



NATIONAL MUSEUM
OF THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE®
Wings & Things Guest Lecture Series

America's Women Military Aviators

Good evening, everybody. It is Malachowski and that is a mouthful of a name to say. I almost didn't marry my husband because of that. I was like, man, I really like you but with a name like that ... ewwww ... you know, I'm not so sure. Luckily I was a smart woman and that actually worked out and I married the guy. Anyways, I want to thank you all for being here tonight. A special thanks to General Metcalf, everybody here at the Air Force Museum for the wonderful invitation and to my great friends, General and Mrs. Cooper, just for your friendship and for your passion for this place which is palpable and is contagious. It's nice to finally be here at this mecca, if you will, this monument to aviation and everything that's good in the Air Force. So thank you and I'd be remiss if I didn't thank Dawn Lazzarine, who for two years has been trying to coordinate my Air Force schedule to get out here today and she has been absolutely indefatigable and I appreciate that, Dawn, so thank you.

More importantly, I'm just really honored to be here today at the Air Force Museum. This is the keeper of our Air Force stories and I'm here to talk about just one story. There are hundreds of thousands of airmen in our Air Force today and there have been millions over the history of our Air Force. Each one of them has a story, and I don't believe any of those stories are any more important or less important than somebody else's. I just have a distinct privilege to be here today to share my one story. I hope what you keep in mind is that it's just one story and that I wish you could hear the story of all of our airmen, past and present, because you'd truly come to understand all that is great about our Air Force. But, you already know that because you're fans of the Air Force and you're here at the Air Force Museum. I'm just here and proud to represent our current airmen and especially to put a visible face on some of the contributions that women are making in today's Air Force.

So I'm thinking, what am I going to talk about? I want to talk about the history of women in military aviation. I started looking into that and I'm like, I'd need like a week long seminar to do that. Then I thought, I'd talk about the history of just women in Air Force aviation, you know, cut out maybe the Navy and the Army. Then I thought, ah that's not necessarily right, especially if you want to talk a little bit about Women Airforce Service Pilots since, you know, that was Army Air Forces days and Air Corps days, and you know, before the Air Force was founded, so maybe that's not right. I was getting really frustrated and I leaned on my wonderful husband, whose last name is Malachowski, and I said, "Hey, what do you think I should do?" And he goes, "Why don't you just tell it through your eyes? People want to hear your life story, how you evolved and got where you are today and share the history of women in military aviation through that."

So today, that's what I plan on doing. I only speak for myself when I say that I have a hard time whenever I bring up the fact that I'm a woman fighter pilot or that I'm a woman Thunderbird pilot because, to me, the term "woman" – I hope it's obvious, first of all. Second of all, it really doesn't do anything to talk about my character as an officer or my skill as a fighter pilot or my

contributions as a Thunderbird. I am an officer, a pilot, and I'm just proud to be an airman. So when I get asked to talk about women's contributions, sometimes I get just a little closed up about it, but I'll walk you through how I learned the importance of understanding being a woman and what this legacy is in this great Air Force.

With that said, I want to share my story, my timeline, along with all the other women who are sitting here in this audience today. I know we've got active duty, reserve and guard in the audience and a lot of veterans, so thanks to all of you.

So the fact that we're going to talk about women aviators, I'd like to say that no male pilots were harmed in the creation of this presentation. *[laughter]* And by no means am I trying to say that women pilots should be separate or anything. We walk hand in hand, we train hand in hand, we go into harm's way hand in hand – right next to our brothers in arms and we're very, very proud to do so. We've been proud to do it since World War II and we're proud to do it today.

All right, so this is to highlight a little bit about it. I'm going to talk about it for about an hour, they said. I'll try not to do it that much but more importantly, after you listen to me, I really hope you guys have some good questions because that's where a lot of the great information comes from. So I look forward to hearing from you and hearing your stories once this comes to an end.

One of the greatest things I had the opportunity to do in my career was dedicate the Air Force Memorial in October 2006. The Air Force didn't get its own memorial there in D.C. until 2006 and to be on that Thunderbird team was certainly, really very quite special. I live just a few blocks from this monument and it's something I get to see every day when I go to work in Washington, D.C., and it makes me really proud. A lot of people think different things about the three spires. There's people that say it talks about our three core values – integrity first, service before self, and excellence in all we do. I like to think of it on a personal note is what I call TLC. I've had an amazing Air Force career. The Air Force has been so good to me. The opportunities that I have been given to go into combat, to lead peers in combat, to fly as a Thunderbird, and be a White House Fellow is all because of the United States Air Force. It is an amazing organization. But I also realize I'm not the only person that could have been the first woman Thunderbird pilot or the first person to lead over Iraq on Election Day. It's all TLC – timing, luck and circumstance. And I think I'm a product of TLC, and when I look at those spires, that's kind of what I think – timing, luck and circumstance.

A lot of people like to look at it and see it as past, present and future. I think that's a pretty amazing thing, too. There's a quote up there – I was talking to a really wise man the other day and said what am I supposed to say? We were talking about legacies, and leaving a legacy personally to your family and leaving a legacy professionally, and I was talking about a specific woman and I said, "How am I supposed to feel about her, her contribution or what she did?" (We'll get to the details later.) And he said, "All you need to know is if she had not been, you would not be." And I started thinking about that in context of legacies in my personal life but also my professional life here in the Air Force. All the things I've been able to do have been because of women who came before me, because of vanguards and trailblazers who have paved the way. Each step along the way there's those of us that add our skill set and our contributions. People talk about, wow, it's full circle. You know, we had women flying in World War II and

now we've had a woman Thunderbird pilot. To me, the circle kind of comes to an end. To me it's just a continuum. If she had not been, you would not be. And today we're very lucky to have one of these lovely ladies, I believe, is in the front row today. I would love to, if you could stand up, my personal heroine, of course, in the front row, Ms. Nadine Nagle. *[applause]* Not only was she a Woman Airforce Service Pilot during World War II but she's also someone who rightfully earned the Congressional Gold Medal so we are amongst greatness here today. Miss Francis Brookings was going to join us today, but she sends her regrets, but I also wanted to put her beautiful picture up there. I find it interesting, the patch in the middle is the WASP mascot. Her name is Fifinella and she was drawn by Walt Disney during World War II specifically for these women aviators, America's first women military aviators. It's ironic, because my call sign that I was given back in 1998 is actually Fifi. The fact is, it has nothing to do with Fifinella. Truthfully, the guys gave it to me to be kind of funny because I was the girl in their squadron. But I'll tell you something – there's some sweet serendipity in the fact that my call sign is Fifi, and I'm very honored to have that.

