

THE FORWARD OBSERVER

OFFICIAL QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE
American Veterans FOR Equal Rights

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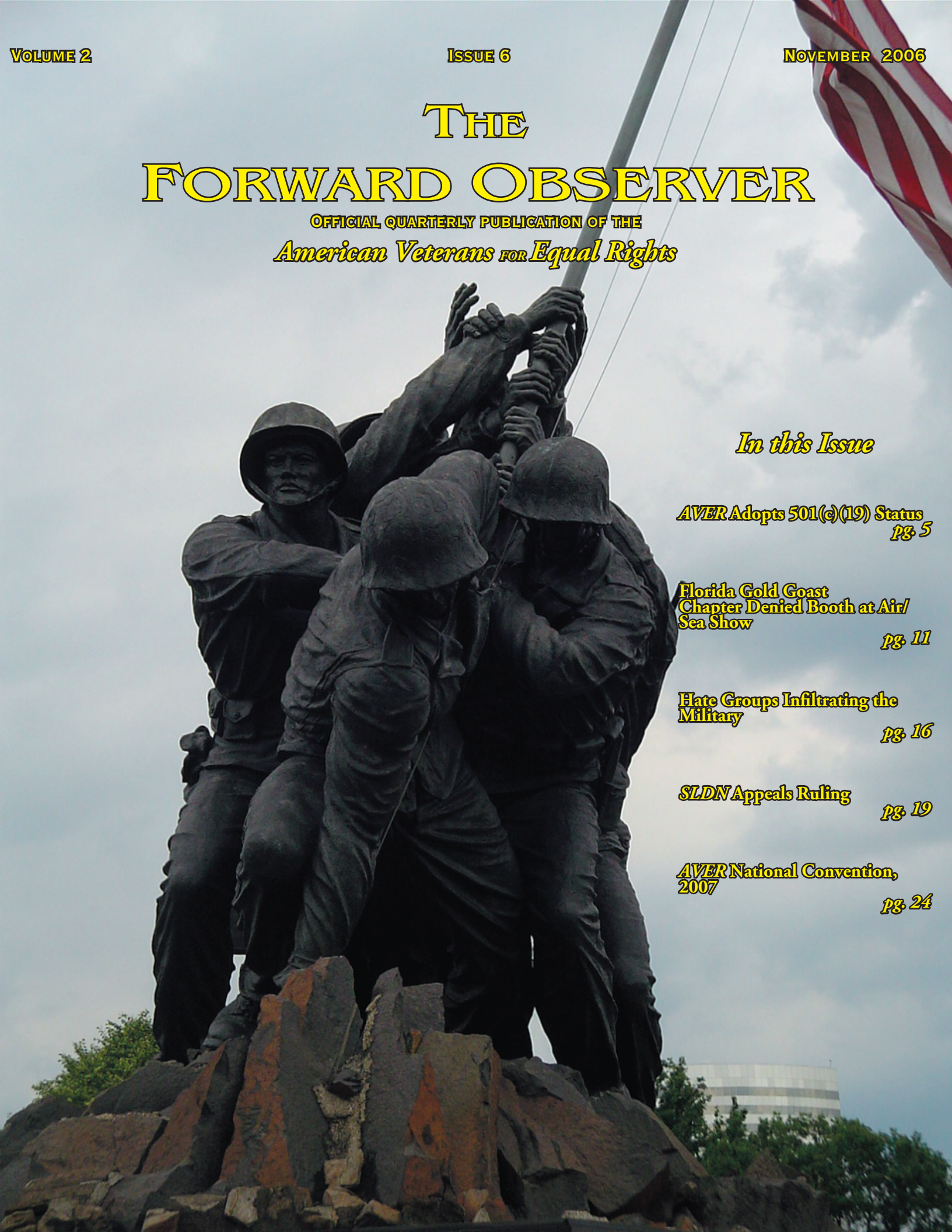
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**65,000 GLBT ACTIVE DUTY
1 MILLION VETERANS**
Who's Watching Out for Them?

***WE ARE.
AND WE COULD USE
YOUR HELP***

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"Thank You For Serving."

Having enlisted just a few years after the Vietnam War ended, and having spent the majority of my service during the "Cold War" era, being thanked for my service is honestly something I'm not accustomed to. In fact, when this occurs, I'm momentarily taken aback and unsure of how to respond. I still remember the days of being labeled a "baby-killer" and other choice phrases, simply because of my desire to become a SEAL. I remember a time when service members were discouraged to travel in-country in uniform, because to do so would attract unwanted attention to oneself.

Fortunately, times have changed. Whether or not people agree with the War in Iraq, they support (and rightly so) our troops over there. After all, these are men and women simply fulfilling a duty; doing a job they've been called upon to perform.

So why, then, does this change once they're perceived to be gay or lesbian? Granted, we may never know the answer to this question. And, while it is true that we may never be able answer said question, there is still much we can do to enlighten those who might ask it.

This is the reason why, and so many other like me, became involved in *AVER* in the first place; and why, despite all the trials and tribulations we seem to face on a daily basis, we continue our involvement in the organization — as the proud patriotic individuals that we are, proud of ourselves and our service to our country.

As you will read in this issue, *AVER* is going through some changes; chief among them, the adoption of a new IRS status, that from a simple 501(c)(3), to the more complex, and more beneficial 501(c)(19) status.

The *Forward Observer* has undergone a "face lift," of sorts, the format changing from that of a simple newsletter into a magazine style format, one geared more toward attracting advertisers in the hope of defraying the cost of publication. And while we're on the subject of the

A WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT

newsletter, let me apologize for the tardiness in getting this issue out to everyone.

So what does all these changes mean for our membership?

Plenty. For one, it means an end to having to refer folks who seek us out during Pride rallies and other such functions; folks who are seeking help in upgrading discharges, or seeking ways to acquire VA benefits. It means more freedom when it comes to fundraising and political lobbying. Most importantly, it means *AVER* will soon be on its way to becoming a fully chartered Veteran Service Organization, on equal footing with organizations such as the *American Legion*, the *VFW*, and other similar organizations; the first and only GLBT Veteran organization in history to achieve such status. I can't tell you how big of an accomplishment this will be for *AVER* as an organization.

As mentioned, this is but one of the changes currently "in the works" for the organization. Steps are being made to have us, as a group, focus more on repealing "Don't Ask Don't Tell," especially now, in light of the recent results of the midterm election just held. This is the best chance we may have to finally see an end to this and any other discrimination policy in our Armed Forces.

For this and other reasons, *AVER* needs your voice and participation now, more than ever. We're looking for people on a chapter level to become involved with public affairs, to help disseminate the word about our newfound status as an officially chartered VSO. We will soon need individuals in each chapter to take on the mantle of Veteran Service Officers; individuals who will be sent for training in order to better assist our veterans in need.

Next year is a convention year. Which means the election of new national officers. We need strong individuals to step up to the plate and help guide *AVER* through the growing years ahead; to continue the hard work begun by this past administration.

Most importantly, we need your voice and your face, to continue delivering our message to those who question our patriotism; for those who ask "the question."

Semper Fi

A J Bur



AVER National Officers



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FOR

Equal Rights

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QUARTERDECK

AVER TO ADOPT 501(c)19 Status

As it stands currently, *AVER* is considered a 501(c) 3 not-for-profit organization. While this is desirable on many levels it does not give us enough leverage when it comes to the federal government and their position statements on our issues. Strategically, *AVER* would be in a much better position to fight legislation and other measures should we incorporate into a 501(c)19, Veterans Service Organization. *AVER* would then be on common footing as other VSO's including the *American Legion*, the *Vietnam Veterans of America*, and so forth. This would also entitle us to submit for a Congressional Charter – something that no other GLBT group has possession of to my knowledge. It would put Congress in a Catch 22 situation where discrimination would be their only basis for not allowing it to pass. It also would give us more clout when it comes to speaking out against the military measures and other issues that affect GLBT veterans.

Now, there is a concern that becoming a 501(c) 19 might not be good for those veterans who were dishonorably discharged from service. For this we propose two solutions – The first would be that those individuals become part of the 2.5% that are allowed as “non-veterans” per IRS guidelines. This 2.5% should be maintained on a per chapter basis, but reported to National *AVER* in timely reports – to be determined. Another solution is to form a new 501(c) 3 group that could operate as a quasi-auxiliary under *AVERN*ational. Auxiliary rules are that members must have some lineal relationship to the veteran in the 501(c) 19 – so our partners would not be allowed in either event. This makes for an ideal situation in which the 501(c) 19 and the 501(c) 3 can be linked together. Separate entities but under one umbrella as *AVER*.

