



THE *Forward Observer*

NATIONAL NEWSLETTER OF THE
American Veterans for Equal Rights

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DECEMBER 2004

In This Issue: Lawsuits bring *DADT* Front and Center
Pride Parades mingle with Veterans Day Parades as
AVER members continue marching proudly.
Convention Updates, Chapter Briefs and National News Round up
The Year 2004.



Dallas *AVER* members (left to right) Bryan Clark, Dan Hergenroder, Mike Watts, and Pepe Johnson
Lead off the 21st Annual *Alan Ross Freedom Parade*
In Dallas Texas

The first time in the history that a Veteran group has led the parade.

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A Word from The President



Okay, so we took a beating on November the Second. And not just a small beating either. This was a good old fashioned, schoolyard, knock down drag out bloody nose-kicked-when-you're-down beating. Does that mean it's the end? Hardly. At least not as far as I'm concerned. So we have another four years of George W. Bush leading our country God knows where. As Bataan chapter president Steve Loomis wrote in an E-mail shortly after the election, the good news is, he (George Bush) can't be elected again.

The bad news is, the battle is far from over. If anything, the elections revealed a flaw in our strategy – a weakness in our battle plan. We – meaning *AVER* and other such organizations such as ours, have concentrated our energies on the politicians, lobbying against *DADT*. And, while this has been effective in furthering our cause, we've forgotten a very crucial element – John Q. Public.

The fact that this election came down to a question of morality speaks volumes of what the American public as a whole thinks of its GLBT population—a direct slap in the face to all of its GLBT citizens if you will. Not only are we denied the rights to marry and adopt children as legitimate couples, we aren't even considered “good enough” to serve in our country's Armed Forces. I, for one, am tired of being treated as a second class citizen. I've read the Constitution of the United States. Not only have I read it, I've served my country in its defense, as have all of you at one time or another.

No, my brothers and sisters, the battle is far from over. Now is the time, in the face of adversity, to show the enemy what we're made of. We have allies working with us, joining us in our cause to defeat *DADT*. Allies in the form of organizations such as *SLDN*, a long-time friend of *AVER*. Other organizations, not so familiar to us, such as the *Log Cabin Republicans*, have initiated surprising attacks of their own, as you will read further on in the newsletter.

What does this all mean for *AVER* and its members? For the moment, nothing. We continue doing what we've done since our humble beginnings – we continue to speak out against *DADT*, lending our personal stories and our voices to other organizations whenever possible. We continue in our attempts to draw more attention to our cause. We, as individuals and as an organization, need to work harder on reaching out to those within and outside of our community. It's time the public takes more notice of the uniformed Color Guard leading the Pride Parades and less attention to the scantily clad leather-boys or the topless lesbians on motorcycles. Especially now, with more and more of our country's youth being called to war. As all of you know already, there wouldn't be a parade if it weren't for the sacrifice of the veterans leading it.

Our grass roots organization is growing. Two more chapters have sprung out from the Texas tumbleweeds. We have a chapter in formation in Rochester New York. There is interest from Tampa, Ft. Lauderdale, Minneapolis, Central New Jersey, and North East Ohio. Among the many things we, as a board, are working on, is the expansion of the regional map which would help us focus our attention and resources on smaller regions. It's an exciting time to be part of *AVER*; to be working on helping change history and to make this country we served to protect and defend, just a little bit better.

We must continue the fight, not for ourselves, but for the estimated 65,000 GLBT individuals currently serving in silence and fear. Fighting for rights and freedoms they themselves do not enjoy. We owe it to these brave individuals – the forgotten heroes of our community. Who better to represent them in their battle for equality, than individuals who have been there – who have worn a uniform in the service of their country, often under the same harsh, restrictive conditions. Yet serve we did, as the proud, patriotic Americans we've proven to be.

In conclusion, I want to thank each and every one of you for your continued efforts in our battle towards acceptance and equality. I've had the privilege of meeting many of you during this past year – to individually shake your hand and meet you face to face. I hope to be able to continue to enjoy that privilege throughout the remainder of 2004 and into 2005. And, whether I've met you in person or not, I do wish to say one thing to all of you. It's an honor and a privilege “serving” with you. Just as it would have been an honor and a privilege to have served with you.

Semper Fi

A.J. Rogue

Taking *Don't Ask Don't Tell* to the next level: The legal battle

Stage One: A surprise opening move by the *Log Cabin Republicans*

Fighting for Freedom

by Marty Meekins, Esq. and Patrick Guerriero

On October 12, 2004, Log Cabin Republicans filed a lawsuit against the United States of America and Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld in the U.S. Federal District Court for the Central District of California seeking to overturn the military's Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy. Some may be wondering why we decided to file suit at this time. Several legal rulings and developments make this the appropriate time to once again challenge the constitutionality of this discriminatory policy.

Log Cabin, like *AVER*, is a membership organization that includes many active duty servicemembers and veterans who have been or are being currently harmed by the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy. Several Log Cabin members approached us earlier this year asking for help. After months of legal research, dialogue with our members, and consultation with some of the nation's pre-eminent lawyers on this subject, Log Cabin determined that now was the appropriate time to file suit. Several recent legal developments have created a situation environment in which a new challenge to Don't Ask, Don't Tell would fare much better than similar lawsuits brought almost ten years ago.

Log Cabin wants to work with *AVER* members, as well as with other organizations dedicated to this issue; most notably the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, the Center for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military, and the Military Community Services Network. All of us must continue building a nationwide grassroots network of GLBT veterans,

regardless of which organization they are affiliated with, to speak out against this discriminatory policy. We value your expertise and, more importantly, your honorable service to our country. We look forward to exploring how Log Cabin Republicans can assist *AVER* with this very important undertaking.

Log Cabin Republicans' lawsuit will not undermine any other legislative or legal strategies that seek to repeal Don't Ask, Don't Tell. The goal of *AVER* members, Log Cabin members and other GLBT groups are exactly the same—achieving full equality for all current and former members of the United States Armed Forces. We look forward to talking with many of you in the future as we continue working together to advance our common goals and to build a stronger Nation.