So where does my story start and how do we come full circle on this? That's me. I was born in 1974. Looking at that young gal, I don't know if anyone would think she'd grow up and be a combat fighter pilot or she'd be a Thunderbird or a White House Fellow. That's the gal that's standing in front of you today. It's ironic because it was the very first year that the military started allowing women into pilot training. The Army and the Navy actually led the way, and those two ladies up there, Barbara Allen Rainey and Sally Murphy, were the first women to actually get their wings in the United States military.

Of course, much to my chagrin, it wouldn't be until 1977, three years later, when I was 3 – you can see the shock on my face – that the Air Force would have its first women enter pilot training, and there were actually 10 women that went through that together – strength in numbers, of course, in that first class. At the time, women could still only fly support type aircraft so tankers, transport, and of course, the trainers – you have the T-37 in the bottom lefthand corner and then, of course, the T-38. I was walking around the museum today with General Metcalf and talking to General Cooper and I was like, wow, there's a T-37 hanging in there and I realized, I guess I'm getting old because that plane's retired now so an aircraft I flew is actually retired.

But those women were good enough to train the men. They were good enough to be their instructors, they were good enough to generate pilots of the highest quality to go out there and fill those fighter cockpits. It took, also in 1977, an amazing step for the WASP because the WASP had been unceremoniously disbanded following World War II. It was in 1977 when finally Congress recognized them and gave them veteran status. When that was signed into law in 1977 – when I'm this old – the WASP were not invited to the signing ceremony, which just blows my mind. We'll talk about that a little bit more, and I will do something to fix that as we get here in the future. But this is happening when I'm three years old.

When I was five years old, Olivia Newton-John was awesome and I liked her short haircut so I took the Olivia Newton-John record to the store and had them cut my hair just like her. Young people in the audience probably don't even know who Olivia Newton-John is. I came from a middle-class family. Both my grandfathers were career Navy, my father had served briefly in the United States Army. We were a patriotic, middle-class American family, and we would go to the

Veteran's Day parades and the Fourth of July and so we went to air shows. I went there and I saw this beautiful plane flying called the F-4 Phantom. I always tell my husband he has to realize the F-4 was actually my first love because it was fast, it flew low and when it came by you could smell the jet fuel, you could see it, you could hear it, you could feel it as it shook in your chest. There is nothing more beautiful, in my opinion, than a flying F-4 Phantom. I fell in love with it that day, and I remember telling my dad when I grow up, I'm going to be a fighter pilot. My dad looked down at me and he said, "You're going to be a great fighter pilot." Little did I know in 1979, that was completely illegal and there were no women fighter pilots at the time. But you know, I was five so I figured I could make my dream come true so I stayed focused on those things.

As I got older – this is me when I'm 12. I apologize for holding a Navy F-18, but this was the type of gifts and stuff I would get for Christmas, which I guess was a little bit unusual for a young gal back in 1986. But I kept staying focused on my goals and in the '80s, of course, we had Panama and Granada and those invasions there, and women were integral parts to those different operations, obviously flying tanker and transport aircraft. All of this was going on while I was still trying to put my posters up and dream of the day that I would fly. I was in sixth grade and in my class I had a teacher – at the time I was a little disappointed – every Friday one of us would stand up and we would have to say what we wanted to be when we grew up and then we'd have to give a discussion on how we were going to get there. So I'm a couple months into the school year, I stand up and said, "My name's Nicole Ellingwood, and I'm going to be a fighter pilot." The teacher stopped me and he said, "Sit down and come back next week when you have something more realistic." All the kids started laughing and making fun of me. This was in 1986, and of course, I cried and ran home. I remember telling my dad and all I remember is my dad immediately got in the car and he left. I don't know to this day, necessarily, where he went, but I think he may have had a conversation with my teacher. So I was depressed and saddened because that's the year that I discovered women couldn't be fighter pilots. I was like, "You have got to be kidding me!"

So my parents, being awesome parents, decided to take our family on a trip to Washington, D.C., to go to the National Air and Space Museum. That was just like a kid in a candy store. I'm running all over the place and in this far, dark corner of this little bitty small display – which, Nadine, I still tell them this display is way too small – they have information on the WASP, the Women Airforce Service Pilots, from World War II. Now, who in here have not heard of the WASP? Oh good, this is a good audience. I'll spare the whole history and the whole story there, but we had over a thousand women who answered their country's call. They went through the same training; they wore military uniforms; lived on a military base, but were not afforded officer status. They were not afforded the same rank, the same pay or any of that. They were good enough, obviously, to train the men for combat, but at the time, obviously, it wasn't culturally acceptable to let women go into combat. With that said, these WASPs flew everything. They flew all the trainers and support aircraft. They flew fighters, bombers, P-51s, B-24s, you name it. People always say to me, "Are you strong enough to fly that F-16?" And I laugh because its fly by wire. I didn't have to take a B-24 and do this like these ladies did, you know, back in World War II.

Thirty-eight of those patriots gave their lives in service to their country. They were not allowed to have flags over their coffins when they were buried. And, in fact, the girls in the class would have to pool their money to ship the bodies home in pinewood coffins. They were instructor pilots. They were test pilots. They ferried aircraft. They did it all. My favorite is they towed targets. Who in their right mind would volunteer to tow targets? That is courageous stuff! They tow this banner behind their plane and let the gentlemen who were going to be fighter pilots come up and, well, shoot at them. I mean, wow, I've been shot at but not voluntarily!

