

Note: This show periodically replaces their ad breaks with new promotional clips. Because of this, both the transcription for the clips and the timestamps after them may be inaccurate at the time of viewing this transcript.

00:00:00	Music	Music	“Service and Deployment,” composed by Mark Isham, from the album <i>Megan Leavey (Original Motion Picture Soundtrack)</i> plays as John speaks. It is a minimalist, ethereal synth melody.
00:00:01	John Roderick	Host	<p>Now this is a dog movie, so a certain percentage of our audience has already decided it’s a 5–Milk-Bone film or whatever without even watching it. The dog people, you know the ones I mean, the Anubisians. When I was a kid, dogs roamed around outside doing dog things like shitting everywhere and licking their peanuts and humping each other and severely biting kids on the leg that were only trying to ride their bikes to the Northway Mall and who made the mistake of riding through Mountain View instead of going out Debarr Road, God only knows why.</p> <p>No one held dogs in high esteem. Dogs were just things in the world, like crows and garbage cans and El Caminos and drainage ditches that led to culverts under the street where the light filtered down through the holes in the manhole covers, and where you knew better than to light firecrackers because your mom was convinced the sewers were full of methane and you’d blow up the neighborhood.</p> <p>Dogs weren't important. They didn't really matter to anyone, they just <u>were</u>. If your dog got hit by a car, it was sad. I remember! My dog Peachy 2 got hit by a car. Peachy 2 was named after Peachy the First who died some other way long before my time, but we were sad about Peachy 2. I’m sure we cried. I don’t remember how long we cried. Nobody sent us a card or anything.</p> <p>Then six months later my mom's boyfriend Bobby found Barney at the Midway swap meet. And he gave him to me even though my mom said he was an ugly dog and, “Why didn’t Bobby find a nice peach-colored dog?” Barney was my best friend, the best dog a kid could want, until Barney ran away. A girl in my class found him and when she had heard I'd lost my dog she invited me over to her house to see if it was Barney. And sure enough, it was. Except when I called to him, he wouldn't come. He had only been gone a couple of weeks, but he pretended he didn't know me. She was a nice girl and her house was nicer than ours and I bet the food was better.</p>
00:01:53	John	Host	<p>Anyway, nowadays people really think highly of dogs. They really do! They let them in the house, for one. And some people even let them on their furniture. I knew a girl once who let her dog get on the bed. I couldn't believe that, let me tell you. But that same night I also learned that, you know, those old wall alcoves in old bungalows that maybe were built to put a telephone or something, but now they aren't good for anything except, like, a votive candle or maybe an ironic statue of a saint draped with a gauzy scarf, depending on how goth you are?</p> <p>Well, she had built a little shrine to the singer Adam Duritz of the Counting Crows in that little alcove in her apartment and she didn't care who saw it. This was a long time ago when it was borderline conceivable that I would have gone to a second location with a girl who liked the Counting Crows. Although, God, not <u>that</u> much. But</p>

there has never been a time, then or now, that I would spend the night someplace where they let the dogs on the beds.

My two co-hosts Ben and Adam are, as you know, a different generation from me. But they're different generations from each other, I guess—in the same way that the Pontiac Sunbird that's based on the Chevy Monza is a different generation from the Pontiac Sunbird that's based on the Oldsmobile Firenza—but being different generations, they both have chosen to own midsized, bearded waterdogs. It's a thing I think they saw in *Sunset* magazine. A waterdog is mustache wax for guys who can't grow a mustache.

00:03:17 John

Host

Anyway, neither of their dogs can tell a doorbell from a sock full of cheese. Adam's dog's Sprocket has Orphan Annie hair and wants to be useful to someone hunting birds, but what he actually does is wait with an all-consuming focus for Adam to move from one room to another, whereupon he will follow and once again commence his vigil. I guess Adam felt he was missing this in his life: a sentinel to accompany him everywhere and sound a bugle every time he stands or sits. To Adam's credit, I am fairly certain that Sprocket is not allowed on the bed and this can only be because Adam was born before 1982.

Ben's dog, on the other hand—the ironically named Darwin—is, as you can imagine, an adorable Benji type who barks at spiders, drags his ass on the carpet while Ben and his wife applaud like proud parents and sleeps between them on the bed, preventing them from ever consummating their marriage. And carpet-bombing them with noxious gas from his specialty vegan diet that costs more than their rent. I don't get it!

Anyway, all dogs die at the end of dog films, but don't let that stop you from watching today's film. "They're not even dogs anymore; they're warriors, and they come back with all the same issues we do." On today's *Friendly Fire*: Megan Leavey.

[Background music fades into podcast theme.]

00:04:33	Music	Transition	<p><i>[Drumroll begins, which leads into the theme song.]</i></p> <p>“War” off the album <i>War & Peace</i> by Edwin Starr. Impassioned, intense funk.</p> <p><i>War!</i> <i>Huh!</i> <i>Yeah!</i> <i>What is it good for?!</i> <i>Absolutely—</i> <i>—nothing!</i> <i>Uh-huh!</i></p> <p><i>War!</i> <i>Huh!</i> <i>Yeah!</i> <i>What is it good for?!</i> <i>Absolutely—</i> <i>—nothing!</i></p> <p><i>Say it again, y’all!</i></p> <p><i>War!</i></p> <p><i>[Song fades down and plays quietly as host begins to speak.]</i></p>
00:04:54	Ben Harrison	Host	<p>Welcome to <i>Friendly Fire</i>, the war movie <u>podcast</u> that’s all about <u>paws</u>. Because it’s dogs this time. It’s a dog episode.</p> <p><i>[John groans and Ben chuckles.]</i></p> <p>I forgot to write one, so I had to do that on the fly. But I pretty much nailed it, so... I’m Ben Harrison.</p>
00:05:10	Adam Pranica	Host	I’m Adam Pranica.
00:05:12	John	Host	And I’m John Roderick.
00:05:13	Adam	Host	I’m really curious about how well this film worked for <u>you</u> , John, who has some complicated feelings about dogs and dog-lovers. I kind of feel like this is one of those episodes where—like a lot of war films—you understand what it’s like to be a parent in a way that Ben and I can’t possibly. And then in this film, Ben and I know what it’s like to love a dog in a way that that maybe you don’t.
00:05:43	John	Host	<i>[Laughs deliberately]</i> Adam, you make it sound—or I think you may be under the misapprehension that I have never owned a dog. When in fact, like a lot of American children, I had dogs growing up, many times.
00:05:55	Adam	Host	It seemed to me socially as though your feelings have changed.
00:05:58	John	Host	Well, what I don’t have that you and Ben do have is an unhealthy codependent relationship with a pea-brained—
			<p><i>[Adam makes a thoughtful sound and Ben laughs loudly.]</i></p> <p>—barking, furball moron that—that—</p>

00:06:10 Ben Host Alright. I'm, uh, I'm gonna turn off the podcast now. I've, uh, I've gotta go.

[John laughs.]

Darwin's calling me from the other room.

00:06:18 John Host Ben's dog couldn't think itself out of a one-opening cardboard box. And I've spent a lot of time with your dog, Adam. Your dog would walk right into a fan blade.

00:06:28 Adam Host If I were on the other side, he sure as shit would!

00:06:31 John Host Yeah. Right through it. Right through a fan.

00:06:33 Ben Host My wife used to like this podcast, and as of now does not anymore.

00:06:37 John Host *[Chuckles]* I love dogs. I just don't like dog owners. That's what it comes down to.

[Ben laughs loudly.]

Dogs are wonderful. It's dog owners I don't like. But in this case, I really responded to the *Megan Leavey* characters. Or are we calling her Megan (*Mee-gahn*), what are we saying?

00:06:53 Adam Host Let's go with the Megan (*May-gahn*) one.

00:06:54 Ben Host That's how they say it in the movie, anyhow.

00:06:56 John Host I really responded to her... character arc. Her relationship with the dog. One of the stories in this story is that she wants to bring a military dog into civilian life. And in the process of watching the film, we are led to conclude that it's an evil veterinarian and a bad system—like, an unfair system—that keeps a PTSD-scarred, battle-hardened war dog from being her, like, frisbee-catching, cuddle-monkey pet.

[Ben laughs.]

And it's a thing that the movie doesn't really interrogate, which is that when Common, her sergeant, tells her, "Hey, look, you know, I don't know if this is—this has never happened to you, but I've had to confront a parent whose kid's arm was ripped off by a war dog."

00:07:59 Ben Host By a crazed war dog, yeah.

00:08:01 John Host Yeah, that had been reintroduced into civilian life.

00:08:05 Adam Host That was a great point.

00:08:06 John Host It was a great point. But the movie kind of—just—he says it, but the movie bounces off of it. And we are left to—we 100% side with the idea that this woman, who's retired from the service—is 100% justified in—because she has a love relationship with this dog, that she deserves to have this dog be treated as a honored veteran.