Marty Meekins, an attorney at White & Case LLP and former Log Cabin Board Member, is co-lead counsel for LCR in its lawsuit. Patrick Guerriero is President of Log Cabin Republicans.

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Stage Two: *SLDN* Reacts in kind

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Servicemembers Legal Defense Network (*SLDN*) filed a lawsuit today, Cook v. Rumsfeld, in the U.S. District Court for the District of Massachusetts on behalf of twelve lesbian and gay veterans seeking re-instatement in the U.S. Armed Forces. Each of the plaintiffs was discharged under the military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" ban on gay, lesbian and bisexual military personnel. Each served during the current war on terror. Their case could eventually reach the United States Supreme Court.

The plaintiffs in the lawsuit all served honorably in the United States Army, Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard. Together, they have served more than sixty-five years in the armed forces. Three have served in direct support of operations in the Middle East. Among them, they have earned more than five dozen awards, medals and commendations.

"My grandfather fought in the Battle of the Bulge in WWII," said former LTJG Jen Kopfsstein, one of the plaintiffs in the lawsuit. "I was on a ship which went out to sea on September 11, 2001, to defend the coast of California at a time when none of us knew if further attacks were imminent. I made a commitment to the Navy when I joined. I deserve the opportunity to live up to my commitment, and serve out the rest of my obligated time with honor, as I served the first part."

C. Dixon Osburn, Executive Director of *SLDN* said that, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell' creates an unacceptable and unconstitutional second class citizenship for our men and women in uniform. Forcing gays into a federally imposed closet and firing them for telling the truth is blatantly wrong. This law robs our nation of the talents and skills of thousands at a time when we can ill-afford to lose a single service member in the war on terrorism."

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Today's lawsuit asserts that "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" punishes gay, lesbian and bisexual service members . . . for their sexual orientation and for their private, constitutionally protected conduct. As a result, it has denied and continues to deny them several Constitutional rights, including the right of privacy, equal protection of the law, and freedom of speech."

"The world has changed during the past decade and since the last constitutional challenges to 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' were filed," Osburn said. "Last year, the Supreme Court, in *Lawrence v. Texas*, recognized that gays and lesbians have a fundamental right to privacy. Seventy-nine percent of Americans support allowing gays to serve openly, including a majority of junior enlisted personnel. Two retired generals and an admiral recently came out of the closet. Our closest military allies allow gays to serve openly. Quite simply, there is no compelling reason for a continued ban on gay personnel in the world's strongest military. It is unconstitutional and contrary to our national security interests."

Among the plaintiffs named in today's lawsuit are:

- Former Navy Lieutenant Jenny Kopfstein. Kopfstein, a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, patrolled the nation's borders in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. LTJG Kopfstein's command declined to discharge her for two years after learning she is a lesbian.

- Former Army Sergeant First Class Stacy Vasquez. Vasquez served nearly ten years as an Army paralegal and was one of the top recruiters in the entire Army. Vasquez was discharged after being outed by a fellow service member's wife.

- Former Air Force Captain Monica Hill. Hill, a physician, was discharged after requesting a leave of absence to care for her

terminally ill partner of 14 years, who died on September 11, 2001.

- Former Air Force Sergeant David Hall. Hall, who served for five years as an enlisted member of the U.S. Air Force before joining the Air Force ROTC program at the University of Alaska, was ranked first in his ROTC class. After serving in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, Hall was fired when a fellow cadet and friend outed him to his command.

The plaintiffs are represented by *SLDN* and the law firm of Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr LLP. Copies of today's lawsuit, biographical information on each of the plaintiffs and related information on "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" are available online at www.sldn.org



Stage Three: A challenge to the Sodomy Law

*Michael Dobbs, Washington Post
December 8, 2004*

WASHINGTON, D.C.

A military appeals court has overturned the conviction of a soldier for consensual sodomy in a decision that gay rights activists are hailing as an important legal victory removing some of the barriers to homosexual activity in the Armed Forces.

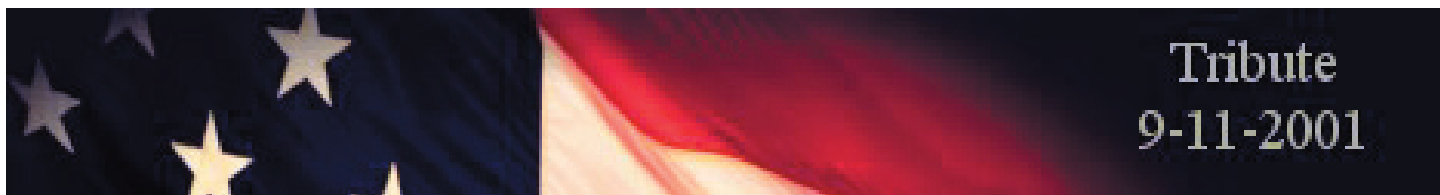
The previously unreported decision, handed down last week by the U.S. Army Court of Criminal Appeals, builds on a landmark Supreme Court ruling last year that struck down a Texas sodomy statute. It is believed to be the first time that a military court has upheld the right of consenting adults to engage in oral sex in private.

"It undercuts the premise of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," said Washington lawyer David Sheldon, who represents several soldiers fighting their dismissal because of homosexual activity. He was referring to a Pentagon policy that has led to the discharge of more than 9,000 openly gay service members over the past decade.

Last week's court decision involved a male Army specialist who was convicted of engaging in oral sex with a female civilian in a military barracks. Kenneth Bullock was charged under Article 125 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

Although the case involved a man and a woman, legal experts said the principles invoked by the three military judges were equally applicable to homosexual activity. The constitutionality of Article 125 has come under assault as a result of last year's Supreme Court decision in *Lawrence vs. Texas*, which upheld the notion of a "zone of privacy" for sexual relationships involving consenting adults.

Legal experts said the Pentagon could appeal on the grounds that the military is a special institution with its own disciplinary procedures.