Additionally, as a 501(c) 3, *AVER* is

limited in its capacity to lobby or fight legislation that affects veterans. With a 501(c) 19 this prohibition is negated and we can go ahead full steam, which could mean operating bars, lodges, and even offering insurance to our members. (More discussion on this can follow.) It would also place the Veterans Administration in a better position to allow for VA trained Veterans Service Officers for our chapters.

Mark LaFontaine, MST

Membership News

I am happy to report that membership in *AVER* continues to grow, and we rejoice in welcoming *AVER-HI* to our ranks! Is this the start of going global?

Big things are happening in the organization, and we must be prepared. *AVER* will eventually be Congressionally chartered, and our non-profit tax status will change as well. For this reason it is very important that our records be in order. And that includes complete files. We are required to have proof of service on all voting members. So if you have not sent in your DD214 for vets, and a copy of your ID for active duty, please do it now.

Many times I get returned mail from the post office for folks who have moved. A request: when you move, please take a moment to notify the membership office, and that goes for any change of address, phone number, email address, and yes, even name change. We'd be most grateful!

Our best recruiting tool is word of mouth. You can convince your friends and colleagues that they need *AVER* as much as *AVER* needs them.

Thanks to everyone for all the work they are doing, support your chapter and we'll keep growing!

Chief Jim Donovan
Membership

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Local Benefits and VA coordination:

We are working with MCSN to provide sensitivity training to local VA social workers who are treating Iraq and Afghanistan returning servicemembers suffering from PTSD. It has been recognized that LGBT troops suffering from combat related stress have exacerbated conditions resulting from the *DADT* policy which causes them to be isolated, lacking the family support network available to heterosexual overseas duty servicemembers, and suffer anxiety over fear of being exposed in the pervasive homophobic atmosphere in today's military.

Via the Office of the Speaker of the NYC Council (an OUT lesbian) we have been meeting with legislative attorneys for the NY City Council Veterans Committee regarding outrageous discrimination against *AVER-NY* in the yearly City sponsored Veterans Day Parade, which is in violation of NYC non-discrimination laws. This should get interesting since the Speaker, long a supporter of *AVERN*Y, now has total authority in making staff and committee job appointments.

Via *MCSN*, we have offered to provide LGBT resources and support for proposed City sponsored Veteran Resource Centers. Once again, New York City agencies are prohibited by law from discrimination against LGBT residents and same sex domestic partners; hence our offer of service requires their serious consideration.

AVER Veterans Affairs continues to receive inquiries about benefits and rights. We have recently begun to receive inquiries from federal agencies

seeking advice from *AVER*. In one instance a transgender veteran had asked for advice from a federal agency regarding VA benefits eligibility using changed gender identity papers. The federal agency sought advice and referral from *AVER* Veterans Affairs; hence *AVER* is now being recognized as a viable veterans association resource.

AVER Veterans Affairs will be attending *SLDN Lobby Days* and advocating for the rights and benefits of our troops and veterans.

Don't Ask Don't Tell Repeal Resolutions roll on:

DADT repeal resolutions have continued to gather steam and growing numbers with resolutions now passed in: New York City, West Hollywood, San Francisco, the State of California, Cathedral City CA, Chicago, and St. Louis. Additionally, national organizations have joined the effort with *DADT* repeal resolutions by *Veterans For Peace*, *Stonewall Democrats*, and *Jewish War Veterans*.

Discrimination; Local Legislation Benefiting Vets

We have begun to watch local legislation affecting veterans and to aver on inclusion of GLBT veterans. For example, New York State and New York City have been considering expanding certain tax exemptions for veterans who are homeowners. Unlike Federal laws, many local laws specifically prohibit discrimination in housing and employment against same sex domestic partners, sexual and other minorities, whether actual or perceived.

Despite these clear local laws, there have been cases of outright discrimination in tax exemptions.

For example, in New Jersey a gay couple, who have been together in their home for nearly half a century, had their Veterans Homeowner Tax Exemption

suddenly revoked by the local town clerk after they recently registered as domestic partners. They sued and won. But, it should not have been necessary to sue.

We have cited this and other examples as demonstrating the need to have specific mention in new legislation, regarding Veteran Homeowner tax exemptions, which prohibits discrimination against veterans who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and or are same sex domestic partners. We urge all chapters to be active and vigilant regarding discriminatory exclusion of local benefits as cities and states take up legislation to honor their veterans.

Helping GLBT Vets:

Veterans Affairs continues to receive inquiries for advice and assistance, regarding benefits and discrimination, from GLBT vets around the country and even from a US veteran living overseas. Inquires come in by phone, by e-mail to *AVER* Veterans Affairs, and via the *AVER* Vets Benefits e-group.

Thanks to our Regional VPs, Chapter Presidents, *MCSN*, and the knowledge of those on the Vets Benefits list, we have been able to direct most folks to the help they need.

Volunteer Participation:

To find out more and volunteer to participate in *AVER* Veterans Affairs, please visit the VETERANS AFFAIRS page on the *AVER* website: www.aver.us/vetafrs.php We welcome anyone with experience, skills, and or knowledge in assisting LGBT vets regarding benefits, legal issues, PTSD, medical and psychological counseling, homelessness, and other areas of concern.

Public Affairs

There has been a marked increase in interview and comment requests from media, recently. This is due to *DADT* being in the news regarding Supreme Court and lower court decisions about the Solomon Amendment and lawsuits over *DADT* by *SLDN* and *LCR*. In addition, journalism graduate students, both gay and straight, are writing about *DADT* for their graduate papers, many of them being published. These requests for interviews, previously once every few months, have increased to 3 or four per month and generally involve several hours of in depth interviews each.

We have issued several press releases recently, regarding the news, and announcing the demise of *BRAVER* President Todd Shinkle. An *AVER* PAO eulogy was read at his funeral by Region 1 VP Marie Bohusch.

We also continue to receive inquiries about benefits and rights. We have recently begun to receive inquiries from federal agencies seeking advice from *AVER*. In one instance a transgender veteran had asked for advice from a federal agency regarding VA benefits eligibility using changed gender identity papers. The federal agency sought advice and referral from *AVER* Veterans Affairs; hence *AVER* is now being recognized as a viable veterans association resource.

In addition, *AVER* Veterans Affairs plans to continue to attend *SLDN Lobby Days*, as we did this past year, to advocate for the rights and benefits of our troops and veterans.



SLDN Lobby Days was attended by DADT repeal activists, media, and leaders from across the US, including an *AVER* contingent, *Military Equality Alliance*, *The Gay Military Times*, *In The Life TV*, and many others. Recently discharged Sgt. Bleu Copas, an Arabic linguist, sang at the *Lobby Days* Dinner.

The big day was Tuesday, May 16, when we went in teams to ‘the Hill’ to visit Senate and House offices with appointments. In the offices of Representatives who had already cosponsored the *Military Readiness Enhancement Act* (which would repeal the *Don’t Ask Don’t Tell* law and allow Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual patriotic volunteers to serve openly and honestly) we thanked them for their support. In offices of those who needed convincing, our teams presented carefully crafted arguments aimed at improving our military readiness and understanding that most Americans now favor integrating GLBT volunteers into our armed forces.

We were generally assigned appointments with our own Senators and local Representatives. The importance of these repeated encounters is that these politicians begin to recognize us and realize that their veteran constituents include voting LGB citizens who will hold them accountable for their actions in Congress.

Shortly after the *Lobby Day* visit, one California Representative added her signature to the *Military Readiness Enhancement Act* shortly. In the months after the event, several more did as well.

AVER Across the Country



AVERNY receives second City Proclamation:

In September, *AVERNY* was presented with a NYC Council Proclamation, issued by Council Member Alan Gerson, in recognition of its commitment to social justice for all. The Proclamation, which recognized the first National Veterans Coming Out Day, was presented at *AVERNY*'s September meeting at the LGBT Community Center in NYC by James Reilly, acting in his dual roles as Vice President Elect of *AVERNY* and as a member of Council Member Gerson's staff.

Mr. Reilly was instrumental in achieving the passage of America's first 'Don't Ask Don't Tell repeal resolution' in NYC earlier this year. At that time, acting as *AVERNY*'s Legislative Liaison, he was notorious for cornering council members at City Hall in order to persuade them to support the resolution. This included following a heterosexual Marine Veteran council member into the council chamber men's room to discuss our concerns over this member's blocking of the measure. The council member's resulting commitment to passage of the resolution, following this conversation, earned Jim the title of Rottweiler.

