



**TRANSCRIPT: INTERVIEW WITH
TAMMY DUCKWORTH
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QUESTION: What is it about women's commitment to freedom and democracy?

TAMMY DUCKWORTH: I think it says that they love their families and they love their Nation and women are willing to stand up to protect what they hold most dear, just as men are. I'm a daughter of the American Revolution and I trace my lineage all the way back to the first women who picked up arms when their husbands fell on the battlefield. So I think it just tells you that women love this Nation just as much as men do.

QUESTION: How aware were you when you were growing up about your heritage?

TAMMY DUCKWORTH: I did not know when I was growing up that my heritage went all the way back to the Revolution. It wasn't until I was in college when my dad moved back to Virginia and started retracing his roots. He had always known because his aunts and grandmother had been a Daughter of the American Revolution, but he started getting into genealogy later in life and that's when we really found that there had actually been a member of our family in uniform during every period of conflict going back to the Revolution.

QUESTION: What was the impact of 9/11 on women's role in the military?

TAMMY DUCKWORTH: I think 9/11 was an equalizer because women and men died, you know, at the Pentagon. The attack on the Pentagon was on us, it wasn't on men, it wasn't on any group, it was on America and the ideals of this Nation, of our democracy, same with the Towers. So I think what 9/11 did was sort of saw that we all had a stake in this. It wasn't just for one group of us to stand up and defend. It was for all of us to stand up together.

QUESTION: Did women's roles change much?

TAMMY DUCKWORTH: You know, for me, when pilot jobs for women were opened up for combat positions, that happened in '93 and that was while I was in flight school. For me the most momentous change was when women were finally allowed to fly combat missions. On 9/11 I actually was in command of the Blackhawk Helicopter Company in Chicago when we were not sure if Chicago would be the next place hit. So I was the first female commander of that company and there we were, in one of the major cities in America, wondering if we were going to be next.

QUESTION: Did you get the sense that then you were going to be deployed?

TAMMY DUCKWORTH: Definitely. Up until that point I had been in command for 3 years. I had been training my men and I had always trained in preparation of having to go to war. So you do everything normally, but when that happened, it was, all right guys, there's no more kidding around, this is the real stuff. And we were ready. We were ready to go and we were proud to go.

QUESTION: So you got to use all your training.

TAMMY DUCKWORTH: When the time came for my unit to be deployed, I had just left command about 30 days prior. I left command in November and the mobilization orders came in December. I was devastated that I wasn't going to get to go with this company that I had trained

for 3 years. These were my boys. These were my men—few women in the company. It was devastating so I volunteered to go. And people said, well you don't support the war why would you go? I said, well, I've been drawing a paycheck from the National Guard for 12 years and American people have paid for my training, have entrusted the Nation's trust in my ability to be a professional, so I'm going to go because it's my duty to go. So it was really about living up to everything that we had trained for and living up to the men and women to my right and to my left.

QUESTION: Tell me about your job while deployed.

TAMMY DUCKWORTH: I did 2 things. I was the assistant operations officer, which meant that I received all the missions into our task force and assigned them to all of the aircrews and decided who would fly what missions and then I tracked all the missions. So it was a 24-hour operation center. I also flew missions as a helicopter pilot as well. I wanted to get outside the wire because all pilots love to fly. None of us love flying a desk [LAUGHTER]. So any excuse we can get in a cockpit, we'll sneak our way in there, even if we have to take someone else out so we can get in, no, [LAUGHTER]. We all want to just be flying and so I both flew regular missions, we didn't really do too many air assault missions. We did a few insertions but just missions all over Iraq.

QUESTION: Were you aware of the dangers?

TAMMY DUCKWORTH: I was always aware. That's how you stay safe and that's how you stay alive. You do a briefing before every mission, and not only did I do missions briefings of my own missions, but I made sure that every aircrew that I sent out to fly a mission got all the proper briefings, the threat briefs and knew what was going on. We'd lost one aircraft to an accident and then a couple of others to really bad weather conditions. I knew what it was like to have aircrew down and trying to find a way to get to them and get them out. Before we flew a single mission, when we first got to our staging base, the first thing they did with the aircrew was to train us on what we needed to know and what we needed to do in case we were captured because aircrews have a high likelihood of being captured behind enemy lines. So we had all the passwords in case we had to be extracted, and all of that. So long ago I knew that as a pilot I had a much a higher likelihood of being captured behind enemy lines and that I would have to deal with that. And I was fine with it.