Veterans C.A.R.E., Los Angeles

Veterans C.A.R.E. members began this last 3-month period attending the bi-yearly *AVER* Region 5 Conference, hosted by the *Sacramento Valley Veterans (SVV)* chapter. The Saturday, August 28th events included a GLBT Memorial and Wreath Laying at the State Veterans Memorial on the Capitol Grounds in Sacramento. We were touched by the speech retired Brigadier-General, Keith Kerr, gave and motivated by the challenge former Marine Sgt. Tom Swann, applied to our future efforts.

Tom told us to grab every opportunity that comes along. That is how he managed to succeed at getting a stone paver honoring GLBT Veterans install there a year earlier—he saw the opportunity and grabbed it.

The luncheon and afternoon meetings in the 100 year-old State Capitol building were enjoyed by all in attendance. The *SVV* members are to be congratulated for planning and executing an excellent Conference.

In October, our members staffed a booth at the *Valley GLBT Visibility Festival*. This new event in the San Fernando Valley was only mildly successful because of the rainstorm that came through that morning. We used the booth to inform the crowd of the candidacy of our member, Donna Groman. Seventeen days later we celebrated because Donna was victorious in winning a seat on the Los Angeles County Superior Court with over 1.08 million votes. We believe that makes her the winningest GLBT Veteran in all of history.

We started the busy month of November traveling to Palm Springs for the *18th Annual Palm Springs Pride Festival* and Parade. The honor guard in the parade was very smart and caught the attention of most of the crowd along the parade route. The *AVER* Palm Springs booth in the festival

was well designed and very active.

For Veterans Day, we called on Donna Groman to speak for us at the *West Hollywood 2nd Annual Veterans Memorial*. Everyone agreed she did a righteous job of honoring Veterans and an excellent job of detailing the grievances we have against the military's discriminatory policies.

Planning for the 2005 *AVER* National Convention, now scheduled for July 1st through 4th, continues. With the help of *AVER* Region 5 Vice President Randy Schecher, and National *AVER* Secretary, Ben Gomez, we hope to plan a very successful convention. More information will be forthcoming in this newsletter.

Veterans C.A.R.E. meets the 2nd Saturday of each month at various locations. Call (909) 875-7178 for the location of those meetings.

Our Holiday get-together is Saturday, December 11 at 1:00PM, in the lobby of the West Hollywood Ramada, 8585 Santa Monica Blvd. We will hold our monthly meeting for two hours and at 3 PM, we will start celebrating. All Veterans are invited to come for a round of good cheer amongst friends.

Edward Westrick
Commander, *Veterans C.A.R.E.*
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Palm Springs Gay Veterans

As if returning home from war victorious, the crowd at the 2004 Greater Palm Springs Pride Parade gave the local *PS Gay Veterans* chapter a reception reminiscent of a heroes welcome as they paraded down main-street USA this past Sunday in beautiful sunny downtown Palm Springs.

The Parade, dedicated to the 4000 glbt couples as Grand-Marshall's who were wed earlier this year in San Francisco only to have them later nullified by the courts was attended by a record number of spectators and participants.

The group's leader, Randy Schecher - energizing the crowd via bullhorn - reminded attendees that our GLBT troops fighting in Iraq/Afghanistan continue to be discriminated against. Not only must they serve in silence, but the spouses of service-members currently fighting in the war against terrorism are not even notified when their partners are injured or killed.

The group encouraged supporters to send a strong message to their representatives in Washington DC to promote equality in America's workplace, to demand an end to discrimination in America and equality for ALL American veterans and asked for their support in Lifting The Ban on gays in the military.

His fervent pleas appeared to energize into a spirited display of rainbow & American flag-waving gratitude, while cheers and shouts of "Thank You" were expressed unanimously all along the parade route! \$409 in donations were collected along the way to help *PSGV* open a local Veteran Service Office to provide VA benefit counseling, etc., to all area veterans.

The *AVER* festival booth, adorned above with the military service flags, enjoyed a steady flow of interest, receiving contact info of numerous new supporters and memberships including women veterans and active-duty GLBT's, some having just returned home from Iraq.

Our most humble thanks go out to *Greater PS Pride, Inc.*, The City of Palm Springs, its residents, and all our supporters locally and from out-of-town attending this year's Pride Celebration who gave us such a moving reception of encouragement and the most generous means to continue providing veteran services, in our battle

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against discrimination towards equality for All Americans.

Yours in the fight for a fair and free America,

Randy Schecher
President, *Palm Springs Gay Veterans*
Chapter, *AVER*
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Sacramento Valley Veterans

Sacramento is pleased to announce the completion of its first un-official year as Sacramento Valley Veterans. A year ago, on Veterans Day, a group of us got together to share stories and meet as gay veterans. One year later, we had our second social with two new attendees.

Sacramento Valley Veterans also participated with *EQCA*, *MECA*, *MEI* and the *SLDN* in Oakland's GLBT Veterans Day Memorial.

We will be working closely with the *MEI* and *EQCA* on getting the word out about GLBT Veterans and service members. We plan on taking the task into the local traditional veteran groups in an attempt to build bridges. Chapter president Ray Allen has successively attended the California Veteran Department Bi-annual Town Hall meeting on behalf of the *AVER* organization.

In the works are a Christmas social, our 2nd annual "Canteen Show" this year will be on March 20th and will be featuring Miss Richfield 1981. We are working on next year as well, and hope to make it the best year ever.

Semper Fi
Raymond Allen
Chapter President, *Sacramento Valley Veterans*
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Puget Sound



Left to right: Rick Graham-VP of *AVER Puget Sound*, Judi Carey-President, Tracy Steen (in back), Nick Jackman, Glenwood Johnson-VP of Finance (in back), Aleksa Manila-Miss Gay Seattle, Dave Smith of *Full Circle Bar and Grill*.