At the end of September, *AVERNY* Vice President Reilly testified at the New York City Council's Committee on Veterans in a hearing on 'How NYC can best ease the transition of those returning from active duty.' In testimony, prepared by Denny Meyer, he pointed out that NYC law prohibits discrimination in housing, employment, and benefits with regard to race,

religion, age, sexual orientation and gender identity, be it actual or perceived. Mr. Reilly avered that the Committee and the City provide oversight and documentation to insure that any services and benefits for veterans returning to NYC do not exclude any citizens nor their domestic partners, as stipulated by the anti-discrimination laws. This testimony was intended to serve as a warning and to establish a precedent for potential lawsuits resulting from any exclusion of GLBT veterans and/or their families from the local benefits program.

The Committee Chairman, a Marine Veteran, was thanked for his support of our *DADT* repeal resolution earlier this year.

Discrimination At the November 11th Veterans Day Parade in NYC:

This year's parade in NYC was dubbed 'Nation's Parade' honoring WWII vets. *AVERNY* had three gay WWII vets front and center, each over 90 years old! One wore his mint condition WWII uniform and led our contingent carrying the Stars and Stripes.

Another in civvies and garrison cap carried a sign saying WWII Vet. And the third fellow, dressed from head to foot in black leather (bless him), insisted on carrying a sign saying GAY WWII VET. Upon seeing our Rainbow

Flag, a United War Veterans Council parade organizer rushed over to us, shouting rudely, and pulled us out of the line of march as we were entering the parade. This was the third year in a row that UWVC has crudely attempted to discriminate against us. Fortunately, we intentionally had a City Council Member (a USAR Capt.) with us who pointed out how he and our WWII hero

vets were being disrespected. Other groups, including *VFP* and *Gold Star Mother* Cindy Sheehan, were threatened with arrest and forced to the back of the parade to censor them.

AVERNY has since testified at a City Council Veterans Committee hearing in which we proposed legislation that would require oversight of the parade committee to prevent such discrimination and censorship which violates NYC laws.

November brought *AVERNY* back to our table at the giant *Gay Life Expo* in NYC, attended by 40,000 people, where we distributed the national brochure, met potential new members, and solicited donations with the refrain: "Are you a veteran? No? Would you like to make a donation for the rights and needs of our GLBT Vets?" However, every time some handsome fellow walked by, Denny altered the exhortation and said, "Are you a Veteran? No? Would you like one?" Somehow that later line brought in more money, sigh, but still no lover for Denny, alas.

At *AVERNY*'s December meeting,



our guest speaker was one of Steve Loomis' lawyers, Atty. Raymond J Toney, who spoke about *DADT* cases and upgrade proceedings. That brought a record crowd and several potential new members.

Denny Meyer
AVERNY Chapter President
glbtvetsnyc@yahoo.com



On October 12, 2005, our chapter participated in *GLOBE* – Gay and Lesbian Organization and Business Expo – on the campus of Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, FL. The college was very positive in their reception of our group and the education we provided to the students was truly inspirational. Most had never heard about gays and the military and the treatment of personnel who are gay. We even talked to and recruited other members of the gay community from the West Palm Beach area and are hopeful to begin a new chapter there shortly.

Then, of course, we had to endure Hurricane Wilma. This hurricane, while not on the same scale as Katrina, was the worst to hit our area in over 50 years. Most of us were without power for well over a week or more. It was truly a test of our spirit as human beings, but it brought out the best in all of us.

We quickly rebounded and got back to business with our November 8th meeting when we hosted City of Fort Lauderdale Commissioner Dean Trantalis. He compared and contrasted his governmental civil service to that of those in military.

On Veterans Day, Nov. 11th, the Chapter participated in the *City of Wilton Manors Veteran's Day Memorial Service* held at Veterans Park. There were over 80 people in attendance and our chapter accounted for over 40 of those attendees. It was truly inspirational as Col. Leigh Coulter presented the city with her "Citizen

Warrior" flag that she received from her service in Iraq.

Our chapter has grown into a truly diverse group of members. We currently have 30 men, 7 Women, and 1 Transgender member and are actively pursuing more with an emphasis on female and transgender individuals. Part of this outreach was our participation on November 20th, with the Sunshine Cathedral MCCs' *Transgender Day of Remembrance*. This event was spearheaded by our own Ms. Leanna Bradley, who was truly amazing in her efforts.

The general membership meeting held on December 13th included our local State Representative, Jack Seiler, who outlined the who, what, where, when, how and why of our state's commitment to its veterans and how we could use that information to gain allies in our cause.

As you can see, the *Florida Gold Coast Chapter* has been very busy promoting civic awareness and in building

strong bonds with our politicians who can aide us in our work yet to come. We are currently in the stages of preparing a working plan for the chapter and in doing so, have garnered the attention of several local grant providers who are asking us to submit proposals for grant monies. This is truly becoming a major success for us here, and I have to say, that not one of our members is relaxing.



Wilton Manor Mayor Scott Newton, State Representative Jack Seiler, and Commisioner Joe Angelo at the Veterans Day event

Each and every one is picking up their proverbial shovel and working as a team to ensure the success of this Chapter and the mission of *AVER*.

Mark LaFontaine
Florida Gold Coast Chapter President
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(ABOVE) Bill Mullins, Chapter President Mark LaFontaine, And Chapter VP Dick Rogers manning their *AVER* booth at Globe on the Florida Atlantic University campus
(BELOW) Jack Seiler and the general membership



(ABOVE) Wilton Manor Mayor Scott Newton accepts the "Warrior Citizen" Flag presented by Col. Leigh Coulter at the Veterans Day Memorial



No Gay Vets at Air & Sea Show

AVER Denied Booth and Volunteer Opportunity

By Jim Buresch

No different than the Americans now serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, local gay veterans who once ran for cover from incoming Nazi, Korean, Vietnamese and Al Qaeda bombs, some who still carry the shrapnel buried deep in their bodies, were denied permission to volunteer in the upcoming McDonald's Air and Sea Show.

The respected local organization being stonewalled, *American Veterans for Equal Rights* (AVER), was even denied the right to purchase booth space provided free of charge to other community groups, says the AVER President, Mark LaFontaine.

LaFontaine, a gay and civic leader, said, "John Williams [an executive with *MDM Group*, a corporate special events company headquartered in Fort Lauderdale] told me that booth space is provided free of charge to groups ranging from children's organization and seniors groups, to veterans groups." Adding, "With all the trouble they're having getting permission extended to the city's participation in the event they had to give something back; apparently they don't feel we gays warrant that same benefit for the nightmarish traffic and noise that event brings to all the residents of the city."

LaFontaine continued, "When I first talked to Mr. Williams [on March 14, 2006] he explained to me what the company did for the community in return for permission to hold their event here. He told me that, in addition to giving free booth space, portions of the event's proceeds go to community groups such as veterans groups. "When he told me veterans groups got booth space for free and part of the proceeds, I thought 'great.' But, when I further explained to him that I was with

American Veterans for Equal Rights, he put me on hold. After more than a few minutes he came back on the line and told me he'd get back me on this," said LaFontaine.

The event reached its climax while U.S. Rep. Barney Frank was in town accepting an award from *Valuing Our Families*. According to one source, when Rep. Frank was told of the conflict he said, "In an ironic way we're winning; it's now unacceptable for them to come out and directly say 'no' to us, so they find other ways to keep the discrimination going."

After not hearing back from Williams, LaFontaine sent an email two days later. "Thank you very much for speaking with me on Tuesday regarding all of the good works that your event promotes for the local community," he wrote.

"As I informed you, I am the president of a local veterans service organization called *AVER* – American Veterans for Equal Rights. We are the Fort Lauderdale Chapter of a national organization. Our website is www.aver-fgc.us. We welcome you to peruse the site for more information."



LaFontaine goes on in the email, clearly stressing the point that they do not want to protest or anything of the sort. LaFontaine said, "We want to show our support for the soldiers and just to let folks know we gays are veterans too."

According to LaFontaine, Williams told him that no booth space set aside for local groups was available. LaFontaine told *The Independent*, "So fine, and I say, 'I've been to a couple of the Air and Sea Shows and I see other veterans volunteering' and ask if we can at least do that?"

On March 15 2006, *AVER* sent an email to the person listed as volunteer coordinator on the event's web site, Shonetta Stinson. She replied the same day only to say that he needed to talk Stephanie Briscoe who was the volunteer coordination for Fleet Week and assured him that Ms. Briscoe would be in contact soon.

On Friday, March 24, 2006, nine days later, Ms. Briscoe sent LaFontaine an email. In the email she states, regarding their volunteering for Fleet Week, "I am sorry to say that our background checks were due today to FDLE. State law, as a result of 9/11, requires all individuals to have passed a background checked prior to the event."