So they were unceremoniously disbanded, unfortunately. The battle would rage on for veteran status and recognition. And again, as I said, in 1977 they were recognized, but again, unceremoniously. President Carter did not invite them to the White House at the time, but the point being here is I'm 12 years old and I'm like, "Of course I can be a fighter pilot. These women were flying P-51s." So it reinvigorated my hope. I knew that maybe in my 12-year-old mind I didn't understand Congress and the law, but I knew women had done it before so I knew I could do it, too. So the WASP have been with me and their legacy and all the trails that they've blazed for me since day one. That's really the point I'm trying to make here.

I stay focused. I go off to high school. I'm a part of Air Force Junior ROTC and Civil Air Patrol. I'm a huge fan of Air Force Junior ROTC, and I love the Civil Air Patrol. I cannot recommend two organizations, especially the Civil Air Patrol, more highly to young people these days and if you know any young people that are interested in aviation or interested in serving their country in a patriotic way, learning more about discipline, self confidence and team work, these are the organizations for you. Civil Air Patrol actually afforded me a scholarship when I was a sophomore in high school that paid for my flying lessons. I grew up in Las Vegas, Nevada, and I would take off out of North Las Vegas Airport, paid for by the Civil Air Patrol, when I was just a kid. That's actually me on my 16th birthday, which is the age you have to be, soloing my first aircraft. I remember flying out of North Las Vegas Airport, just down the street from Nellis Air Force Base where the F-4 Phantom was flying, where the Thunderbirds would practice, you know, every Monday and Tuesday, and I would watch them. I never thought about being a Thunderbird, but I did think about that F-4. It's amazing that I would come back home so many years later as a Thunderbird and fly right over the same field where I had my first solo as a 16-year-old girl.

I point out this gal here because she was integral to me staying focused at this time. That's us where we were about 15. Kim Campbell, she goes by KC. We've known each other since we were 12. We used to run around and tell people in the Civil Air Patrol (because we were in CAP together), we're going to be fighter pilots when we grow up and people would just laugh at us and guys would chuckle and some of the adult instructors, were like well, you know, if they let you, you'd probably be a good one, but you're probably just going to have to fly something else, which was fine. Of course; we'll fly whatever they'll let us. But she was important to be because it was nice to have another gal that thought like me. We're going to hear a little bit more about Kim Campbell later on but she's been my friend for 23 years.

So I headed off to the United States Air Force Academy for a wonderful and marvelous education, had a fabulous time there. I got myself involved in the glider program. People ask a lot – I want to learn to fly or I don't have a lot of money or can't afford big-powered engine

lessons. I say go for gliders. If you can be a great glider pilot, I think you can fly absolutely anything well. If you can learn to fly by the seat of your pants and you can understand energy management, and you can fly a coordinated turn with rudder, and the yaw string stays straight in your windshield, you can absolutely fly an F-16 or an F-15. People think I'm crazy, but you have to trust me. If you can fly a glider well, I really think you can fly anything well and I guess Captain Sully Sullenberger kind of proved that also.

While I'm there at the Academy in 1991-1992 there was a battle raging in Congress. That battle was following Desert Storm, whether the Combat Exclusion Law should be lifted on women flying fighter aircraft. Lo and behold, you have all these people fighting for and against women becoming fighter pilots. I'm watching this, of course, with bated breath as a young, aspiring second lieutenant and aspiring Air Force pilot. I remember I would walk around like, you know, I'd be a fighter pilot if they let me. By this time the F-4 Phantom had been retired and so I said I'll fly the F-15E Strike Eagle because that was its replacement. So I had all this F-15E Strike Eagle stuff up in my cadet room. I said I'm going to fly the F-15E Strike Eagle if they let me, but they won't, so I want to fly the KC-10 because I want to be able to drag the fighters into combat because fighter pilots can't do anything without tanker pilots, which is true.

So that was my goal and I walked around, probably a little bit cocky, and then all of sudden there was this day on the terrazzo my sophomore year. They made an announcement over the big loud speaker – I'll never forget it – because it was a cold day and I was walking by myself and you listen and they say: Attention in the area, attention in the area ... You're like, yeah, you hear that all the time ... but they announced that Congress had lifted the ban on women flying fighter aircraft. You would think I was totally excited but I was absolutely petrified because I realized I'd been talking smack since I was like five years old! *[laughter]* You have to go to pilot training and finish that, you've got to finish kind of high, then you've got to make it through fighter school. All of a sudden it hit me that man oh man, I hope I can do this. My friends come running over to my room. They're like Nicole, they lifted the ban. You're going to be able to fly your Strike Eagle. I'm thinking oh my gosh, I hope I just get a pilot slot. *[laughter]*

One of the coolest things happened my junior year. Jeanne "Tally" Flynn, up there in the upper left hand corner, was America's first combat fighter pilot. Ironically, she flew the F-15E Strike Eagle, which was my dream plane. She was a first lieutenant. The Air Force was sending her around kind of on their education/media tour to say: Hey this is the new way we're going. Here's our first woman combat fighter pilot and that's that. She's a phenomenal human being. She was coming and have this panel with cadets. I got to sign up and get in one of the lectures with her and I had this picture of a Strike Eagle and I was going to have her sign and all this stuff. And lo and behold, I got mono. So I was totally – yeah, mono went around like crazy at the Air Force Academy – so I was locked down and I missed Jeanne "Tally" Flynn. A few years after that I would be flying on her wing in an F-15E Strike Eagle. So I got to get her autograph and made up for it and her and I are having dinner next weekend. I'm very lucky to have her as a mentor.

I was there watching this evolve. You see where I'm going with this ... because she was, I can be. Down there, as I approached graduation, which I graduated in 1996, 95-96 was when Martha McSally was flying her A-10. She became the first woman fighter pilot to actually fly in combat. She was also the first woman to command a fighter squadron. Both of these ladies are still in the

Air Force, and they're both doing extremely well and I suspect their careers will continue for quite some time.

I get a lot of attention for being the first woman Thunderbird, and it cracks me up because this stuff has been going on since the day I was born. There are so many stories out here and I'm just highlighting a few.