Veterans Day, a day that means something special to millions of Americans. As a nation we traditionally have parades, memorials and ceremonies – for some, even a day off. Radio talk show hosts spend hours lauding the efforts of veterans, inviting vets to call in and urging everyone to "thank a vet". But behind every event, somewhere along each parade and listening to all those radio shows exists a group, a large group, sometimes silent, sometimes angry, and sometimes, resigned.

This group, thought to number near 1.3 million, comprises GLBT veterans who have served this country. The group includes the approximately 65,000 gay and lesbian servicemembers now serving. Also included are the 10,000 servicemembers kicked out of the service since 1993 when "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" made it illegal for gays and lesbians to serve in the military. This is the group you are not likely to see marching openly and proudly in the Veteran's Day Parade.

On this Veterans Day, a small group

got together with the intention of raising money to help support the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell". The event was hosted by the *Full Circle Bar and Grill* on 14th Ave in Seattle. The proceeds were donated to *AVER* – American Veterans for Equal Rights. *AVER* is a chapter based non profit association of active, reserve, and veteran servicemembers dedicated to full and equal rights, and equitable treatment for all present and former members of the U.S. Armed Forces.

Modeled after the Gong Show and MC'd by the fabulous Aleksa Manila, Miss Gay Seattle, would-be karaoke singers offered up their talents against a bidding war for the right to ring a gong sending the singer off-stage. An ongoing raffle and auction helped raise over \$300 for *AVER Puget Sound*. The group is raising money to send members to Washington DC to lobby Congress during *SLDN* (Servicemembers Legal Defense Network), *Lobby Days* in May. This year *AVER* and *SLDN* sent 64 veterans and activists onto Capitol Hill. Members visited their elected representatives urging them to support the repeal of *Don't Ask, Don't Tell*.

The *Full Circle Bar and Grill* has been supportive of *AVER* for over a year, hosting fundraisers and promoting *AVER's* cause. Dave Smith, The Imperial Prince of Seattle and an employee of the *Full Circle Bar and Grill*, has worked extensively with Glenwood Johnson of *AVER* to make sure each event goes off seamlessly. *AVER Puget Sound* is pleased to have the *Full Circle* take such an interest to promoting their cause. Through the events, *AVER* hopes to draw more members from the Seattle Area. Estimates place the number of GLBT veterans in the greater Seattle area at over 14,000.

Judi (Julz) Carey
President, *AVER Puget Sound*
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**Editors note. The above article, and picture at the beginning of the column, first appeared in the "Seattle Gay News," a weekly publication. The article, written by Judi Carey, appeared on the front page, above the fold.*

(right)
Texas Colorguard members from left to right: David Guy-Gainer, (SA) Bryan Clark, (Dal) Mike Watts, (Dal) Wes Giles, (SA) and Bob Weeks, (SA) pose for the camera prior to the start of San Antonio's Veterans Day Parade.



(left)
Uniformed members of the Palm Springs Chapter proudly displaying their colors during the city's annual Pride Parade this past Fall.

(right)
National Capital Chapter members, dressed in their newly created chapter uniforms, take a moment from Color Guard duties at the gravesite of Sgt. Leonard Matlovich over Veterans Day.





Operation: *Lift the Ban III*, Los Angeles

As many of you have already been made aware of, the dates for next year's *AVER* convention, originally scheduled for President's Day weekend, has been moved to the 4th of July weekend, 2005.

This collective decision was made after an assessment of the progress made on securing such things as a host hotel and a venue for the military ball, and whether or not the few remaining months would allow enough time to set up the much needed fund-raising events in order to ensure a profitable convention. Hence the decision to move the convention to the 4th of July weekend.

This also means national officer elections, originally scheduled to take place in February, will be postponed until July as well. A nomination committee is currently being formed to accept nominations for the office of national president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. All interested individuals who meet the requirements as outlined in our constitution, are encouraged to submit a nomination. Further details as to where to submit nominations will be forthcoming, both online and in the next issue of the *FO*.

Listed below are the updated details for the upcoming convention in July. It's never too soon to begin making those plans to attend! More information will be forthcoming soon.

When: 1 – 5 July, 2005

*Where: The Ramada Suites and Hotel
8585 Santa Monica Blvd.*

*Hollywood, California
310.652.6400*

Confirmation # 71126208

How much: \$105.00 per night

An Update to the proposed *AVER* Colorguard uniform

In the last issue, we introduced a proposed *AVER* color guard uniform – an option for chapters without uniformed members. Since then, we've received a great deal of feedback. Based on that input, we've finalized the uniform, which made its official debut at SLDN's national dinner in Washington, DC on October. In addition to the feedback were several questions. Here is our attempt to address as many of them as possible.

Do I have to wear this uniform, or can I still wear my military uniform?

No, of course you don't have to wear it, and of course we want to continue to see *AVER* members at events in their original-issue military uniforms. However, some of us can no longer fit in our military uniforms. Or have hairstyles or facial hair that don't look appropriate with a military uniform. Even those of us who do wear our military uniforms from time to time don't wear them to certain events, like summertime all-day Pride festivals. Having the optional *AVER* uniform gives those who would otherwise wear civilian clothes a uniform to wear. It also takes us in the direction of more mainstream groups, like VFW and the American Legion, both of whom have special veterans' uniforms that they use for events like wreath-laying ceremonies at Arlington Cemetery.

Why this uniform?

We hoped to accomplish several goals with this uniform, and we think the model we have arrived at fulfills all of them.

First, we wanted the uniform to be affordable. A jacket-and-pants combo can cost several hundred dollars. Our ensemble, which costs less than \$50, consists of a navy-blue police/military-style shirt, (\$15.95 including the patches sewn onto the sleeves) a red beret (available for at most Army-Navy surplus stores for \$15) and khaki trousers, which many people have already. A khaki tie tops everything off nicely.

Second, we wanted the uniform to be non-branch specific, yet representative of all branches. The navy and khaki colors are reminiscent of the Navy or Coast Guard, while the khaki necktie shows a Marine influence. The beret is pure Army. And

what's Air Force about this uniform? The fact that it's practical and comfortable!