Briscoe, in a subsequent email, stated that there were two volunteer coordinators; one for Fleet Week (Briscoe), and Shonetta Stinson, the volunteer coordinator for the Air and Sea show. Briscoe recommended that LaFontaine contact Stinson.

All emails sent to Williams, Stinson, and Briscoe were not returned by press time. *The Independent* then contacted the chief of public relations for MDM, Elaine Fitzgerald and left a specific message with her secretary explaining the nature of the call and press deadline. *The Independent* did not hear back from anyone at MDM at press time.

According to Markoff, the situation was unintentional and there was a miscommunication with his employees. Part of that miscommunication was stating that complimentary booth space was made available to veterans groups, when, in fact, the only complimentary booth space provided are to military recruiters.

"Markoff was more than willing to meet with us," LaFontaine said. He was hoping that with such a meeting they could work out an agreement to include the participation of various types of veterans' groups. He was also seeking to have booth space available to veterans groups and at least one fundraiser to support local veterans' organizations.

Markoff had agreed to meet with LaFontaine in June. In an e-mail to LaFontaine, Markoff stated, "I am excited about the opportunity to work with your organization and appreciate your interest in helping us grow the event in the future."

"I found it appalling that they weren't including or reaching out to veterans groups," LaFontaine said. "While on active duty, our veterans are wonderful, but once you're retired no one cares... You never hear about the injured vets in the media once they're back home."

In his e-mail Markoff stated, "Our desire is to say 'thank you' to the men and women of the military that volunteer to put their lives in danger to protect our freedom. Those that serve, or have served, truly are heroes and deserve to be recognized for their sacrifice."

LaFontaine said this is one of the primary reasons why veterans' organizations are important for the community. "These organizations are helping our veterans obtain benefits, help with transportation, food and activities. These are the types of groups they [Air and Sea Show] should be supporting as well. Currently, the majority of the money raised is being donated to children's charities."

LaFontaine was certain he wouldn't have gotten a response without help from *Independent* readers. "I'm grateful to the community in general for making phone calls and coming forward on this issue," he said. "By putting pressure on the company [MDM] it forced their executive director to finally make contact."

While MDM finally contacted LaFontaine to discuss the situation, he says he is disappointed and frustrated by the lack of response from Fort Lauderdale's political leaders. He

Air and Sea Show Responds to AVER

Fort Lauderdale Political 'Leaders' Ignore Phone Calls

By Michael James
mjames@ourindy.com

In the wake of last issue's cover story "No Gay Vets at Air & Sea Show," MDM's executive director Mickey Markoff has stepped forward to resolve the situation. MDM is the company that organizes the show.

Within 48 hours of *The Independent* hitting the streets, Markoff called Mark LaFontaine, president of the local chapter of the *American Veterans for Equal Rights* [AVER]. "I was surprised that he called on Friday," LaFontaine said. "That shows good character and that they're willing to reach out to the community."

said that he called several officials and they did not return his calls until after the situation had already been addressed by Markoff. "Where are these people? They come to us for their vote when they need it and now they won't return phone calls," LaFontaine said. "I think that we need to do more outreach to our local politicians so they know exactly how we feel."

As for Markoff's initial non-response to LaFontaine, Markoff stated, "I apologize for any misunderstanding or miscommunication that may have occurred on behalf of our team and want to reassure you that it was unintentional... I am sure [by] working together we can add additional value to this honorable project."

LaFontaine said, "I made it clear [to Markoff] that I intend on holding him to his word. We'll be watching closely."

He also stated that it is important for the GLBT community to be aware of such situations, both in regards to MDM and the total lack of response from the city political machine. "When we see these things happen, whether intentional or not, it should be a wake up call," he said. "Our community has become far too complacent."

However, even with the diplomatic resolution with MDM, LaFontaine said, "I still feel like we're being stonewalled... But, we must keep moving forward."



San Antonio Chapter Members Preparing to Lead the San Antonio Night Parade

The San Antonio Chapter was out and active in the Pride Events in central Texas. Renamed the *Wes Giles Memorial Color Guard*, the San Antonio formation again led the parades in Austin and San Antonio as well as performed a presentation of colors at the opening of the San Antonio Pride Festival. While published photos, as usual, focused on the main flags, what is not pictured are all of the Austin and San Antonio members who carried service flags and the banner.

Members also provided support to the *SLDN* booth at the Austin Pride Festival. We enjoyed a wonderful day with Dixon Osborne and David Hall of *SLDN* stickering the crowd and getting the word out. The Austin festival was held "about two blocks from the sun," with temperatures in the low 100's. Nonetheless, around 700 people signed the repeal petition.

Chief Gainer, represented both *SLDN* and *AVER*, providing a one hour presentation and Q/A to the Employee Alliance for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Empowerment at IBM® (EAGLE) in Austin. It was wonderful to meet with members of this organization of thousands of IBM employees worldwide.

TEXAS SHOOTOUT



The Texas Shootout is a regional GLBT softball tournament that is held annually in Austin. This year's tournament included teams from as far away as Ft. Lauderdale and Los Angeles.

The inclusion of the *Wes Giles Memorial Color Guard* in the opening ceremony was something the tournament director felt was absolutely imperative. Once the flags were in position, a local individual led the crowd a capella in singing the National Anthem.

An impressive event to say the least. If you haven't tried marching in softball diamond sand, you have missed an experience.

FROM MEMBERSHIP

"American Veterans for Equal Rights is a gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender-founded veteran's advocacy and service organization dedicated to the equal and fair treatment of all service members and veterans, while honoring the service and sacrifices of all service members and veterans." Mission statement, *AVER* national by-laws.

Membership in *AVER* continues to increase, especially Life Memberships. I feel that is because veterans continue to believe in our mission of equal and fair treatment and veterans want to help other veterans.

AVER officers, both national and local, have assisted many people with their concerns, for example, discharge upgrades, pay problems, burial honor guards and monuments.

AVER continues to be in the forefront of educating our legislators on the value, equality and fairness of passing the *Military Readiness Enhancement Act* which would implement the open proud service of everybody.

Membership renewal letters have been sent to all renewing members. Please update any information on the reverse of the letter, then submit it along with your membership fee to your local chapter, if known, or to the membership office at the address listed in the letter. Please consider a Life Membership, and think about *AVER* when making out your will.

Thank you for continuing to serve our country!

THE MEDICAL SIDE OF DADT

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

Two men are talking at the Eagle.

"I don't know, Ted—I'm not sure I can take it anymore. It was bad enough when Tim was in Iraq—why did he have to go over there anyway? Now that he's back he's not the man I've loved for ten years. Not even close."

"How so?"

"He wakes up in the middle of night screaming. Sometimes he grabs me, and I don't mean in an affectionate way. He crosses the street when he sees a woman in Muslim clothes coming in our direction—it's embarrassing! And he is definitely drinking too much. Why the hell didn't he just tell the Army he's gay and stay home?"

"He didn't because he loves this country as much as we do, and wanted to serve it in the military. He wasn't going to let a little thing like 'Don't Ask Don't Tell' stop him. I disagree with him about the war, and I know you did, even before he went. But it was his decision, not ours."

"Understood. And I really do still love him—but I'm almost afraid of him. You're a cop—have you ever seen anything like this? You told me once a lot of the homeless are Vietnam veterans. Was this their problem?"

"For some it was, but not just them. Remember Ann, my partner?"

"Yeah—whatever happened to her? Why aren't you partners anymore? Did you have a falling out?"

"Far from it—she was the best partner I ever had. I felt safe on the street when Ann had my back. I learned ten times as much about being a cop from that lady as I did at the Police Academy. She could have been chief of police far as I'm concerned."

"Then why aren't you still partners?"

"Remember that shoot out with the druggies last fall, when the rookie cop got hit?"

"Yeah—it was all over the papers."

"Ann was never the same after that. She did everything she could to protect him. There was no reason she should have felt guilty about it. He made a dumb rookie mistake. I told her a dozen times it wasn't her fault, and so did Ellie, her partner. She couldn't hear us. She had nightmares, felt jumpy at every loud sound, even a car backfire. Ellie said she caught her smoking grass one night after work—and Ann was death on any kind of drugs! Remember, her old man was an abusive drunk. She's at a desk now—what a waste!"

"I never knew all that."

"Yeah, well we cops don't talk much, except among ourselves. But you're a police reservist, so I guess I can trust you to keep quiet about it."

"Roger that. Did Ann ever get help?"

