



THE FORWARD OBSERVER

THE NATIONAL NEWSLETTER OF AMERICAN VETERANS FOR EQUAL RIGHTS, INC.
VOLUME 4 ISSUE 3 APRIL 2010

Operation Golden Eagle GLBVA/AVER Celebrates 20th Anniversary in Washington, D.C.



March on Washington 1993



March on Washington 2000



Meeting of GLBVA Veterans in Washington, D.C. 1990



Senate Subcommittee Hearing 1990



Jim Darby, Don MacIver, Miriam Ben Shalom D.C. arrest 1993



Jim Darby carried away by cops, March on Washington 1993

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For the latest information about forming chapters, refer to the AVER national Web site: www.aver.us. Select Chapters under About AVER.

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FROM THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

I am always open to hearing from our members. My email address is president@aver.us and my phone number is 678 596-1311. I do still work for a living, and I may not be able to get back to you right away, but I will do my best to respond to each one of you who takes the time to contact me.

On behalf of the National Board I want to thank each of you for your continued support and wish you all a happy spring. The end of discrimination against LGBT service members will not happen by chance. It will happen because each one of us has worked very hard to defeat the prejudice that threatens to undermine our nation's freedom at its very core: in those who have personally sworn to uphold it. Each one of you has had a part in the coming victory, and our nation owes you a deep gratitude for your continued service in the defense of our nation's liberty.

Respectfully,
Danny Ingram, National President
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FROM THE MANAGING EDITOR

Greetings

Working on the history of GLBVA/AVER (refer to "A Brief History of GLBVA/AVER" on page 5) brought back so many memories and so many faces. But first I have to say that I started with a ten page history, hoping to reduce it to several pages. I didn't expect it to be six "type-written" pages. And that includes leaving out a great deal of information. I hope that you enjoy reminiscing about all those "happy warriors" aka gay veterans.

I apologize for all of those names and photos left out, and will try to include them in future issues.

And, yes, I know every one of those veterans in the centerfold, and yes, they are all gay and have all faithfully and honorably served their country. Many of them, like me, were drafted, and could have easily avoided serving. But we didn't. And this country is a better place because of our service.

We are all looking forward to the many Pride events that are coming up soon. Please remember to get some photos to help document our existence for future generations.

Respectfully,
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Operation Golden Eagle: American Veterans For Equal Rights Honors WWII Vets

Washington D. C. This June, American Veterans for Equal Rights (AVER) celebrates 20 years of working for LGBT equality in the U.S. Armed Forces with Operation Golden Eagle, a series of events planned in conjunction with Capitol Pride in Washington, D.C., the city where AVER was born in 1990. AVER members from across America will gather in the nation's capitol June 11th–13th to commemorate the founding of AVER, the oldest nation-wide LGBT veterans service organization in the United States. The focus of the celebration will be LGBT World War II veterans, those men and women of the “greatest generation” who defeated the forces of tyranny in the largest conflict the world has ever known and returned home to the United States to found the modern gay rights movement.

The anniversary event has been named Operation Golden Eagle in honor of the “golden years” of these first generation LGBT Americans, many of whom wore on their uniforms the famous golden eagle patch (nicknamed the “ruptured duck”) to distinguish their status as returning WWII veterans.

A main event of Operation Golden Eagle will be a wreath-placing ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery scheduled for 1:35 p.m. on Friday afternoon, June 11th. The wreath-placing party will include AVER National President Danny Ingram, and three prominent gay World War II veterans: Dr. John J. McNeill, Dr. Frank Kameny, and Mr. Jack Strouss.

Dr. McNeill, who served under General George S. Patton, was captured at the Battle of the Bulge, and imprisoned in a Nazi POW camp. He received the Purple Heart.

After he returned to the U.S., Dr.

McNeill was ordained a priest in the Society of Jesus.

Following the publication of his book *The Church and the Homosexual*, a landmark work on gay and lesbian spirituality, Dr. McNeill came under the scrutiny of the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, then headed by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) who ordered him to remain silent. After refusing a further order from Ratzinger in 1988 to cease all ministry to LGBT people, Father McNeill was expelled from the Society of Jesus after 40 years of service.

Dr. McNeill will be signing books at the Dignity Center located near the Eastern Market Metro Station, from 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 p.m. on Saturday, June 12th. AVER members are encouraged to come and meet Dr. McNeill, one of our most distinguished members, and help support his trip to Washington for Operation Golden Eagle, which he is attending at his own expense.

Harvard-educated astronomer Frank Kameny returned from fighting Nazis in WWII only to be dismissed from his position as an astronomer in the Army Map Service in 1957 because of his homosexuality. Dr. Kameny went on to form the Mattachine Society of Washington, D.C., one of the earliest and most influential gay rights organizations of the modern gay movement.

In 1971, Dr. Kameny ran for Congress from Washington D.C. as the first openly gay candidate for national office. He was also one of the founders of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) and helped found the Gay Rights National Lobby from which the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) evolved.

Mr. Jack Strouss of Atlanta, also served under General George S. Patton in the European Theater of WWII. Mr. Strouss had his transport ship torpedoed from beneath him in the English Channel and was rescued by a Free French cruiser. He went on to fight in the final drive to Germany and served

in the Army of Occupation following the Nazi surrender. When Strouss returned home to the U.S. he took a job working for the U.S. Department of Civil Service only to be fired during the infamous McCarthy era due to his homosexuality.

On Saturday evening, June 12th, AVER will lead the annual Washington Pride Parade as the event's official color guard. World War II dignitaries will ride in designated vehicles in the parade and all LGBT veterans will be invited to join the color guard. The AVER color guard will carry a special vintage silk 48 star World War II era national flag and a World War II Memorial flag in honor of Operation Golden Eagle.

On Sunday AVER will staff a “recruiting station” at D.C.'s Capitol Pride Festival to recruit new members for the AVER Capitol City Chapter, which the national organization hopes to build as one of its most prominent chapters. Members of AVER from all over the nation will help staff the booth throughout the hours of the Pride Festival.

And to top off Operation Golden Eagle, members of AVER will present a Taps ceremony from the main stage of Capitol Pride with “all hands present.” All WWII veterans will be invited onto the stage to be recognized for their service. The Taps ceremony will remember all LGBT service members who have given their lives in the defense of our nation's freedom, especially Major Alan G. Rogers, who was the first known gay combat casualty in modern U.S. history when he was killed by an improvised explosive device while leading a patrol in Baghdad, Iraq, on January 27, 2008. Rogers served as an officer in the Washington, D.C. Chapter of American Veterans for Equal Rights.

The following are planned events yet to be scheduled:

AVER will conduct a wreath-placing ceremony at the grave site

of Technical Sergeant Leonard Matlovich who was one of the first and most prominent gay service members to challenge the military's ban on gay service in the 1970s. A recipient of both the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart, Matlovich's grave marker bears the famous words WHEN I WAS IN THE MILITARY THEY GAVE ME A MEDAL FOR KILLING TWO MEN AND A DISCHARGE FOR LOVING ONE. Matlovich rests in Washington's Congressional Cemetery where AVER hopes to establish a national LGBT war memorial in the future. This event is not yet scheduled.

AVER hopes to sponsor a Saturday-morning press event at the World War II Memorial featuring our three distinguished VIPs and other LGBT WWII veterans to speak on the injustice of the "don't ask, don't tell" issue and use their gravitas to help place a final nail in the coffin of the military's ban on gay service members. To encourage WWII veterans to attend the press event, AVER is offering free lifetime membership to every WWII veteran who participates. AVER hopes this will be the largest gathering of openly LGBT WWII veterans in U.S. history and one of the most powerful collective voices ever to target the injustice of the gay ban.

