

*(This is a transcript of the raw video interview footage originally available on the Web at:*

*http://www.wjla.com/news/stories/0508/520397.html*

*The interview is conducted by Arizona ABC 7/NewsChannel 8 reporter Suzanne Kennedy, and the interview subject is Kellee Twiggs, recent widow of USMC SSgt. Travis Twiggs, who died on May 14, 2008 in Arizona. The interview appears to have been conducted on Friday, May 16, 2008. The interview was transcribed on May 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>, 2008, by www.HealingCombatTrauma.com.)*

## **Transcript of Kellee Twiggs Interview**

KENNEDY: Kellee, let's talk a little bit. You and I – we've been talking – and you've said that your husband was different after his third...

TWIGGS: ...his second...

KENNEDY: ...his second tour.

TWIGGS: Yes, ma'am.

KENNEDY: How did he change?

TWIGGS: He just became very ... he couldn't sit still. He would isolate himself. He had problems sleeping. And it wasn't as bad as when he came back from the third trip, but he was just...different. You know, he wasn't...ummm...A lot of times we'd all have family night and we would camp out in the living room and watch movies with the girls and just hang out...and he couldn't sit still, and he was very... He was always movin' ... legs always twitching, and things like that.

KENNEDY: Was he angry?

TWIGGS: He would have his moments, yeah. He didn't like loud noises, and he was just, um, very irritable, I guess. And he would go from happy/aggravated, happy/aggravated – it was kinda like a light switch.

KENNEDY:He was treated for PTSD: Did he acknowledge that he had issues, post-returning from Iraq?

TWIGGS: Well, I think that it wasn't as bad. Like, he knew he had problems, or was feeling different; and then he was home for six months and left, and went back to Iraq. And then when he was there, he lost two good boys in his platoon, and when he came back, we moved up here (Stafford, VA, near Quantico, VA), and he went straight to the Naval Hospital (Bethesda) and went and talked to a doctor about it [in other conversations, she describes this person not as a doctor but as a Physician's Assistant, or PA.] And they started different medicines and the doctor [or PA] had even made a comment that this was the most severe case of PTSD she's ever seen.

KENNEDY:Tell me a little bit about that...let me take you back [to that]. What did the doctor say?

TWIGGS: It was pretty much a checklist of ten different things [about PTSD that they gave him] like if um various things [to check off if he had them as symptoms]. And he had all of them. And she said, "Well, yes, you have PTSD," and they said "What's some of the side-effects, um, how do you know? What or how are you feeling?" And he said, well, he has trouble sleeping, he was having flashbacks, very bad dreams, um, just like I said, irritable, not being able to sit still, always wanting to do some moving, and you know, always [varying quickly between] happy/sad, happy/sad, happy/sad, you know.

KENNEDY:He was treated at Bethesda [Naval Hospital]. Did he seem like he was getting any better, or did it [his PTSD symptoms] stay just as bad?

TWIGGS: Um, no, this last time that he was treated, it ... he went and he was working with the Wounded Warriors and they . he was put in charge ... he was company gunny [gunnery sergeant of the company] over them, and he had all the boys [the Wounded Warriors under his command], and he was getting back to that military [stance] where he was, you know, feeling good and working with the Marines, and then, um, the command came down and told him that he couldn't have that position, and this was just a couple weeks ago. And so, that's when it ... that's when he started [struggling] all over again. And [was] real irritable, and ...

KENNEDY:So, when he was told that he couldn't have a position...

TWIGGS: Right.

KENNEDY:...that he was currently, temporarily holding, or?

TWIGGS: Right. Yeah, that they ... I guess the higher-ups in Bethesda that were working with the Wounded Warriors, gave him that [position], and all the Marines [that he was working with], [they] *loved* him. And, you know, he was over them, and working with them, and he was getting back into that [Marine Corps mindset] ... you know, that military, um, what is the word? I guess that military feeling, and you know, all that – and, um, they came down, and told him that he couldn't have that position anymore. And when that happened, that's when he started [experiencing the PTSD symptoms] all over again, becoming irritable, not sleeping, calling ... you know, just very upset.

KENNEDY:(Interviewer coughs.) When he ... how did he change, after the loss of those two subordinates [the guys in his platoon] in his unit?

TWIGGS: Um [tone turns serious/grave]. He felt as though it was his fault. And he felt that he should have done things differently. And he just ... I believe he had a lot of guilt [over those two deaths], you know, because he didn't [she emphasizes] “bring those two boys home to their family.”

KENNEDY:Would you say that that triggered a breakdown?

TWIGGS: Um, I'm sure it had a lot to do with it, yes ma'am. I'm ... he was just ... he felt like he *failed*, and that, you know, he failed those families. And so, that's why I believe that kicked in the PTSD, even more – you know.

