or something like that. So I went and bought a sewing machine and got busy. And the things that I made were garbage, but it was something. And then I kept honing that craft and got better at it.

By the way, I went from being in a very horrible place mentally to having something to focus on. Then I continued with therapy and started taking the meds and that's when my world became normal again. It felt like a crane lifted me out of the ditch and put me back on the road, and I was great after that. So it gave me a light at the end of tunnel.

We all know that alcohol and self-medicating does not fix your problems. A lot of us have been there. Neither does suicide. If I can do it, anybody else can do it. You don't have to create a business. You can do whatever. You can learn to play music or you can start a non-profit, or whatever you're passionate about. Have it not been for having something like that to focus on, the outcome could have obviously been different.