While I was at the Academy, I was very blessed, a lot of serendipity. Mentors are important. And you know what? Sometimes I do think it's important to have someone who looks like you as a mentor. Mentors come in all shapes and sizes. I get that, but I was lucky to have Sue Ross. Sue Ross was my English teacher my freshman year at the Academy. For whatever reason, she took a liking to me. I told her I was going to be a fighter pilot if they let me – kind of cocky and stuff – and she started talking to me and she became my sponsor family and for four years I would hang out at her house on the weekends and talk to her and her husband, who was also an Air Force pilot. Sue Ross graduated number one out of anything she ever did. She was number one out of pilot training when women couldn't pick fighters. She was distinguished graduate out of anything and everything she did: two years promotion early to major, two years promotion early to lieutenant colonel, two years promotion early to O6 ... you get the picture? I mean, what sweet serendipity did I have a role model like this. She kept saying you need to stick to that fighter pilot training. When the ban was lifted, she was the first person that said, you know what, you've got to do this. I can't go back and do this. I wish I could. I believe in you. How can I help you stay focused and stay confident? I will tell you, when you're 18-19-20-21 years old, those ups and downs you have, especially as a young gal, it was important to have Sue Ross around.

I have that picture down there of the KC-10 refueling a B-52 because, remember, we had Desert Storm I in there, as well. Desert Storm I is what kicked off that battle in Congress whether or not we should let women fly fighters, etc. So all this was going on as I was starting to go to the Academy. I had met Sue Ross. I love this picture because Sue Ross refueled her husband during Desert Storm I who was a B-52 pilot. So yeah, maybe she wasn't in the cockpit of the B-52 but please know Granada, Panama, Desert Storm I, women were there and women have been there since World War II – side by side, hand in hand with our brother airmen. I just think that story of her refueling her husband is awesome. I didn't say it earlier but my husband is actually a Strike Eagle WSO and I married my backseater. *[laughter]* What can you say, he's the best WSO I know – ask him and he'll say I'm the best fighter pilot he knows, which is a good answer at my house.

Upon graduation, it really was a time to walk the talk. I'd been talking a lot since I was five years old and had this dream. Part of me was nervous because I thought, man if this doesn't work out at pilot training, what's going to happen? I didn't really have a backup plan. I went in there, I said I just want to graduate. I don't care what I fly. I'll be honest. That wasn't really what was in my heart. I wanted to be a fighter pilot. I remember with my class 98-03, there were like 30 of us that started. There was another gal, Kim Shelair, phenomenal. She went on to fly helicopters ... just a sweet lady. I don't know how else to put it, just one of the nicest gals you'd ever meet. We were friends at the Academy as well.

I went off to T-38s and ended up obviously flying a Strike Eagle. I remember the first day of class, they had me stand up and you introduce yourself and say what you want to fly. Everyone goes around, my name is John Smith and I'm going to fly the F-15, or my name's Billy Bob and I'm going to fly the F-16. In my heart I'm thinking I'm going to stand up and say – I was just nervous, it was really weird – what if I stand up and say I want to be a fighter pilot? Because they hadn't had gals come through the pipeline at Columbus Air Force Base that had gone into fighters yet. So I stood up and said my name's Nicole Ellingwood and I'm going to fly the F-15E Strike Eagle. And, oh boy, there were a lot of eyes rolling, you know, 21-year-old boys, 21-year-old girls in the same room. What do you think, and it's a competitive atmosphere. When I sat down I thought maybe I shouldn't have said that. Maybe I sounded too arrogant; maybe I alienated myself from my peers. But as you know, it actually worked out so that's good.

I failed my second check ride in T-37s. I don't want anyone to ever think I am some sort of perfect pilot because I was a Thunderbird. I never graduated number one out of anything I've done, ever. I'm always number two, three or four. I graduated fourth eventually out of my pilot training class. There's some stuff online that says I was like number one in my class at the Academy and number one out of pilot training. Not true. I was 124 out of the Academy and number 4 out of pilot training. I'm very proud of that.

I ended up obviously going over to the T-38. This gal also became very important to me, much in the same way that Kim Campbell was. This is my friend, Tally Parham. So I had finished T-37s and started T-38s and there was a gal that had been in T-38s. Sometimes you can fly T-37s at different bases and they bring you together for T-38 training and all this stuff. Tally was awesome. She was just a cool cat. She was a class in front of me and she was in T-38s and I thought oh my gosh, there's a girl flying T-38s. That's so cool and she was going to be a fighter pilot. She was chosen to go to pilot training by the South Carolina Air National Guard. So she enters pilot training knowing she's going to be an F-16 pilot at the very end. Where as I'm active duty, I enter pilot training hoping to rank high enough to hopefully pick a fighter if there is one when our class graduates. But she was like my hero. I followed her around as if she had been a hardened F-16 pilot for 20 years, and she was only three months in front of me. But her and I would sit I remember in Columbus, Mississippi, open a bottle of wine – 'cause we were 21 – and sit in our rocking chairs and we were very manly toward each other – yeah, we're going to be fighter pilots. But we'd share some of those stories. Sometimes the sideways look you got from some of the instructors. Remember cultural change is hard for everyone, in any evolution, in any organization. We, the women, who were going through it and I'm sure Nadine you can back me up, we had our own changes we had to go through ourselves and things we had to put up with, but it's important to note the gentlemen did, too. To just walk in and say I expect you to change instantaneously because I'm here, I have arrived, is not nice but it's also not realistic. So, yeah, there were times that some of the instructors – I had one instructor in T-38s that wouldn't fly with me. He was an old fighter pilot and he just wasn't going to change his ways, and I was just grateful for the ones that would. The vast majority would.

Where we are today, it has changed a lot. You can't walk into a fighter squadron today without seeing at least one woman, and it's really not a big deal. We've been doing it since World War II, but we've been doing it since 1993. So, it was a time of change and it was nice to have Tally Parham because we'd sit there in our rocking chairs drinking our wine and she's like, yeah these

guys are the same and mhuh, I've heard that one, too. It was kind of a fighter pilot-like friendship, and she's still my friend to this day, and I was glad I had her to get through that.