KENNEDY:Did he ever say, after tour two, tour three – “I don't want to go back. I'm freaked out, I feel awful ...”

TWIGGS: No, ma'am ...

KENNEDY:“... Or was he like, “this is my job, this is what I need to do.”

TWIGGS: Right. Yes, ma'am. One of the side-effects [hallmarks] of PTSD is that they'd rather be there than here. And it's like you said, I mean,

you cut my husband, he bled green. You know, he was a Marine and we ... me and the girls knew that that was Dad's job, and that's what he had to do. And, um, it's just ... they're over there, and they have adrenaline running through their bodies for seven months, you know, from the time they wake up to the time they go to sleep, and you take 'em from that and you put 'em here, and you expect 'em to just be 'normal,' and just kinda go back into the flow of things, and it's not so easy, you know. They want to go back over there and be with their boys, and make sure they're okay, and so forth.

KENNEDY: What do you think of him and his brother, you know, driving across country, and everything that followed, between whatever happened at the Grand Canyon, and the chase by police – what do you think of all that? [In other words, how do you explain that to yourself? Was that really Travis?]

TWIGGS: Well, I mean, I just ... me and my mom were talking earlier, and I just wish that I *knew* what was going [through his head], I mean, *why*, what was going through their heads? Um, I would have no ... [idea]. I would have no clue why they would do this. I mean, why T-Bo – that was his family's name [for him] – and, I don't have no idea why he would want to leave his two girls, and what made [him do that.] But I believe that they [he and his brother] had a pact [like a suicide pact], that they weren't gonna do this, and be [caught], and come out alive, if that makes any sense. And, you know, it's just bothering me that all these bad things are being said about my husband, that he's a murderer, and then he committed suicide, and I think that they probably had a pact, that look – if we get caught, you know, found – that you need to ... that this needs to be done, you know. And I don't think that my husband maliciously went out of his way to kill his brother, you know, as it's being said.

Um, our landlord actually just called, Mr. Bob, and he said that when he saw this, he started calling all the radio stations [to tell them about the Travis he knew, who was different], and he was just 'out of his mind' because Travis was the *niciest person*; he was so *nice*, and he would go out of his way to help anybody. And this was [just a huge shock to him] rather nerve-wracking when you see that they're talking so ugly about him. [Essentially, when those of us who knew him, knew him to be so different from how he was being portrayed.]

KENNEDY: So why do you think they may have gone to the Grand Canyon? Do you think they had a pact to commit suicide, or are you saying, they had a pact that if they got caught...?

TWIGGS: Yeah, I think it was a pact to ... I mean, apparently they did [have a pact to do something] because they were going to drive off in to the Grand Canyon, together [this is what police think they were doing initially, when their car got stuck, after which they carjacked the other car, driven by the tourists]. But I think that when it didn't go that way [their car apparently got hung up on a tree in the attempt, if it was that] you know, when they were driving from the border, I'm sure they were talking about you know, look, this is what needs to be done and you know, just do it.

KENNEDY: Do you think that all this [the events of the last few days] is the result of his PTSD?

TWIGGS: Yes, ma'am [looks forlorn]. Yes, ma'am.

KENNEDY: Tell me about that. Give me your thoughts.

TWIGGS: I think that he just felt like when he came and said that he needed *help*, that he was suffering from all these things [PTSD symptoms, individually], and they just kept giving him medicines, and, well, "Try this one." "Oh, this one isn't working? Well, try this one." "Oh, this isn't enough? Take more..." you know what I mean? It was all about just feeding him medicine [medication]. They sent him to the VA in West Virginia, [but] and there's a place in New Jersey, that is more one-on-one [for therapy]. They have a counselor that's there, that works with you every day, one on one. And I don't understand why he was never sent there.

KENNEDY: So you don't think that he got the right help...

TWIGGS: Right. Yes, ma'am.

KENNEDY: Tell me your thoughts. What do you think?

TWIGGS: I think that when they said that he had the most severe case [of PTSD they had ever seen], that they should have sent him straight to Lyons, New Jersey, at this PTSD clinic, or, I don't know if it's especially *for* PTSD

clinic, but it was an *option*, that we tried to get – when he left [the VA clinic in] West Virginia – him into that place.

KENNEDY: He needed more... Tell me [about] that.

TWIGGS: **He needed someone to work with him about the guilt that he felt, for “letting those two boys” – as he put it – “die”. He had to work with the guilt.** And you know I’m sure he’s seen some things over there [Afghanistan and Iraq], that were in his mind and he needed more *one-on-one*. He needed to go to that place [the treatment center], and he needed that help, and not **just taking him and sticking him in a psych ward, and feeding him medicine [medications], and doing, you know, counseling with all these other people** [there, who potentially weren’t even struggling with the same things]. **He needed more one-on-one help.** And it wasn’t about, “Take all this medicine, and you’ll feel fine.” It was like they were constantly .. as I felt they were just comatose-ing him [with the medication], to make him walk around like a zombie and making him *forget*. And that’s not ... [gonna help him]. It was *deeper*, and he needed that *help*.

