

A Matter of Conscience

part 3: status in the military

by Craig Douglas

As the American Army recruiting commercial goes, "you can be all you can be in the army," and "the army needs a few good men." What do these statements refer to? What does it mean to be a good man? What does it mean to be all you can be? To answer these questions one might turn to the events of the last year during what has become known as the Tail-Hook Scandal, when some military officers sexually and physically abused their female counterparts. Maybe the male officers in this event were trying to be all they could be! Or maybe these officers were just a few good men who got a little carried away! Some military officials would like us to believe the latter. The military of the past tried to make itself look like a macho-male dominated organization which did not allow for any form of tolerance let alone allowing for the induction of women, blacks and other minority groups. I wonder if this macho characteristic was just a cover. Maybe the macho-male dominated military felt threatened by the idea that not only they could defend their country. This threat seemed to make them believe that society would no longer believe that these men were macho beasts any more but were just as vulnerable as the rest of society. How would these macho individuals fill their inflated ego? The lessons of time have shown all of us that other members of society can play an equal, if not, more beneficial role in the military than their macho-male counterparts. Some military officials would have us believe that homosexuals threaten this establishment due to the fact that they can be blackmailed. I wonder what the military officials were talking about when they came up with this rotting turkey! If anyone in society can keep a secret I'm sure it would be a homosexual. For most of their lives these individuals had to keep secret their true individuality, in most cases hiding it from everyone. This black-mailing technique would have less validity, anyway, if the military of the United States dropped its ban on Homosexuals in the military.

Dealing with the issue of Homosexuals in the military may help us deal with the prejudices which still exist in our society when dealing with our individuality and qualities which make us different from each other. For the past few months we have been introduced to

the fight for rights of gays and lesbians in the army in the United States. Little else is talked about in the media when it comes to this issue. Even in Canada, which had dropped its ban in October of 1992, it would seem that there is still a battle going on in the minds of Canadian people when it comes to dealing with this issue. To help us look at the United States situation more objectively we should understand the environment for homosexuals in the military in other countries. Taken from *The Advocate: The National Gay And Lesbian Newsmagazine* March 9, 1993:

"Gays March In Many Other Armies"

The United States and Britain are almost alone among developed nations in banning the gays and lesbians from the military service, but even in more accepting nations, homosexuals often lack career parity with other soldiers, according to reports that emerged the first week in February amid debate on lifting the U.S. ban.

The Netherlands, which stopped asking soldiers about their sexual orientation in 1974, is the most liberal. "We want full acceptance now rather than mere tolerance," said army lieutenant colonel Rene Holtel, head of the 4,500 member Foundation of Homosexuals in the Dutch Armed Forces, which receives an annual defense ministry grant.

Britain and Russia remain least accepting. Homosexuality was decriminalized in Britain's military in June but still is banned. In Russia's armed forces, it remains a criminal offense punishable by five years' incarceration.

Conditions in most nations, though, mirror those in Germany: No regulation bars gays and lesbians. Still, the Gay Association wrote Defense Minister Volker Ruehe on Jan. 24 charging that the 12,000 homosexuals in the army had almost no chance of promotion. Israel's military doesn't have a ban either, but former senior army official Uzi Even said Feb. 2 that he was forced out after disclosing that he is gay. "It was like an iron curtain went down," he said.

Canadian Armed Forces spokesman Capt. Marc Rouleau said Gays are being integrated smoothly just three months after the last restrictions on them were lifted. "There have been no indications of any physical abuse," he said.

Some important events in history dealing with the issue of Homosexuals in the military;
1943 The Pentagon initiates its ban on gay and lesbian service.

1948 President Harry S. Truman issues an executive order ending racial segregation in the military.

1950 Congress creates the Uniform Code of Military Justice, a series of regulations applying to all military personnel. The code prohibits both homosexual and heterosexual oral and anal sex.

1957 Federal courts rule that military personnel may appeal military-court decisions to the civil courts. For the first time, people charged under the ban on gays and lesbians can take their cases to the civil courts.

1966 Gay groups stage the first demonstrations protesting the treatment of gays and lesbians in the armed forces.

1974 Sgt. Leonard Matlovich, a Vietnam War hero, is discharged from the Air Force under the ban on gay and lesbian service personnel. Matlovich challenges his discharge in court. The case garners intense media attention, and a federal judge eventually orders the Air Force to pay Matlovich \$160,000 in back pay.

1976 Army reserve drill sergeant Miriam BenShalom is denied reenlistment after announcement of her lesbianism at a news conference.

1982 The Reagan administration affirms its intentions to strictly enforce the ban on gay and lesbian service personnel. The Pentagon adopts new, strict guidelines intended to keep gays and lesbians out of the armed forces.

1984 The Supreme Court rules that Army sergeant Perry Watkins cannot be discharged because his commanders had known he was gay throughout his 14-year military career but repeatedly allowed him to reenlist.

1987 Joseph Steffan is expelled from the U.S. Naval Academy.

1989 Rep. Gerry Studds (D-Mass.) publicizes a Pentagon report that concludes that gay and lesbian service personnel do not threaten national security.

1990 ROTC cadet James Holobaugh is discharged from the corps and ordered to repay his \$25,000 scholarship. 1992 Margarette Cammermeyer comes out to her commanding officer and is discharged from the Washington