00:08:33 Ben Host My wife works—in her capacity as an attorney for the city sometimes will work with the police department and spent some time in the last year with a—like an officer who works with police dogs who adopts the dogs when they are finished their term of service, because they, you know, age out or whatever. And she was telling me that, like, the—they stay pretty, like, with a pretty regimented lifestyle even after they're, you know, cycled out. Like, they live in a kennel outside. Like, it's not a dog that you can safely have curled up at the foot of your bed.

00:09:17 John Host [*Somberly*] Right.

00:09:18 Ben Host Even—you know, even when you've worked with the dog for its entire life. Like the—like, it's a—and I don't know. I thought—I only have the events that are depicted in the film to go on, but the fact that she went on to work with dogs in, like, security settings stateside afterwards led me to think that she may be the kind of person that takes that seriously and isn't going to, you know, try and treat Rex as a—as a—[*chuckles*]*—as a cockapoo, or whatever.*

00:09:49 John Host I think that that's probably true in real life, but I felt like the movie—you know, there's— [*sighs*]*—this is a, I think, a really good movie. But it does veer over into, like, dog's rights—dog-owner rights activism a couple of times.*

00:10:05 Ben Host Yeeahh.

00:10:06 John Host And I don't think that that is clear. She does not establish in—within the context of the movie—that this dog is a dangerous animal that needs to—for the rest of its life—be treated a certain way.

00:10:17 Adam Host Right.

00:10:18 John Host What we see is the dog playing with stuffed animals, curled up at the foot of her bed.

00:10:23 Adam Host I wish the film showed the many safeguards that she had to implement in order to keep the dog with her. Like, it—there's a magical thinking in the film that gives us the conclusion that, you know, the dog died peacefully at the foot of her bed at the end of its life and that all was well for the last year that they got to live together. But, like, what Common tells her is no less true at any point in time.

00:10:53 Ben Host Yeah. It's interesting that the movie has that in it. Like, that scene with Common, given how much it brushes it aside. Like, that's a real concern, and the movie kind of blows past it.

00:11:05 Clip Clip **Megan Leavey (Megan Leavey):** I think that I'm going to be able to start training with him again in a couple weeks.

00:11:08 John Host All these movies made in recent years, we are really focused on PTSD. What it's like to come back and try to integrate into the world. And we see in this movie how hard it is for Megan Leavey to come back and start living a, like, a valid existence. And we see veterans portrayed all the time as, like, somebody slams a book or a car backfires and they jump into combat mode.

But what if you were a killer dog? I mean, what if you were a 90-pound German shepherd and somebody slams a book? Or as Common says, a little kid points a squirt gun at you, right? And that is the 10% of this story that, toward the end of the movie, we're so

focused on Megan Leavey and her—you know, and what is kind of a pretty impressive process of creating, like, the public interest and the campaign to get her to be able to adopt this dog.

But they really leave this key element, which is like, “Is she a responsible dog owner? Is this a—“ I mean, it becomes a case of, like, we are trusting that she is. But every dog owner thinks that they’re better than everybody else. Every dog owner thinks that they’ve done a great job of training their dog and that their dog would never—

00:12:35 Ben Host

I don’t! *[Laughs.]*

00:12:36 John Host

Well, no, but your dog is, you know, like, right. Your dog is—what, is he sitting on your head right now?

[Adam laughs.]

I’ve seen it. I’ve seen the dog sit on your head. She’s got a dog that can break your arm with its jaw. Where are the safeguards? Where’s the gun lock?

00:12:49 Adam Host

I really like—in spite of all of this—how little the movie is about that. Like, there’s a good half an hour about Megan’s cause and what it has to do with living with Rex during his retirement. But I feel like 75% of the movie is about how broken Megan is. And about her life and her struggle. And I think that is what makes the movie far better than it would have been if it leaned further into the dog drama.

00:13:17 Ben Host

The character that has zero direction, zero motivation, like, she is clearly depressed at the beginning of this movie. And finds what she needs by a lot of happenstance. Like, enlisting in the Marines does not guarantee that you’re gonna wind up around these dogs. Like, she winds up around these dogs because she enlists in the Marines and then continues to be a depressed fuckup.

00:13:41 Adam Host

Right.

00:13:42 John Host

Right. Leave the dog thing aside. Leave the Marine Corps out of this movie. And you have a really great portrait of a person that just doesn’t jibe. You know, like, she—this is such a wonderful characterization of somebody that—she was depressed going in. She had a purpose within the Marine Corps but you—but it never made her—she was never, like—she was born again hard, but she was never happy.

She had, like, she had a—one happy moment, which was the—basically the night she spent with Matt Morales. Uh, but otherwise, like, her whole life is a pretty rough slog. And it’s not—I don’t think because of anything she did. I think that she is—this is kind of a mental illness movie. And a very sympathetic one, you know? Like, a very, I think, accurate portrayal and a sympathetic portrayal of what’s it’s like to just struggle. Struggle to find meaning, struggle to connect with people.

00:14:46 Adam Host

Struggle without the safe harbors that many people have. Like, her dysfunctional family is an example of this.

00:14:53 John Host

Yeah.

00:14:54 Adam Host I really wonder what it was like for her watch, like—I wonder what it was like for the real Megan Leavey to watch this film and see her parents onscreen depicted as they are. That had to be really hard.

00:15:06 Ben Host Yeah. Bringing your mom and dad to the premiere of the movie—
[John laughs, Ben starts chuckling.]
—where the mom is depicted as cynically trying to find out about how your—what your death benefits are going to be if you get killed in Iraq.

00:15:20 John Host Oh, I know. And you gave her, like, a—gave her kind of a cheapo box of department store makeup for Christmas when she's back on leave from her bomb disposal job?

00:15:29 Adam Host Edie Falco is so great in this movie.

00:15:31 Clip Clip **Jackie Leavey (Megan Leavey):** I just—I don't know how this works.
Megan: Thank you so much for coming, mom!

00:15:34 John Host Well, and what's wonderful is that the story of her father, Brad Whitford—who's almost unrecognizable—

00:15:40 Adam Host Yeah.

00:15:41 John Host —he is so—he is such a, like, sort of sympathetic, warm and fuzzy guy, and yet she never really appreciates it. I mean, he's just as much of a pain in the ass to her.

00:15:55 Adam Host He seems like the obvious choice to live with, and because she never sees him as obvious, you wonder if something else is going on there.

00:16:02 John Host Right. And whether or not that's evidence of her—you know, of her mental illness, or whether he's, like—

00:16:09 Adam Host Yeah.

00:16:10 John Host I mean, the thing is, he's such a milquetoast. I wouldn't want to live with him, either.

00:16:14 Ben Host Yeah, he's, like, so much less engaged than the Edie Falco character.

00:16:19 John Host Right. Right.

00:16:20 Ben Host It seems like—you know, like, there's the scene where he comes home and finds her eating breakfast cereal for dinner in bed, and is like, "Hey maybe—maybe that's a terrible idea?"
[John chuckles.]
But, like, there's no way that's the first time she's done that. Like, when you're eating breakfast cereal for dinner in bed, like, that's part of your depression routine.

00:16:44 John Host Right.

00:16:45 Ben Host And it seems like he is—he's the kind of dad that is, like—that emotional availability is parceled out in such meager portions that it basically isn't useful.

00:16:56 Adam Host I've had cereal for dinner kind of often in the last week. Am I—
[John laughs.]
—am I ok?

00:17:01 John Host You are also a broken man, Adam.

00:17:14 Adam Host Alright.

00:17:05 Ben Host You're broken, you're directionless, and that's why I think the Marine Corps is right for you.

00:17:09 John Host Hey! That hadn't occurred to me. Adam, you'd be a great late-in-life Marine.

00:17:13 Adam Host My best friend in high school enlisted, like, in the Marines. And he and I went to the recruiting station together. We had a high school where recruiting officers would come in and set up their table during lunchtime and he befriended one of them. What he thought was a friendship, because that's what recruiting people make you believe.

00:17:37 Ben Host Mm-hmm *[chuckles]*.

00:17:38 Adam Host And, like, I went to the recruiting station with them a couple of times. And they gave me the hard sell. And they got him, but they didn't get me. I think my conflicts with my parents were often explosive, growing up, and this was one of the biggest explosions with them, was once they had learned that I spent any time in a recruiting station it was one of the biggest blowups we ever had. And it was so—

00:18:04 John Host That they didn't want you to join the Marines.

00:18:06 Adam Host Yeah. And it was so traumatic that it actually did... it did break that spell.

00:18:12 Ben Host Wow. Was that out of wanting to protect you from danger, or... ?

00:18:17 Adam Host Oh, I'm sure. Yeah. I mean, their sense of that protection was a theme throughout my entire upbringing.

00:18:23 Ben Host Yeah.

00:18:24 John Host It wasn't just that they were a Air Force family and they didn't want you joining the Marines?

00:18:27 Adam Host *[Chuckles]* No. Yeah.

00:18:30 Ben Host Well, yeah. I mean, like, my mom was an Air Force brat and my dad was in the Army, and they didn't want me to join the military when I was coming up on their—the grounds of their anti-war stance. It wasn't necessarily about—out of protection for me. But out of a political disagreement with, like, the military-industrial orientation of our country.