What You Can Do to Help

Here is what you can do to help: Sponsor a WWII veteran. In order to make Operation Golden Eagle a success AVER is in need of LGBT World War II veterans to attend the event. Anyone interested in participating in June or helping sponsor a WWII veteran should contact AVER President Danny Ingram at president@aver.us. Help is also needed with logistical support including providing local transportation, creating an advance team to help with permits and locations, and raising funds.

Come to Washington and participate. AVER is hoping to make

Operation Golden Eagle a tremendous experience for LGBT veterans of all ages and from all eras. For more information continue to watch for news releases on the AVER national website at www.aver.us.

Most of all, AVER is about honoring service, and we hope to take the opportunity in June to say thank you to all LGBT veterans for your service and your dedication to helping end the injustice of the ban. Please join us in Washington, D.C., the weekend of June 11th-13th as we honor our first generation and we celebrate the camaraderie unique to those of us who have served in the armed forces. There is an organization for you as an LGBT veteran, and it is AVER. Come see what we are about and consider membership in the only LGBT veterans service organization recognized by the VA.

—Danny Ingram, National President

A Brief History of GLBVA/AVER

GLBVA/AVER will be celebrating its 20th anniversary in May of this year. Thanks to one of the founders, Staff Sergeant Miriam Ben-Shalom, and to the first editor of *The Forward Observer*, Clifford Krapf, most of the historical records are intact. These historical archives are stored in Chicago. All copies of *The Forward Observer* have also been placed in the Chicago History Museum and in the Gerber/Hart Library in Chicago.

In February of 1990, six veterans who were attending the NGLTF Creating Change Conference in Minneapolis met and discussed forming a national veterans organization. All six veterans were officers of their local LGBT veterans groups. They agreed to meet later in the year in Washington, D. C.

On Thursday, May 17, 1990, the National Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Veterans of America (GLBVA) was founded in Washington, D. C, by the lesbian veteran activist and former U. S. Army

Staff Sergeant Miriam Ben-Shalom, along with the assistance of four gay veterans and one bisexual veteran.

Those co-founder military veterans included: Former U. S. Navy Ensign Jim Woodward, President, San Diego Veterans Association; Bill Lake, first officer, Veterans Council for Equal Rights and Equality (C.A.R.E.), Los Angeles, California; Ken Huntington (aka Ron Rasmussen, Jr.), President, Texas Gay Veterans Association; former Navy Chief Petty Officer Chuck Schoen, public affairs officer representing Veterans C.A.R.E Redwood Empire, California, and the predominantly gay, Alexander Hamilton Post 448 of the American Legion, San Francisco, California; and bisexual U.S. Army veteran Cliff Arnesen, President, New England Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Veterans, Boston, Massachusetts. GLBVA was officially incorporated in the State of Wisconsin.

Staff Sergeant Miriam Ben-Shalom, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, was elected the first President. Groundwork was laid for the creation of a national constitution and by-laws. Miriam traveled the country creating new chapters. By 1992 GLBVA had 44 chapters across the country.

Reading through some of the earlier issues of *The Forward Observer* brings back memories of the dangerous and troubled times that these early pioneers faced. This was the era that we now call B.C. (Before Clinton). Gays serving in the military were victims of murders, witch hunts, violence and "suicides." When President-elect Clinton announced that he was going to lift the ban and let gays serve openly, the proverbial poop hit the fan. (Deja vu?)

It is incumbent upon us to remember and to honor all those brave service members who had the courage and determination to create the first national LGBT veterans organization in this country. In this 20th anniversary issue we will simply try to highlight some of the outstanding heroes of the movement, bring to light some of the battles

that they fought, and also mention some of the politicians who were the heroes and villains of the day.

Some highlights from the past:

1990

Local LGBT veterans across the country join together to form GLBVA. Miriam Ben-Shalom is elected first president. Cliff Krapf is the first editor of *The Forward Observer*. Six chapters are formed. Each year new voices and new LGBT veterans appear in the news and the movement. Their names will simply be added at the end of each year.

1991

Operation Old Chestnut—in October gay veterans marched 40 miles from Fort Meade to the White House to protest military discrimination against LGBT service members. Congresswoman Barbara Boxer (D-CA) holds press conference to protest gay related shootings at Fort Irwin, California. The PERSEREC Report and the Crittenden Report on Gays in the Military are issued. New voices and veterans in the fight include Karen Stupski, Dusty Pruitt, Mel Dahl, Tammy Baldwin, Alan Stephens and Perry Watkins. Perry later becomes famous for winning his battle against the military after a 16-year struggle, and also for his role in the film *Sis*. Hugh Lunde, Bill McGarry, Michele Parisi and Ed Westrick. Twelve chapters have been started.

1992

The Navy begins “witch hunts.” GLBVA responds with Operation Save a Sailor. Congresswoman Patricia Schroeder (D-CO) introduces the Military Freedom Act. Colonel Margarethe Cammermeyer is removed from the military after 28 years as a military nurse. Twenty-eight colleges and universities bar military recruiters from their campuses for discrimination against gays. Dick Cheney becomes Secretary of Defense. There is a huge push to sup-

port President-elect Clinton. National preparations for a second March on Washington in 1993 begin. The GLBVA National Conference is held in Baltimore, Maryland. A march on a local Marine base is held. Congressman Gerry Studds (D-MA), Congressman Barney Frank (D-MA), Gregg Monsma, Keith Meinhold, Tanya Domi, Sam Gallegos, Jim Antonevich, Glen Morin, John Artoux, Lynn Strawbridge, Iver Nielsen, Kirt Grubbs, Jim Holobaugh, Tracy Thorne, Gene Barfield, Bill Beaman and Adam Gettinger-Brizuela. 27 chapters.

1993

Cliff Arnesen, Ron Rasmussen and Chuck Schoen go to Washington to give oral testimony at the U.S. House Subcommittee on Oversight and Veterans Affairs. Two major events in 1993 truly energize the gay veterans movement. The first is the second historic March on Washington. More than a million LGBT people descend on the nation's capital. Several members of GLBVA are arrested protesting the DADT policy. GLBT veterans participated in numerous events in Washington D.C. Author Randy Shilts is there to gather material for his book *Conduct Unbecoming*. Later in the year Seaman Allen Schindler is murdered by shipmates in Japan. The Navy tries to cover up the incident, but political activist Michael Petrelis blows the whistle, and escorts Dorothy Hadjys, Allen's mother, to Japan for the investigation. Forty-four chapters.

1994

In February 1994, GLBVA holds its convention in San Antonio, Texas. New officers elected are Nancy Russell, Lloyd Haver, Steve Webb and Gene Barfield. LGBT veterans also travel to New York City for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Stonewall Riots. German Lopez and Cale Lehman from the New York chapter lead the march.