1997, 12 December, that was when I graduated from pilot training and that's when my dad pinned my wings on. As you can see I'm terribly excited, and I'm very excited because I was able to pick an F-15E Strike Eagle. So right off of pilot training I headed off to Seymour Johnson Air Force Base in North Carolina and got to fly the second plane of my dreams because, of course, the F-4 was retired. Big plane ... I showed up there, and there had been a couple of women who had flown before me in the Strike Eagle, Jeanne Flynn who we mentioned before, and another gal named Dawn Dunlop who we'll get to in a minute. They're a lot taller than me, and I remember when I walked in there was a little bit of consternation while we were going through academic training and simulator training. They wanted to know if I was tall enough to taxi the plane and use the brakes because they hadn't had somebody my height and there was this conversation about should we make her go taxi the plane around the base. I'm thinking, hey, that's just more jet time for me so whatever. It ended up not happening because there's this what'll we do and if we do it, we don't want to highlight her, you know how those things go.

So they match up pilots and WSOs. That was the first kind of thing coming in and they're like she's just too short. I'm five foot four, by the way, which is the minimum height to fly ejection seat aircraft, just so you know. So I am just again TLC – timing, luck and circumstance – I just get by by the skin of my teeth. In the back seat of the Striker you have a WSO, or weapons systems officer, and what they do is they kind of draw names out of a hat and compare records and they match up these crews. You go through all your F-15E training with the same crew so there's consistency and you learn together. If one person fails the sortie, the other person does. It's a total crew concept.

There's this big day after academics before you start flying where they have the Crewing Day, and it's like a party, and all the instructors get together and you drink a beer and do a shot with your WSO or your pilot and this is a big exciting thing. They're pulling the names out and they're like Ellingwood and Sabric, and her and I come walking up and they didn't realize that they had put two girls together. They're like, oooh, can we do that? I'll never forget the looks and just the chuckling, and they said they'd change you guys if you're uncomfortable. Her and I are like you've got to be kidding me. Of course, we're thrilled to fly together. And we were the first Air Force all-female fighter air crew. I'm very proud to share that distinction with Gina Sabric who is an amazing officer. She went on to get a whole bunch of air medals and a Distinguished Flying Cross in Operation Allied Force, which made her so distinguished they decided to send her to pilot training, and she is now an F-16 pilot and just returned recently from a tour in Iraq at Balad Air Base. I'm proud to share the Strike Eagle history.

When we went out on our solo, this is the time we first flew together. I'm pretty happy after landing. This is her back there just happy I probably didn't kill her, because at that point WSOs are kind of just along for the ride because it's just the solo part. We're not doing any tactical plan. They had news crews out there, and it's bad enough you've got to come around the pattern. You're thinking I can't mess this up and it's only your fifth or sixth flight – you solo pretty early without an instructor – so you're just not going to mess this up and there's these little media vans

at the end of the runway ... I'm like, just what I need ... there's these media vans for both of us. But it actually turned out just fine and slowly over time it became just more normal.

You can battle at each comment, or you can battle at each look, or you can speak volumes without saying a word at all, and I think her and I, that's what we just did. Were we the best crew? No. She was a better WSO than I was a pilot. I was absolutely average, once again. But I made it through.

Headed off ... been in three operational fighter squadrons. I got over 2,000 hours in the F-15 and the F-16, 200 hours of combat time. I flew in Operation Deliberate Forge over Kosovo, which is different than Allied Force, and then I was able to fly Iraqi Freedom. I also did a tour in there as an Army Liaison Officer or an ALO with the Second Infantry Division out of Camp Red Cloud in Korea. That was one of the finest assignments of my career because it taught me about close air support from a soldier's perspective and from the ground battlefield. It made me a lot better as an Air Force fighter pilot and as a close air support pilot when I returned to Iraq in 2005.

Tons of stories there like all of you I'm sure have from your combat time and your time in the service, but my most proud moment happened on the 30th of January 2005. This is us getting ready to take off just a little bit before midnight. That's Pud Wilson, my WSO, and myself and obviously we have all our combat gear on. By serendipity, we'd been selected to lead the only formation of fighter aircraft allowed over Baghdad on their historic Election Day. So here's the Air Force providing me this opportunity to be a part of history, which is amazing. If you recall at the time, we moved a lot of the American forces to the outskirts on the ground and they also removed the aircraft overhead. The idea being that they wanted to give the Iraqi people the feeling of ownership, for their own security, a feeling of ownership on their big election day.

So they allowed a two-ship over, so there was a two-ship of F-15Es, and I've told this story a thousand times and I'll try to keep it kind of short. We took off, the sun rose, we're over Baghdad, the only two-ship over Baghdad and we're relatively low. We wanted them to know we're here, but there's not a lot of us here. We carried weapons in the event something would happen. We knew where all the polling stations were, and our job was to check those polling stations and make sure there weren't any bad guys, IEDs, ready for any kind of firefight. The sun came up, and I'll be honest, the sun is just not more beautiful at sunrise than it is in the Middle East. It is huge and red and orange, and it's because of the sand and dust in the air, it's just this color that I just can't explain to you unless you see it with your own eyes. I'd been over Baghdad a lot – it's a bustling city – but that morning they'd put the curfew on driving in people. So the sun comes up and you're used to seeing people going for prayer and market and all that, and there's nothing. It is like a ghost town. Baghdad is a huge city, too. It's a ghost town. And all of a sudden, it hits the time the election polling places open, and there's nobody at the polling places.

Now this is from my soda straw perspective and do I exaggerate? Probably, slightly in my mind at the time but I'm looking around going, where are you people? I mean we've been fighting, we've lost American lives on the ground, and nobody is out there. I ended up in the northeast corner near Sadr City and we're just looking around with the sniper pod and I see this lone guy walking down the street. I'm thinking, mmm I know what you're doing. You are going to go blow up a polling station because you're by yourself, you've probably got some stuff strapped on

underneath there. I feel guilty saying that, but that was the way you have to kind of be trained to think. So we started tracking him in the target pod and low and behold, all of a sudden this lone man walking down the street started gathering people behind him. People started coming out of their houses and I kind of saw this develop in front of my own eyes and I called him the Pied Piper of Sadr City now because he was actually going to a polling station to vote. He was the first guy who said, you know what, I'm going to walk down this street and risk my life to do something that people around the world, including Americans, take for granted all too often. And I'm going to go vote.