Third, we wanted it to be unisex, and this is why we eventually chose berets as headgear. The entire universe of military headgear basically consists of the following: ball caps, garrison caps, saucer caps, and berets. Of these, only ball caps and berets are unisex. Had we adopted garrison caps or saucer caps, our female members would have had to either wear men's hats or find the female versions, which tend to be unavailable at Army-Navy surplus stores and are therefore considerably more expensive. Garrison caps and saucer caps are also not size adjustable. That left us with two options, ball caps and berets. We felt that ball caps were too casual for formal events; hence the berets. We understand the charged sentiments that berets should be earned and not issued. However, the fact is that the entire U.S. Army is now wearing berets. We deliberately chose the color of bright red to avoid any confusion with Rangers or airborne units.

Fourth, we wanted the uniform to say three things: that we are veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces, that we are members of *AVER*, and that we are GLBT and proud of it. This is accomplished through 3 shoulder patches: The reverse American flag, the *AVER* logo, and the rainbow patch.

Fifth, we wanted to leave room on the uniform for individual expression. Because this isn't a real military uniform, chapters and individuals can decorate it however they like. Chapters can sew a chapter patch on the left sleeve below the rainbow patch. Individuals can wear their original military ribbons and nameplate, and can sew unit patches onto the shirt pockets, as well as wearing pins for *HRC*, *SLDN*, etc..

Won't this uniform be too hot in the summer?

Yes, and we welcome input for developing a summer uniform that would likely consist of a short-sleeve button down shirt or polo shirt, with identical patches, but in a lighter color, either white or khaki, which could then be worn with shorts, sneakers, and ball caps. In the meantime, if you have a uniform that works well for you during hot-weather events, stick with it. Or, to cool it off a little, omit the necktie,

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San Antonio

Elections were held in San Antonio with Dave Guy-Gainer elected President, an Active Duty individual whose name we can't release was elected Vice President, and Ron Clarke was elected Secretary Treasurer.

The *San Antonio Chapter* partnered extensively with the forming (and now chartered) *North Texas Chapter* in several events targeted at educating the community at large during Veterans celebrations.

The combined chapters, (Dallas and San Antonio) marched for the first time in Texas history as an individual (and invited) unit in the *San Antonio Veterans Day Parade*. The *AVER* banner was carried proudly in front of the US, Texas, Rainbow, and the *We Support Our Troops* flags.

San Antonio also participated in a very emotional wreath laying ceremony at Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery.

Another first was accomplished with the help of the Dallas partners. Members from both chapters were hosted by *KOOP 91.7* in Austin for a live, one hour talk show focused on *Don't Ask Don't Tell*. And, while the hour passed too quickly, they do expect to be invited back.

Ron Clarke, the chapter's Public Affairs Officer, has done an excellent job of building a Public Relations program resulting in several publications statewide printing stories ranging from chapter activities, announcing reports released by *SLDN*, and a 15 second spot at the end of the weekly *MCC* broadcast.

The chapter plans to rest just a bit during the month of December – but not much. They plan to use the month to shore up relationships with other area veterans groups, the Mayor's Veterans Affairs Commission and others, and to also lay out the framework of next year's activities. Perhaps they'll take time to enjoy the holidays as well.

Congratulations from San Antonio to the newly chartered *North Texas Chapter* (Dallas) and the *South Texas Chapter* (Rockport). San Antonio looks forward to

partnering with you – welcome aboard.

God bless all of the *AVER* members, and remember, over the holidays, our active duty brothers and sisters who serve in silence.

Dave-Guy Gainer
President, *AVER*-San Antonio
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South Texas Chapter

Members of the *South Texas Chapter* held a dinner meeting this summer and, being in good spirits, decided to host a trip to the Gulf coast by other Texas *AVER* members. So far, both Dallas and Houston members are expected.

The date is tentatively set for the third weekend in February. The theme will be celebration of the new *AVER* charter recently received for the South Texas Chapter. A business meeting is planned so both old and new members can catch up on what's happening. Plus, several local tourist activities are scheduled, probably including a trip on the Texas Treasure casino ship and a tour of the WWII aircraft carrier Lexington. We have also been invited to have the whole group provide a color guard for Sunday services at the Metropolitan Community Church of Corpus Christi.

Dan Pugh
President, *South Texas Chapter*
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North Texas Chapter

One of the newest chapters to join the *AVER* family is the North Texas Chapter, located in Dallas, Texas. Interest in forming a veterans group began in September of 2003 when an interview about Pepe Johnson appeared in the Dallas Voice, the local GLBT newspaper. Johnson had been a sergeant in the US Army and had recently discharged under DADT. He was interested in forming a support group for GLBT veterans in the DFW area.

From that article, a veterans group was born. To help with their growth, they aligned themselves with the Dallas Gay and Lesbian Alliance as the Veterans Project. The alliance with *DGLA* proved to be greatly beneficial to both groups. It raised community awareness for GLBT veterans' issues, and provided the Veterans Project with the guidance needed to form a productive group that benefits the community.

Earlier this year the Veterans Project formed friendships with the *AVER* chapters in Houston and San Antonio. With the encouragement of these chapters, the *Veterans Project* formed a formal, armed color guard, and for the first time ever led off the *Allen Ross Freedom Parade* this past September in Dallas. They were joined by members from the San Antonio Chapter and by A.J. Rogue, the national president of *AVER*.

The color guard also performed in the opening ceremonies of the *HRC's Black Tie Dinner* in Dallas. Members of the color guard went to San Antonio, to march with that chapter in the Veterans Day Parade.

The *Veterans Project* has participated in two mass mailings of packages to the troops in Iraq, one in December of last year and the other this past November, when over 30 packages of donated items were sent.

Encouraged by the positive experiences with the Houston and San Antonio *AVER* chapters, and the personal involvement of A.J. Rogue and James Apedaile, the *Veterans Project* voted in September to become a chapter of *AVER*. A regional meeting was hosted in Dallas this November, and the *North Texas Chapter* received its charter at that time.

