

Prologue

Lights rise on center stage where there is a chair and a portable lighting apparatus. On the screen behind the chair is a live video feed image of the chair. We see the image being jostled around and hear someone talking tech in the background. Ruth shuffles in and we see her mirrored on the screen as she sets her rifle aside and shields her eyes from the glare of a light. Behind her, we see the camera focusing and zooming in on her upper torso and face.

RUTH

Is this where I'm supposed to sit, ma'am?

DOCUMENTARIAN

Yes, right there is great.

RUTH

Where does this go? (*Mimes holding up a small microphone.*)

DOCUMENTARIAN

You can clip it right on your collar there.

Ruth mimes clipping the microphone to her uniform and squirms a bit in her seat.

You comfortable enough, Ruth?

RUTH

Yeah, Fine. I guess I'm just kinda nervous about being on camera. I'm not exactly sure what I'm supposed to say...

DOCUMENTARIAN

Nerves are natural... Why don't you take a few deep breaths, close your eyes and focus on the sounds in the room around you. When you feel ready, open your eyes.

Ruth somewhat skeptically does as she's instructed.

Better?

RUTH

Sure. So... Why am I here again?

DOCUMENTARIAN

I'm producing an independently funded documentary about the experiences of women serving in combat zones.

RUTH

All right, so you want to know why I enlisted and what it's like on deployment, what I do here, that kind of thing?

DOCUMENTARIAN

Exactly. Just start by talking a little bit about who Lieutenant Ruth Jackson is... look directly into the little blue light when you speak. Great... Whenever you're ready, Ruth.

RUTH

(Waves stiffly at the camera.) Hi, there... I'm, uh...I'm Lieutenant Sarah Ruth Jackson... I go by my middle name, Ruth. I'm from the South, and I'm a patriot. *(Looking up as if asking 'Is that good? Keep going?')*

DOCUMENTARIAN

That's great. Why don't you talk a little bit about that-- Patriotism—what you mean when you use that word.

RUTH

Yes, ma'am.

DOCUMENTARIAN

Please call me Sheila.

RUTH

(Hesitates, then nods.) Sheila... Okay, so Patriotism. Well, when I say I'm a patriot, I mean I'm a Patriot... underlined and capitalized. My head's red. My belly's white and my legs are as blue as the Carolina Coast. My country is blessing and I would die for her.

DOCUMENTARIAN

That's perfect, Ruth. Keep going, just like that. Just speak freely. Say anything you feel-- You don't have to censor yourself here.

RUTH

(Incredulously, the stiffness suddenly gone.) I'm a woman in the United States Armed Forces on her second tour of duty. I'll share as much as I feel is appropriate to share; the rest I'll keep to myself.

DOCUMENTARIAN

Okay, then. No problem. Start with what you can tell me. How would you characterize your childhood?

RUTH

Traditional; Southern Bible belt.

DOCUMENTARIAN

What state?

RUTH

North Carolina.

DOCUMENTARIAN

It's beautiful there.

RUTH

The most beautiful state in the nation.

DOCUMENTARIAN

And you were raised Christian?

RUTH

Pentecostal. Church of God. When I was eight or so I got the Holy Ghost in Revival and I spoke in tongues. One of the Church Mothers interpreted. She said I was born to be a defender of the Word.

DOCUMENTARIAN

As you've grown, have your beliefs altered at all?

RUTH

God is always God. He does not change, so why should I?

DOCUMENTARIAN

So you are a fundamentalist Christian and a fierce patriot. Do you find that most of the women serving beside you share your ideals?

RUTH (*smirking slightly, pauses*)

Some of these girls are more focused on how the men's buttocks look in their fatigues than they are in protecting their Constitution or serving their God.

DOCUMENTARIAN

Are you saying you have no interest in buttocks?

RUTH

Sure, of course. I'm interested in making sure mine are covered in the event of an enemy attack, so I don't end up bleeping dead.

DOCUMENTARIAN

You can swear if you want to.

RUTH

I don't see how that helps save American lives, do you?

DOCUMENTARIAN

Ruth...What makes you mad?

