



Don't Ask, Don't Tell: Detailing the Damage

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Contents

Overview	2
Cost Snapshot	3
Loss of Critical Skills and Qualified Personnel	4
Costs in Recruitment and Retention: Reliance on Less-Qualified Troops	5
Costs to Unit Cohesion, Privacy, and Morale	7
The Costs of DADT: The Military’s View	8
Damage to Morale and Readiness of Gay and Lesbian Troops	9
Financial costs	11
Notes	12

Overview

Recently, top military leaders, along with many lawmakers and much of the public, have called for an end to the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy that bans gays from serving openly in the military. Polls consistently show a solid majority of Americans are against the policy, and Adm. Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the highest uniformed person in the nation, said in February that lifting the ban was “the right thing to do,” echoing President Obama’s sentiment in the 2010 State of the Union address.

Calls to end the ban have rested largely on the belief that the policy is unfair to gay, lesbian, and bisexual service members, and on a growing awareness of research showing that the policy is not necessary to preserve cohesion, readiness, or effectiveness. But while the policy is overwhelmingly seen as unjust and unnecessary, there is less consensus on whether it is actually harmful to the military, and therefore less of a sense of urgency about the need to repeal the law. Indeed, some defenders of the current policy say “don’t ask, don’t tell” is “working” and that there is no compelling reason to change it, particularly while the nation is engaged in two wars.

This report details a litany of costs incurred by the military, the troops—both gay and non-gay alike, and the nation as a result of DADT. Indeed research and experience now show that the policy is a costly failure that has had the opposite of its intended effect. DADT was supposed to preserve indispensable talent in the armed forces; protect privacy, morale, and unit cohesion; and let gays who did not voluntarily reveal their sexual orientation serve their country discreetly without undue hardship. It was, in short, supposed to make sexuality into a non-issue in the U.S. military.

Yet the actual impact of the policy has been quite different. Far from protecting military readiness, the policy has harmed it, sacrificing badly needed personnel that is replaced with less qualified talent; undermining cohesion, integrity, and trust through forced dishonesty; hurting the morale of gay troops by limiting their access to support services; wasting hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars; invading the privacy of all service members—gay and non-gay alike—by casting a cloud of suspicion and uncertainty over the intimate lives of everyone in the armed forces; and damaging the military’s reputation which makes it harder to recruit the best and brightest America has to offer.

COST SNAPSHOT

DADT has had the opposite of its intended effect by harming privacy, morale, readiness, recruitment, retention and cohesion instead of protecting them. The overall results of DADT have been to:

1. Waste the talents of thousands of essential personnel with “critical skills” who were fired for their sexual orientation, including Arabic language specialists, medical professionals, combat aviators, counter-intelligence agents, military police and more
2. Strike at the heart of unit cohesion by breaking apart cohesive fighting teams, and undermining trust, integrity, and honesty among soldiers
3. Hamper recruitment and retention by shrinking the pool of potential enlistees and discouraging many of America’s best and brightest young people from joining, or remaining in, the military
4. Lower the quality of military personnel by discharging capable gay troops leaving slots to be filled through “moral waivers” that admit felons, substance abusers, and other high-risk recruits
5. Infect the morale of the estimated 66,000 gay, lesbian, and bisexual troops and their military peers who must serve in a climate of needless alienation, dishonesty, and fear
6. Impair the family readiness of gay, lesbian, and bisexual troops who are preparing for deployment since they cannot name their partners on paperwork
7. Hamstring tens of thousands of gay, lesbian, and bisexual service members from doing their jobs by limiting their access to support services that are essential to morale and readiness
8. Invade the privacy of all service members—gay and straight alike—by casting a cloud of suspicion and uncertainty over the intimate lives of everyone in the armed forces
9. Increase reports of harassment that are more difficult to investigate and harder to prevent because of the policy’s strictures on gathering honest information and because of service members’ inability to safely report abuse
10. Embarrass the military through consistently bad press reports on an institution increasingly seen as intolerant, widening the “civil-military gap” and further hampering recruitment efforts by alienating Americans who view the military as out of touch
11. Cost the American taxpayer hundreds of millions of dollars paid toward lost troop replacements, administrative enforcement, and defending the policy in court
12. Use up valuable time by officers who must investigate and discharge gay troops