QUESTION: Tell me about November 12.

TAMMY DUCKWORTH: November 12th of 2004 was a really good day for me. I woke up early, I was going to get to fly, not just a short mission, but I was going to fly an entire day's worth of missions with one of my favorite pilots to fly with, Chief Warrant Officer Dan Milberg. The pilot in the second aircraft was another pilot I love to fly with. So, we had a great day. We flew north, we flew south, we flew all over the Baghdad area. We even had time to stop and eat at the big chow hall and get a milkshakes and stir fry made to order, which we did not get. I even actually, right at the end, managed to run over to the Post Exchange there in the green zone and grab some Christmas ornaments. It was a really good day. We started it super early. Then we were getting ready to go home when a call came in and said can you divert to this other airfield and pick up some passengers. Most of my crew wanted to go back and I said, no, because I was wearing my operations officer hat, I said no we got to go get these guys; we can't just leave somebody stranded, hoping another aircraft will come by. So we diverted to go pick

them up and on the way back from that diversion to our flight route was when we were hit. We basically flew into an ambush, it was an area where insurgents that had been flushed out of Fallujah had been there, it had not been cleared in about 30 days, so no U.S. troops had cleared that area. They were watching aircraft fly overhead all day long and by about 1600hrs in the afternoon, when we came through, they were ready. They threw everything they had into the air, an RPG; we were hit first by small arms fire. I heard metal on metal on my side of the aircraft. I swore and said a bunch of things and told Dan that we'd been hit and was leaning forward to actually hit our GPS. It's really interesting because our GPS wasn't working and I knew that, but the training takes over, so immediately I started to put down the grid coordinates, so that we could report where we had encountered enemy action. That's when the giant fireball landed in my lap and I was hit by an RPG. It basically vaporized my right leg. My left leg was kicked up into the instrument panel of the aircraft and was sheared off and it blew off most of the right arm. At the time I didn't know that I was injured. It hit all of our avionics so we couldn't talk to one another. The cockpit, at first, filled with smoke. So I got on the controls and tried to fly the aircraft. I think what happened was I would black out and wake up and then I would try to fly, black out, wake up, and try to fly, just seconds at a time. Because you have to keep flying [LAUGHTER] - - you're in the air, you can't, you know, you're the pilot, it's your responsibility to keep flying and so I did the best that I could. Dan Milberg, my good friend is the real hero in all of this. He actually landed the aircraft and then carried me to safety.

QUESTION: What kind of toll did it take on you?

TAMMY DUCKWORTH: You know, it didn't take much of an emotional toll, and it doesn't now. The only time when I was very emotional was when I was waking up in the hospital, Walter Reed, about 11 days later. I'd been put into an induced coma. They kept me sedated for this whole time and as they were reducing the medication and I was waking up I kept hearing doctors and nurses talk of a helicopter accident. And to a pilot an accident and an enemy attack and a forced landing are two very different things. I remember trying to land my aircraft, desperately trying to land my aircraft. At this point as I was waking up my husband had already told me I'd lost my legs and had already told me that some of my crewmembers had been hurt. But then I kept hearing doctors and nurses, helicopter accident, so I thought that I had crashed the aircraft, that I did not successfully fly the aircraft and that that's how I lost my leg, because I remembered us landing the aircraft and I couldn't understand why there was a crash that we'd landed it. So I thought maybe I didn't complete the landing and rolled the aircraft and that's how I lost my legs and that my crew chief, Sergeant Fierce, which is a great name for an NCO, Sergeant Fierce, was hurt and almost lost his leg. And so the emotional toll came then when I thought it was my fault, that I hadn't done my job and that I was a failure as an officer, as a Soldier, as a pilot. So that was really, really tough. Until my husband said you're going to be fine, life's going to be fine. I said, I don't care about the legs, I hurt my men. I didn't do my job. He said, no, no, you did. They showed me a picture, this one picture of my Blackhawk sitting in a field with a hole underneath my seat and a hole above my head, with a big chunk missing out of my seat. Then I saw Sergeant Fierce, as we were going into surgery, the nurses were so kind and they put our two gurneys next to each other, because I still didn't believe people, because I still thought it was my fault. I looked at him and I just started crying. I said I'm sorry, I hurt you, I didn't do my job, I'm a crappy pilot, I'm so sorry. And he's like what are you talking about? You and Dan did everything you could to land the aircraft. We're alive because you guys kept doing your jobs. And I've been fine ever since.