RUTH

(pause) People... You know, back home. They think it would be better if we all gathered in Central Park and meditated our way to world peace. Bleeding heart liberal ignorance at it's finest. *(Lightens the mood for a moment; cracks a joke)* Do you like me yet?

DOCUMENTARIAN

Do you want me to like you?

RUTH

I don't really care, either way. You don't have to like me. I PROTECT YOUR LIFE... every day. While you're watching reality television and eating organic granola, I'm ferreting out I.E.D.s so we can safely run a convoy of supplies back to the men stationed forty miles from the nearest water source. While you drive your son to soccer practice in your Toyota Highlander, I'm showering with one bottle of water and sleeping with dirt and clay pieces raining from the sky into my ears and mouth. While you live your sheltered, tech-savvy life, I'm inhaling petrochemicals so I can protect your family... but because I am right-wing you are likely to disregard the validity of my opinions as ignorance.

DOCUMENTARIAN

Ruth, you shouldn't assume my disregard. I'm merely here as an observer of human behavior and to attempt to communicate a story by asking questions, hopefully without judgment or any particular agenda.

RUTH

Fair enough. What's next?

DOCUMENTARIAN

How about some current events. I assume you are aware of controversies surrounding the recent repeal of 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell.' How do you stand on this issue?

RUTH

(Pauses, cocks her head slightly.) DADT was working just fine. I'm sure some of the individuals I've served with entertain questionable habits in their personal lives but if they're willing to put their duty before their bedroom predilections I don't care to know. Do they have my back in the dust-filled ditches or don't they? That is what matters in war. Personally, I think they should have just left it alone.

DOCUMENTARIAN

When all of this is over, and you are back home in North Carolina... What do you visualize your life looking like? Do you see yourself settling down and having a family?

RUTH

I suppose. It is kind of hard for me to picture myself as anything other than a soldier right now. I mean, I figured I would eventually get married, but my family acts like I'm an old maid at 26. I just want to finish out my 20's in active duty, while I'm still in ideal physical condition.

DOCUMENTARIAN

Were you an only child or did you have siblings?

RUTH

I have three brothers, and most of my friends were their friends. I climbed trees, built forts and played flag football. People used to say... You know, they used to think...

DOCUMENTARIAN

They thought you were gay.

RUTH

Yeah, which was ridiculous of course. This one time at church, my parents made an appointment for me to talk to my Youth Pastor. They asked me if I had ever had *'unnatural inclinations of a physical kind toward members of my own gender.'* I was shocked. I stormed out saying, "Jesus will forgive you but I might not!" I didn't talk to my parents for a week after that. They dropped it, but still talked all the time about the kind of wedding I'd have someday, and how much they were looking forward to grandchildren. *(Rolls eyes)*

DOCUMENTARIAN

Did they support your decision to enlist?

RUTH

They were surprised, and concerned, but eventually southern pride won out and within a week the whole town threw me a huge going away party. My mother insisted on putting makeup and a skirt on me, and everyone made a fuss over how I looked. It surprised me too, actually. *(slight laugh)* Some of the men from church tried to talk to me, wantin' me to write them when I was away, but I didn't see the point of that so I gave them the wrong email address.

DOCUMENTARIAN

Well, I certainly appreciate your candor, Ruth. You're a natural, and your answers are terrific.

RUTH

Well, I'm pleased you're pleased, Sheila. Now if you all don't mind, I have to clean my gun. *(Starts to get up but stops.)*

DOCUMENTARIAN

I just have a few more questions before we finish up here.

RUTH

(Sits back down, somewhat impatiently) Alright... Five minutes more. *(Gestures to Documentarian to continue.)*

DOCUMENTARIAN

More current events. Specifically, incidences of sexual harassment and sexual

violence against women serving in the military.

RUTH

I'm afraid I don't have much information or personal insight on that subject.

DOCUMENTARIAN

If you don't mind I'd like to read you some statistics. (*Ruth nods 'go ahead'*) Based on our research, we estimate that upwards of 70% of all female military personnel are victims of some degree of sexual assault, and upwards of 90% are victims of sexual harassment.