"Yeah, she did. She was reluctant to ask, to admit she needed it, but she had more insight than most of us, and she did find a doc who works with cops and understands our



culture. Dr. Sam is a Navy man himself, a Vietnam vet. He treated a lot of folks like Ann—and like your Tim—at the VA. He said it was PTSD, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. They used to call it 'shell shock.' They didn't really get a handle on it until the Vietnam vets began to come home with it big time. Now they know it can happen to anybody who goes through a major trauma—I'm afraid we'll see a lot of it in those who survived the hurricanes. But Ann's doing a lot better. She'll be back on the street by Thanksgiving."

"So what should I tell Tim? That he needs a shrink? Lots of luck! Besides, he says the VA would never accept a gay vet."

"He's wrong—they will if he has an honorable discharge. And you really don't think every VA clinician is straight, do you? C'mon! There are VA clinics everywhere—look in the phone book."

"What if he doesn't want to go to the VA—he's pretty down on the military these days."

"Then he should see a private doc, one that's comfortable referring him to a psychologist or social worker if that's what he needs. Best way to get a referral to a GLBT clinician, or GLBT friendly one, is to ask a friend. Or he should check the ads in the gay papers—then interview a couple docs to see if there's a good fit. A lot of professional societies have referral lists for gay men and lesbians. The gay and lesbian psychiatrists group covers the whole country. I used them to find help for a pal who was gay bashed in Mississippi. I think I still have the number. Yeah, here it is: 215-222-2800. The office is in Philadelphia, but they know GLBT psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers all over the country. If he still won't go, than maybe Ann can talk to him. I know he likes and respects her a lot. Let me know if you want her to call him. Now, good buddy Phillip—remember that hot fireman I told you I met at Mike's party? He just walked in! If you'll excuse me----!"

"Go for it! Good luck! And thanks!"

Mike Rankin, M.D.
Capt, MC, USNR (Ret.)

Hate Groups Are Infiltrating the Military, group Asserts

By JOHN KIFNER

Published: July 7, 2006

New York Times

A decade after the Pentagon declared a zero-tolerance policy for racist hate groups, recruiting shortfalls caused by the war in Iraq have allowed “large numbers of neo-Nazis and skinhead extremists” to infiltrate the military, according to a watchdog organization.

The Southern Poverty Law Center, which tracks racist and right-wing militia groups, estimated that the numbers could run into the thousands, citing interviews with Defense Department investigators and reports and postings on racist Web sites and magazines.

“We’ve got Aryan Nations graffiti in Baghdad,” the group quoted a Defense Department investigator as saying in a report to be posted today on its Web site, www.splcenter.org. “That’s a problem.”

A Defense Department spokeswoman said officials there could not comment on the report because they had not yet seen it.

The center called on Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld to appoint a task force to study the problem, declare a new zero tolerance policy and strictly enforce it.

The report said that neo-Nazi groups like the National Alliance, whose founder, William Pierce, wrote “The Turner Diaries,” the novel that was the inspiration and blueprint for Timothy J. McVeigh’s bombing of the Oklahoma City federal building, sought to enroll followers in the Army to get training for a race war.

The groups are being abetted, the report said, by pressure on recruiters, particularly for the Army, to meet quotas that are more difficult to reach because of the growing unpopularity of the war in Iraq.

The report quotes Scott Barfield, a Defense Department investigator, saying, “Recruiters are knowingly allowing neo-Nazis and white supremacists to join the armed forces, and commanders don’t remove them from the military even after we positively identify them as extremists or gang members.”

Mr. Barfield said Army recruiters struggled last year to meet goals. “They don’t want to make a big deal again about neo-Nazis in the military,” he said, “because then parents who are already worried about their kids signing up and dying in Iraq are going to be even more reluctant about their kids enlisting if they feel they’ll be exposed to gangs and white supremacists.”

The 1996 crackdown on extremists came after revelations that Mr. McVeigh had espoused far-right ideas when he was in the Army and recruited two fellow soldiers to aid his

bomb plot. Those revelations were followed by a furor that developed when three white paratroopers were convicted of the random slaying of a black couple in order to win tattoos and 19 others were discharged for participating in neo-Nazi activities.

The defense secretary at the time, William Perry, said the rules were meant to leave no room for racist and extremist activities within the military. But the report said Mr. Barfield, who is based at Fort Lewis, Wash., had said that he had provided evidence on 320 extremists there in the past year, but that only two had been discharged. He also said there was an online network of neo-Nazis.

“They’re communicating with each other about weapons, about recruiting, about keeping their identities secret, about organizing within the military,” he said. “Several of these individuals have since been deployed to combat missions in Iraq.”

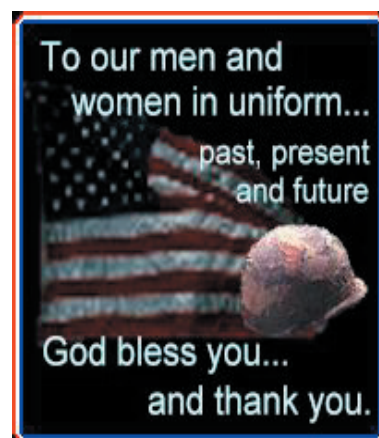
The report cited accounts by neo-Nazis of their infiltration of the military, including a discussion on the white supremacist Web site Stormfront. “There are others among you in the forces,” one participant wrote. “You are never alone.”

An article in the National Alliance magazine *Resistance* urged skinheads to join the Army and insist on being assigned to light infantry units.

The Southern Poverty Law Center identified the author as Steven Barry, who it said was a former Special Forces officer who was the alliance’s “military unit coordinator.”

“Light infantry is your branch of choice because the coming race war and the ethnic cleansing to follow will be very much an infantryman’s war,” he wrote. “It will be house-to-house, neighborhood-by-neighborhood until your town or city is cleared and the alien races are driven into the countryside where they can be hunted down and ‘cleansed.’”

He concluded: “As a professional soldier, my goal is to fill the ranks of the United States Army with skinheads. As street brawlers, you will be useless in the coming race war. As trained infantrymen, you will join the ranks of the Aryan warrior brotherhood.”



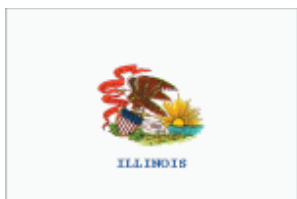


Local members of *Momentum San Diego* presented a wreath yesterday. At the microphone, Ben Gomez, *AVER* National Secretary and San Diego Chapter President, read the following statement:

“On behalf of the 1 million gay, lesbian and bi-sexual veterans now living and the 65,000 now serving, the American Veterans for Equal Rights dedicates this wreath to all fallen veterans who have served their country.”

Despite a couple of “Oh, my God’s” and soft gasps, everything went very well. We couldn’t be more proud of taking this risk, but it had to be done.





As usual, it has been an extremely busy year for the Chicago Chapter. In September all three officers of the Chicago Chapter were re-elected - President Jim Darby, VP/Treasurer JoAnn Ariano, and VP/Secretary Ed Wosylus.

In October, *SLDN* and *Chicago AVER* co-sponsored an event, Let Them Serve, at the Pritzker Military Library. Dixon Osborn, Ed Wosylus, Ald. Tom Tunney, and others spoke, and a video of some recently discharged servicemembers was shown. It was a very moving evening, and ended with our own Travis performing his special rendition of "America, the Beautiful."

"Veterans Day in Chicago has become Veterans Month because of all the activities that take place. We are very fortunate that Mayor Daley has been so supportive of all Veterans causes. A new Vietnam Veterans Memorial along the Chicago River was dedicated on Veterans Day. Thousands of veterans turned out for the ceremony, and several members of AVER were asked to read some of the names of the 2,934 Illinois servicemembers who died in Vietnam.

Also on Veterans Day the Chicago Chapter held its 13th Annual Veterans Day Dinner at Ann Sathers Restaurant. There was a great turnout for all the festivities. Steve Amella provided the music, Miss Foozie danced and sang for the troops, and two vets provided Echo Taps at the end of the ceremony. But, the highlight was our speaker, Army Specialist Jeff Howe, who just returned from his second tour of duty in Iraq. Jeff wowed the audience with his tales of his experiences while serving this country. Unfortunately, he was removed on the 4th of July because he is gay. What a loss to this country.

What a waste of taxpayer money. And, what a slap in the face to someone who has so valiantly served his country.

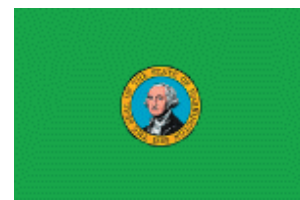
Jeff received a standing ovation as the Chicago Chapter honored him with the "Happy Warriors Award." He is truly one of our heroes.