1995

The annual convention is held in West Hollywood, California. Ed Westrick and the L.A. Chapter host the event. The previous officers were re-elected except that Jim Darby became the new Vice President. Two notable guests were Herb King, famous (or infamous) for inventing K-Rations and Sergeant Johnnie Phelps, General Eisenhower's jeep driver in Germany. Sergeant Phelps' story is in *Conduct Unbecoming*. Many veterans travel to Washington D.C. to meet with Congressional leaders. Veterans also meet with Jeff Levy, Director of White House National AIDS Policy; Richard Socarides, Deputy Assistant to the President; and Elizabeth Birch, Executive Director of HRC. Some veterans attend The Joiner Conference for Minority Veterans. Dane Hays, Ken Osborn, Mack Thomas III, Bob Hoy, Tere Frederickson, Dallas Culvahouse, Ken Warnock, John Stokes, James Apedaile, Luke Martinez, Tom Swann, Bud Robbins, Zoe Dunning and Cari Bausone.

1996

No elections are held, but conference is called for San Antonio. Members then converge on Washington, D.C. for the Joiner Conference and to continue lobbying as many members of Congress as possible. Terry Helvey, Allen Schindler's convicted murderer is eligible for parole. GLBVA chapters from around the country send faxes to Fort Leavenworth demanding that he not be released. The parole board calls Mrs. Hadjys asking her to do what she can to stop the faxes. Their machines are overwhelmed. George Buse, Ed Kassing, Max Woerner, Don MacIver, Dirk Selland, Paul Thomasson, Lee Miller and Jodi Hoenninger

1997

The 1997 Convention is held in Corpus Christi, Texas, aboard the U.S.S.
(continued on page 18)

Repealing “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”: End is Near, but Battle Continues

I arrived last Thursday in Washington, D.C. making my annual pilgrimage to the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network Lobby Days. I’ve participated in every single SLDN Lobby Days since the beginning. But somehow, this year was different.

I arrived energized and optimistic because both houses of Congress have bills that would effectively repeal “don’t ask, don’t tell.”

When I landed at Dulles International, I caught up on all the news of Lieutenant Dan Choi and his protest actions at the foot of the White House. To my knowledge, there hasn’t been such a form of protest by a veteran or active duty service member since the Vietnam War. Needless to say, Lieutenant Choi’s actions caught the attention of the global LGBT community. I noticed Facebook status updates of pride and happiness for Lieutenant Choi’s actions. He was hailed as a hero by many who did not serve in the military. (I personally know that.) Those who did serve or were on active duty remained silent or were concerned by his actions. Specifically they were concerned about what the outcome would be and what members of Congress would think.

Furthermore, there was concern that Lieutenant Choi subjected himself to disciplinary action according to the Uniform Code of Military Justice. Regardless, Lieutenant Choi gained international attention for the repeal of “don’t ask, don’t tell” and, really, only time will tell.

Friday was the annual SLDN Lobby Days event. Being from California, I am fortunate to be represented in Congress by Senators Barbara Boxer and Diane Feinstein and by Representative Susan Davis. All of them have co-sponsored the Military Readiness Enhancement

Act (MREA) in their respective chambers. It was exciting to hear that the MREA has 191 co-sponsors of the House version and 26 co-sponsors of the Senate version.

Since my representatives are already co-sponsors, I was a lobby day team captain. As team captain, I escorted my group through the congressional halls and visited representatives from North Carolina, Florida and Ohio.

Our first scheduled visit was with Florida Republican Congresswoman Ginny Brown-Waite. We met with her chief of staff. I’ll refer to him as Pete. Pete was a very colorful young man. I couldn’t help noticing Pete’s body language. He sat across from me with his legs and arms crossed. I sensed some hostility. After some short introductions, Pete stated that the congresswoman is firm on her beliefs and will not change her mind on supporting the bill.

Then, the fireworks began. With aggression in his voice, Pete shared that he was gay and a Republican. He believes that it is the Democrats’ fault that the law exists and he was tired of the Republicans taking heat for not supporting the repeal. It was unfortunate that the remainder of our conversation was focused on political rhetoric surround-

ing the issue.

Never once did we hear anything from Pete about his concerns for his fellow Americans, or for any gay American service member. Perhaps the Washington political machine has consumed his life so much that he’s now unable to demonstrate any personal concern for those who defend his rights. Of course, our meeting ended with no support from the congresswoman. But it was a fresh reminder that, even within the LGBT community, there is a vast political spectrum.

The remaining visits gave us the opportunity to talk with non-committed Democrats. I’m pleased to report that the efforts made by some of my fellow lobbyists gained a few more co-sponsors.

On a different note, with all the visits that were made, one common message was clear to us: “The Congressperson is busy with the health care issue.” It is my belief (and hope) that, now that health care reform has been passed, Congress and the President can focus on repealing “don’t ask, don’t tell.”

On Saturday, Servicemembers United hosted a DADT strategy forum. Several veterans and supporters were present, including nationally recognized

(continued on page 9)





Staff Sergeant Miriam Ben-Shalom, Hero of the Military Rights Movement

Miriam Ben-Shalom is one of the great heroes of the LGBT military rights movement.

It has been my pleasure to confer with her on a number of occasions, and it is my honor to help guide the organization she founded 20 years ago.

Miriam was one of the first to draw fire in the movement for military freedom, and she has the scars to prove it. She's been beaten back again and again, sometimes by her own community, which is always much more painful and debilitating. But her courage and perseverance continue to bring her back to the fight for justice and equality.

Miriam is a great inspiration to me and to many other LGBT veterans. Knowing her has made me even more determined to carry on the crucial mission of American Veterans for Equal Rights. I am pleased to have her continued support as we carry our mission into its third decade and begin our transition into a veterans service organization.

It is with profound and heartfelt conviction that on the 20th anniversary of the organization she founded, I express on the behalf of the officers and the membership of American Veterans for Equal Rights, our sincere and well deserved gratitude to Miriam Ben-Shalom for her dedication and service to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender service members of the United States military.

—Danny Ingram, *National President*

May 11 Lobbying by Vets Focuses on Repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"

Washington, D.C. Servicemembers United and the Human Rights Campaign announced expanded plans for a national Veterans Lobby Day to be held on May 10-11, 2010 in Washington, D.C., as Congress begins to focus on the defense authorization bill, which is the likely vehicle for "don't ask, don't tell" repeal. The lobby day, which will bring hundreds of gay and lesbian veterans—including members of AVER—and their straight veteran allies from around the nation to Capitol Hill, is

expected to be the largest lobbying event on "don't ask, don't tell" to date."

"The next thirty days are going to be absolutely critical in the push for repeal of the 'don't ask, don't tell' law this year," said Alexander Nicholson, a former U.S. Army interrogator discharged under 'don't ask, don't tell' and the current executive director of Servicemembers United. "We need every supportive veteran who is able to come to Washington to join us here on May 10th and 11th for this final push, and we are thrilled to have such an unprecedented coalition of pro-repeal and pro-military organizations joining us in this effort."

"This broad coalition coming together to urge Congress to end 'don't ask, don't tell' represents a powerful voice for repeal this year," said Jarrod Chlapowski, the military spokesperson for the Human Rights Campaign. "A wide majority of Americans, including Democrats, Republicans and independents recognize this discriminatory law hurts our national security and fails to live up to our values. The time to end 'don't ask, don't tell' is now." Nearly 14,000 Americans have been abruptly fired from the U.S. military because of the "don't ask, don't tell" law—including more than 800 mission-critical specialists. Servicemembers United and HRC have been jointly engaged in extensive field and grassroots organizing work across the country to lay the groundwork for repeal through initiatives like the Voices of Honor Tour, which was organized in key states to highlight the costs of "don't ask, don't tell" and promote the voices of gay and straight veterans who support repeal. Iraq War veteran Representative Patrick Murphy (D-PA) and Senator Joe Lieberman, (I-CT) are championing this legislative repeal effort on Capitol Hill.