Before that sortie ended that day with Pud and I, there were lines that seemed miles long, people standing single file, calmly, orderly, risking their lives to vote. And I thank the Air Force for letting me be a part of that. It was pretty amazing and I'll never forget it. It was a long sortie – and guys wear what's called skull caps, on their short hair they put this cloth that prevents the helmet from giving these burns and rubs and these hot spots. Well, it really doesn't work well with girl hair so after the mission, I had all these hot spots because I didn't want to come off head-set in case something happened. So this is on our way back to base and I took off my helmet and Pud was yelling at me, "What are you doing fixing your hair?" And I could hear him from the back so I turned around and he had actually taken a picture. So that was a pretty historic day for Pud Wilson and I, for the Air Force, and for the Iraqis.

Great girlfriend of mine over here, Shaka Fujimoto, my gosh, five foot four, 90 pounds soaking wet, I kid you not. She's the tiniest thing you've ever seen. She was a brand new wingman. I was on my third tour. I was a flight commander instructor pilot, and we got to go out while we were deployed to the USS *Harry Truman* ... for me, kind of a sad event. I had acted as mission commander in the recovery of two downed F-18s and brought some of their brothers home, back to the ship, so they wanted to fly me out there. They said they had room for one more. Ironically, they only had female birthing open so I said, "I guess that means my friend, Jen, is going. And so we went out there to the *Harry Truman*, which was really gracious of the Navy and what our sailors do and those aircraft carriers is unbelievable. If you ever get a chance to do it or watch it on Discovery Channel, do because it's just inspiring.

So I point here is Jen flew on my wing a couple times because they'd always put an experienced flight lead with and inexperienced wing man. I'll never forget one night we were fully loaded. We took off 80,000 pounds gross weight. We are stacked – as much as a Strike Eagle can be with air-to-ground munitions. We've got gentlemen in both our back seats. She's my wingman. It is night time, awful thunderstorms run, NBGs. The clouds are going up to 40,000 feet, the tanker pilots are awesome, trying to do the best they can to avoid this weather. You get up to 40,000 feet in a fully loaded Strike Eagle, and you literally have to go into min. afterburner in order to stay on the boom. Okay? So the gas is coming in just a little bit faster than you're putting those dinosaurs, and you're thinking, "Oh my gosh, if I don't get this gas," and it was the most difficult sortie I'd ever been on. It was one of her first, and she did awesome. You know, we took our time. Her voice, every time she keyed the mike, she sounded like she knew what she was doing. She was confident, you know.

What was funny is, the point of this story, is that other tankers will come up behind you and they'll stack in formation, you know, a mile, three miles back and they'll wait their turn. So we

had some Navy F-18s behind us or maybe some British aircraft, or whatever waiting their turn to get on the tanker, and when there are aircraft on a tanker, the code phrase for that is “Chicks in Tow” – this is not a joke. *[laughter]* So we’ve got this KC-10 pilot who happened to be a woman, two F-15E women flying and trying our darnedest in this thunderstorm to get gas and all of a sudden, these male F-18 guys check in and the KC-10 lady pilot, who I don’t know to this day, was heard, “Yeah, negative Navy one two ... hold one mile back ... Chicks in Tow” ... and she just started laughing on the radio, and then Jen and I started laughing, and our WSOs started saying, key in their mike saying, “There’s guys in this formation.” *[laughter]* So there really were chicks in tow that day, and it was just a good story and I’ll always remember Jen. She just had her second child last week, and she’s returning to fly the F-15E Strike Eagle in July next year, which I just found out Monday is the same class I’ll be in so the girls shall rejoin here soon.

So why would a fighter pilot trade in a Strike Eagle for flying loops to music? That is a fabulous question. After all THAT I had seen in Iraq – the team work, the professionalism, the American people, the true stories of heroism and hard work, and dedication and sacrifice – I thought what better way would there be to share the Air Force story. When I applied to the Thunderbirds, I had absolutely no idea – this is sincere – first of all it was my husband’s suggestion, I did it three days before the application deadline. I had no idea that they hadn’t had a woman before. It didn’t even occur to me: 1) because women had been flying since ‘93. You’ve got to be kidding me that the Air Force Thunderbirds hadn’t had a woman; and 2) it was just operations as normal. I mean, all the guys who were my age who would be on the team, they had always flown with women, too. You see what I’m saying? We didn’t think it was that big of a deal. Archivaly, I would find out I was the 15th woman over a five-year period to have applied to the team. People often say because you made it, you must have been the first one that applied. It doesn’t matter to me either way. I did the best I could, but that’s the actual numbers because people kept hounding me about that so I was the 15th woman over a five year period.

I got to fly right wing. All of these guys are phenomenal. They treated me with the utmost of respect. Every single one of them are my friends. I talk with them daily on e-mail. This poor guy, Ed Casey, he was opposing solo the first year. He now is my cubicle mate over at Air Force International Affairs so he can’t get rid of me. And I love this picture because when we would line up before a show, if you’ve ever seen it, you stand here and they announce you and they do all this hoopla stuff, but we’re always joking and talking with each other. Any time we’d line up before the mike started, this guy, the jokester, Brian Ferra, he would always say under his breath, “One of these things is not like the other, one of these things is not the same” and we had fun with it. You know, they realized that there was a lot of extra media attention but they realized it was good for the Air Force, that it was sharing 20 percent and putting a visible face on 20 percent of our Air Force. They trusted me. He was my instructor pilot, you know, Steve Horton. Scotty Zanza was my ying and yang. He was the left wing and I was the right. If we weren’t in perfect sync, the whole formation would duff. Colonel Robbins put up with me, bless his heart. He goes by Hollywood. Perfect Thunderbird One.

Most difficult thing for me to do are in these two pictures down here. Number 3 is always in the sandwich. Number 1 is always correct, no matter what he does. He’s your attitude indicator and that’s true. He’s everything because when you’re flying so close, you don’t have a concept necessarily of where the horizon is. You’re not looking through your HUD, you’re not looking at

your instruments. So I mean that jokingly and seriously. Number 2 has a little bit of movement on her hair. We're pulling at four Gs to each other. My goal is to not move as Number 2 bobbles up and down which she needs to, because if I unload that would kill my friend, Steve Horton, who I like a lot. So Number 3 is always in the middle of everything ... 1,2,3. I don't think I figured out how to fly this correctly until probably, really nicely, until the start of my second year.