Some of the publicity surrounding our Veterans Day events brought some inquiries about the history of *GLBVA/AVER* and the Chicago Chapter. The Pritzker Military Library had a very small collection of material on gays in the military. That gave our members the opportunity to donate a number of books for their collection. They also asked for any old newsletters that we might have. Patrick Bova, local and National Archivist for *AVER* provided them with a complete set of all 182 copies of the Chicago newsletter, *VetPride*, dating back to April 1992, and virtually all copies of *The Forward Observer*, the national newsletter, dating back to 1990.

The *Chicago Historical Society* also contacted *AVER* for any materials that the chapter might be willing to donate to their archives. Along with t-shirts, posters, badges, etc. *CHS* was also given a complete set of both publications. Little did we know in those early days that someone might be interested in our history.

A third copy is on its way to Gerber/Hart Library, Chicago's premier gay and lesbian library. The message is, don't throw anything away. Someone might want it all.

Jim Darby, President
Chicago Chapter, *AVER*



Sept 2005

AVER Puget Sound members RADM Al Stienman and Col Grethe Cammamayer were invited and spoke at a PFLAG event on the Campus of University of Washington Tacoma to a good crowd of students and faculty about the issues concerning DADT.

Oct 2005

Aver Puget Sound was awarded donations from the St John Abby of the Sisters of the Perpetual Indulgence to purchase a complete set of Service Flags to be used in the Pride Activities and parades the Chapter participates in. Chapter Officers attended a BBQ at the Cuff to receive the donation.

Aver Puget Sound participated in a *NVCOD* event hosted by the CC Seattle's and sponsored by Gay Leather Mr. Washington. A couple of members attended in uniform and spoke about *AVER'S* efforts in overturning the *DADT* policy. The group was well received.

March 2006

The chapter was pleased to learn that the National Board of Directors appointed our chapter president Julz Carey to the post of Region 5 Region 5 Vice-President. *AVER* Region 5 includes California, Oregon, Washington and Hawaii

April 2006

Chapter member Tracy Steen hosted an evening with the national college tour "Call to Duty" at his home which was well attended by chapter members and guests. The guests met informally with the tour founder Alex Nicholson and got an informative update on the tour's progress.

Aver Puget Sound assisted and participated in the April *Call to Duty* appearance on the campus of the University of Washington, Kane Hall. It was a well-attended event with over 200 in attendance brochures and information was distributed. The audience also included active duty personnel that showed up in support of "Lifting the Ban" and ending DADT

June 2006

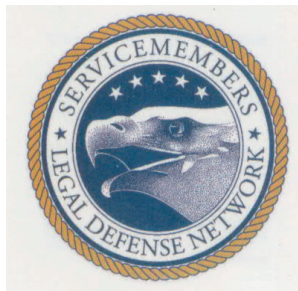
Aver Puget Sound provided the Color Guard for the Seattle Pride Parade. This parade was relocated from its traditional Capitol Hill location to the heart of downtown Seattle's 4th Ave. The Chapter provided a complete Color Guard which included representatives of all the Armed Forces in uniform carrying the National Colors and the 5 service flags. The Chapter was honored to have in attendance and the participation of *AVER* National President A.J. Rogue for this historic day. The parade was well attended, as well as the festival at the Seattle Center. Chapter members also assisted in staffing the *SLDN/AVER* booth at the Pride Festival at Seattle Center 25-26 June

AVER National President A.J. Roque and Puget Sound Chapter member RADM Al Stienman were featured speakers at lecture at the Seattle Center in conjunction with the Pride Events. They spoke on DADT issues.

July 2006

Aver Puget Sound members participated in Pride Events at Tacoma and Kistsap, WA

Respectfully Submitted
Nick Jackman
Secretary / Treasurer,
AVER Puget Sound



Gay Veterans Announce Appeal of District Court Ruling on 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' Challenge

WASHINGTON, DC

Servicemembers Legal Defense Network— *SLDN* —announced it intends to appeal a court decision dismissing its constitutional challenge to the military's *Don't Ask, Don't Tell* ban on lesbian, gay and bisexual personnel.

The organization announced the appeal during its annual fundraising dinner in Washington, D.C., on May 13. The suit was filed in December 2004 on behalf of lesbian and gay veterans who were discharged under the military's ban. In April, the District Court for the District of Massachusetts dismissed the lawsuit, granting a motion to dismiss brought by the federal government.

"*SLDN* intends to appeal the recent court decision granting the government's motion to dismiss our lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of *Don't Ask, Don't Tell*," *SLDN* executive director C. Dixon Osburn said. "The men and women in *SLDN's* lawsuit are among the best and brightest America has to offer. They have diligently fought for the right to serve our country and defend our ideals. All of us at *SLDN* are enormously proud of their determination and we work to honor them every day."

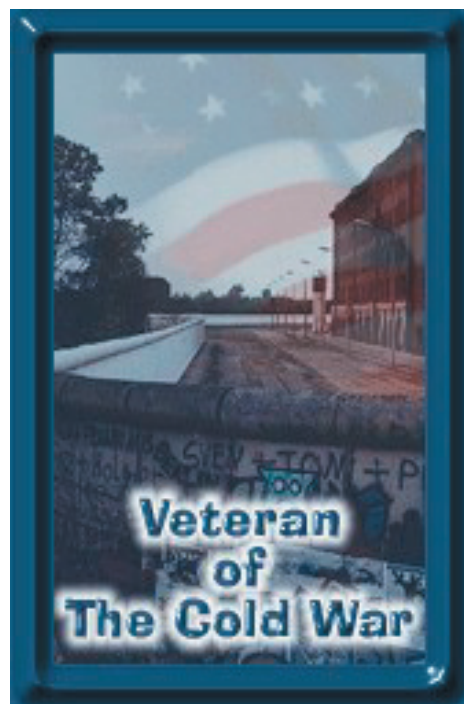
The plaintiffs in the lawsuit are represented by *SLDN* and the law firm of Wilmer Culter Pickering Hale and Dorr. Together, the plaintiffs have served more than sixty-five years in the armed forces. Two have served in direct support of operations in the Middle

East. Among them, they have earned more than five dozen awards, medals and commendations.

"Overturning *Don't Ask, Don't Tell* will be a watershed moment for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Americans just as racial integration of our armed forces was a pivotal moment in the civil rights fight for African Americans," Osburn said. "When our federal government stops discriminating, state governments, local governments, private corporations and the courts and twenty-five million veterans from every corner of America will follow suit. . . . Then, we will have won the battle."

For more information on the *SLDN* lawsuit, and profiles of the plaintiffs in the case, visit www.sldn.org/press.

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(202) 797-1635
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The Crow's Nest
**AVER Wishes To Acknowledge The Following Contributors
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Demetrio Munoz
Father Philip G. Salois, Ms.
Hank Thomas

Region One



In addition to the flurry of activity, well described in Denny Meyer's reports, Region 1 chapters have had some very important activity this year.



In early Spring, *NEO AVER* hosted the annual National Board Meeting at the *Cleveland Wyndham Playhouse Square* hotel, during which it was decided that the 2007 *AVER* National Convention would take place at that hotel, likewise hosted by *NEO AVER* - the NE Ohio chapter of *AVER*.

After a busy Spring, *NEO AVER* had a fairly quiet summer, but kicked off Autumn with an Ice Cream Social to draw fresh interest. Eleven people total dropped in for the free food and to learn about *AVER*. It was a great kick-off for the final establishment of the 2007 National Convention Committee. Many positions have now been filled on the Committee, though there is still plenty to be done and *NEO AVER* is actively seeking volunteers to help make sure this will be a terrific convention.



On 15 April 2006, our region, and *AVER* as a whole, lost a true hero, Todd Shinkle. Todd was the founding President of *BRAVER* - the Buckeye Region chapter of *AVER*. His funeral included many tears but many giggles and even belly laughs too; a celebration exactly as Todd had wanted. Yes, there were some giggles that he died on "tax day," right in line with his extremely wry sense of humor. After a quick scramble with the Columbus Police and the *Patriot Guard Riders*, 46 PGRs stood on guard with flags waving, lining the entryway to the funeral home.

Todd's funeral cortege was then escorted by the *Patriot Guard Riders* on motorcycles, including *AVER* Region 1 VP Marie Bohusch, all 56 miles between the funeral home in Columbus and his final resting place in Washington Courthouse, his family's home town.

BRAVER has resumed meetings, and is now led by President-du-Jour Chief Mike Warner [USN Ret.] Elections to confirm new officer positions will happen according to *BRAVER*'s normal election schedule.



RAVER

The Rochester chapter of *AVER* is still in formation. In addition to working on building his chapter, Tim Stallman is also putting together the "Big Band" for the 2007 *AVER* Military Ball in Cleveland, and likewise organizing the silent auction.