Loss of Critical Skills and Qualified Personnel

The clearest costs of “don’t ask, don’t tell” are the thousands of qualified service members who are discharged because of the policy, a number which reached 13,500 in fiscal year 2009. The lost troops include Arabic language specialists, pilots, doctors and other medical professionals, intelligence operators, military police, weapons experts and more. These figures do not capture the countless gay, lesbian, and bisexual troops who are spared a discharge but who decline to re-enlist because of the unique burdens placed upon their service, including that they are denied the opportunity to have relationships, start families, and enjoy the benefits that are considered critical to

the morale and retention of military members. The figures also do not count an untold number of young Americans who fail to consider joining the military because—gay or straight—they regard the military as an intolerant and outdated institution because of its discriminatory policy against gay Americans. The consequences to national security of the loss of critical skills is made clear by government statistics and reports decrying the shortage of qualified personnel in the armed forces, particularly during those recent times when recruitment and retention have suffered.

- According to GAO, 757 troops with “critical occupations” were fired under the policy between fiscal years 1994 and 2003. These included voice interceptors, interrogators, translators, explosive ordnance disposal specialists, signal intelligence analysts, and missile and cryptologic technicians.¹

- Three hundred and twenty-two fired service members had skills in what the military deemed “an important foreign language.” In the two years after 9/11 alone, 37 language experts with skills in Arabic, Korean, Farsi, Chinese, or Russian were discharged under the policy. All together, more than 58 Arabic language specialists were discharged as of 2003 because they were gay, and no doubt many more since then.²

- The military has also expelled hundreds of other gay troops with additional needed skills: 268 in intelligence, 57 in combat engineering, 331 in medical treatment, 255 in administration, 292 in transportation, 232 in military police and security, and 420 in supply and logistics between 1998 and 2003. It also ousted 49 nuclear, biological and chemical warfare experts; 52 missile guidance and control operators; and 150 rocket, missile and other artillery specialists.³

- In the first ten years of the policy, 244 medical specialists were fired, including physicians, nurses, biomedical laboratory technicians and other highly trained healthcare personnel. The military acknowledged it has struggled with shortfalls in recruitment and retention of medical personnel for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The consequence of shortfalls in military medical specialists are particularly grave. According to a Senate report issued in 2003 by Senators Christopher Bond and Patrick Leahy, hundreds of injured National Guard and Army reserve soldiers received “inadequate medical attention” while housed at Fort Stewart because of a lack of preparedness that included “an insufficient number of medical clinicians and specialists, which has caused excessive delays in the delivery of care” and a “negative impact on morale.”⁴

- Troop shortages result in the overtaxing of current forces, an over-reliance on the National Guard and reserves (who on average have less training, higher stress levels, and lower morale than full-time soldiers), extended deployments, stop-loss orders delaying discharges, more frequent rotations, and forced recalls.

Costs in Recruitment and Retention: Reliance on Less-Qualified Troops

In addition to the direct loss of personnel through “homosexual conduct” discharges, DADT exacts significant costs in the military’s ability to recruit and retain qualified personnel. Discharges under the policy have occurred in precisely the job categories where shortages have been most dire, and when slots are emptied, standards have been lowered in desperate attempts to fill them. The discharge figures do not capture those who leave or never sign up in the first place due to opposition to the policy, a position held by three quarters of the American public. In the years preceding and following 9/11, all four

major service branches were plagued with recruitment and retention shortfalls. The situation became so dire that Major General Michael Rochelle, head of Army recruiting called 2005 the “toughest recruiting climate ever faced by the all-volunteer army.”⁵ Recruitment has been made tougher both by the banning of recruiters on campuses which oppose discrimination, and by harm to the military’s reputation that results from this opposition, both of which widens a “civil-military” gap that concerns experts across the board.