KENNEDY: Do you feel like he was failed [by the system]?

TWIGGS: Yes, ma’am. Yes, ma’am. I think that he just ... I mean, for a doctor [the PA] to say, “This is the most severe case that she’s ever seen,” that should be [warning] *flags* sent up, that this boy needs *help*. This boy needs more one-on-one. Not just sending him to West Virginia, where he was there and he did – it was more of a – I guess, a social – to get your *social* skills back, or whatever. And that’s not what he needed, you know. He needed ...

KENNEDY: (Coughs off to the side.) I don’t want to cough over all that you’re saying... (cough, cough.) He served his country...

TWIGGS: Yes, ma’am...

KENNEDY: Did his country serve him?

TWIGGS: Well, I mean, when it came to the PTSD and all that, I mean, I know that ... I mean, I understand that “PTSD is new” [actually, it isn’t], “it’s this whole new thing” and “how do we treat it, what do we do?”. Um. I think that they need to do more for these boys and girls that are coming

back with [PTSD], that are having these issues. They need to just work with them... They need to figure out what's going on. You know, at Quantico, they have a P.A. [physician's assistant] that "knows all about PTSD." It's not even a *doctor*, you know. And that's...that's a *problem*. I mean, the Marine Corps' *HUGE*. I think we could find a *doctor* [hurt sarcasm] that would be more helpful and more one-on-one with these people, you know?!

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KENNEDY: How do you want your husband to be remembered? I mean, I would think, given the circumstances, you don't want him remembered for what happened over the last couple days...

TWIGGS: Right.

KENNEDY: I mean...

TWIGGS: I want him to be remembered as he *was*, as a great *man*. *A great husband, a great father, a great Marine*. You know? I want him to be ... Anybody that knew him, knows that he was just... he had a very big heart. And he wanted to help everybody. And he loved his country, and he loved his family, and he loved the Marine Corps. And I just think that they just ... they just didn't give him the help that he needed, you know? Whoofph. (Big exhale.)

KENNEDY: Is there anything else you want to say? Did the PTSD take his life? I mean, is that essentially what led him to ... [the events of the last few days]?

TWIGGS: I think it just drove him crazy, if that makes sense. You know? Like, he just felt like he's been asking for help and help and help – and it was never *given*. And I think that he felt like he *failed*. He failed his country, he failed his boys in Iraq, he failed the Marine Corps – and then, he was slowly starting to fail his family. I don't know if you saw that he wrote that article in the *Marine Corps Gazette* [in January, 2008], and it was like he was failing us, because he couldn't be there *for* us, because of the PTSD. And so he was asking for help, to deal with this, and he wasn't getting it [the help that he needed]. And I think that's why the boys [Travis and his brother] went and did what they did.

KENNEDY: Do you miss him?

TWIGGS: Oh, God, YES. Very much so. Very much so. (Looks down.) I miss his hands – he had big hands. And I miss his smell – his “neck sugar.” Yes, ma’am. (Breaks down, weeping.)

KENNEDY: Is there anything else you want us to know, or anything else you want to say?

TWIGGS: (Cries, tries to compose herself.) I want them to be known as the [people they were.] He was a great person. He was a good person. He was such a good person. (Weeps.) And I just hate to hear ... I hate hearing all these bad things about him, because it was not *him* ... [he wasn’t like that.] (Sniffs.) And I guess that’s it [that’s all I have to say.]

I don’t know, mom, can you think of anything I should say? Am I leaving anything out?

(Voice off-camera: “I think that’s it.”)

KENNEDY: I just want you to feel like you had an opportunity to say what you wanted to say...

TWIGGS: (She nods.)

KENNEDY: Is there anything else you wanted to say?

TWIGGS: (Wipes her tears.) No, ma’am, I don’t believe so.

KENNEDY: Do you think they need to fight harder for soldiers with PTSD?

TWIGGS: Oh, yeah, definitely. I mean, they need to do more research and figure out what’s going on, and ... it’s not all about “just give ‘em medicine” – it’s not that, at all. I mean, I don’t understand why they wouldn’t send him to New Jer... to Lyons, New Jersey, and give him the help that he needed. You know? I mean, they just kept sticking him in psych wards, and then when he’s in the psych ward, they just give him medicine and make him “blhhhhh” (she imitates someone being really out of it) and walk around in comatose-dom. And that’s not helping. You know? It just makes him forget about it [what he’s seen, what he’s struggling with]. You know, and

then when they wean him off the medicines, it's still there [the PTSD, what he was struggling with].

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