If you would like to volunteer for the convention, play in the band, donate any items to the silent auction, or become a convention sponsor, please contact *NEO AVER*, and we will put you in touch with the appropriate committee member. For more information about the convention, please see that article later in this issue of the *Forward Observer*, or visit the convention page online at aver.us/convention

Marie Bohusch
qcws@neoaver.org

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ANNOUNCING MILITARY EQUALITY ALLIANCE

Military Equality Alliance organizes grassroots efforts to achieve equality in our armed forces

SAN FRANCISCO, Calif. - July 5, 2006

This Fourth of July, *Military Equality Alliance* "declares its independence" as a nonprofit 501(c)(4) organization dedicated exclusively to grassroots lobbying for the passage of the *Military Readiness Enhancement Act*, which would repeal the *Don't Ask, Don't Tell* law and allow patriotic American volunteers to proudly serve openly in our armed forces, regardless of sexual orientation.

Military Equality Alliance (MEA) will focus entirely on grassroots lobbying in select Congressional districts and states to inspire constituents to urge their elected Representatives to repeal *Don't Ask, Don't Tell*.

Operating under section 501(c)(4) of the IRS code governing nonprofits, MEA will focus all of its resources on grassroots constituent-based lobbying.

MEA's executive director, Jim Maloney, former director of the *Military Education Initiative* (MEI), said, "We realized that we could contribute in a very significant way by focusing on gaining the support of the public in key congressional districts and states. We look forward to working with the many other LGBT activist organizations, many of which have already given us so much assistance and advice, in helping deliver what we believe will be the

lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community's first national legislative victory."

MEA's grassroots strategy has two key components. First, it will feature an intense focus on a relatively small number of key Congressional districts and states, in order to recruit constituent activists in those areas who will then spearhead their own constituent-based grassroots advocacy efforts. Second, it will provide individualized training to activists who will concentrate on local organizing.

"We welcome the targeted grassroots efforts of MEA as a complement to our own, and that of other local, state and national organizations. Lifting the ban will require all hands on deck.

Together, we can achieve equality for all patriotic service members in our nation's armed forces," said C. Dixon Osburn of *Servicemembers Legal Defense Network* (SLDN).

"I applaud this effort by MEA to dedicate its resources directly toward repealing the law against gay military service," says Rear Admiral Alan M. Steinman, USCG (Ret). "The grassroots focus is exactly the right strategy to get rid of *Don't Ask, Don't Tell* once and for all."

In addition to serving on the MEA advisory board, Rear Admiral Steinman serves on the honorary board of SLDN and is lead advisor to the Call to Duty Tour.

MEA is pleased that its initial fiscal sponsor is *Equality California*, which was instrumental in 2005 in obtaining a resolution from the California state legislature calling on Congress to repeal the *Don't Ask, Don't Tell* law and allow patriotic Americans to serve openly in our armed forces regardless of sexual orientation.

"With more LGBT veterans in California than any other state, *Equality California* is proud to stand with MEA in the pursuit of equality for the men and women in our Armed

Services," said Geoffrey Kors, *Equality California* executive director.

For more information, please contact:
Jim Maloney, Executive Director,
Military Equality Alliance
415-370-3313



MCSN Partners With Community Organizations To Bring Military Mental Health and Social Services Training to Cities Across the U.S.

Arlington, VA

Military Community Services Network (MCSN) announced today its collaboration with community organizations to bring MCSN 'Basic Training', Peer Mentoring, and LGBT Military Sensitivity Training to cities across the United States. The training workshops seek to give community partners, organizations, individual volunteers, mental health and other social service professionals a more in-depth understanding of how to address the unmet social service needs of the LGBT military community.

MCSN is currently working with organizations like PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) and MCC (Metropolitan Community Churches) and several others to plan these training workshops. Many LGBT military servicemembers, their partners, and families go without any type of social services support due to the military's *Don't Ask, Don't Tell* law.

These training workshops will allow *MCSN* and community partners to continue building a nationwide network of trained peer mentors, confidential mental health and other social service provider referrals, and support programs to meet the needs of the more than 65,000 LGBT servicemembers and their families. The training material is developed and reviewed by several retired, reserve, and active duty military mental health professionals volunteering with *MCSN*.

"The combination of these training workshops is a valuable resource to provide effective training and education for community partners, organizations, volunteers, mental health and other social service providers who live and work near military communities," said *MCSN* founder and Executive Director Tony Smith. "It strengthens the ability of local people helping their fellow military neighbors and increases our ability to link all of these resources together in a true network and formal sponsorship program. This ensures that an LGBT servicemember and their partner have social service resources available even when they move to a new assignment location. It also allows sharing of resources, ideas, and 'best practices' of various network partners to consistently improve and grow our support network."

Future dates and locations include:

Aug. 8 -- Columbia Maryland (Howard County)
 Sept. 28-29 -- Manhattan Kansas (Ft. Riley)

The following locations are currently in the planning stages for this year and early 2007:

Albuquerque NM, Charlotte NC, Columbus GA, Norfolk VA, Boston MA, San Diego CA, Sacramento CA, Fort Worth TX, Seattle WA, and several more.

To learn more about the *MCSN*

training workshops or schedule one in your area, or if you are interested in attending a training or volunteering, contact tonysmith@mscnfamilies.org. Finally, if you would like to be an event Sponsor or make a contribution to support our training programs you may donate online at mscn.org Or mail your check payable to "MCSN" at:

MCSN
 P.O. Box 2963
 Arlington, VA 22202-0605

AVER regions have vacancies for Regional Vice Presidents, especially in regions 2. RVPs have a voting position on the Board of Directors.

Please help us.

AVER National By-laws require regions to have an election every 2 years for this position. Voting members who have the interest and dedication please contact president@aver.us or membership@aver.us for information and eligibility requirements.



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Spring Issue

Publication Date:	15 April
Deadline for Ads/submissions	01 April

Summer Issue

Publication Date:	15 July
Deadline for Ads/submissions	01 July

Fall Issue

Publication Date:	15 October
Deadline for Ads/submissions	01 October

Winter Issue

Publication Date	15 January
Deadline for Ads/submissions	01 January

OPERATION: LIFT THE BAN V AVER 2007 CONVENTION, CLEVELAND, OHIO

The Wyndham Playhouse Square, located in the heart of downtown Cleveland, Ohio, has been chosen as the site for the 2007 *AVER* National Convention. The convention, hosted by the Northeastern Ohio chapter of *AVER*, promises to be an exciting one. Because of the locale chosen for the convention—the theatre district of downtown Columbus, directly across from four Broadway capable theatres—a “Stage Door Canteen” theme has been chosen. Our intention is to bring you informative presentations and panels, and great entertainment as well, including a boogie-woogie Military Ball. Also included will be a special daytime sidetrip or two for those wishing to do a little sight-seeing, and special bar-night events with local GLBT bars for those who might wish to go out after “convention hours.”

CALL FOR PRESENTERS: We’re looking for individual to host presentations on networking in the community, GLBT Military history, legal matters such as retirement issues, VA benefits, etc., relevant legislation, as well as other presentations of interest to our national members. If you are interested in giving a presentation, please email *NEO-AVER* at qcws@neoaver.org

, or send your proposal to: *NEO-AVER*/PO Box 1895/Stow, OH, 44224, and we will be in touch with you soon.

WHAT TO INCLUDE:

Any bio information pertinent to your presentation such as related experience, etc.

An abstract summary, approximately 150 words in length, (more if needed) of your intended presentation or panel

discussion

A list of needed peripherals such as AV equipment, easels, photocopying services, etc.

Rank your three favorite time-slots: Friday 1,2,3,4 - Saturday 1,2,3,4. There will be two morning and two afternoon

slots on each of those days. The first afternoon slot 90 minutes. All others will be 60 minutes.

NEO-AVER is also looking for volunteers to help make this event a huge success. We need folks to help on-site during the convention, as well as off-site prior to the convention. On-site tasks will include such “jobs” as helping with registration, staffing the silent auction, conduction *Military History Project* interviews, and Colorguard services (veterans with uniform required) among others. If interested in helping out, please email *NEO-AVER* at qcws@neoaver.org or write to *NEO-AVER*/PO Box 1895/Stow, OH 44224.

MUSICIANS NEEDED FOR MILITARY BALL BAND. Performance will include a Military Revue prior to dinner (Branch songs), the National Anthem for the presentation of the Color Guard, and approximately one hour of WWII era “Big Band” music after dinner. Those interested should send their name, contact information, and instrument to *NEO-AVER*, so that we can put you in touch with our Region One Band Leader.

AVER IS PROUD TO HOST ITS SECOND CONVENTION WITH THE WYNDHAM. The Wyndham is a partner of the National Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce (NGLCC).