(continued on page ten)

(continued from page nine)

The newly elected officers of the *North Texas Chapter* are: Bryan Clark, president, Mike Watts, Vice-President, John Ames, Secretary. The treasury position will be filled at the next chapter meeting. At the regional meeting, Bryan Clark was also elected as the Regional Vice-President of Region IV.

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BRAYER – Ohio

Representing our local GLBT Community the Members and Supporters of the Buckeye Region of American Veterans for Equal Rights (*BRAYER*), a GLBTTSa Veterans Service Organization (VSO), proudly marched, for its second time in Columbus history and the first time with our 20 foot by 30 foot Great United States (GUS-2) Flag, along side the other VSOs in the Veterans Parade. Although we did not receive much recognition from our local GLBT leaders by their attendance, *BRAYER* members were able to pick-up their slack by marching with our fellow VSOs and showing everyone that, “We have always existed, We exist now, and we will continue to exist” within and out of our Armed Forces. This was just one of the many cadences yelled by our group of patriotic marchers during the Parade that were enjoyed by those who showed up on that sunny, crisp day

Passing by an above average crowd of onlookers for any Columbus Veterans Parade in recent history and eventually marching passed the Mayor’s Reviewing Stand, which was temporally built across from the Statehouse just for the Parade, the *BRAYER* contingent of thirteen marchers (more

than twice the number we had from last year) received an overwhelming amount of applause for our enthusiasm, our cadences, our GUS-2 Flag, and it made each of us feel extremely proud to finally have gotten the recognition every Veteran deserves. Mayor Coleman smile appeared to grow even wider as our highly motivated group marched passed him, as the many high officials situated on his reviewing stand stood to salute our GUS-2 Flag, and especially when our 3 foot by 5 foot Rainbow “Diversity” Flag passed by, which is another first for such a Flag to be included in any Veterans Parade. Whether it be here in Columbus or some other city. Moreover, *BRAYER* would like to report there were no violent acts or aired negative feelings worth mentioning, towards either our VSO and/or supporting marchers before, during and after the Parade.

BRAYER would like to thank Mayor Coleman’s Office and the City of Columbus for putting on an excellent Parade; the Union Station Restaurant and Bar for their generous discount towards a meal for all our members; and to the Max and Ermas Restaurant at the City Center Mall for their generous Gift Card donation which was used to pay for our group’s lunch immediately following the Parade. As *BRAYER*’s President and founding member, Todd wishes to extend a final special thank you to each of those folks who “braved” the day, who carried our VSO’s Flags, and who marched in the parade, knowing we much in the minority.

If, for one reason or another, you were not able to attend the parade, *BRAYER* would like to invite you to visit our cabinet display in *Tradewinds*, which is located at 117 East Chestnut Street. Many of our members are displaying personal military memorabilia items from November 6th to the 26th. If you would like to display your personal military memorabilia during this Veterans Month please contact me at Tel.: 614.777.4328 (Columbus local) to arrange a time to place your items at *Tradewinds*. You need not be a member of *BRAYER* to display your memorabilia, and this offer is open to all veterans and their families.

During this same time, if you happen to stop off at *AWOL*, *Slammers*, *SMK Advertising*, *Somewhere Else*, *South Bend*, *Stone-wall Columbus Center*, *Tradewinds/Plugged Nickel*, *Tremont*, and *Woof*, please talk to a person on duty about purchasing a small USA Flag for a \$1.00 donation. This is for

a contest we at *BRAYER* are having to raise some much needed funds for the Mothers of both PFC Barry Winchell (Army) and Petty Officer Allen Schindler (Navy.) These were two sons and military service members were each brutally murdered at different times & places for their sexual orientation while serving our Country in silence. All funds raised will be equally split and given to the mothers, in order to help them continue touring across our country to speak out against the Department of Defense’s unjust policy of *Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell*, using their own personal testimony and horrible experiences of having to bury a child murdered at the hands of their fellow military service members.

On December 11th, *BRAYER* will award the location who raises the most donations with a Gold Football Helmet with an Army or Navy decal, which the winning location is to keep until next year, when we hold this same annual contest for a good cause. The decal to be placed on the helmet will be determined by which football team wins the Army-Navy game held on December 4th.

BRAYER is seeking Veterans and Auxiliary Members to recruit into our growing 501 (C)(3) Non-Profit organization, Ohio’s only chartered GLBTTSa Veterans Service Organization. For more information about *BRAYER*, contact Todd Shinkle. Contact information posted below.

Hugs & Salute!

Todd Shinkle, USAR
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****Editor’s note: Apologies to Todd, but I bet that helmet looks real good with the Navy decal on it.***





AVERNY – New York City

September saw *AVERNY* president Denny Meyer on national TV as a 'Veteran', complete with pink triangle regalia, on stage behind presidential candidate John Kerry. He also gave a speech about *DADT* and *AVER*'s mission to Stonewall Democrats (NYC), gave testimony on Veterans issues to the New York City Council Committee on Veterans Affairs, and he participated in a NYC City Hall press conference regarding the local Equal Benefits for Domestic Partners law.

In early November, *AVERNY* members manned a booth at New York's Gay Life Expo with over 40,000 GLBT attendees, signing up potential new members and spreading the word about *AVER*'s mission. The following week, *AVERNY* marched in New York City's Veterans' Day Parade, complete with our own mounted gay cowboy, Buster Marengo (the *AVERNY* Calvary), and fluttering Rainbow flags. Prior the parade, we held an hour-long press circus which was attended by supportive NY City Council Members. The United War Veterans Council (the parade committee) did their bigoted best to prevent *AVERNY* from marching and having visibility; they changed our lineup location in order to confuse and discourage our marchers, and at the last moment tried to put a boisterous group of anti-war protestors in front of our contingent in order to hide us from the media. But, this year we had a camera crew from *In The Life TV* with us for the entire parade. With our TV camera aimed at parade organizers, we screamed, "discrimination!" resulting in a quiet group of Asian-American WWII vets being placed in front of us at the last moment; and we marched through the heart of the City, very visible, proud, and cheered by the crowds.