The number of partner organizations continues to grow. Please visit the Veterans Lobby Day Web site to find out how to get involved.
www.VeteransLobbyDay.org

Repealing "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"

(continued from page 7)

Pam Spaulding of the popular Pam's House Blend blog. The group discussed the two bills in Congress, the strategies of the national organizations that support the repeal and creating a common message for those who support the repeal. At the forum, it was mentioned that preparations are underway for a strong push for DADT lobbying, a rally and march are set for May 11, 2010 in Washington, D. C.

Organizations like HRC and SLDN are among the many sponsors of the rally and are encouraging their supporters and the LGBT community to participate.

The way I see it, we've passed the halfway mark for support of the repeal, but still a lot of work needs to be done by the Senate.

The main focus is the Senate Armed Services Committee, where seven ranking members are teetering toward supporting the bill. These Senators are from the Midwest and South. I was surprised to see that Senator Jim Webb has not fully committed to the Senate bill. He has voiced support for the repeal, so I hope that with influence from his constituents and colleagues he will make the right decision. Everyone must understand this battle will take a turn for the worse if the Senate bill doesn't make it through the committee.

I would encourage everyone to contact all members of the Senate Armed Services Committee and ask them to support the bill. Also, take some time to thank those who already have.

The highlight of my trip was going to the annual SLDN dinner at the beautiful National Building Museum. Close to 1,000 people were in attendance. Among the attendees was political commentator and DADT repeal supporter, MSNBC's Rachel Maddow. I was fortunate to meet her and tell her about Senator Sam Nunn's visit to my ship, the USS John F. Kennedy. I appreciated that she took the time to listen to me

and to pose for a couple of photos with me.

I was there when Ms. Maddow met up with MREA House bill sponsor Congressman Patrick Murphy, and felt excited to hear her invite the congressman to appear on her show.

Speaking of Congressman Murphy, I was fortunate to speak with him after his excellent and invigorating speech. I thanked him for his support and offered to help and support him in any way that I could.

After I introduced Congressman Murphy to an active duty Navy friend of mine, I was impressed by how the congressman paid full attention and listened to every word my friend said. Congressman Murphy thanked my friend for his service and gave him a business card and invited him to communicate with him any time.

I also noticed that Congressman Murphy had a certain charisma, much like that of a young Jack Kennedy. Who knows, I may have met a future President of the United States.

As always, I left The District of Columbia invigorated and excited. I realize that in order to succeed with the repeal of "don't ask, don't tell," the entire GLBT community has to speak with one voice. We have to set aside our differences and focus on our priorities. As for me, a veteran, "don't ask, don't tell" will always be my issue. The only reason I say this is because I served our country in silence. I am proud of my service. I know what it is like to have my freedoms compromised. My focus is to speak for those who continue to serve in silence, defending the freedoms we often take for granted. We must always remember that they cannot fight for their freedoms. It is our responsibility to do that for them. But one thing is clear, we can't stop the fight until the President signs the repeal.

So, our work is not finished. Please write to President Obama and ask him to take the leadership in getting congress to pass this bill. To those of

you who did not serve in the military: Demonstrate your patriotism and help in this fight. To my fellow veteran and active duty brothers and sisters: Keep fighting. We're here to see this through. We are so close. Don't give up hope. And, above all, we are proud of your service.

—Ben Gomez, San Diego Chapter President

AVER Responds to Changes to Enforcement of DADT Announced by Defense Department

The following press release was issued by the national president of the American Veterans for Equal Rights on Friday, March 26, 2010:

In a press conference on Thursday, March 25th, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen outlined immediate changes to the enforcement and investigation of "don't ask, don't tell" violations. Among the changes are that third party outings will require testimony under oath, and statements made to clergy, medical or mental health clinicians, public-health officials, lawyers, and security-clearance investigators will be inadmissible. The decision to discharge must now be made by a general or flag officer. These changes, with legal caveats, are described as being "fairer and more appropriate," while the Pentagon proceeds with its research on "how to implement an end to DADT."

American Veterans for Equal Rights, the nation's only veterans service organization officially recognized by the Department of Veterans Affairs as providing support to gay troops, believes that, while any changes in policy enforcement that inhibit DADT discharges are welcome, the fact remains

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Do you swear to uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States of America?



Just a few of the members of GLBVA/AVER who answered the call when their country needed them.



AVER Responds

(continued from page 9)

that patriotic American volunteers are still being discharged and will continue to be discharged due to homosexuality until the DADT law is fully repealed.

Danny Ingram, National President of AVER said, "America's security and the lives of American soldiers will continue to be jeopardized by the removal of highly qualified military personnel with skills crucial in the war against terror. So long as discharges continue, the national defense of the United States suffers from a costly policy that accomplishes nothing."

What these changes significantly demonstrate is that the Pentagon has now decided that known gay service members may in fact continue to serve, simply depending on how their sexual orientation came to be known. In other words, it seems clear that the ability to serve, based on sexual orientation and previously presumed issues of morale and unit cohesion, is no longer considered relevant by the Pentagon. If those issues were still relevant, it would not matter how the military authorities find out that a service member is gay. Hence, AVER urges an immediate end to the entire DADT policy to allow service members to serve openly and proudly regardless of their sexual orientation, which the Pentagon has now tacitly acknowledged has no relevance.

"The Pentagon has in fact been ignoring the DADT policy for years when it suited them," said Ingram. "When a deployed gay soldier is outed or becomes known as gay by some other means, the military will wait until that soldier's unit returns home to the United States before discharging him or her. If the military really thought that having an openly gay soldier in a unit damaged morale and cohesion, they would get the soldier out of the unit as quickly as possible. But they don't, because they know the truth, and the truth is that having openly gay or lesbian service members in the military

does not damage the morale or effectiveness of the unit. Removing qualified personnel, which places an added burden on the remaining members of the unit team, is what damages morale. Maintaining the integrity of the unit and valuing all of its diverse members builds morale and cohesion. This is a fact well known to the Pentagon."

American Veterans for Equal Rights is the nationwide veterans service organization which serves the needs of LGBT veterans, service members and reservists since 1990. AVER is the nation's only VSO officially recognized by the Department of Veterans Affairs providing support to gay military personnel, veterans, and their families.

—Denny Meyer, Marie Bohusch, and
Danny Ingram

Caring for LGBT Troops and Vets: AVER's Future as a Veterans Service Organization

Theresa Seay joined the U.S. Women's Army Corps in 1952 at the age of 18 and was honorably discharged following three years of service. Years later, Theresa approached the Department of Veterans Affairs for services but discovered that there was no record of her DD214, so she was denied eligibility.

Almost 60 years following her service, Theresa met retired U.S. Air Force Reserve Major Beth Settle, who is now employed at the Department of Veterans Affairs. Theresa met Beth at an AVER Georgia social event at the home of Alejandro Lopez, then vice president and now president of the Georgia AVER Chapter. Beth was able to get a veterans' service representative to successfully research Theresa's records and soon she was signed up for full service with the VA. This included a very supportive veterans service officer with

the Georgia Department of Veterans Services. Recently Theresa suffered a minor stroke and was admitted to the VA Medical Center in Decatur, Georgia, where she received "exceptional care," much better than she felt she would have received through Medicare.

Theresa is now mostly recovered, and is looking forward to her first appointment at the VA's Women's Wellness Clinic, which has all women doctors and nurses. Theresa is on her way to a new life chapter of proactive health care. She is very happy she met Beth at an AVER event. AVER was there for her. Happy ending.