00:18:54 Adam Host And yet there are innumerable examples of directionless people who join the military for its great structure and are bettered for it.

00:19:06 Ben Host Right. Like, she's unambiguously bettered for it. I think she's such an interesting character because I've never felt—I've felt a lot of the—of the, like, psychological things that she struggles with. The anxiety and depression stuff. Obviously not the, uh—the combat PTSD stuff. But a lot of what's motivating her at the beginning of the movie was very familiar to me. But the directionlessness is not. But I looked up the real Megan Leavey, and she's born one day before me.

00:19:39 Crosstalk Crosstalk **John:** Wow

Adam: Whoa.

00:19:40 Ben Host Same month, same year. And you know, this is the war I would have gone to if I had enlisted.

00:19:47 Adam Host There's a whole generation of enlistees for whom 9/11 was the cause.

00:19:53 Ben Host *[Adam makes a couple of affirming sounds as Adam speaks.]*

It's so interesting to me that it's not the cause for her. Like, this movie—there's the one clip of Colin Powell making a disingenuous case for the war in Iraq. I thought that maybe we were gonna get taken in a direction of her bomb-sniffing dog being oriented toward finding the nonexistent WMDs and that this movie was going to be an indictment of the case for going to Iraq and an indictment of, like, the damage it did to our soldiers that could have been avoided. And it really is not at all about that. And it's surprising that that Colin Powell clip is in there at all, given how much it's not about that. It's just about one person's experience on the ground.

00:20:37 Adam Host That's a great point.

00:20:39 Ben Host It's a very, like, personal, subjective film. It's not—

00:20:43 Adam Host It's strictly a biopic

00:20:45 Ben Host Yeah. It's not, like, making a bigger case about the use of dogs in war or the use of—of war in—

00:20:53 John Host Dogs.

00:20:54 Ben Host —advancing—

[Adam chuckles.]

—geopolitical stuff.

00:20:58 John Host *[Ben makes a couple of affirming sounds as John speaks.]*

The clip had to be in there, because she enlisted in 2003. And so even if it wasn't—even if she wasn't personally going to avenge, I think that everybody that joined the military in 2003 had 2001 on their, you know, somewhere on their shoulders, right? In 2003, I thought about joining the military. I did the research to see, like, would they still take me at the age of 35.

00:21:28 Adam Host Are they recruiting admirals? I mean, this is the question you need to answer.

[Ben laughs.]

00:21:31 John Host Yeah. Could I join—could I join as an admiral? And if so, what’s the pay and compensation like?

00:21:37 Ben Host Okay. Officer Candidate School, maybe. But is there something like Brass Candidate School? Is that something you offer?

00:21:45 John Host I feel like I’m already as old as a major. Can I just join as a major?

[Ben and John laughs.]

00:21:52 Adam Host Did a parent ever walk you away from that idea, John?

00:21:57 John Host Me?!

00:21:58 Adam Host Like, what was the—yeah. I mean, what stopped you?

00:22:00 John Host Oh, I flirted with recruiters for months. They called my house all the time.

00:22:09 Adam Host It’s nice to get that kind of attention, huh?

00:22:11 John Host I was—*[chuckles]*—yeah. I was on a first-name basis with a couple of them. You know, I was in the Civil Air Patrol. So, you know, there were—I was fast-tracked into the Air Force, if I wanted to. And I was never... I didn’t see it as a job opportunity. I always pictured myself as a—you know, a college-bound elitist, not as somebody that was gonna enlist in the Air Force out of high school. But I was—I did believe that I should join the military. And I think I believed I would join the military until—I don’t know when. A certain—I crossed a certain threshold of drugs, maybe—

[Adam chuckles briefly.]

—that I went far enough into drugs that it felt like that was its own boot camp? I’m not sure. There was a moment—and it—and honestly it was after 9/11 that I—that in looking into joining the military at age 34 and then, you know, sort of weighing that against, like, “Well, my band is doing pretty good.” I mean, I just—

[Adam laughs.]

—it was always in the back of my mind until I had until I aged out. And I regret it. But I regret not having been in the military at some point. I think I would have been someone it straightened out. But my mom was so, so like, aggressively pacifist, if the recruiters called and she picked up the phone, she would swear at them. “Never call here again! You fuckers!” You know, she was, like, not even kidding. ‘Cause my mom does not believe in war.

00:23:51 Ben Host One of the funniest things my mom ever said to me was, “Like, if there is ever a draft and you don’t have a choice, I would like you to enlist in an elite fighting force.” *[Laughs.]*

00:24:02 Adam Host *[Chuckling, amused]* What?

00:24:03 Ben Host *[Chuckling]* Yeah, she wanted me to be like a Navy SEAL or something.

00:24:06 Adam Host “I would prefer you were in Delta Force.”

00:24:09 Ben Host Yeah. Yeah. *[Laughs]* Because she thought, that, like, the chance that I would be you know, cannon fodder was that much lower.

00:24:18	John	Host	It got to the point where I was <u>secretly</u> talking to recruiters, just 'cause I felt bad for them.
00:24:22	Music	Transition	Theme music plays, "War" by Edwin Starr. <i>War!</i> <i>Huh!</i> <i>Yeah!</i>
00:24:26	John	Host	I really responded to the movie from the beginning. And partly it is—you know, Ben, you're—obviously the age gap between us is a thing that we talk about a lot on this show. And it's funny, it's—but it's a nice part of our relationship. You are kind of prematurely an old man, despite— <i>[Ben laughs heartily.]</i> —despite being, like, super-performatively woke all the time. But also you're just—you know, you have a lot of the same cultural sensibilities that I do. Like, we share a universe. Megan Leavey feels to me much more like a millennial that I wouldn't identify with, right? She seems like somebody that dates gamers. She seems like somebody that— <i>[Ben laughs heavily.]</i> —uh, you know, that listens to Limp Bizkit.
00:25:21	Music	Music	A very short moment from "Nookie" by Limp Bizkit, off of the single <i>Nookie</i> . A mid-tempo, rock/rap beat. <i>Hey!</i>
00:25:22	John	Host	Like, she's just in a universe—and part of that is that she's from a—you know, she's from a different part of the world. She's lower-middle class—
00:25:31	Adam	Host	Boy, the music really places this film in a time, right? Hearing a song—hearing a Lit song—
00:25:36	John	Host	I know.
00:25:37	Ben	Host	Yeah.
00:25:38	Adam	Host	— <i>[chuckling]</i> really brought it all back.

00:25:41 John Host *[Laughs and claps in the background.]* But I—but I identified—despite all the cultural differences, despite the fact that a lot of—just the way she dressed and her friends dressed, I just felt like they were a few years away from having worn pacifiers on chains around their necks and, like, and JNCOs, you know what I mean? Like, they were—they were not my people.

But I immediately identified her as my people, because I could see her struggle. Her inner struggle to find meaning in life. And I felt like Kate Mara’s performance was super-effective, because she never... she never wasn’t Megan Leavey. The movie never let us off the hook, either. They ne—we never got—even when she was making out with her boyfriend and it seems cool, they had—immediately had a misunderstanding and she immediately, like, iced him out, and he was, like, *[imitates a teenager’s voice]* “What?” And, you know, it was—it all just felt so real.

00:26:44 Clip Clip *[A score of minimal, slightly unearthly, emotional synth music plays.]*

Megan Leavey (Megan Leavey): Good boy.

00:26:46 Ben Host This movie has, like, a crazy cast. It—it’s a really good movie. And I don’t remember seeing it advertised. I don’t remember hearing about it. And I wondered if this is, like, one of those—like, there’s, you know, like, there’s all those network sitcoms that nobody we know watches, but are, like, hugely popular in red states. And there’s starting to be almost, like, two parallel culture industries in this country, where we just don’t engage with or even hear about stuff that’s not marketed toward us in blue America. And I wondered if this movie, like, had had a cultural moment, just outside of my cultural bubble.

00:27:32 Adam Host Hmm.

00:27:33 John Host Super confusingly for a 19—for a 2017 movie, 3/4 of the movie poster is an American flag.

00:27:43 Adam Host Right.

00:27:44 John Host And then she and her dog appear down at the bottom. You know, and she’s completely in her, like, camo war outfit. So you don’t even really see her face.

00:27:54 Ben Host Right.

00:27:55 John Host It’s just barely... *[stutters]* it’s clear that she’s a woman, but just barely. And so that marketing would suggest that this is real, um...

00:28:05 Ben Host Like a real rah-rah, patriotism—

00:28:07 John Host Yeah, *American Sniper*, right?

00:28:10 Ben Host Right.

00:28:11 John Host It’s not a movie that you would expect to see Edie Falco and Common and Brad Whitford in. Um—

00:28:18 Ben Host *[Thoughtfully]* Right.