- According to the Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law, an additional 41,000 qualified gay Americans might join the military if the ban were lifted, and an additional 4,000 personnel might remain in uniform each year if they could do so without having to lie about their identities.⁶

- To fill recruitment shortfalls as the wars in the Middle East wore on, the Pentagon in 2004 began issuing mandatory recalls to thousands of troops for deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan. The Pentagon’s recalls targeted specialists with needed skills in intelligence, engineering, medicine, administration, transportation, and security, the very same areas that were being drained by the discharge of capable gay and lesbian troops. The military could have avoided these involuntary recalls if it had not previously expelled competent gay troops in the very same fields: from 1998-2003 the military recalled 72 soldiers in communication and navigation but expelled 115 gay troops in that category; 33 in operational intelligence but expelled 50 gays; 33 in combat operations control but expelled 106. In total, while the Army announced in 2004 it would recall 5,674 troops from the Individual Ready Reserve, 6,273 troops had been discharged for being gay, lesbian or bisexual since 1998. Further, IRR units are less well-prepared and less cohesive because their personnel have not been training together while not on active-duty.⁷

- Rather than hiring or retaining competent gay troops, the military began to hire less competent recruits, including those who scored poorly on military aptitude test and enlistees who were granted “moral waivers” – invitations to enlist despite a prior record of criminal activity or substance abuse that would normally prohibit entry, including murder, kidnapping, and “making terrorist threats.” In 2005 the army increased by nearly 50 percent the number of new recruits it granted moral waivers. Between 2003 and 2006, 4,230 convicted felons, 43,977 individuals convicted of serious misdemeanors, including assault, and 58,561 illegal drug abusers were allowed to enlist. According to GAO, soldiers who are granted moral waivers are more likely to be discharged for misconduct than those who are not.⁸

- In the spring of 2005, the army reported it was recruiting higher numbers of ex-convicts, drug addicts, and high school dropouts, acknowledging that they were being advanced even when they had failed basic training, “performed poorly,” and become a “liability.” In 2005, the army hired 667 soldiers who scored in the lowest third of the military aptitude test—14 more than the military discharged the previous year under “don’t ask, don’t tell.” Evidence shows that high school dropouts also have higher dropout rates from the service, are more difficult to train, are more prone to disciplinary problems, and are less likely to serve out their contracts.⁹

- While some argue that the number of gay discharges are small, the military itself has found smaller losses unacceptable. In the summer of 2005, the military issued a memo instructing commanders to help “reverse the negative trend” in attrition by lowering standards to retain under-qualified personnel, including drug addicts, alcoholics and those who failed to perform adequately or pass physical fitness tests. “By reducing attrition 1%, we can save up to 3,000 initial-term soldiers,” said the memo.” That’s 3,000 more soldiers in our formations.”¹⁰ The memo concluded, “Each soldier retained reduces the strain on recruiting command and our retention program, which must replace every soldier who departs the Army early.”¹¹ This memo expresses the military’s own view of the high costs of losing a much smaller number of personnel than the 13,500 separated for homosexual conduct.

- Evidence shows that “don’t ask, don’t tell” harms the military’s reputation by embarrassing the military, which further hampers recruitment efforts by alienating Americans who view the military as out of touch. In recent years, the role of DADT in widening “civil-military gap” has been evidenced as mainstream commentators as well as small and even conservative newspapers throughout the country have blasted the policy. “Military Dumb in Any Language,” read the headline of an editorial in the *Charleston Gazette*. “The Pentagon has let prejudice come in the way of the fight against terror,” read the editorial. The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* called the policy “ludicrous” and wrote that it was “utterly inconceivable that our government would compromise the safety of the nation” by firing nearly 10,000 troops

just for being gay. And the *USA Today* editorialized that “The current policy lacks common sense.”¹²

- According to an article in *Armed Forces & Society* by Dr. Aaron Belkin of the Palm Center, the current policy on gay and lesbian service members harms the military’s reputation in at least four ways: it is inconsistent with public opinion; it elicits scathing criticism in the media while garnering almost no positive coverage; it fosters anti-military sentiment on university campuses, which use the policy as an occasion to protest the military generally; and it conflicts with the views of key segments of the military, especially junior enlisted members and certain high-ranking officers who now support openly gay service.¹³