Theresa's story is certainly a simple example of AVER's potential as a veterans service organization, but it does demonstrate the need for a dedicated watchdog to help LGBT service members and troops get the benefits to which they are entitled in a safe, supportive, and respectful environment.

It appears that the end of the ban on gay and lesbian service members is near, and AVER has certainly had a successful role in that long, costly battle. But the end of the ban will not mean the end of discrimination against



Theresa Seay joined the WACs in 1952, but it wasn't until she became a member of AVER that she gained access to the VA.

LGBT service members when it comes to promotions, honors, and especially benefits, where it is a particularly difficult struggle for any veteran to get services from an organization where the same people who determine benefits also hold a tight fist on the budget. It will be easy for some veterans to “fall through the cracks,” and someone will need to stand watch for LGBT veterans to make sure they do not suffer life-altering discrimination.

I believe that AVER, as the only LGBT veterans service organization recognized by the VA, can fill that role better than any other group. We should be wary of any LGBT organization that suddenly appears on the scene offering to take care of veterans as a means of raising money for other purposes. AVER has been around the block and we have stayed on the front lines throughout the long fight.

Since AVER is an organization composed of veterans, I believe AVER is the one organization that can faithfully claim that “we will have your back” when it comes to caring for LGBT veterans.

It will be a challenge. But I believe that we can meet that challenge as we have met the challenge of unjust policies perpetrated against our people by forces less concerned with defending freedom than with maintaining prejudice.

I look forward to that challenge, and I look forward to working with all of you as together we transition AVER into an effective veterans service organization to care for our LGBT patriots who have faithfully done their duty to care for our freedom.

—Danny Ingram, National President

“Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” is Antiquated

[The following column was written especially for the San Antonio Express-News and first appeared on its Web site MySanAntonio.com on 03/25/10.]

Re: “Leave the military alone” (Letters, March 18) by Major General L.W. “Svede” Svendsen Jr.:

I have great respect for every veteran, and in America everyone is entitled to an opinion. However, Svendsen retired from the Air Force in 1980 and much has changed since then. The American people, many other general officers, both active and retired, and politicians who had a role in implementing “don’t ask, don’t tell” believe the policy should be repealed.

Svendsen postulates if the policy is repealed it will result in mediocrity in the military. What results in mediocrity is poor leadership and lowering recruiting standards to accept those with a criminal history or lower test scores to fill recruiting quotas while rejecting highly qualified gay recruits simply because they are gay. It makes no sense.

In a commentary for the Washington Post last June 22, Gen. John M. Shalikashvili, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff from 1993 to 1997, said: “Enforcement of the ban was suspended without problems during the Persian Gulf War and there were no reports of angry departures. A majority of U.S. service members say they know or believe someone in their unit is gay, according to a 2006 Zogby poll, and most of those who know openly gay peers report no detriment to morale or cohesion.” Studies “found no correlation between a unit’s readiness and whether known gays serve in it,” Shalikashvili added.

This issue is more often than not argued on emotional rather than rational bases. Our national policy is not well served when we make decisions based on the way we feel rather than the facts of the case. In this instance national policy is about to change. It will change because people are ready for the change

and because it makes good human resource sense. Shalikashvili also pointed out: “More than three-quarters of the [American] public favors the change.”

Our military is stretched thin and thousands of patriotic men and women, who happen to be gay, are ready, willing and able to serve their country. In fact, a UCLA study found “more than 40,000 recruits might join if the ban is lifted.”

Gays have served in our military since the Revolutionary War. Ben Franklin brought a Prussian, Baron Frederick Wilhelm von Steuben, to America to train the Continental Army. Colonel Alexander Hamilton said of Steuben: “Tis unquestionably to his efforts we are indebted for the introduction of discipline to the Army.”

In his book, *Conduct Unbecoming*, Randy Shilts reported Von Steuben was a gay man who wrote regulations for the “Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States.” It is ironic that today there are those who argue that gays undermine good order and discipline. The evidence is to the contrary where there is proper leadership.

General Shalikashvili ended his piece by making the point, “Let the evidence do the talking.” That seems to me to be very good advice.

—Lieutenant Colonel Nancy A. Russell, U.S. Army, retired. Lieutenant Colonel Russell is a past president of American Veterans for Equal Rights.

Definition of Aver aver (ə vur')

1. To declare to be true; state positively; affirm
2. Law to state or declare formally; assert; allege

Etymology: ME averren < OFr averer, to confirm < L ad-, to + verus, true.

Chapter Reports

Albuquerque

The New Mexico Bataan Chapter of AVER in Albuquerque has come up with some unique ideas to attract members. Not only do we have potluck dinners, but we also have movie nights. Members are encouraged to bring their favorite snacks for the movie, and also to bring something substantial for the potluck dinner.

After the February business meeting members had the opportunity to see either *Yossi and Jagger*, an award winning film about two lovers in the Israeli Defense Force, or *A Glimpse of Hell*, a 2002 true story about the U.S. Navy investigation of the explosion on board the battleship U.S.S. Iowa.

Several members of the Bataan chapter traveled to Washington, D.C., to participate in the Freedom to Serve Rally on the grounds of the U.S. Capitol, followed by lobbying the New Mexico members of Congress to support the Military Readiness Enhancement Act which will end the DADT policy.

At the April meeting officer elections were held. There was also a presentation of *Duty to Honor for Our Country*. A new online presentation will include AVER at the Equality Across America March in Washington and color guard presentations for the Veterans Day Parade and also for the Albuquerque Pride Parade, which will be held on June 12th. The AVER color guard will again lead the Albuquerque Pride Parade.

The online presentation has been given at both a local young men's group, and at the Rainbow Vision retirement community in Santa Fe.

The Santa Fe Pride Parade will be held on Sunday, June 26th and AVER is considering being a part of that parade.

The dates for the Bataan chapter vary, but they alternate between board

meetings and general meetings. Most meetings are held on weekends at Steve Loomis' home. More information is available from Steve at:

Steve Loomis, President
Bataan Chapter of AVER
P.O. Box 30625

Albuquerque, NM 87190
505 301 1737

Bataan-AVER@swcp.com

—Steve Loomis, President, Bataan Chapter

Chicago Chapter



Greetings.

So much news about the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy this year has generated a great deal of interest in the Chicago Chapter of AVER. Since January, photojournalists, Kristin Heinichen, Erica Heather Wright, Erica Demarest and Lisa Rosenthal have all attended our local meetings and photographed most of our members. We are not lacking for publicity.

Kristin Heinichen, from Ohio University has also photographed LGBT veterans in Ohio, Indiana and California, and will probably be visiting other members of AVER. This is part of her Master's Project.

Chicago AVER was also contacted by the local VETART Project, and our Treasurer, Travis, has works on display at several op-shops.

In February members participated in the Salute to African-American Veterans, and in March we participated in the Salute to Women in Defense of the Nation.

In March Chicago AVER donated \$100 to the victims of the Haitian earthquake via the organization American Red Cross.

In March several members attended the Equality Across America Seminar which was held in Chicago. Lieutenant Dan Choi was the veteran speaker at this event.

We are extremely happy to report that both of our Illinois Senators, Senator Roland Burris and Senator Dick Durbin are on board in the U.S. Senate to end the DADT policy.

We are gearing up for two events in April and May. In April there will be an Illinois Warriors Summit at the University of Illinois at Chicago, and AVER will be one of the more than 100 veterans groups that will be participating.