00:28:19 John Host *[Ben makes a few affirming sounds as John speaks.]*

And the movie is not ideological, particularly. Like, it portrays those checkpoints a—I think fairly realistically. And from a war standpoint, from a foreign policy standpoint, you see—and we’ve seen it before in a lot of movies about Iraq—just how badly our presence there just... like, what a negative experience it was for everyone involved, right? You’ve got 18-year-olds at a checkpoint who are, like, hard-frisking a bunch of Iraqi civilians, assuming every one of them has a bomb. And the civilian population is just trying to get—go to the store. People are screaming at them. But you also feel the tension on behalf of the soldiers, where it’s like, *[In a mumbling, pinched voice]* Yeah, everyone maybe does have a bomb.” Like, the whole thing sucks! And there’s no heroes.

00:29:18 Ben Host Like, knocking the guy off of his moped because it keeps backfiring, and it’s like. They don’t—they’re not actually worried about this guy, but it’s like—it’s putting everyone on edge, and they’re like, “Get—like, knock it off with that!”

00:29:28 John Host Right. Right. When they’re out—when she actually gets blown up finding those bombs, like, the commanding officer of that mission is kind of portrayed as either incompetent or a little chickenshit, or maybe both. Like, he’s in the Humvee going like, “We’re getting out of here!” at the end there and almost leaves her.

00:29:50 Ben Host Right.

00:29:51 John Host And you feel like, *[In a high-pitched, restrained voice]* Is he the hero? Not exactly.”

00:29:54 Adam Host And what’s the deal with those red flags? Why does she have to take off her backpack in order to reach them? It seems like she should be wearing those on the front of her uniform—

00:30:03 Ben Host Yeah.

00:30:04 Adam Host —so she doesn’t have to take off her bag.

00:30:05 John Host There you go.

00:30:06 Ben Host In like a—like a quiver.

00:30:07 Adam Host Yeah!

00:30:08 Ben Host I—like, after that scene where that officer kept, you know, like, sort of, like shifting blame onto her in a way that was really unfair, I was expecting him to have a redemption. Like, “Oh, he’s put you forward for... citation Y.” Whatever that would be. I’m not really conversant on that. But, you know, when she wakes up in the hospital bed and in discussions after that scene, her heroism is part of the conversation. But it doesn’t seem like anybody that was there was man enough to identify her heroism after the fact, as far as we could tell.

00:30:47 John Host Right. He didn’t—I mean, I almost expected that he was going to report her for some infraction, the way he was treating her.

00:30:58 Ben Host Right.

00:30:59 John Host Uh, and that we were going to get back to base, and they were going to say, “We don’t want to work with her anymore!” Although clearly, like, she became a favorite of the Marines.

00:31:06 Adam Host Like, tonally, when she couldn't get back into the Humvee—is that an—is that one of the things you're describing? Like, they seem to be blaming her for her inability to catch up.

00:31:17 John Host Yeah, right. Or just—and that just felt like, “Never leave a man behind.” But the—but the—

00:31:23 Adam Host Yeah.

00:31:24 John Host —the commander—whoever—I don't know if he was an officer of if he was a enlisted, but he was not focused on his team. He was focused on getting out of harm's way. I feel like, Ben, back to your thing about why we never heard of this movie, I wonder whether calling a movie *Megan Leavey* is almost to doom it to—because if—because saying, “Hey, I'm—let's go watch *Megan Leavey*,” it doesn't communicate anything.

00:31:53 Adam Host I completely agree.

00:31:34 John Host Could also just be, like a costume drama, right? “Megan Leavey. She was—she lived on the plains.”

00:32:00 Adam Host If *American Sniper* were called *Chris Kyle*—

00:32:02 John Host Yeah.

00:32:03 Adam Host I think it would have made a quarter of its box office.

00:32:06 John Host Right. I mean, you could have called this movie *War Dog*.

00:32:09 Ben Host That's supposed to be what happened to that movie *John Carter*. It was, like, a \$300 million production budget that didn't do anything at the box office and—*[chuckles briefly]*—it's a pretty fun movie, but it's, like, “What is *John Carter*?” It's nothing to anyone.

00:32:24 Adam Host If Spielberg had been involved, it would have been called *War Dog*.

00:32:29 Ben Host *[Chuckles]* Do you think it's leaning on the fact that she made a bit of a media profile for herself in fighting to get the dog? Like, they're hoping it jogs your memory. “Oh, yeah. I saw her come out at that beginning of a Yankee game.”

00:32:43 John Host Yeah, maybe. But it—but that was a bad strategy, if true.

00:32:48 Ben Host Yeah.

00:32:49 John Host I mean, and like you say, maybe people that, uh—maybe people in the Bronx all are like, “*[imitates a Bronx accent]* Oh, yeah, Megan Leavey, man.” You know, and—

00:32:57 Ben Host “*[Also in a Bronx accent]* She's walking here!”

00:32:58 John Host “*[Still in accent]* Hey!”

00:32:59 Ben Host “*[Still in accent]* Just like us!”

00:33:00 Adam Host God, were those the most New York Marines at the end?
[Ben laughs.]
When she goes out onto the field. Oh, my god.

00:33:08 John Host Yeah.

00:33:09 Clip Clip *[A crowd cheering, with a soft, uplifting brass film score underneath.]*

00:33:12 Ben Host It's a special brand.

00:33:13 Adam Host Yeah, I love it.

00:33:14 John Host I think that the fact it's zoomed in on her didn't make a political statement, really got into the world of dog-training within the context of the military and what you actually expect out of a dog and how that dog behaves and how close you become with it. But also that—little things, like that soldier saying, “Never tell a kid your dog's name.” 'Cause then that comes back to—

00:33:40 Ben Host Yeah.

00:33:41 John Host You know, that'll come back to haunt you. That dog—the kid will call the dog and throw a grenade up its butt. All that stuff, like, it was—the minutia, the small details really told the larger story—

00:33:53 Ben Host Yeah.

00:33:54 John Host —I think super-effectively.

00:33:55 Ben Host I love tradecraft in anything. Like, any time you get to see, like, really specific stuff about how a weird job works—

00:34:03 Adam Host Mm-hmm.

00:34:04 Ben Host Like, it's always such an interesting way to tell a story. I don't know, yeah, like, they teach you all of the rules of, like, how these dogs work. Like “Okay, they're gon—he's gonna sit every time he smells a bomb. And—and then what happens? I don't know! That's somebody else's job.”

00:34:30 Adam Host Weren't you surprised at all the different breeds? I thought for sure this was just a German Shepherd-only job, but when we see the K-9 camp, there's all shapes and sizes there. I thought that was neat.

00:34:31 Ben Host Yeah.

00:34:33 John Host Well, and let's not neglect the performance of Rex.

00:34:36 Adam Host Yeah.

00:34:38 John Host Uh, what a good boy. Am I right?

00:34:40 Adam hsothost I thought he was very good. I did not see a credit for Rex, though. Why did they not give him a credit in the movie?

00:34:48 Ben Host His agent really fucked up. *[Chuckles.]*

00:34:50 Adam Host Yeah.

00:34:51 John Host Cause Rex was aacting!

00:34:53 Ben Host He was acting, and he also looks exactly like the real Rex.

00:34:56 Adam Host Yeah. Oh, wait! Here we are. Sorry. Buried deeply on the IMDB page is, “Rex is uncredited. But he is played by Varco.” Varco is the name of that dog.

00:35:08 Ben Host Varco.

00:35:09 John Host Varco.

00:35:10 Adam Host Yeah. How could you not credit the dog?

00:35:13 John Host I know. What is—

00:35:14 Adam Host We see animal credits in movies all the time!

00:35:15 John Host Cause Varco, he very compellingly portrays a mean dog, an angry dog, an upset dog. But also a loving dog, a calm dog, a capable dog.

00:35:27 Adam Host Holy shit! I just clicked on Varco the dog's acting credits. He's in this season of *Curb Your Enthusiasm*. He's Adolf.

00:35:35 Ben Host *[Surprised and pleased]* Oh, wow!

00:35:37 Adam Host The same dog!

00:35:38 Ben Host Dang!

[Adam chuckles.]

00:35:41 John Host Varco's hella famous.

00:35:43 Adam Host Yeah. But those are his only two credits.

00:35:45 Ben Host Varco's star is on the rise.

[Adam giggles.]

00:35:47 Clip Clip **Boris (*Curb Your Enthusiasm*):** He's got a handsome face, but you can tell... he's stern.

00:35:53 Adam Host Not every film succeeds in its depiction of real people, and this is a film that I think has it both ways. Because Kate Mara is great as Megan Leavey, but there's a part in this film that gives us a Chuck Schumer.

00:36:07 Ben Host *[Chuckling]* As well cast as Varco is, the guy that played Chuck Schumer is not.

00:36:13 Adam Host It's unfortunate because you don't need that scene specifically to tell this story.

00:36:18 Ben Host You know, for as apolitical as this movie presents itself as, like, there are a couple of things that almost seem like they're there to propagandize on Chuck Schumer's behalf. Like, the—there's like a newspaper headline that's like, "Senator Schumer Honors Soldiers," or something like that *[chuckles]*. Just like, that is not—that is not a plausible newspaper headline in any scenario.

[John laughs pointedly.]

00:36:44 Adam Host In the communities that go and see a film based on a movie poster and how much of an American flag is in it, I can't imagine that that played particularly well in those theaters.