So Thunderbird pilots aren't perfect. We all have our Achilles Heel, and for me, it would be the trail formation during training season, and it would be this for my entire first show season. But eventually – and I put the good pictures in there – I figured it out because these guys helped me, they trained me.

So I kind of became a role model without knowing it. The crowds and the people would just be freaked out that there was a gal flying and sometimes I'd get a little defensive. Of course, there are women flying, you know, women have been flying since 1993 in fighters. And I finally realized one day, I'm going about this all wrong. This is an opportunity to educate and, in fact, women have been flying fighters since World War II. So instead of being slightly defensive about it, I came to realize I had an opportunity right here in this moment of time to share more of an integral part of the Air Force story. And it's here where I realized that it means something for young people to see someone who looks like them succeeding. And I was very proud to be a part of that, and I am proud to be a part of that.

So I would have the privilege of coming across, for the first time in my life. a real live WASP. Since I was 12 years old, I wanted to meet these gals who kept me motivated through so much and as a Thunderbird, the WASP come out of the woodwork. They're at every air show. They love that stuff. And you know, they're fighter pilots and bomber pilots and transfer pilots and they always wore these beautiful blue scarves. You could see them on the autograph line flapping in the wind ... gorgeous, beautiful women, graceful beyond all get out and just so humble.

This is Betty Blake. Betty Blake is a great friend of mine to this day. She was the first woman to fly a fighter. She flew P-51 Mustangs. How cool is that? She flew P-51 Mustangs! If I had been a fighter pilot in World War II, I'd have wanted to fly the P-51. This is her and I meeting for the first time at my very first air show at Luke. You'll note that the two fighter pilots are both drinking. I am a beer girl. She is a gin and tonic girl. I had to stop drinking at a certain time because I'm a Thunderbird and I had to go home to get ready for the air show the next day. I was walking away from the bar and she goes, "Hey, Thunderbird. Where are you going?" I said, "Oh, Betty, I've got to get going. You know, you hold up the bar for me." She goes, "What kind of fighter pilot are you?" Bless her heart.

I just got to meet so many lovely ladies. Pearl Judd is just a doll – all of them, all of them. I had the opportunity following my Thunderbird tour to do something special as a White House Fellow. And my first month as a White House Fellow, I got asked to come speak at the WASP reunion, their final reunion in Texas. What a privilege! I thought, why did they want me to come speak and I was really nervous. I went and gave my speech and, of course, we all ended up at the bar. Literally, we were at the bar until midnight. I couldn't believe these ladies in their 80s and

early 90s are just holding it down. And they're talking about how maybe their stories had been forgotten and there was a wonderful WASP called Deanie Parish and her daughter Nancy Parish, and they have an organization called Wings Across America. WingsAcrossAmerica.org is a phenomenal website. They've worked their lives to get this website up to speed, all this information, oral history, etc. And Deanie was talking to me, feisty as ever, just a wonderful pilot, she said, "You know, Tuskegee Airmen got national recognition. I think the only way for our story to be told, which is all the WASP really care about, is that people know." They don't care about a medal. They don't care about recognition in the accolade kind of way. They care about an education for America of what they did. Because when they were disbanded, their records were signed and sealed classified, not to be reopened until the 1970s. So when the history books of World War II were being written, they were forgotten. That's why they're not in it, and that's not okay. I think all of you agree with that.

So Deanie Parish got me thinking. I went to their website, went back to this White House Fellowship. This is my class – 14 Fellows, 10 civilians, four military. We're standing here with Colin Powell ... that's me right next to Colin Powell. He's cool. And I couldn't shake what Deanie Parish said. I went to their website. They put in years, and they'd been writing letters and trying for recognition, and I realized I'm in a place to maybe make this happen. I talked to my husband about it and I tossed and turned for like a month or two and in December I started putting pen to paper and I came up with these ideas and started shopping them around. And no one was listening on Capitol Hill, and I didn't know what was wrong, and I hadn't told any of my classmates.

Colin Powell came to talk, and I was trying to be all kind of cool and said, hey big ideas, how do you take something that's a big idea and make it happen? You know, I was not being very specific and he said, "Great ideas need great champions." I realized I wasn't being very strategic in how I went about trying to garner support through the Senate or the Congress, and I hadn't been very strategic in my presentation.

Luckily, there's a great gal named Sarina James who was a McKinley consultant, and she also happened to invent voice recognition software when she was 18, but that's another story, and she worked with Mother Teresa in Calcutta. This is not a joke. She is my hero, and I wish you could all meet her. She said, "Why don't I look at your presentation?" She helps me redo it. She's very nice, she's like, "Hmm, that's a real great military briefing. You get two minutes with them and if you can't nail it in the first 30 seconds, you're done, and you also need to draft the bill. I thought, draft the bill – I don't know how to draft the bill. She goes, "You need to walk in there and in two minutes tell them why the WASPs are important and hand them the bill and say I did all the work for you, now sign it." She's like 60 pounds soaking wet and I'm like, "Yes, Sarina, yes!" She would have been a great fighter pilot.

So Sarina and I went about drafting the bill, and I spend a lot of time at the Library of Congress. I met up with some fabulous ladies, Lt. Col. Roxie Dolf, United States Army, and Ms. Angie Nappenberger, United States Navy. They've never gotten recognition or publicly applauded for anything they did with this bill and so today I'm doing it for them. Senator Hutchinson, that's her aide, and she's Senator McCulskey's aide. Senator Hutchinson and Senator McCulskey decided to co-champion the bill in a bipartisan way. All the original signers are all the women Senators.

And let's be honest. Deanie Parish and Nancy Parish had an idea. They had all the ammunition. I had the gun in the right place to shoot and these gals are the ones that, every day for 10 months, walked the halls, knocked on doors, and forced the signatures. They didn't know me. They'd never met a WASP. They just believed. And so to Roxie Dolf and Angie Nappenberger, they'll be my sisters forever. It's kind of a joint operation there, you know, Army, Air Force, Navy, just missing a Marine.