Plans are underway to attend the 20th Anniversary of GLBVA/AVER in Washington, D.C., in June.

The Chicago Chapter meets the first Thursday of every month at 7:00 p.m. at the Center on Halsted.

Jim Darby, President
Chicago Chapter, AVER
P.O. Box 29317
Chicago, IL 60629
773 752 0058

jamesdarby@aol.com
www.averchicago.org

—Jim Darby, President, Chicago Chapter

Florida



The Florida Gold Coast Chapter met at the Pride Park Community Center in Wilton Manors on Tuesday, April 13th for a special program. The AVER color guard participated in a ceremony presenting a banner to the Ninninger Veterans State Nursing Home on March 17th.

The Florida Gold Coast Chapter of AVER, and members of the Broward County Veterans Service Council organized a Veterans entry in Fort Lauderdale.

dale's St. Patrick's Day Parade. After the parade, these organizations were notified by the events coordinator for the City of Fort Lauderdale that they had won best non-profit entry in the parade.

In an outreach effort, AVER volunteers contacted Veterans Service Council members and organized an entry that included different groups which were led in the parade by bag piper Mike Albetta. The contingent included wheelchair bound veterans from the State of Florida, residents of the Ninninger Nursing Home, volunteers from the Marine and Air Force ROTC groups who escorted the Ninninger veterans, followed by Mrs. Sandy Steen, former Mayor of Wilton Manors, who was accompanied by two volunteers from the organization American Moms for Soldiers with banners.

AVER followed these organizations with its own color guard, several members carrying the service flags from the different branches of the military, a Korean War combat jeep carrying an AVER WWII veteran, and two cars from the Flaming Auto Group South Antique Car Club carrying AVER veterans with POW flags.

The day was an exceptionally beautiful one, but most exciting were the crowds that cheered all the veteran service groups as they passed by. The



welcoming cheers brought tears to the eyes of many. "Especially to the eyes of those vets from the Viet Nam era who were not as warmly welcomed home by some anti-war protesters," noted one participant.

AVER and friends extend a special note of appreciation to both Cindi Hutchinson and Terry Rynard for their commitment and dedicated effort in helping to coordinate the overall outreach effort which made this Saint Patrick's Day celebration a memorable one.

The Florida Gold Coast Chapter meets the second Tuesday of every month at 7:00 p.m. at the Community Center—Pride Campus, 2040 N. Dixie Highway, Wilton Manors. Call 954 537 3582 or:

President Mark LaFontaine
P.O. Box 11247
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33339
954 537 3582
www.aver-fgc.us

—Andy Eddy, Secretary, Florida Gold Coast Chapter.

Georgia Chapter



AVER Chapter President Alejandro Lopez served in the United States Army from 1984 to 1989. He was a Personnel Administration Specialist (75B). Alex attended Airborne School and graduated as a parachutist. All of his military service was stateside which included Fort Jackson, South Carolina, Fort Benjamin Harris, Indiana, Fort Benning, Georgia and finally a permanent duty station at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

Before joining the military, Alex grew up as a migrant farm worker in



Texas. Job experiences included factory work, food service, retail and corporate America.

Alex is looking forward to helping his fellow veterans and assisting in leading the fight against the "don't ask, don't tell" policy for a better future for our GLBT service members.

Our first quarter meeting was held at Keswick Park Community Building in Chamblee, Georgia on Saturday, February 20 at 1:00 p.m. Special guests included Danny Ingram, President of AVER, and Jeff Cleghorn from the SLDN Board of Directors.

On March 13 AVER held a Meet and Greet and Eat social mixer on Clairmont Road at the 57th Fighter Squadron Group Restaurant in Atlanta at 1830 hours. Plans are in the works for a variety of upcoming events for the Georgia chapter.

"I fight for your freedom and I am gay." For more information about the Georgia Chapter, please contact:

President Alex Lopez
P.O. Box 2115
Decatur, GA 30031
404 429 1316
www.avergeorgia.org

—Alex Lopez, President, Georgia Chapter

Hawaii Chapter

The Hawaii Chapter of AVER is based in Honolulu. It is currently in the

process of major changes as you can see from its Web page.

Its mission is to provide support services and promote advocacy on behalf of LGBT veterans and service members in Hawaii. Its membership is diverse, including veteran and active duty service members, both gay and straight, as well as military partners and civilian allies. All have unique experiences with discrimination, and all have a passion for establishing equality within the culture of the military. AVER-Hawaii currently meets monthly, usually at the Center.

For more information about the Hawaii Chapter, contact:

President Sean Smith
Hawaii Chapter, AVER
2092 Kuhio Avenue #1705
Honolulu, HI 96815
808 497 0650
simashang@yahoo.com
www.averhawaii.com

—Sean Smith, President, Hawaii Chapter

Indiana

Scott Spychala has been working hard to establish the first Indianapolis Chapter of AVER. Several veterans have signed on, and Scott is working with HRC and several other local groups.

Kristin Heinichen, photojournalist from Ohio University drove to Indianapolis to interview Scott about his work to help repeal DADT. I want to



Scott Spychala

note here, that Kristin's photography is quite remarkable, and we will be including more in future issues of *The Forward Observer*.

There is still no name for the future chapter, but Scott can be contacted at: Scott Spychala, President
Indiana Chapter, AVER
317 890 8834
scottmspy@aol.com

New York



The New York Chapter of AVER has been working to support the efforts of Senator Kirsten Gillibrand of New York to advocate the repeal of "don't ask, don't tell." The recent Senate Armed Services Committee hearings on DADT were at the urging of Senator Gillibrand, and she is a co-sponsor of the Senate bill to repeal DADT. AVERNY has also met with our U.S. representative, Anthony Weiner, from the New York Congressional delegation to thank him for supporting repeal and to urge him to continue proactive advocacy.

In late March, AVERNY had a table at the huge GLBT Expo at New York City's Javits Convention Center where 20,000 LGBT visitors from around the U.S. visit our booth to find out about DADT repeal and AVER.

Our March meeting featured a visit by openly gay Australian

Navy Chief Petty Officer Stuart O'Brien on his third trip to the U.S. to support efforts to repeal DADT. Australian Defense Force Chief O'Brien has volunteered for and served two tours in Iraq. He is an Admiral's staff writer and regularly provides consultation and advocacy to the Australian Defense Force regarding improved benefits for LGBT service members.

AVERNY has worked with the producers of *Yank! A WWII Love Story*, an off-Broadway, New-York-City-1940's-style musical play about the love between two gay soldiers serving in the South Pacific during WWII.

AVERNY spoke on a panel, following a performance of the play, about the history of gays in the military and the progress of repealing DADT.

Monthly meeting dates and times vary. For more information, refer to the following Web site:

www.averny.tripod.com

—Denny Meyer, President, AVERNY

North Carolina

AVER of NC is still in formation and is being spearheaded by Cecilio Orta, a veteran of the United States Army. And what a great job Cecilio is doing. He already has a fantastic Web page on line: www.avernc.org.

We are so impressed with the amount of work that he has already done. The resources on his Web page include a number of major veterans service organizations, nine North Carolina military bases and a documents and information section for helping veterans to take advantage of all the local services that are available.

There is also an extensive section on civic engagement with quarterly service projects.

We are so proud of how much progress he has made in such a short time.