00:36:57 Ben Host Yeah. I mean, you know, I guess depending on how closely those people follow politics. He's kind of a bogeyman in certain right-wing and certain extreme left-wing media, but—

00:37:10 Adam Host I really like that story. Like, the truth of the story is that Megan Leavey, like, staked him out and ran into him on the steps and made her pitch. And I think that we live in a country where that's still possible is—like, I sincerely believe that that is great. That she was able to do that. And was able to make her case in such a way that it led to the success that she achieved in her mission.

00:37:37 John Host But this movie could have interrogated—or interrogated (*in-tee-ro-gated*), rather—that moment because there's a take on that that this is an incredibly cynical movie on Chuck Schumer's part, in the sense that it's an easy win. There's a lot of bigger fish to fry in the world, but he get—you know, this corporal comes up to him with tears in her eyes on the capitol steps, and he—and there's some guy that's like, "Well, we're—we got a \$7 billion budget for these submarines." And Chuck Schumer's like, "You go on ahead. I'm gonna talk to this corporal about her doggo."

[*Ben laughs.*]

And then he gets all—he gets to reap all of the publicity benefits of being on the side of this girl who just wants to be with her dog. It costs him nothing, unless that dogs bites a child.

00:38:26 Ben Host Yeah, if —if the arm gets ripped off later—

00:38:29 John Host Right.

00:38:30 Ben Host —it could be used in a political ad against him or whatever.

00:38:33 Adam Host I mean, I really wish we knew more about the tension between biographical subject, a production company, the story that she sold. Like all of these elements there could have been a lot of conflict around.

00:38:48 John Host I mean, it's distributed by Bleecker Street. Um, it's not distributed by Copenhagen Snuff.

00:38:56 Ben Host [*Laughs*] What—what would the implication be if it was distributed by—[*laughing*—Copen—

00:39:01 John Host By Copenhagen? It probably wouldn't, you know—that's not, like, Chuck Schumer's target markets.

00:39:09 Ben Host It's not distributed by *Infowars*?

00:39:10 John Host [*Chuckling*] Right.

00:39:11 Adam Host You can't get Will Patton in a movie without some Copenhagen on the crafty table.

[*Ben chuckles.*]

00:39:18 John Host Uh, just for reference, Bleecker Street has released the following movies that we've already discussed on *Friendly Fire: Beast of No Nation*, *Eye in the Sky*, *Anthropoid*—

00:39:29 Adam Host [*Intrigued*] Hmm. Wow.

00:39:30 John Host We have, uh—so that should kind of give you a sense of—just those four movies, they do have some commonality, don't they?

00:39:38 Ben Host I feel like they are all sort of under the radar, in a certain way.

00:39:43 Adam Host Pretty high floor for quality, I think—

00:39:46	John	Host	Mm-hmm.
00:39:47	Adam	Host	—given that sample size.
00:39:48	Ben	Host	Right. Definitely.
00:39:49	Clip	Clip	Speaker (Megan Leavey): I'm just telling you what I know, Corporal.
00:39:50	Adam	Host	For a film with an—a giant American flag on the poster, do what extent do you feel like this film is pro-military or not? I think one of the main conflicts in it is where Matt is, like, obviously re-enlisting. He's obviously going out for another tour. There's not another thought in his head. And Megan's like, "What the fuck are you thinking? Like, now is your time. You put in your time. You can be done if you want to." And in that conflict, there's never a moment where you feel like Megan is unpatriotic. At least, I didn't. Or that Matt was more patriotic, even. It oddly didn't choose a side there, to me. Do you think a film should make a case—do you think <u>this</u> film could have made a stronger case in one of those directions and hit harder?
00:40:42	John	Host	Personally, I didn't know why she didn't re-enlist. And the film didn't explore too much her PTSD. Not enough to make it clear that, like, getting blown up and her combat experiences were just like, "I'm done." 'Cause it felt like when she was getting out that she was like, "We're done. Rex and I are leaving." And when she realized Rex couldn't leave, I kind of expected her to re-enlist. Now—
00:41:12	Ben	Host	Yeah.
00:41:13	John	Host	—obviously this isn't—this isn't a dramatic, uh—they're not taking a lot of license here. This is really her story, and she didn't re-enlist. But she went back to a world where she—it was the same world that she'd left. A world where she had nothing. She went back to living with her mom, moved in with her dad. Like, she did not go on to thrive immediately after. Why didn't she stay in? Her boyfriend was in.
00:41:40	Adam	Host	To me, it means that she's more like her dad and her stepdad than she is like her mom. And that's a quality that she hates, right? These coasters.
00:41:52	John	Host	Yeah.
00:41:53	Adam	Host	These people who coast through their own life without really, like, seizing on the agency that they have. Bradley Whitford's character tries to—like, he gets a really nice moment where he makes the case that when you lose everything, you still have to cobble together a life that's worth living. Like, if you manage to live through the loss—
00:41:13	Ben	Host	Right.

00:41:14 Adam Host —you owe it to yourself to at least put in the effort. And even through Bradley Whitford’s character seems like he may not have been able to do that for himself. Maybe he—maybe his way of doing that is loving his daughter. But, like, that seems to be something that Megan can’t do for herself. And that might have been something that was too subtle, is how similar she was to the father figures in her life, and how much—you know, her mom has a ton of agency—right or wrong—in how she uses all of her power. But, like, if you don’t want to be like her—and one of her main character traits is both agency and being a totally awful person—like, I can understand her unwillingness to be like that. And how stuck she’s gotta feel between those paths, right?

00:43:06 John Host *[Quietly]* Right. That was another thing that made the characterization of this woman so interesting and compelling, was that it seemed like she was making bad choices, continuing to make—*[chuckles]*—to make bad choices.

[Someone chuckles.]

Joining the Marines was was maybe the best thing that ever happened to her, but it didn’t fix her forever. It didn’t—you know, she came out the other side maybe even more chewed up.

00:43:31 Ben Host It a—it was like a bad choice that had some accidental upsides, almost.

00:43:36 John Host Yeah, it gave her confidence in the way that Marine Corps recruiters want you to think. In answer to—I mean, your question, Adam, whether this is a pro-military movie. Like so many of the movies we watch, the pro-military message is all threaded into the camaraderie. Whenever we see sort of honorable military people working within an honorable system, it gives us a feeling that this is a stable world and that the military is a necessary and good component of civilization. But when we see the military in action, in Iraq, we do not feel like we’re doing a good job there.

00:44:28 Adam Host I mean, I want to be clear. Like, I reject the premise of my own question. Like, I think the context of the question was more in the, “Would this have been a more popular film if it had made a stronger case for itself in a pro-military direction.” That—I was sort of wondering if the reason that it wasn’t as successful was because it hadn’t.

00:44:49 John Host Well, ‘cause it’s not anti-war.

00:44:51 Adam Host No, but it’s interesting how, like, by not being 100% pro one can assume that something is anti. There is very little room for—

00:45:02 John Host Yeah.

00:45:03 Adam Host —for the middle or for the ambiguous in matters having to do with the military.

00:45:09 John Host If you were a red-stater, you could focus on... our lead actor, her character arc. You could identify with the fact that she likes Lit.

[Ben cracks up.]

You could identify with, you know, with—

00:45:23 Adam Host I do.

00:45:24 John Host —you know, with her hoodie and her sadness. And the path—you know, the sort of path out of the working class that the military offers you, and that—and the camaraderie and the, you know, like, the homoerotic wrestling. You could go into this movie and go out the other side feeling like this was a pro-America, pro-military movie. There's nothing in it explicitly that denounces that. That's why that flag is on the poster. It couldn't be there cynically.

00:45:55 Ben Host Well, guys, one way that this movie is not pro-military is in a way that it screws up a thing about the military that an internet pedant noticed. You guys want to hear about the—a goof from the IDMB goof section?

00:46:10 John Host *[Deadpan]* It's what I live for.

00:46:12 Ben Host “When the master sergeant first introduces the new joins, he refers to Megan Leavey as ‘Private.’ But her rank insignia is Private, First Class.”

00:46:23 Sound Effect Sound Effect *[Morse Code begins to play as Ben finishes the IMDB page quote.]*

00:46:24 Ben Host “The Marine Corps does not refer to privates, first class as ‘Private.’ The master sergeant should have introduced her as ‘PFC Leavey.’”

00:46:30 John Host Right.

00:46:31 Ben Host I went down a Wikipedia rabbit hole of, like, the—all of the different ranks within the enlisted subset of the military. Like, the—like, noncommissioned officers and it seems like there're seven or eight different rank classes you can be before you get to lieutenant or ensign or whatever, depending on which branch you're in.

It's hard for me to understand why there are so many subdivisions within the enlisted ranks.

00:47:02 John Host Well every—it's like a pyramid, right? There are way more privates than there are PFCs. There are more PFCs than there are lance corporals. There are more corporals than there are corporals. You know, at each level—

00:47:15 Adam Host And when you're a PFC, you want to get a bunch of privates under you and then you're earning more with every private that you get, and then—

00:47:25 John Host *[Chuckles]* Yeah.