AVERNY has appointed City Hall insider James Reilly (a.k.a. 'Rottweiler') as our Legislative Liaison to see to it that

our views and initiatives are actively and aggressively pursued. Following up on our City Council Resolution introduced last summer by council-member Alan Gerson regarding the *Don't Ask Don't Tell* policy, James has found that opposition by traditional veterans associations has caused cowardly council-members and committees to all but shelve the non-binding resolution, putting it off for a more politically 'convenient' time. The *DADT* resolution remains active, however, pending earnings and, ultimately, a council vote. Jim has been cornering council-members, pointing out to them that GLBT vets did not wait for a more convenient time to volunteer to serve their country.

Denny Meyer, president
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National Capital Chapter

Although things have settled down from the summer and Pride, the *National Capital Chapter* continues to stay busy and engaged. In October, new officer selections were made and the new chapter leadership is in place and has hit the ground running. One of our first goals is to increase membership in the chapter. To that effect, Alan – our treasurer and membership coordinator – has already begun to develop new strategies to encourage others to join.

After much discussion and debate, the chapter finally settled on a uniform for the chapter color guard. Our color guard represented *AVER* by presenting and retiring the colors at the *SLDN* "End the Witch Hunts' National Gala" on 2 Oct. 04 (see our picture on the *SLDN* website). We also provided a color guard for the Veterans Day Celebration on 13 Nov. 2004 at the grave site of Leonard Matlovich at the Congressional Cemetery.

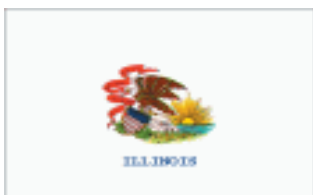
Our chapter is also reaching out to other veterans' organizations. Galen Grant, Chapter President and Lara Ballard, Regional VP attended the Women in Military Service for America (*WIMSA*) Veterans Day celebration on 11 Nov. 2004 at the *WIMSA* memorial at Arlington National Cemetery. (Picture featured at beginning of this column). As a result of this attendance, Galen was invited to provide her oral history through *WIMSA* as a lesbian veteran. In addition, she has been asked by *WIMSA* to assist in gathering the oral histories of other lesbian servicemembers. Galen would appreciate being contacted by any women veterans of *AVER* who would be interested in participating in this project as both subjects and interviewers.

The *National Capital Chapter* is also scheduling to visit veterans at the Washington, DC Veterans Hospital over the holiday season.

On a personal note, Galen wishes to take this opportunity to thank the previous chapter leadership for their work over the previous year and the continued support they provide to the new leadership currently - Kudos to Tony Smith, Lara Ballard, Sharon Alexander, and Harvey Stoler.

The *National Capital Chapter* meets on the 4th Wednesday of every month at 7:00 p.m. at St. Thomas' Parish, Dupont Circle, 1772 Church St., NW, Washington DC.

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AVER Chicago

As always, the Chicago Chapter of *AVER* kept busy participating in a myriad of activities during Veterans Month in Chicago.

Events began, as always, with a Mayor's reception for ALL veterans, hosted by Mayor Daley, an ex-marine, and one of the strongest supporters of the Veteran's community. This took place on Wednesday, November 3rd, with a good number of the Chicago chapter members in attendance for the Dinner and the Reception held at Chicago's Cultural Center.

For the 12th year, on Saturday, November 13th, a number of *Chicago AVER* members traveled to Steger, IL to hold a ceremony at the grave of Allen Schindler, U.S. Navy Radioman who was murdered in 1992 by fellow shipmates. Thanks to everyone who attended, especially Steve Amella who provided the musical accompaniment, and Travis, who graced us with his beautiful voice.

On Thursday, November 11th, *Chicago AVER* participated in the Annual Veterans Day Ceremony. For the second year in a row, this year the event was held at the newly renovated Soldier Field. Hundreds of people were there for this special Ceremony. Dozens of local and state politicians were there to celebrate the event, including Mayor Daley, State Treasurer Judy Baar Topinka, Ald. James Balcer, Commissioner Theresa Petrone, and many military personnel. Ten members of *Chicago AVER* were there to participate in the ceremony. Chapter President Jim Darby, and VP/Secretary Ed Wosylus placed the traditional *AVER* wreath with the pink triangle.

After the ceremonies all participants were invited into Soldier Field for a

sumptuous feast and a tour of the stadium.

Our 12th Annual Veterans Day Dinner was held on Veterans Day, Thursday, November 11th. Our Dinner, which is always held at Ann Sathers Restaurant on Belmont, was a great success. Our speaker this year was Sgt. Miriam Ben-Shalom.

In 1990 Miriam was one of the six founders of America's first national GLBT veterans organization - Gay, Lesbian & Bisexual Veterans of America, which later became *AVER*.

Having served in both the Israeli and the U.S. Army, Miriam has been a fighter and a warrior all of her life. She has definitely not 'served in silence' in or out of the military.

Dinner guests were treated to only a few highlights of her tumultuous career.

Miriam received resounding applause and a standing ovation. Chicago members were truly inspired by her courage and willingness to stand up and fight, not only for her rights, but also for all GLBT veterans. We thank Miriam for coming down from Milwaukee to share her history and her life with us. She is truly a Happy Warrior, and our Treasurer, JoAnn Ariano presented Miriam with our Happy Warrior Award at the Dinner.

AVER, Chicago was honored to have several local talents performing for us this year at the Dinner. Steve Amella generously entertained the crowd with renditions of God Bless America, the five Service Songs and other patriotic pieces.

And also, a special thanks to Travis for his very moving performance of America the Beautiful. What a gift!

And thanks to Mabel, both for Color Guard performance, but also for her soulful rendition of Taps.

The evening concluded with a chorus of America the Beautiful, bringing everyone to their feet – not once but twice – demanding an encore. America the Beautiful, written by Katherine Lee Bates, a lesbian, has always been a favorite with GLBT veterans, and it's impossible to have a Veterans Day Dinner without it. Several years ago, members decided to stand and hold hands while singing this beautiful song, which has since become a Chicago

GLBT veteran's tradition.