Cecilio can be contacted at:
Cecilio Orta
6701 Fishers Farm Lane

Unit D1,
Charlotte, NC 28277
info@avernc.org
704 900 2905
www.avernc.org

Ohio

After many months of dormancy, NEOAVER is finally getting back into gear. During April, we were invited to speak at a Cleveland State GLASA meeting and at a NEOHA meeting. NEOHA is the North East Ohio Alliance for the LGBT pride and gay/lesbian and straight alliance student groups of Cleveland State University, Cuyahoga Community College, Baldwin Wallace College, Oberlin College, Case Western Reserve University, John Carroll University, and Youngstown State University. During the NEOHA meeting, we were able to get the new AVER postcards out to those groups that attended, and students agreed to make sure they are visibly available in both the pride/GSA and veterans service offices on their respective campuses.

Many of our older veterans have expressed concerns about already being stretched too thinly between many LGBT organizations, and so we are currently placing our focus on LGBT veterans who may be using Chapter 30 or 31 VA education benefits, reservists, and guardsmen, as well as our "service age" straight allies who are not yet spread so thinly. Our activities are still fairly informal right now, but we plan to have regularly scheduled monthly meetings back on the calendar by September. NEOAVER has established a Facebook Page to help facilitate communication and activity within the region.

Web Report

The AVER IT and Web Development Committee is still in need of skilled assistance. James Apedaile has to temporarily reduce his time commitment to tend to a work-related relocation. Marie Bohusch also has to reduce her time

commitment significantly until further notice, unfortunately due to serious family health issues. Anyone wishing to join the committee should be very familiar with HTML scripting. Familiarity with graphic design, MySQL database administration, and PHP scripting and modification will help reduce ramp-up time.

The AVER Facebook page was established on June 15, 2009. It just hit the milestone of 200 fans on January 28, 2010. As of April 28, 2010, we have 354 fans—a 77% increase in only three months. If you have a Facebook account, please become a fan of AVER by clicking the Like button, and share a link to our page with all of your own Facebook friends. We currently use the Facebook page for all outside news links, and for brief AVER-news bits. For press releases and longer news items, please see the main AVER web site at <http://www.aver.us>.

The AVER Cafepress store has been updated with items specifically for the AVER 20th Anniversary. New items include t-shirts, mugs, BBQ aprons, and more. The anniversary items are priced slightly higher than our normal items. Proceeds will help pay for transportation of our WWII VIPs and fees related to Operation Golden Eagle, AVER's 20th Anniversary celebration and wreath laying events which will coincide with Capital Pride 2010 in Washington, D.C.

AVER has an affiliation with GoodSearch. GoodSearch is driven by the Yahoo! search engine, and makes a donation to AVER for every valid search. Via GoodShop, a small percentage of every purchase is automatically donated to AVER. A custom GoodSearch/GoodShop toolbar can be downloaded for Internet Explorer and Firefox users. To use either service, click on the link on the AVER national web site, or go directly to <http://www.goodsearch.com> and enter AVER into the organization form box below the question "Who do you GoodSearch

for?" To date, a total of \$14.34 has been raised for AVER via this service.

Palm Springs

The Palm Springs Chapter continues rolling along under the great leadership of Mel Tips who founded the chapter 18 years ago.

Monthly meetings are held at the Golden Rainbow Center on Tahquitz Canyon Way on the second Friday of every month at 1:00 in the afternoon. Unlike most other chapters, the Palm Springs veterans have a potluck with the main course put together by Mel. Mel, incidentally, was a cook in the Navy for 20 years so he can make all those delicacies like liver and onions and chipped beef on toast.

The veterans are great supporters of the Desert AIDS Project and most are planning to attend the Sunshine Ladies (Les Dames du Soleil) event May 9th to show their support.

The Palm Springs Chapter, like most other chapters, is getting ready for both the Memorial Day Parade and the Pride Parade. They always have a great turnout, and usually receive wild applause when they march down Palm Canyon Drive. I can attest to it because the Chicago veterans participated twice in their parade.

Mel Tips
P.O. Box 5012
Palm springs, CA 92263-5012
760 329 6560
miltips@aol.com

Puget Sound Chapter



The Puget Sound Chapter color guard is one of the sharpest groups in the country. Photos from last year's Pride Parade are up on their Web site. Marching down the parade route in Seattle has to be one of the most
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History

(continued from page 6)

Lexington. President Nancy Russell steps down as President and becomes vice president. She is honored for five years of building GLBVA, getting the 501(c) 3 status, and testifying before Congress. Other new officers elected are Jim Darby, Mel Tips and Jim Donovan. The featured speaker at the convention is Captain Warren Dinges, who spent 5 months in Fort Leavenworth prison for being gay. The new Board issues The Lexington Letter. Copies are sent to the President, the Vice-president, the Secretary of Defense, the Director of Veterans Affairs, and all 538 members of Congress. A letter was also sent to Secretary of Defense William Cohen asking for a meeting with the officers of GLBVA. The meeting is granted with Assistant Secretary of Defense Frederick Pang. On May 5, 1997 Terry Tobias, Mel Tips, Cliff Arnesen, Edward Clayton and Jim Darby walk in the front door of the Pentagon. A number of issues are covered with ending the DADT policy as the primary goal. The film *Any Mother's Son: The Dorothy Hadjys's Story*, is produced.

1998

The Convention is held in Denver. Captain Michele Benecke from SLDN, and Colonel Edward Modesto are the featured speakers. The Denver Declaration is sent out to the President and all members of Congress. Officers travel to Washington, D.C. to meet with the leaders of HRC, and NGLTF, and to attend the Joiner Conference. They lobby anyone they can. Angie Colella, Dave Schneider, Jack Harris, David Buck, Mark Repass and Wally Straughn.

1999

The National Convention was held in Palm Springs, California. Featured speaker is Colonel Cliff Anchor. Besides being a rabid activist he is also the lover of both Tom Dooley and Sergeant

Leonard Matlovich. The Palm Springs Letter is sent to the President and all members of Congress. The GLBVA contingent to Washington D.C. for The Joiner Conference is the largest ever, outnumbering all the other minority veterans groups. Frank Gaxiola, Mary Schmeltzer, Jean Albright, Wes Giles, Bridget Wilson, Vernon Copy Berg, Archie Wilson, and Daryl James.

2000

Annual Conference is held in Las Vegas. The Las Vegas Letter is mailed again to the President and all members of Congress. Members travel to Washington, D.C. to participate in the Millennium March on Washington. The highlight of GLBVA participation is GLBVA President Edward Clayton speaking on stage, flanked by gay veterans. On Veterans Day 2000, the Phoenix Chapter dedicates the first Monument to GLBVA Veterans. Steve May, David Digel, Brenda Vosbein, Marvin Liebman, JoAnn Ariano and Rusty Pounds.

2001

Denver hosts the Convention in 2001. Dr. Aaron Belkin, from the Center for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military is the Convention speaker. Newly elected officers include Jim Donovan, Nancy Russell, Mel Tips and Jim Darby. The Denver Declaration is issued as in the past. In May, local AM-VETS Post 66 of Palm Springs, California dedicate a monument in honor of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender veterans in Cathedral City, California. Local members of GLBVA cooperate in this endeavor. Another important development this year is the Invitation to GLBVA from the Department of the Army to participate in a wreath-laying ceremony in Arlington Cemetery at the Tomb of the Unknowns on Memorial Day. GLBVA had done wreath-laying ceremonies for years, but had never

received a direct invitation. Mark Wolf's play, *Another American: Asking and Telling* opens in Washington, D.C. Robert Harris, Jeff Cleghorn, Mack Fisher, David St. Amour, Andy Eddy, Denny Meyer, Steve Mueller, Charlie Sharples and Durell Bosworth.