QUESTION: How does it happen that women came under fire?

TAMMY DUCKWORTH: Women are prohibited from holding a combat job, they are not prohibited from serving in a combat zone. That is the fine line that most of the civilian population does not understand. Women cannot be infantry, they cannot be armor, they cannot be artillerymen, but they can be medics, attached to an infantry unit, so they could be in a combat zone, but they cannot hold a combat job. Forty years ago you could keep people behind a frontline, but there are no frontlines now. So women have been dying, fighting, and getting wounded in combat right next to their male counterparts for the last 10 years. And so, this discussion is so far behind the reality of where these amazing men and women are right now. These men and women are serving next to each other, taking care of one another, getting the mission done, and in a professional way. Let them do their jobs.

QUESTION: What does the secretary's [secretary of defense] announcement mean?

TAMMY DUCKWORTH: Well it means opportunity to compete for a job. It's fantastic what the secretary did opening up combat jobs to women. What's happening now is kind of a work around. You have an infantry unit that has to go and clear a building of insurgents, for example. But they have to bring a female with them. Now she can't be infantry because women cannot hold a combat job. But she could be a cook or a medic or a supply clerk who volunteers to go and she's kicking down doors right alongside them. And they need the woman there to search female prisoners. The Marines have total engagement teams that are all women because Afghani women will not talk to men but they will talk to other women. And they can get a lot more information from women sometimes than from the male leaders in the community. So what this does is now allow women to fully compete for these positions, if you can do the job based on the job requirements, you should be able to do it. I think you're going to see a greater pool of recruits available to the military at a time when it's an all-volunteer force. If we can ever increase the pool of willing and capable people who want to do this job of defending our Nation, then we should do that and it's going to benefit our readiness. In the long term, it's going to allow women to rise through the ranks because right now we don't have women at the very top ranks of the military. It's called the Brass Ceiling because in order to become a 3 star, a 4 star, or even just to make General, a premium is given to people who have been in command of combat arms branches. Women can't have those positions, so when you go up before any evaluation board or selection board, the male resumes jump up higher because they've had those commands and women have not.

QUESTION: What's the reality of females becoming prisoners?

TAMMY DUCKWORTH: It's very real. Men get captured all of the time. I find this argument insulting, this argument that, well women may be captured, women may die. I find this insulting to men. It's as if a man's life is less valuable than a woman's life. I would hate to tell some mother that her son was more expendable than another woman's daughter. I've always known, especially being in aviation, that I had a high likelihood that I would be shot down behind enemy lines, that I would be captured, that I would be tortured, that I would be raped. These are all occupational hazards of the job I chose to do. And I was trained, you know, to escape, evade until eventual rescue. And I knew all of these dangers, and I went into my job knowing exactly what I was getting involved in. You know when you join the military, you go out to the shooting range and you fire and you practice firing your weapon and you're shooting at cut outs in the

shape of human bodies. You know you're going to combat, and you know you're going to be shooting and killing people, if you have to and that they will be shooting back at you. So trust in the professionalism of our military men and women. I think it's just as terrible that men get captured and raped, and in fact, men probably have a higher chance of getting raped when they're captured than women do, because of all that comes with it. So I think that this is an equal risk. It's a job. It's an honorable profession, it is one that I had the great privilege of being in and I was willing to sacrifice for my Nation, if that's what it took. Those things are not value judgments on me. Those are the conditions of war and I chose to be a warrior.

QUESTION: Rape.

TAMMY DUCKWORTH: I think that what's happening in the military now is the military is becoming more open and really addressing this issue and doing the best that they can. I think that rape occurs throughout American society and the military is a reflection of that. I think the military certainly needs to do a better job, but they are well on their way to improving things. However, we have to trust in the professionalism of our forces. As we get more women rising through the ranks and gaining these higher positions, you're going to see fewer of these cases because the women will be in leadership positions, and women will have higher rank and they will be able to say no, cut that out. Let's be honest, men are victims of military sexual trauma as well. I don't remember what the figure is, it's over 40% of all military sexual trauma is actually on men. So we have to be very clear that this is not acceptable in the military and that if you commit these acts, you will be prosecuted and you will be drummed out of the military and that we will protect the victims. The only way we can get there is if we hold to the standards, enforce the regulations, and make sure that we have more people rising through the ranks who then become in charge, who will adhere to this regulations.

