



Joe sits down with retired Air Force Colonel Merryl Tengesdal to discuss piloting the famed U2 spy plane. There are less than 1500 qualified pilots since the program's inception in 1955, and he shares her experiences as the only African American woman in its ranks. She also discusses her debut as a contestant on Season 2 of CBS' *Tough as Nails* which airs Wednesday Nights.

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## About Merryl

Colonel Merryl Tengesdal (USAF, Ret.) is the first and only African American woman to fly the United States Air Force's U-2 spy plane which is used for specialized high-altitude reconnaissance missions. A native of The Bronx, New York, Tengesdal is a graduate from the University of New Haven with a Science Degree in electrical engineering. She was one of three women to make it through the program. After Officer Candidate School commissioning, she began a career as a Naval Aviator by flying the SH-60B Seahawk Helicopter at Naval Station Mayport, Florida. During that time, she deployed on two long cruises and multiple short cruises to the Middle East, South America and the Caribbean. After a three-year sea tour in helicopters, Colonel Tengesdal went on to become a T-34C and

T-6A Instructor Pilot. After completing T-6A Instructor Training, she became one of four Navy T-6A Instructors to train Navy and Air Force students at Joint Student Undergraduate Pilot Training (JSUPT) at Moody Air Force Base, GA. Her former Navy flight instructor, Commander Ron Robinson, has said that Merryl David (maiden name) “was one of my best flight students, and it doesn’t surprise me that she’s doing so well.”

Once she completed her Navy obligation, she continued her military career by transferring over to the Air Force to fly the Lockheed U-2S Dragon Lady at Beale Air Force Base in Northern California. Tengesdal was deployed to multiple locations in support of Operations OLIVE HARVEST, ENDURING FREEDOM, IRAQI FREEDOM and HORN OF AFRICA.

While stationed at Beale AFB the first time, she held the positions of 9th Reconnaissance Wing (9th RW) Chief of Flight Safety and 9th Physiological Support Squadron Director of Operations. After her tour at Beale AFB, Tengesdal continued her career by becoming the Detachment Commander of Detachment 2 WR/ALC Palmdale, California where she was in charge of flight test and Program Depot Maintenance for the U-2S aircraft. Thereafter, Tengesdal worked at the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) and U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM) J8 staff. As Chief of Studies and Assessments Branch, she was responsible for developing the Command’s position on capability gap assessment(s), development and integration for senior-level documents submitted to the Joint Staff. Colonel Tengesdal returned to Beale and held the positions of Deputy Operations Group Commander and Inspector General, 9th RW, Beale AFB, CA.

Tengesdal’s final duty was as the Director of Inspections for The Inspector General (TIG) of the Air Force, Office of the Secretary of the Air Force, Pentagon, Washington DC. The Inspections Directorate develops, revises, coordinates, and implements Air Force inspection policy, and provides oversight and reporting of inspection programs to TIG, Chief of Staff of the Air Force, and Secretary of the Air Force on the readiness, economy, efficiency, compliance and state of discipline of the Air Force. Tengesdal is also the Executive Secretary of the Air Force Inspection System Council.

In 2017, Tengesdal retired from Air Force as a colonel.

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