00:47:26 Adam Host —and then you move up the pyramid—

00:47:28 John Host Right.

00:47:29 Ben Host Yeah, you want a lot of privates in your downline.

00:47:31 Adam Host Yeah.

00:47:32 John Host Pretty soon all the privates have to—you know, they're tithing up to you. That's how you become a millionaire.

00:47:36 Adam Host Right.

00:47:37 John Host They've got a garage full of product samples.

00:47:40 Adam Host Look, and the quality of the products is just as good as what you can get in the store.

00:47:45 John Host Better!

00:47:46 Adam Host That's what people don't realize.

00:47:48 Ben Host Can you imagine a set of kitchen shears that could cut right through a penny?

[Adam laughs.]

00:47:51 John Host Well, plus you end up with a pink Cadillac if you're in the top sellers.

00:47:55 Adam Host Sure do.

00:47:56 Ben Host Wow.

00:47:47 John Host Each one of those ranks has a role that it plays in a platoon or in a company. You know, they each—

00:48:05 Ben Host Yeah. I guess I've just seen it depicted as, like—I understand what the sergeant does, because there's been so many movies about, like, what the sergeant does. But I—I guess I just don't know what a corporal does, and she's a lance corporal in—when she's deployed to Iraq, right?

00:48:21 John Host She's a—she is a corporal. I'm not sure if she's a corporal as she goes in. I think she maybe is—ends up as a corporal. You know, at the end of the movie, it's revealed that Rex has been promoted to sergeant. He outranks her when he retires.

00:48:38 Ben Host But she doesn't salute him. 'Cause he works for a living.

[John chuckles.]

00:48:43 Adam Host Do do dogs have uniforms, like dress uniforms and stuff? Like, do they wear medals on their—on their collars?

00:48:52 John Host I think they do. I think—

00:48:53 Adam Host How does that work? Oh, wait, here we go. A dog is always one rank higher than its handler, out of respect, is what I'm reading.

00:49:01 John Host *[Under his breath]* Ohhh. Whoa.

00:49:02 Adam Host Always.

00:49:04 John Host Whoa. Nice.

00:49:05 Adam Host That's very interesting.

00:49:06 John Host Adam, what's the highest-ranking dog in the US military?

00:49:09 Adam Host Uh, Sergeant Major Jiggs is the highest-ranking dog.

00:49:15 John Host *[Laughs uproariously, then, catching his breath]* Sergeant Major Jiggs!

00:49:17 Adam Host Jiggs was originally acquired by the Marines in 1922. So, he was a World War One dog.

00:49:24 John Host *[Quietly]* Oh, wow.

00:49:25 Adam Host He was a Sergeant Major. Jiggs is a great name.

00:49:27 Ben Host Huh. And what's the highest-ranking penguin in the Norwegian King's Guard?

[John laughs.]

Can you just google that real quick, Adam?

00:49:39 Adam Host Uh, oh yeah. I've got it. Nils Olav. "King Penguin Nils Olav walks past soldiers past soldiers from the Norwegian King's Guard after he was knighted at the Edinburgh Zoo." That's the picture I'm looking at.

[Ben laughs.]

And he's—and he's wearing a little thing on his—on his wing.

00:49:55 Ben Host Like a little arm band, yeah.

00:49:56 Adam Host Yeah!

00:49:57 Ben Host He sure does.

00:49:58 Adam Host That's great.

00:49:59 Ben Host That's fun. It's fun when animals have ranks!

00:50:02 John Host It is fun.

00:50:03 Ben Host That's what we've learned today on *Friendly Fire*.

00:50:05 Adam Host You know, I'm sure a lot of lower-ranking people in the military feel like they're cleaning up their upper ranks' shit, but—

[Ben laughs loudly.]

00:50:14 John Host Yeah *[inaudible]*.

00:50:15 Adam Host Rarely is that ever so literal as it was for Megan Leavey.

00:50:20 Ben Host Yeah. I did not expect the closeup of the dog turd getting—

[John chuckles.]

—skittered across the floor by the—that was—*[breaks off, laughing]*.

00:50:27 Adam Host That was a nice attention to detail. This film was almost called *Rex*. Where do we land on whether or not that should have been its name?

00:50:34 Ben Host Better name.

00:50:35 Adam Host I think we're pretty pro-*Rex*, huh?

00:50:37 Ben Host It's a better name. It's, like—he's not what the movie is about, but—

00:50:41 Adam Host Yeah, that's true.

00:50:42 Ben Host —he's close enough.

00:50:43 Adam Host Uh, makes me wonder if that movie title was already taken by something in the pipeline, something *Jurassic-Park*-related?

[John and Ben make thoughtful sounds.]

Or something. Like, if you get squatter's rights on a—on a summer movie—

00:50:55 Ben Host Yeah.

00:50:56 Adam Host —can't just take *Rex*.

00:50:57 Ben Host I think they had—actually had to do a lot of that, like, the original shooting script had, like, a scene where some Iraqi militants were like, "We're gonna be alright as long as these dogs don't figure out how to open doors." They had to move this movie away from *Jurassic Park* as much as they possibly could before releasing it.

00:51:16 Adam Host It's a film that came out in June. Like, this had a prime summertime release. And yet did just a paltry \$14 million at the box office.

00:51:29 Ben Host Too bad. It's a good movie.

00:51:30 John Host Was it considered a success, though? Even having made only \$14 million.

00:51:34 Adam Host Critically, it is a success. It's very well liked. And not just by us.

00:51:40 John Host The thing is it, you know, it doesn't feel like a small movie, right? It doesn't feel like a movie that was made on a soundstage. They've got good locations. They've got—they've only got one helicopter in the movie, and it does feel like a surplus Huey that they found somewhere. It's not like they got a Black Hawk. Uh, they rented some, you know, some backlot chopper. But otherwise, it felt like, um—it felt like a much higher-budget war movie. Sorry, Marines movie.

00:52:13 Ben Host Yeah, I mean there have been a lot of movies that have set themselves up for failure by setting some of the action in Iraq and then just not nailing the look and feel of that. And I think they shot the Iraq stuff for this film in Spain, I want to say?

00:52:31 Adam Host Wow.

00:52:32 Ben Host It felt like it was far enough up the believability curve to not be cheesy.

00:52:39 John Host It benefitted from keeping the framing small. Like, we saw just a couple of sections of Iraqi streets. But it never did a—you know, it never did a birds-eye view of Ramallah or something.

00:52:52 Ben Host Right.

00:52:53 Music Transition Theme music plays, "War" by Edwin Starr.

War!

Huh!

Yeah!

00:52:56 Ben Host I think it's about time to rate and review this thing.

00:52:59 Adam

Host

I think a biopic presents an interesting challenge for the rate and review for *Friendly Fire*. I think—I think we have—we have stated time and time again, we don't do documentaries on *Friendly Fire*, and I think the reasons are fairly obvious. It's hard to rate something that's based on something true. And I think a biopic is as close as this show gets to being tasked with that. I think it makes it difficult to be especially critical of a film like this, irrespective of its objective quality.

And I think the—I think the quality of this film is really high. I think Kate Mara is great in this movie. And I think she's a really great actor and has been for a long time. I think pairing her with Edie Falco is a great pairing. She's been one of our best actors for years and years. I think the story itself is really strong. But how do you rate this movie? I think it comes from a line of dialogue that's repeated throughout, and it comes from these scenes where the dogs are being trained.

The idea of you sending your feelings down the leash is a quality that a dog handler must consider at all times. Every time that they're with their animal. 'Cause these animals are very sensitive. They can feel it. They can feel when you're nervous. Or when you're scared. Or when you're happy. They feel all those things. They feel it through the leash. And I think the leash is a great instrument to use as a rating system for this film. Did we feel it through the leash in watching this film?

[Ben chuckles.]

I did! I like it to a certain level. I think—it's weird to say this, but in a two-hour movie titled *Megan Leavey*, I could have used more Megan Leavey in this movie! And I wanted to know more about her life after Rex. Like, we get the postscript. We get—we see the pictures. We get the triumphant, you know, walk up the steps at Yankee Stadium. All those things feel really good, but in a movie about someone's brokenness, in a movie that tells you that that's what it's about, we don't really achieve any kind of resolution to her story.

And maybe that's because she's a younger person who's still living her life, who by all accounts is living a thriving and successful life. Um, I could have used a little bit more of her, and I think part of it is that we're given the gift of a Kate Mara throughout. And we're given such an ably performed part. And such an interesting story that it actually did leave me wanting more in a way that kind of caps my review of the film. I think I'm gonna give it four leashes.

00:56:56 Adam Host I haven't seen a war film like this before. And I think I've resisted the idea of seeing a war film like this. You know, you see the dog and the flag on the poster. It feels like it could be sort of a Hallmark film in all of the worst ways. But it's not. It's so much better than its poster or its title. And it's made up of a lot of really poignant moments. And I think those moments add up to a really good film.

It gave me a lot to think about. And I think Megan's brokenness is—is something that—that I keep going back to as one of its strengths. Like, her life is really hard. And she finds the strength in the military and she finds strength with this relationship that she has with a dog. And that's enough. But I wonder if it's enough for her entire life.