2002

At the 2002 Convention in San Diego, delegates vote to change the name of GLBVA to American Veterans for Equal Rights (AVER). Mrs. Dorothy Hadjys-Holman is the featured speaker. In San Diego, the Military Ball is introduced as part of the Convention. In honor of Veterans Day, SLDN, HRC and AVER join together to recognize GLBT veterans through the Documenting Courage: Veterans Speak Out project. Paula Neira, Bob Weeks, Dan Pugh, James Dillon Merrill, Lee Morales, Ed Graves, Bob Lehman, Ray Post, Harvey Stoler, Brenda Silva, Michael Todd Kilmer, Todd Shinkle, Tim Higgins and Bruce Inman

2003

The National Convention was held in San Antonio. Officers elected were Nancy Russell, Alan Rogue, Ben Gomez and Hank Thomas. Private First Class Barry Winchell is murdered in bed in Fort Campbell, Kentucky. Barry's parents, Patricia and Wally Kutteles are the Convention speakers. The San Antonio Proclamation is mailed. In June, a number of AVER members take part in the SLDN Lobby Days in Washington, D.C. Lieutenant Colonel Steve Loomis, President of the Albuquerque Chapter, appeared on *60 Minutes*. Steve had been discharged just weeks before his retirement.

2004

In 2004 it is decided to hold the Annual Convention in Washington D.C. in conjunction with SLDN's Annual Lobby Days. A midyear conference

of officers is held in Chicago, Illinois on March 20. A charge of conduct unbecoming is lodged against President Nancy Russell based upon alleged discourteous email exchanges between President Russell and Craig Musser, a member of the St. Louis chapter. An independent committee is chosen to review the case, and two of the three members of the committee feel that the charge does not merit any action. Six of the nine board members ignore the results of the independent committee and vote to remove President Russell. A number of members and officers of GLBVA are outraged, and simply quit. Jim Darby, editor of *The Forward Observer*, reports the story, including eight pages of photographs showing all of the accomplishments of Ms. Russell. Jim Darby is removed as the editor of *The Forward Observer*. Alan Rogue, the new president, also assumes the role of editor issuing a revised edition of *The Forward Observer* with all the photos removed. The Convention is nonetheless successful with a good number of top brass and celebrities attending, including David Mixner, Urvashi Vaid, Rear Admiral Steinman, Brigadier General Virgil Richard and Brigadier General Keith Kerr.

2005

The 2005 Convention held in West Hollywood, California, is named Operation: Lift the Ban. Officers elected are Alan Rogue, David Guy-Gainer, Ben Gomez and Laura Ballard. Some convention highlights include meeting the authors of works written by or about LGBT veterans, a presentation about the Library of Congress Veterans History Project, a showing of *Sis: the Perry Watkins Story*, a memorial service at the West Hollywood Veterans Memorial, and a Fourth of July extravaganza at the Hollywood Bowl. Congressman Marty Meehan (D-MA) introduced the Military Readiness Enhancement Act (MREA). Marie Bohusch launched

AVER's new Web site.

2006

The Chicago Chapter set up a reception and a welcoming table for national and international gay veterans attending Gay Games VI held in Chicago. Congressman Gary Studds, a great friend and supporter of LGBT veterans passed on. Ed Wosylus, Travis and Ed Zasadil.

2007

The National Convention is held in Cleveland by the NEOAVER Chapter and called Lift the Ban V. Dr. Frank Kameny is the major speaker. General Shalikashvili and former Secretary of Defense Cohen call for an end to DADT. New officers elected are Jim Donovan, Ray Allen, Marie Bohusch and Mark LaFontaine. The Chicago Chapter of AVER is inducted into the city's Gay and Lesbian Hall of Fame. Congressman Marty Meehan retires and Congresswoman Elaine Tauscher (D-CA) assumes the lead on MREA with 144 sponsors. Marie Bohusch becomes Editor of *The Forward Observer*.

2008

More than 100 retired generals and admirals call for an end to DADT. President-elect Obama says that he will lift the ban. Alan Berube passes on. Congressman Patrick Murphy (D-PA) assumes the leadership of MREA. Ann Bidwell, Marquell Smith, Bill Mullins and Jean Rogers.

2009

Newly elected President Barack Obama speaks about ending DADT. Former President Nancy Russell is exonerated of charges against her, and returns to the AVER Board. Jim Darby resumes the position of editor of *The Forward Observer*. The Fourth National March on Washington is held in

October. There are a number of LGBT veterans groups participating. The fifteenth National Convention is held in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. New officers are Danny Ingram, Julz Carey, Nick Jackman and Mark LaFontaine.

2010

In the first three months of 2010 there are more than 200 newspaper articles covering DADT.

Dozens of groups are putting the pressure on the Obama administration to keep its promise to end the DADT policy. Under the leadership of Congressman Patrick Murphy (D-PA), MREA support grows to 191. Secretary of Defense Gates and Admiral Mullen issue new rules on gay ban. AVER President Danny Ingram faxes a press release emphasizing AVER's position on the DADT policy.



It may be hard to believe, but we tried to make this a brief history of GLBVA/AVER. There are longer versions with more information on both the national Web page and on Denny Meyer's *Gay Military Signal*. Since the Baltimore Conference in 1992, film, videotapes and photographs have been taken at all meetings, conferences and conventions of GLBVA/AVER and are presently stored in Chicago. The history of LGBT service members and veterans service to this country is an important part of America's history. We thank all those brave Americans who served and continue to serve their country.

—Jim Darby and Patrick Bova,
AVER archivists.



Puget Sound

(continued from page 17)

thrilling experiences imaginable.

Congratulations to two of their members. In October, Julz Carey, Past President of the Puget Sound Chapter was elected as the National Vice-President of AVER, and Nick Jackman, current President of the chapter was elected as the National Secretary of AVER. One of Nick's duties is to run a monthly fuze. Yes, a fuze. It's a new word for me. In the old days it was called a teleconference.

Members usually meet every other month on the 3rd Friday at 6:00 p.m. at the Jim Wiley Community Center, 98 8th Ave, NW.

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www.averpugetsound.org

San Antonio Chapter

The San Antonio Chapter meets the 2nd Thursday of every month at Fuddrucker's Restaurant (Colonnade Shopping Center) at 9845 IH-10 W. at Warzbach Rd. Social hour at 5:30 p.m. and general meeting at 6:00 p.m.

AVER San Antonio
Robert O. Weeks, President
9915 Powhatan Drive, #6-H
San Antonio, TX 78230-2228
210 722 0873
www.sanantonio.com

San Diego Chapter

The San Diego Chapter of AVER participates in numerous events and parades throughout the year, including the County of San Diego Veterans Day

Parade, which is one of the largest in the country.

President Ben Gomez flew to Washington, D.C. in March to participate in SLDN's Lobby Days. At their dinner, Ben had the opportunity to meet a number of celebrities, including Rachel Maddow, Major Mike Almy, Congressman Patrick Murphy (D-PA) and Lieutenant Colonel Victor Fehrenbach. Ben's article is included in this issue.

The San Diego chapter has regular meetings on the 2nd Wednesday of every month. See the web page for further info.

AVER San Diego
Ben Gomez, President
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San Diego Chapter Web Site



Emblem designed and created by Marie Bohusch