July 1, 2009. September is when I got the idea from Deanie Parish. Less than a year later we had it signed into public law, which is kind of a record. A lot of people helped out. I know there's people in this audience that helped out, calling and writing and all of that, but there's Bea Hadu, Elaine Harmon, and Loraine Rogers, myself, Wendy Wasick, Casey Sanaford, tanker pilots, Dawn Dunlop, Bobbi Doorenbos, former White House Fellows and good friends of mine. That was a wonderful day, a lot of hard work, and what's beautiful is in 1977, Bea was the head of the WASP organization and when that bill was signed into law to give them veteran status, she wasn't invited. We found out approximately one day prior that this was happening. Roxie Dolf hunted down Bea Hadu, who was flying in a powder puff derby. She still flies. And she said, "I'll be up there," and she flew her little buns up and she made it to her signing, by God, on behalf of all her sisters and that's a pretty cool thing.

But all of us there, it wasn't closing the loop like people say. It was continuum. Dawn Dunlop and Bobbi Doorenbos, who I pointed out, were White House Fellows before me. Dawn Dunlop is the first woman to fly the F-22. She's currently the vice wing commander out at Edwards Air Force Base. Bobbi Doorenbos was one of the first formations of F-16s that was scrambled on September 11 ... both still serving their country.

My friend, Kim Campbell, my best buddy since I was 12 years old ... we talked about her earlier, you saw us with our awful prom dresses and '80s hair. This is her as a bone fide combat veteran. She had been shot at over Baghdad. She lost all hydraulic power and had to fly the A-10 in manual reversion. Everything says you can't land an A-10 in manual reversion. It hadn't been done successfully before until Kim Campbell brought her plane home and survived. She received the Distinguished Flying Cross, and I'm so proud to have been her friend for 23 years. She's two below the zone to lieutenant colonel, and I'm certain I'll be pouring her coffee some day. She had a lovely little boy, but she's now back in the cockpit flying A-10s out in Arizona.

My friend Theresa Weems, who's a cubicle mate of mine. She says, "I'm just a tanker pilot." I said, Theresa, I've been there at 40,000 feet in a thunderstorm on NBGs going where no tanker pilot should ever want to come get me, and you guys have come for me. Tell me your story." Two and a half hours later, come to find out, she drug in the first flight of bombers that went into Afghanistan on October 7, 2001. She also was the primary refueling aircraft over Masari Sharif the day that it fell and the Taliban were put out. I'd say that's pretty special but even if I tell her today it's a big deal, she says it's not a big deal.

I love this gal, Julie "Jules" Grundahl ... graduates number one out of her pilot training class and takes a helicopter to be with her husband. Could have been a fighter pilot, wouldn't trade it for the world. She has one of the most noble and honorable missions – Combat Search and Rescue. In the HH-60, she's recovered plenty of sometimes deceased, sometimes live, sometimes

throwing whatever body parts you can into her helicopter so she can get those people out of there before something worse happens and the enemy takes those remains and does something bad with them for propaganda. I think the adults in the audience know what I'm talking about. And she says, "No, I don't really do anything that special." You know what's interesting? The Air Force has really bulked up helping out the Army. So she pilots these HH-60s with Army Special Forces, with Army Rangers on it, flies them over at night – three in the morning – to some compound that they're going to raid. They fast-rope out of her helicopter. Everyone's getting shot at. Remember, the Army doesn't – you know, they've adjusted their rules, and thankfully we've got women flying Apaches and all that – is there an Apache pilot here today? Hey, you're the first woman Apache pilot. Cool! *[applause]* I think you're awesome. Thanks for coming. I'd love to talk to you later. But they have these Air Force pilots who are not only doing Medivac, now they're doing this Army raid support and she's flying with Special Operations Forces and getting in harm's way all the time.

And my all-time just favorite, and I call it "changing paradigms" because I think this gal is phenomenal. Jean Havens is an F-16 pilot. She's also a cancer survivor that ended up back in the cockpit. She volunteered – no joke – to go be the first commander of the first Iraqi pilot training squadron. Now we talk about women moving into the future and continuing that bold legacy that our WASP started so many years before, I think this is the wave of the future. Here you have an American woman and an American fighter pilot volunteering a year of her life to go teach people to fly in aircraft that aren't F-16s, people who maybe don't speak the best English, and let's be honest, people who are culturally different when it comes to the roles of women. But she's earned their respect. They have no choice. She's the only instructor they get, right? And she's taught these guys to fly and she's building an emerging air force, but more importantly, she says, "Each time I fly with one of these guys, I'm chipping away, just making a little ..." Same thing, she doesn't need to make changes by speaking. Just by doing, she speaks volumes, and she's changing paradigms. She just found out she's going to be the Deputy Defense Attaché in Pakistan. I think she's amazing.

At the beginning, I said "If she had not been...you would not be." I hope that maybe makes more sense to you now, what I meant by that. You know, whether it's in your personal life or your professional life, somebody, somewhere, you're a part of something bigger than yourself. In this Air Force, I found a place. I found a place where I could make a difference. I found a place where a lot of my sisters and brothers, all of us make a difference. And the guy who was so wise at the beginning that told me this comment was my favorite WSO, my husband Paul. He's the only reason I have had the confidence and the courage to seize the opportunities that the Air Force has provided me. So I think he's one of the wisest guys.

I'm going to show you the next slide and I don't want any sadness or anything, but if she had not been, I would not be. My grandmother passed away two days ago, and she's very proud of all of us, of course. She's holding my Air Force Academy graduation picture there. She passed away very peacefully – good life, okay – but I guess this is what I'm trying to say is at the end of the day, we've really got to be grateful for our roots and where we come from and not just for the legacy you're inheriting, but for the legacy you're creating.

So, women love their country, too, and some of us choose to show it by wearing our nation's uniform, and a lot of us get to do it by flying airplanes. We're very, very, very proud to do it, and we're proud to carry on a legacy and hopefully continue building on that legacy. I guess that's what I ask all of you. What legacy are you a part of? Have you said thank you? Have you acknowledged those people, and what legacy do you want to leave? And so, with that, you guys listened to me for like an hour. I would love to hear about you and answer any questions that you might have.