QUESTION: Female homeless veterans.

TAMMY DUCKWORTH: I've worked on homelessness for quite a while now. It's been something of a cause for me, both for male and female homeless veterans. There's a couple of things that are going on. Women are entering into homelessness faster than men. Part of it is because once they get out of the military, where they got equal pay for equal work, and they come back into the civilian population, women now make 70 cents on the dollar. So, the female veteran's income automatically drops by 30% below a male veteran's income of equal background just by nature of being female once she leaves the military. More women are single moms than there are single dads. And so what happens is when women enter into homelessness, they tend to bring children into homelessness with them. This is compounded by the fact that not a lot of shelters accept women and children. Then, if they're dealing with Post Traumatic Stress or if they started substance abuse or self-medicating, now they have a choice that they have to make. Do I enter a treatment program and get clean and get off the streets, or do I stay on the streets with my kids? And most treatment programs do not accept children. So now they're faced with I know I need to get help, but I can't get help because if I try to get help, they'll take my kids away. It's this vicious cycle. The other issue is that a lot of homeless shelters that cater to women don't even think to ask the women coming in if they're veterans. They just assume that they're not. And yet there are all of these federal dollars that come with the benefits for female veterans that can really help lift them out of poverty, out of the situation that they're in. So, it's a shortcoming of the agencies that don't think about asking if these women are veterans,

to a lack of resources to take care of families, to the fact that when a woman leaves the military, she automatically loses 30% of her income compared to a man of equal background.

QUESTION: Why is WIMSA [Women In Military Service For America Memorial Foundation] special?

TAMMY DUCKWORTH: Because it tells America that women have served this Nation as well. I don't think people think about the fact that our daughters are on the front lines just as our sons are, and that we love this country as much as they do and that women are willing to lay down our lives as well. WIMSA really chronicles all of the women and what's great it shows the diversity of women, all the different backgrounds and ethnicities and races and educational levels and regional, it's just really amazing and it talks about some pretty funny stuff there. Have you seen one of the displays, which actually I loved. The flight suit that you wear was a one piece with a zipper that didn't quite come down far enough, so women actually, such as myself oftentimes, would dehydrate ourselves because we didn't want to use the restroom. We actually had to strip and it just took a lot more time. It wasn't so much the modesty part. When you're in a mission you don't want to slow down the mission for 5 minutes so you can pee. [LAUGHTER] while a guy can just, you know, use the Gatorade bottle in the cockpit, you're stuck. And so one of their displays is, I think it's called to Pee or Not to Pee. And it's actually talking about the flight suits, and the equipment that was not designed for women and it talks about all of these issues. It's kind of a humorous look at it, but it was very real. And actually a lot of female veterans now have urological disorders, especially those in jobs like I did, because they would purposefully dehydrate themselves.

QUESTION: What would you like people to know about the women serving today?

TAMMY DUCKWORTH: That they're an amazing cross section of this great Nation, that they come from all different backgrounds. They come from families like mine, that have a long history of service, or sometimes they're immigrants, wanting to become citizens and this is the fastest way that they can become citizens. They are, like myself, I was a Ph.D. student when I joined and yet there are people without GEDs who use their time in the military to get a GED by the time they graduate from basic training. But that at the core of everything, for every woman that serves, just like for every man, is their willingness to answer the call. This Nation says who will protect us. Who has come forward, who will leave your homes, who will leave your families and protect not just your neighbors and the people you love, but people from across the country that you will never know, who will never thank you. Who will do this? And these women said I will. And they stepped forward.

QUESTION: And they all volunteered.

TAMMY DUCKWORTH: And they volunteered to do it. That's says an amazing thing about them and it says an amazing thing about our military. I think our Nation's in good hands.

QUESTION: Anything else?

TAMMY DUCKWORTH: The mental health hotline is something I'm very proud of. It's a 24-hour telephone hotline that you can call, or this is the part I'm very proud of, it's a 24-hour chat room that you can access. The VA has actually intervened in suicides in progress in theatre because the Soldier or Marine was actually on the chat room at that moment and got the help that he or she needed. So it's really critical. I want that information out so that not just the troops

know, but that family members know. Because you never know when that little phone number or web page that you've got stuck to the front of your refrigerator is a piece of information you're going to need to tell someone here, log in here, here, call this. And they'll also help with homelessness. If they're veterans who are on the verge of becoming homelessness, an associated part of that is the homelessness helpline as well.