"GUS," the giant 50 foot flag was displayed along one of the restaurant's walls, along with our famous "Wall of Fame" with the names of hundreds of GLBT veterans covering the other wall. Please contact the Chicago chapter if you wish your name added to the growing list.

A silent auction featuring dozens of unusual items brought in hundreds of dollars. Thank you to all of the generous members; both those who donated these priceless items, and also those who bought them. And a special thanks to Mike Higgins, for 'cleaning out his closet,' and to Aydene and Travis for their paintings.

We wish to extend a special thanks to all our members who so generously contributed their time, energy, money, expertise and dedication to make this Veterans Day Commemoration a really special time for all of us. Our country may not appreciate and recognize the contributions of GLBT veterans, but we do. Like all other veterans, you are also America's heroes.

James Darby
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shoulder cord or aguillette. Be creative!

and opt to wear a ball cap instead of the beret

How do I purchase this uniform?

Step 1: Go to website <http://qmuniforms.com>. Click on "Law Enforcement," then "Apparel/Uniforms," then "Uniform Shirts." Select the LawPro 65/35 Poly Cotton Uniform Shirt. Order a long-sleeve shirt in your size in midnight navy for \$15.95. Some women may find that this shirt does not fit them well, and may need to either shorten the sleeves or purchase a slightly more expensive women's shirt at another website. Try the Flying Cross brand available at <http://www.galls.com>.

Step 2: Round up your patches. You need a "reverse" U.S. flag patch (with the stars to the right), available at most military clothing sales stores and Army-Navy surplus stores for \$1.50 to \$2.50. You need a rainbow flag patch in the same size and shape as the U.S. flag. Finally, you need two *AVER* logo patches, one for the shirt and one for the beret. These are available through the DC chapter for \$5 or 10 for \$35. You can order them yourself through Dan Kaufman Graphics (<http://www.dkgraphics.com>), but be advised, you cannot order them in batches of less than 100.

Step 3: Sew or iron on the patches. The U.S. flag goes on the right sleeve, 1 inch below the shoulder seam. The *AVER* logo goes 1/2 inch below the U.S. flag. The rainbow flag goes on the left sleeve, 1 inch below the shoulder seam. Be sure and pin the patches in place while wearing the shirt, to make sure they're level, before you begin sewing or ironing.

Step 4: Buy a red (NOT maroon) beret and sew or iron on the second *AVER* patch, 1/4 inch above the rim, right where the flash would normally go. Red berets are available at many Army-Navy surplus stores and can also be purchased on-line at <http://www.paradestore.com> for about \$15.

Step 5: Decorate the rest of the uniform however you like! Add your service ribbons and name plate. Wear it with or without a khaki necktie (which can be purchased at a Navy clothing sales store for \$5). In cold weather, skip the tie and wear a white turtleneck underneath. If your chapter wants to adopt a special patch, sew it 1/2 inch below the rainbow flag patch on the left shoulder. Go to <http://www.paradestore.com> and pick out a

Can our chapter create a different uniform?

AVER isn't about forcing anyone to do anything. However, the advantage of having the same uniform in every chapter across the country is that we can achieve a uniform look for the *AVER* National Convention, or other events where it might eventually be possible to organize large-scale color guards or details. Such as the annual wreath laying at Arlington National Cemetery each Memorial Day. We believe we have devised a uniform, based on extensive input from *AVER* members across the country, that is practical, sharp-looking, and will greatly improve GLBT veteran visibility, and we sincerely hope you will wear it proudly.



AVER Chapters currently on Holiday Hiatus



Mid-America Pride St. Louis



Delaware



Atlanta, Georgia



Minnesota AVER



Albuquerque Bataan Chapter



Rocky Mountain Chapter



Houston



PSGV President and Region 5 VP Randy Schecher, (left) proudly carries the *AVER* banner with Inng-time activist and *AVER* member, Tom Swann (right)

Ohio *BRAVER* members proudly marching in the Columbus Veterans parade. The second time in history, and the first time carrying “GUS II”



National Treasurer Hank Thomas and a fellow Marine pose beside the *AVER* booth during the North Carolina Pride Parade and Festival this past Summer



AVERNY members brave a chilly day and chillier attitudes to march in New York’s annual Veteran’s Day Parade



*I grew up in a world
In which everything was gray
My mother and father told me
It had always been that way
Grow up brave and strong, son
Grow up clean and true
Play while you're still young
Then do what you must do*

*(Men are men)
(Boys are boys)
(And in this world)
(You have no choice)*



*I didn't understand
As all the changes came
How could they be so wrong?
Why wasn't anything the same?
Fall in line there soldier
You're a part of the plan
Weapon to your shoulder
You are God's right hand*

*(Black is black)
(White is white)
(And they are wrong)
(While we are right)*



*The final fevered battle
Will be for complete control
We'll storm the battered barricades
Where the sickness feeds and grows
Unlock the gates! Release the fates!
Throw the shackles to the shoals.
The last citadel to fall
Will be a lonely little cell
In a wounded human soul*



*I did my level best
To do as I was told
And put out of my foolish head
Thoughts of ever growing old
Yes sir, Yes sir
But can't you see?
Yes sir, Yes sir
They look just like me*

*(Into the breach)
(Guard the flanks)
(To Almighty God)
(We give our thanks)*



Ohhh—they look just like me

*Then on that day I woke up
And I finally spoke up
Crying "This is my sacred name"
And my sacred trust is
To join with the legions
Who fight in the regions
Abandoned by truth and justice*



*The final fevered battle
Will be for complete control
We'll storm the battered barricades
Where the sickness feeds and grows
Unlock the gates! Release the fates!
Throw the shackles to the shoals
The last citadel to fall
Will be a lonely little cell
In a wounded human soul*

THE LAST CITADEL
Mike Watts
(Dallas Chapter VP)
September, 2002



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