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Veterans Find Solace, Common Ground on the Open Road

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VVS04E08

Host Intro:

Recent scientific studies show there are significant mental and physical health benefits to motorcycling. But many military veterans already know the riding motorcycles is good therapy. Today, our Veterans' Voices series concludes with Army veteran and Wright State student David Berry of Springfield and Marine Corp veteran Steve Ratcliffe of Dayton, who share a love for the open road.

Host Outro:

That was Marine Corp veteran Steve Ratcliffe and Army veteran David Berry. 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: Veterans and motorcyclists Steve Ratcliffe and David Berry. Photo courtesy of David Berry.

Transcription:

Steve Ratcliffe (SR): As I was walking by where all the recruiter's offices are, they were in a row downtown, I saw the Marine recruiter there, the Dress Blues in the window, and I thought, "Hey, aren't they supposed to be like the toughest and do the coolest stuff?" And I want to do cool stuff, so two weeks later I was in Parris Island on an infantry contract.

David Berry (DB): What was your role? Were you a Team Leader or a Pointman or a Gunner?

(SR): Primarily, I was a Pointman. It's an interesting job, probably the most casualty-inflicted position in an infantry unit, but you get the adrenaline and you're first on everything so you definitely have stories to remember.

(DB): You said you wanted to do cool stuff and a Pointman is about the coolest stuff you can do.

(SR): Right.

(DB): What got you started in riding? I know for me, I got back from the military and I was Airborne and a Scout, so I was used to doing pretty adrenaline-filled stuff and pushing that danger button. And when I came back, I had no experience on two wheels, but I was like screw

it, this has always been something I wanted. I have some deployment money, so I'll go out and buy a bike and if I crash it, I crash it, it's my bike. And then it kind of grew into an obsession from there. So what do you think it is about motorcycles and veterans that go hand in hand?

(SR): The adrenaline of it. There's something to be said about being on two wheels, not too high off pavement, and ripping down the road a little faster than you should be sometimes, so it's kind of dangerous and keeps your head on a swivel. You'll be enjoying the sights and you've been enjoying the wind for hours, and you start smiling, and it's a feeling of, as cliché as it sounds because everybody says it's freedom out there, but it really is. You feel great. I can't; help but feel a tingle inside my chest. And a lot of military folk are used to that adrenaline depending upon what your job was. You might have had adrenaline all day everyday and you're looking to fill that void, you're looking to find that excitement. It does bring back lots of memories and it feels like it goes hand in hand.

(DB): I would definitely agree. And to take it a step further, when I get on the bike, I feel focused again. Whenever I was out on a mission or whatever, I was doing cool adrenaline dangerous stuff just that focus always seemed to come up, and the bike is the fastest way I can get that mindset back. And another thing I like is that I spent a lot of time out in the field, so I really enjoy being a minimalist and only having the things I absolutely need on me. And when I'm riding and feeling the wind and being out there in the elements, it reminds me of being back in the field, to a degree.

(SR): Yeah, I agree with that, especially if you're on a camping trip and ride somewhere and camp, and ride somewhere and camp. You meet some friends you're going to become real close with because you're going to pack up your bikes and go for a trip here, and camp for the night, and then go for a trip there. It forms a good bond, similar to what you had in the military.

(DB): Yeah, I love riding with military groups because they know how to do that formation, no one really messes up, they keep their intervals, they pass back signals. That's one of the quickest things that take me back and I'm like yes.

(SR): Yeah, I can see that because you're in the exact same formation, you're going for a long time, you're just following the guy in front of you. Its very similar to that.

(DB): When I'm riding with people, I'm not even looking at the speedometer.

(SR): Me too. Unless I'm point or lead on the ride, then I have to pay attention to the speedometer. But if I'm not doing that, I don't look at it either. I just follow the person in front of me and enjoy the time.