And if you're making a biopic about someone's life, I think you just need a little bit more than what this film gives you. Than this—this little glimpse. So, I'm gonna give it the four leashes.

00:57:02 Ben Host I think I'm gonna come in right—right there alongside you at four. I was also very apprehensive that we were going to see a movie that was trying to sell me a bill of goods that I'm not in the market looking for. And instead I found this movie to be an amazingly sensitive portrayal of—you know, like, it's a movie where I get to spend some time in the shoes of somebody that I might never meet, you know?

00:57:35 Adam Host Yeah.

00:57:36 Ben Host Or I might meet—like, I think she—Megan Leavey now works as a vet tech or something like that? So, like—I don't know, like—I don't know the people who work as technicians at my vet's office in this way. And it's an amazing story. And the director of this movie, Gabriela Cowperthwaite, also directed *Blackfish*, the documentary that—

00:57:59 Adam Host Whoa!

00:58:00 Ben Host —was instrumental in turning public attention on the abuse of marine mammals at waterparks around the country. And for that to—that was the previous film that she did. And that’s such an issue-oriented movie. Like, I did not watch *Blackfish*, ‘cause I was scared it would make me too sad. So I don’t really know what it’s like as a film, but I know that it caused, like, major upheaval in the way SeaWorld is seen and what SeaWorld has to do to continue operating. So, like, the fact that she made this next and it’s a film that does not get up on a political soapbox is a really interesting surprise.

And I think in avoiding that it focuses you in on this—on this individual. Like, that Colin Powell clip I expected to be, you know, the precursor for this movie becoming something that it wasn’t. And I think that I’m kind of—you know, I was drawn to that Colin Powell clip, ‘cause I was like, “Alright, here we go. The Bush administration’s gonna get it. And I love seeing the Bush administration get it.”

But instead you just spend time with this—with this amazing soldier and her dog and the relationship that they built with each other. And and that, in its own way, is just as powerful a statement about what the Iraq war meant to a certain kind of person. And it’s a valuable experience to live that for an hour and a half or whatever.

So yeah. Four leashes from me.

00:59:55 John Host Yeah, it had not occurred to me, Adam, that what this movie needed was more Megan Leavey. But I agree with you 100%. And, Ben, the way you just described the experience of it, really, I think is a great encapsulation of, like, what is—what’s good about this movie. The restrained focus. So many movies we see want us to go through boot camp with the soldiers. And we’ve been given that treatment so many times where it’s—where we’re standing there, sometimes with the drill sergeant screaming into the camera, trying to put us in the shoes of some 18-year-old with a freshly shaved head. But this movie gives us Megan Leavey and Rex in a shipping container at a forward operating base in Iraq, where she shows up, she’s in-country for eight hours, four hours, and all—and she’s all of a sudden on this little base and goes in the shipping container and says, “You know, there are—sometimes there are benefits to being a girl—“

[Adam chuckles.]

“—‘cause you get your own private bunk.” And she stares out the window. And I have never felt more in the moment with somebody.

[Adam makes a thoughtful sound.]

You know, like, I’m never gonna be a 5-foot-tall, 100-pound, 20-year-old Marine girl—

01:01:26 Adam Host Right.

01:01:27 John Host —at a forward-operating base with my dog. That’s—none of that is ever gonna happen. And I never thought it. I never wanted to identify with it or care, you know. But in that moment it’s just like, “Wow.” It’s a kind of bravery where you can follow the story of this—of Megan Leavey, who’s just like, “I’m just a high school loser. Never made it with the ladies ’til boys told me something,” whatever.

[Adam chuckles.]

And you can just kind of follow her, like, kind of stumbling through life that got her to that point. But the fact that she was in that shipping container for however many—however long it took for her to change her clothes and walk out that door into that hot sun and be like, “That’s right. I’m here. I guess I’m the bomb disposal person. Hello.”

You know, like, what—

[Adam makes an affirming sound.]

—it just, it does such an incredible job of commu—it’s, you know, it’s not bravery in the sense of—of heroic sacrifice. It’s that other kind of bravery, of just, like, “Well, I guess this is what I’m doing now,” bravery.

I really liked this movie in spite of its challenges. In spite of the fact that I felt like her walking out at the Yankees game at the end was a pretty pat ending, where it felt like, “Oh, yeah, well, this—the actual Megan Leavey went on to become a veterinary technician. So we can’t really end the movie on that. Um, we gotta end it on something. Let’s end it on the baseball—” You know, like, it felt a little bit *American Sniper* in that sense. In the, like, ending-in-a-heroic-moment. But you’re—you’re right, Adam. Like, what happened to this person?

01:03:10 Adam Host A certain type of person would enjoy the Yankee Stadium ending and be like, “She’s going to be alright.”

01:03:16 John Host Yeah, right.

01:03:17 Adam Host But I’m not that kind of person.

01:03:18 John Host No.

01:03:19 Adam Host I want to know that she put together a life and has an apartment and a boyfriend and, like, she’s—she’s got a life after this. And there’s no suggestion that she does. You have to do that research for yourself.

01:03:31 John Host And even when you do that research, it’s not clear. Uh, like what’s going on in her life right now. And she’s 36 years old. And I ho—
[chuckles] and I wish the best for her, you know?

01:03:43 Ben Host She and I are actually having a joint birthday party this year.

01:03:46 Adam Host Oh!

01:03:47 John Host Oh! Alright. I hope I’m invited.

01:03:49 Ben Host *[Chuckles]* Right. Yeah, we’re gonna go down to the bowling alley and have some fun.

01:03:54 Adam Host You gonna drink some tequila without a chaser?

[Ben chuckles an affirming sound.]

01:03:58 John Host I feel like Gabriela Cowperthwaite did a great job making this movie. And I wish that it had been a bigger hit. And I—and I hope that she makes more films. ‘Cause I thought that was a lot—there’s just a lot going on in this movie, and the performances were just really spectacular.

I was—I never got bounced out of it. I’m gonna go a little higher than you guys. I’m gonna give it 4.3 leashes.

01:04:29 Ben Host Wow!

01:04:30 Adam Host Alright!

01:04:32 John Host Four leashes and a dog collar that might be used on a consenting person.

01:04:42 Ben Host *[Laughs heartily]* That was very diplomatically put, John.

01:04:45 Adam Host Alright. Well, our guys do not get to grant consent for our choices of them.

01:04:51 Ben Host Yeah, it’s just foisted upon them. *[Chuckles.]*

01:04:53 Adam Host *[Chuckling]* It’s true. Ben, who’s your guy?

01:04:56 Ben Host My guy is a character that’s, like, hard to like at the beginning of the movie, but I came to have a great affection for. Um, much as Megan Leavey did. It’s Rex the dog.

01:05:10 John Host Hmm.

01:05:11 Adam Host *[Whispers]* God. *[Regular tone]* Fucking classic.

01:05:13 John Host *[Quietly]* The star of the film—

01:05:14 Ben Host Yeah.

01:05:15 John Host —is Ben’s guy.

01:05:16 Ben Host The star of the film. Rex the dog is my guy.

01:05:17 Adam Host The—I feel like the original idea for, “your guy” was—was not choosing the star of the film. Like—like—

[John chuckles.]

01:05:24 Ben Host I didn’t choose Megan Leavey! I just like Rex the dog. He was a good boy.

01:05:29 Adam Host Wow.

01:05:30 Ben Host He found all those bombs in that field, and then he got blown up and he just, like, kept going. I really admire that about Rex the dog.

01:05:36 John Host Are you gonna pick a—are you gonna pick a supporting dog, Adam?

[Ben laughs.]

01:05:40 Adam Host My guy’s Sergeant Dean. He really—like, his story—I mean, you start out hating him, because he is that classic hateable you-don’t-know-what-it’s-like guy who just came back from deployment.

01:05:53 John Host Right.

01:05:54 Adam Host And you're like, "Get a load of this guy, trying to—trying to scare our favorite characters before going to Afghanistan." And yet, you know, the longer we get to know him, the more affection we feel for him. And then—and then he's killed. He's killed offscreen and grieved. And I was surprised at how much I grieved his character's death in this movie. It shouldn't have been possible. He—Tom Felton was in this film very little. But he brought such a humanity to that part. I don't know, I really—I really enjoyed him. And I liked how he was sprinkled throughout the film. Like, by the time we get to experience the friendship and camaraderie that he has with Megan, he's gone. And so that was effectively painful when he died. So he's gonna be my guy this time. What about you, John?

01:06:44 John Host Yeah, I—one of the things that's most curious to me about military life and something that I don't think I could ever know having not been in the military is how noncommissioned officers can maintain a kind of, like, stern discipline with their subordinates and also be kind of kind and caring and generous.

01:07:06 Adam Host Right.

01:07:07 John Host And this movie does a really good job of maintaining in—in Sergeant Dean, in Gunnery Sergeant Martin—you know, they care about their soldiers, but they never break character. They never—they never are not in command. And that's such a great... I don't know, like a great institutional relationship that I've never—I've never experienced, right? I mean, as soon as somebody has any authority over me, as soon as they show the slightest sign of kindness—

[Adam laughs.]