RUTH

Those percentages can't be accurate. Where did those figures come from?

DOCUMENTARIAN

The Department of Defense.

RUTH

I'd like to see that report for myself.

DOCUMENTARIAN

Are you claiming that in six years of service you have never heard--

RUTH

I'm not saying that. I've heard some things. But you have to understand some of these women are here for the wrong reasons to begin with. They look for ways to get out, or get a husband. When the guy sleeps with her and then doesn't give her a ring she cries wolf to get back at him. It happens all the time.

DOCUMENTARIAN

Ruth, did you know Lieutenant Susan Flynn? She served with you on your tour in South Korea, Camp Red Cloud.

RUTH

(*Stiffening, suddenly suspicious.*) Yes, I knew her. Why?

DOCUMENTARIAN

We've been in contact with her mother. She said that Susan was a close friend of yours who often wrote about you in her letters. Lt. Flynn was dishonorably discharged from the 2nd Infantry Division in 2008 for violations related to *Don't*

Ask, Don't Tell.

RUTH

Lt. Susan Flynn was an excellent soldier. It made absolutely no sense for her to come out in uniform with only six months left.

DOCUMENTARIAN

Ruth, did you know she was raped?

RUTH

(Laughs incredulously) What is this, some kind of practical joke? *(Looking around the room)* Who put you up to this?

DOCUMENTARIAN

Susan was raped in South Korea two weeks before she was discharged.

RUTH

You're lying. There is no way that happened. She would have told me.

DOCUMENTARIAN

Maybe she didn't think you would believe her.

RUTH

I don't! It never happened. We were together every day. We were Battle Buddies!

DOCUMENTARIAN

Susan's mother told us that you stopped being her Battle Buddy after she sent a video letter to your personal email account. According to her, Susan asked you to delete the message after viewing it. Did you comply with the request, Ruth?

RUTH

I don't recall. What do you mean you talked to her mother? What is this and how is a private message anyone's business? May I ask what this has to do with your film?

DOCUMENTARIAN

I am only asking because it is unclear how information about Susan's sexual orientation became public knowledge shortly thereafter... In fact, her attack took place three days after the message was received.

RUTH

(Dumbfounded look.) There's no way! Susan was very capable of defending herself. She excelled in defensive tactics.

DOCUMENTARIAN

According to her account—which is right in front of me, with her handwriting and signature *(mimes holding the paper out to show Ruth)*—there were three men involved in her attack.... They told her they were going to 'fuck her straight' and threatened to kill her and make it look like friendly fire if she said anything. Despite the threats to her life, Susan reported the attack to her Commanding Officer the next day and was shortly thereafter discharged for being a homosexual.

RUTH

(Floored.) That can't be true.

DOCUMENTARIAN

(Mimes pulling out another paper from her file.) We were provided a copy of her suicide letter by her mother, Ruth. It outlines all of the events I've mentioned. It also goes into great depth about Lt. Flynn's feelings about you....

RUTH

Susan is dead?

DOCUMENTARIAN

I'm sorry... I thought you knew... *(Producing yet another paper)*. According to her death certificate, on April 12, 2009, Lieutenant Susan Flynn shot herself through the mouth with a legal handgun on the second anniversary of her reported rape....

RUTH

I don't believe you. You're fucking lying *(mimes grabbing the paper away and frantically pores over its content)*.

DOCUMENTARIAN

I'm very sorry about your friend, Ruth....

RUTH

Oh God. *(Crumples the paper and throws it as far as she can, fighting back tears.)* This

interview is over. (*Mimes ripping off the microphone and tossing it violently to the ground*). Fuck you! FUCK YOU! You DO NOT have my permission to use any of this IN YOUR FILM. Fuck.... Fuck.... Fuck... FUCK!

Ruth throws the interview chair across the room. With her hand over her mouth to suppress her vomit reflexes, Ruth grabs her rifle and staggers out.

Oh My God, forgive me. Forgive me, please forgive me.

She attempts to compose herself but is struggling to overcome an overwhelming feeling of disorganization and shock. She looks at her gun for a long moment, retches into a garbage pail, wipes her mouth and staggers offstage.