From the Wyndham Worldwide Website: The National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce is the largest Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender (GLBT) business development and economic advocacy organization in the world. The NGLCC represents the interests of more than 800,000 GLBT businesses and entrepreneurs, and is committed to forming a broad-based coalition of GLBT owned and friendly businesses, professionals, and students of business for the purpose of promoting economic growth and prosperity of its members. As a funding partner, Wyndham Worldwide was awarded “Corporation of the Year” for its leadership in promoting and recognizing the value of diversity.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE FOR THE 2007 CONVENTION

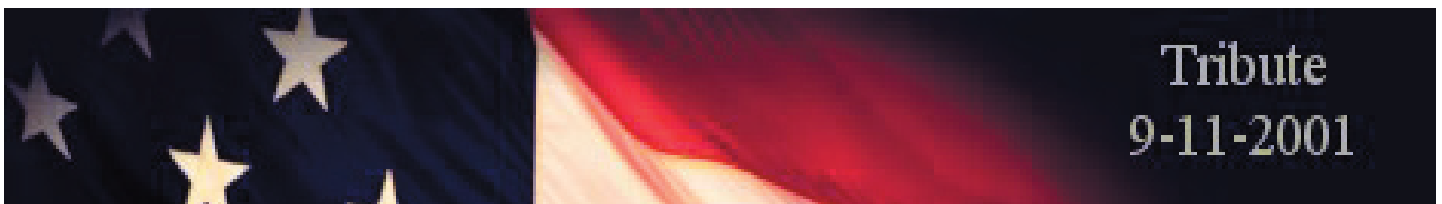
Day/Date	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
Wednesday, 18 April		Books signing Early registration	
Thursday, 19 April	Business Meeting	Site-Seeing trip	Opening Reception
Friday, 20 April	Registration Presentation and Panels, Veterans History Project, Movie		
Saturday, 21 April	Presentations and Panels, Veterans History Project, Military Ball		
Sunday, 22 April	National Officer Elections and Regional Reports		Flag Retirement Ceremony
Monday, 23 April	Wreath Laying Ceremony, Hotel checkout		

A CONVENTION TO REMEMBER

Members of *Veterans C.A.R.E.*— the Los Angeles Chapter of *AVER* — built an exciting four day event from June 30 to July 3, hosted at the West Hollywood Wyndham Belage. A cool round of meetings, discussions, parties, book signings, awards banquet, memorial ceremonies, film showings and a Fourth of July celebration at the Hollywood Bowl were all featured attractions; all geared toward helping gain support and draw attention to our campaign: Operation: Lift the Ban.

We wish to thank everyone who attended, and everyone for *VETERCARE*, and the various national officers and individuals all around the country who put in countless hours of work to ensure a smashing success.

See you all in 2007!





TAPS

In Memory of Our Fallen Comrades

A neighbor, friend, and fellow Gay Veteran passed away at age 73 after a long illness. Ray C. had been a US Air Force Staff Sgt in Korea. Like nearly everyone else back then, he served in silence. He was a quiet, mostly closeted, gay man who worked in air-shipping most of his life, had a lover long ago, and spent decades devoting his time and energy voluntarily managing youth baseball leagues.

He left me a folio, so his relatives wouldn't find it, which contained faded fifty year old letters to another twenty-something boy, sent so long ago. I read those letters on a sunny Sunday afternoon as I tried to imagine the long forgotten thunder of war, shells slamming into the earth, as that young gay sergeant poured out his heart to another lad in letters written in lulls between battles; letters that meant so much that he'd saved them all these decades into old age.

His funeral was held in the morning, very proper, very Roman Catholic. The Air Force sent a two man Honor Guard, taps was played by the bugler, the flag was folded and presented to his elderly sister. Respecting his wishes, I wore a plain unmarked garrison cap as I saluted his flag-draped coffin. No rainbows. I cried not just for a lost friend, but for the loss of another Gay Hero whose life as a Gay Man went unrecognized uncelebrated, in silence, because of ignorant bigotry. I wanted to grab the bugle and play 'Somewhere Over The Rainbow' and toss a handful of rainbow glitter-dust to help the angels fly him to heaven.

But, I behaved, stood at attention, and saluted his flag in silence. What's left of a vet who lived In The Life? Just those old faded letters?

Denny
NYC



*In Memoriam
Todd Shinkle*

The officers and members of American Veterans For Equal Rights New York wish to convey our warmest condolence to the families of Todd Shinkle: Ron Willard and family, the Shinkle family, the BRAVER chapter founded by Todd, and the Ohio and Northeastern AVER community.

Todd came through like a locomotive at full steam, whistle blowing. He made a commotion; and we are all better for it, bless him.

As the founder of BRAVER, using a combination of Midwest down-to-Earth country cordiality and a 'don't take no for an answer' resolve, Todd managed to convince many of the correctness of repealing the ban on gays serving openly in the military, gaining their endorsement and support, including that of local politicians, businessmen, and veterans groups.

Todd Shinkle was the kind of friend and leader that comes once in a lifetime; his courage will inspire us all to carry on with his vision and determination.

Now, what remains is simply knowing and remembering that he was one of us, another fallen gay veteran hero who devoted himself entirely to the cause.

Denny Meyer,
President, AVER-NY

Wesley Giles Passed Away
April 26th, 2006

Wes Giles was born February 26, 1951, in Los Angeles, California, to Virgil and Martha Giles.



He was preceded in death by his parents and nephew, Karim El Fattal. Wesley is survived by his son, D. J. Medrano; sisters, Nancy El Fattal and husband, Ray, Shelley Olivier and family; nephews, Michael, David, Rashid and Jamil El Fattal; great-nieces, Jenna, Micaela, Brooklynn, Elizabeth (Beth), Katelyn and Juliana El Fattal and great-nephews, Levi, Jacob and Benjamin El Fattal.

Wes will be greatly missed by his fellow veterans but never forgotten. He was the founder of the San Antonio Chapter of *AVER* and helped spawn the Houston Chapter. He energetically fought toward the demise of *Don't Ask Don't Tell* and was unafraid to tell the story to anyone he met. He made one of his dreams come true by forming the Texas Color Guard.

Wes tried his best but could never choke back his tears of pride as his guard led the Pride Parades in San Antonio, Houston, Dallas, Austin and even Waco. In the photograph, Wes is

preparing to lead the FIRST Pride Parade ever held in Austin, Texas, in 2002.

Wes rests now, but his spirit lives on across the community.

Tributes:

"Wes was one of the first people I met when I joined *GLBVA* in 1997. A strong supporter and worker for Veterans rights, *GLBVA/AVER*, and the abrogation of *DADT*. He tried to attend all the conventions, but ironically, he missed most of the SA convention because of his work as a Transportation Security Administration officer. After that convention, he was the TSA officer who checked me at the airport - when the alarm went off! He was conscientious in that job, too, because he didn't let his friendship with me deter him from a thorough job. I shall miss him very much." Chief Jim Donovan – Past President *American Veterans for Equal Rights*.

"I am sorry to hear about the passing of another one of our great veterans. My thoughts and prayers are with all his friends and family. Wes you will be missed, but never

forgotten." James Apedaile – Vice President, Region 4, *American Veterans for Equal Rights*.

"Wes was a true friend. He would not take no for an answer when he asked me to join *AVER* and march in his color guard. I think I said yes but I am still not certain that I did. He was the catalyst for the advances made in Texas and for making the gay and lesbian patriot visible. I am greatly saddened to lose such a friend but I know that Wes is still amongst us at the very core of our motivation. I know of nothing that he would not share with others – friends or strangers. His energy, dogged determination, and 'never give up' drive were contagious. When I grow weary, I shall remember Wes and keep on going. If Heaven has never had a Pride Parade, they are about to!" Dave Guy-Gainer, Vice President, *American Veterans for Equal Rights*.

A well regulated militia, being necessary to
the security of a free state, the right of the people
to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that
all men are created equal, that they are endowed
by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights,
that among these are Life, Liberty and the
pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these
rights, Governments are instituted among Men,
deriving their just powers from the consent of
the governed, — That whenever any Form of
Government becomes destructive of these ends,
it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish
it, and to institute new Government, laying its
foundation on such principles and organizing its
powers in such form, as to them shall seem most
likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

Amendment II to the United States

Constitution

The background of the image is a stylized, wavy American flag. The stars are in a light blue color, and the stripes are in a light red color, set against a white background. The flag is framed by a thin blue border.

***TO ALL
ACTIVE DUTY
AND VETERAN
SERVICEMEMBERS
THANK YOU
FOR
YOUR SERVICE***