—you know, I immediately seek to destroy them and our friendship. But you couldn't do that in a relationship with your gunnery sergeant 'cause they're gonna—

01:07:52 Adam Host Yeah.

01:07:53 John Host —they're gonna clap you in irons. I want to say that my guy is... Megan Leavey's next boyfriend.

[Adam makes a thoughtful sound.]

Not on—not onscreen. Uh, after the—after this movie concludes, the next unlucky guy that starts to date her?

[Ben laughs.]

01:08:11 Adam Host Post-Morales?

01:08:12 John Host That's—yeah! That's just a guy that works at Best Buy or whatever that meets her in line at a—Chick-fil-A. And is like, "Hey, you know, we should go out sometime." And she's like, "I guess." And then they get—and then they go out for a year and it just—and he is just brutalized throughout the course of the relationship, but he kind of thinks it's his fault, too. But I don't—I can't be that guy, 'cause we don't know about him. I mean, I know about him. And, if he's listening: solid, brother. But I can't be that guy. I can't be him.

[Adam laughs.]

I can't have my guy be a guy that doesn't appear in the film. My guy is the... Iraqi dad with the Mercedes Benz and the six-year-old son who's just trying to get through the checkpoint. And—

01:08:58 Adam Host Yeah.

01:08:59 John Host —he's obviously educated. He's obviously a middle-class Iraqi. And he's got—he's on one side of this gate, and he's got to get to the other side of the gate. For some reason. He doesn't—it's a dentist appointment--

01:09:12 Adam Host He's got all those XBoxes.

01:09:13 Ben Host Yeah, you're just jealous that that guy had a trunk full of XBoxes, John.

[Adam chuckles.]

01:09:16 John Host He did. He did. I am jealous. He was going to find the gamers in his—in the suburbs.

01:09:23 Adam Host Yeah, maybe that started Megan Leavey's attraction to gamers that you hypothesized earlier.

01:09:29 John Host *[Chuckling]* Maybe it did. He had—he had 311 cranking on the cassette.

[Ben laughs.]

Uh, but, you know I—just spending that little bit of time with this person who was—before the invasion—living in Baghdad or Ramallah or—he was living in Iraq, somewhere where Saddam Hussein was in charge and it was a bad... government. But he could drive across town, presumably without getting stopped, waiting for two hours in line, and then being confronted with 15 Americans between the ages of 18 and 24, loaded to—loaded for bear and empowered to shoot anyone they want at the slightest provocation and being made to wait and then be, like, force-frisked, shouted at, sp—you know, like, by just... dummies.

And I fe—the reason he’s my guy is, I’m 51. And if I suddenly found that in order to get from my house in south Seattle to Burien to pick up some barbecue, I had to go through a checkpoint where the guys at the checkpoint were from Iraq or even from Massachusetts—let alone from Georgia—and those guys had the power to shoot me if I stepped out of line and they were gonna tell me to get down and to open my jacket and to—all this other shit, I would be dead. Because I wouldn’t be able to do it! I would be the one that was just like, “Fuck you!”

[Ben chuckles.]

“Like, you cannot fucking—do not touch my kid! Fuck—“ You know, I would be, like—I couldn’t.

01:11:22 Adam Host Yeah.

01:11:23 John Host I couldn’t not. I could not keep a lid on it.

01:11:24 Adam Host John dies at a checkpoint.

01:11:25 John Host I would die at a checkpoint. I couldn’t live like that.

01:11:28 Adam Host Yeah.

01:11:29 John Host And to imagine—to imagine living like that. And it—and it’s just—and that role is just a role that is played by this actor in order to ramp up the tension in a scene where we’re there to watch Megan Leavey and Rex, like, handle a tense situation. But, I mean, I spent a lifetime with that guy and his kid. And just the—I don’t know. Driving away from that checkpoint with that feeling of just shame and, like, *[makes a disgusted sound]*. I mean, it’s a wonder that every single person in Iraq didn’t become an insurgent. I would become an insurgent.

[Ben chuckles.]

I’m al—I’m a cultural insurgent already.

01:12:12 Adam Host Sure are, a Suburban full of Xboxes.

01:12:13 Ben Host Yeah. *[Laughs.]*

01:12:16 John Host Yeah, well, and the thing is that, you know, I’m just at war with the—with Reddit. But it could be worse!

01:12:23 Adam Host Yeah.

01:12:24 John Host Reddit and Facebook and Twitter.

01:12:25 Ben Host You're on peaceful terms with 4chan, though. *[Chuckles.]*

01:12:28 John Host Oh, yeah. Well, those are the—those are my people, you know.
[Ben laughs.]
Anon. What's up, Anon?

01:12:33 Adam Host Where else is John gonna get his porn?

01:12:36 John Host Boy, if you're getting your porn from 4chan, you are in sor-ry shape.

01:12:40 Music Transition Theme music plays, "War" by Edwin Starr.
War!
Huh!
Yeah!

01:12:43 Adam Host Well, we only have one source for what the next film on *Friendly Fire*'s gonna be, and that's John's big die. What are you what do you say you put that into the big Yahtzee cup you've been using and—
[John laughs.]
—give that thing a spin? Tell us what we're gonna watch next.

01:12:58 John Host Unfortunately, my Yahtzee cup is still full of coffee. Hang on. *[Slurps coffee]* Mmm.

01:13:03 Adam Host Hold on a second. You're sticking the die into a mug with coffee in it? And you have been?

01:13:10 John Host Yeah! *[Stutters]* It adds a lot of—you know, I—somebody moved all my stuff that made my normal dice corral.
[Ben makes a thoughtful sound.]
So I threw it in my coffee cup a couple of weeks ago. And I like it. I like the Foley.
[Adam chuckles briefly.]
And you know, the white numbers of the—

01:13:27 Adam Host Everyone does.

01:13:28 John Host —the white numbers of the die are kind of getting a little coffee-stained. It's giving a little wear and tear.
[Someone makes a thoughtful sound.]
Alright, here we go. *[Beat]* It's vintage. It's vintaging it.

01:13:40 Sound Effect Sound Effect *[Clinking sound of the die being rolled, clattering and spinning on a ceramic surface.]*

01:13:48 John Host A coffee-stained 25!

01:13:51	Music	Music	A brass-heavy, upbeat march fades in and plays as Ben speaks.
01:13:52	Ben	Host	Twenty-five is a 1951 World War II film directed by George Waggner. It's called <i>Operation Pacific!</i>
01:14:04	Adam	Host	Is there an exclamation point in that?
01:14:06	John	Host	<i>[Chuckles]</i> Is there a colon? " <i>Operation colon Pacific?</i> "
01:14:09	Ben	Host	There is not. There's a John Wayne in it, though.
01:14:12	John	Host	Ohh.
01:14:13	Adam	Host	Wowww.
01:14:14	Ben	Host	As a submarine's second-in-command who inherits the problem of torpedoes that don't explode.
01:14:19	John	Host	Oh, wow! It actually—
01:14:20	Adam	Host	Oh, no!
01:14:21	John	Host	—covers that story. How interesting.
01:14:23	Music	Music	Theme song slowly fades in as the hosts speak. "War" by Edwin Starr.
01:14:24	Adam	Host	You're gonna need some explody torpedoes out there.
01:14:26	Ben	Host	That's one of the main things they need to do. They need to seek and they need to destroy. I'm excited. I love a submarine film.
01:14:35	Adam	Host	Yeah. Back to our roots.
01:14:36	Ben	Host	<i>[Chuckles]</i> Back to our roots. That will be next week on <i>Friendly Fire</i> . We will leave it with Robs from here! So! For John Roderick and Adam Pratica, I've been Ben Harrison. To the victor go the spoiler alerts.
01:14:47	Music	Transition	Theme song fades to full volume. "War" off the album <i>War & Peace</i> by Edwin Starr. — <i>destruction</i> <i>Who wants to die?</i> <i>Ohhhh war!</i> The song continues at a slightly lower volume as Rob speaks.

01:14:51 Rob Schulte Producer

Friendly Fire is a Maximum Fun podcast hosted by Ben Harrison, Adam Pranica, and John Roderick. This podcast is produced and edited by me, Rob Schulte. Our theme music is “War” by Edwin Starr, courtesy of Stone Agate Music. And our logo art is by Nick Ditmore.

There’s no better time than the present to go back in the listening libraries of *Friendly Fire*. Last year, we put out an episode covering 2002’s *The Sum of All Fears*. Set in the Tom Clancy cinematic universe, Ben Affleck as CIA analyst Jack Ryan must stop a nuclear bomb from going off at a football game.

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[Theme song plays for a while at full volume before fading out.]

01:16:27 Music Transition

A cheerful ukulele chord.

01:16:28 Speaker 1 Guest

MaximumFun.org

01:16:30 Speaker 2 Guest

Comedy and culture.

01:16:31 Speaker 3 Guest

Artist owned—

01:16:32 Speaker 4 Guest

—audience supported.