- Since DADT was implemented, more than two thousand high schools have sought to deny military recruiters access to students or student information largely as a result of opposition to the discriminatory policy. The Pentagon acknowledged that in just one year, high schools barred military officials from recruiting on campus more than 19,000 times. The military’s constrained ability to recruit on campuses made it harder to fill shortfalls, and contributed to the reduced standards of incoming troops. The result, as described in a House Armed Services Committee report, was “higher operational risks, reduced readiness, and increased stress on both deployed and non-deployed forces.” The services, it said, “are not able to attract sufficient high quality recruits to maintain the quality force so critical to readiness.” The committee concluded that “further reductions to recruit quality standards present a very costly and dangerous risk to military readiness.”¹⁴

THE COSTS OF DADT

“There is no question that we need more skilled, dedicated personnel, and there is certainly some evidence that the current policy is getting in the way of that.”

— Sen. Sam Nunn, former congressional sponsor of “don’t ask, don’t tell”

“To condone discreet homosexuality in the services while opposing the official acceptance of declared homosexuals is to set oneself up for the charge of hypocrisy.”

— Prof. Charles Moskos, chief academic architect of “don’t ask, don’t tell”

Costs to Unit Cohesion, Privacy, and Morale

While the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy was supposed to preserve unit cohesion, evidence shows that it has instead undermined it by breaking apart cohesive fighting teams, undermining trust and honesty between soldiers, and depriving units of highly valued and valuable members of the team. Rather than protect privacy, it has undercut it by focusing excessive attention on people’s private lives and by telling troops that there are gay people in their units but that they cannot know which unit mates are gay. The impact on morale has been devastating, especially on the estimated 66,000 gay troops, whose access to support services that are critical to readiness is constrained by the policy. The command climate suffers, however, for both gay and straight troops, as a result of forced dishonesty, and an environment of suspicion. Under the policy, the military has investigated, threat-

ened, and even discharged straight service members, and turned people into informants against their friends and co-workers. The military also saw reports of anti-gay harassment mushroom once the policy was implemented, targeting not only gays but straights—often women who did not conform to male expectations of proper gender behavior, or who rebuffed or complained about unwanted male attention. Even when service members have followed the law and policy, they have frequently been investigated and discharged, even when their unit mates and superiors state that their presence is a boon to cohesion and their departure would be a detriment. The resulting atmosphere could be one of veritable witch hunts, accompanied by fear, uncertainty, and deception that impairs, by definition, cohesion and morale.

• In 2009, *Joint Force Quarterly*, a top military journal published for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, published a study citing a “growing gap between social mores and the law,” and finding that, “if one considers strictly the lost manpower and expense, DADT is a costly failure.” The author of the report, Col. Om Prakash, an active duty officer in the Air Force, concluded that the policy:

- » “has had a significant cost in both personnel and treasure”
- » “may do damage to the very unit cohesion that it seeks to protect
- » “has led to an uncomfortable value disconnect as homosexuals serving, estimated to be over 65,000, must compromise personal integrity
- » “has placed commanders in a position where they are expected to know everything about their troops except this one aspect
- » “is not supported by any scientific studies”¹⁵

• Testimony in the case of Major Margaret Witt v. United States Department of the Air Force shows the damage to the unit that resulted from discharging a well respected officer when she was found to be a lesbian. According to declarations in the case by unit mates, the investigation and separation of Major Witt caused harm to the morale and cohesion of the unit. Major Witt was relied on for her leadership capabilities, and helped “ensure the safety” of the unit and the “effective chain of command” in the Squadron. One unit mate wrote that “I believe that the morale of the member [sic] of the 446th have been severely damaged because Major Witt is not allowed to continue to serve with our Squadron” and that “discharging Major Witt from the U.S. Air Force would be detrimental” and that “morale, cohesion, and good order would be severely jeopardized even further.” Another wrote that “Major Witt played an important role in ensuring the good order, morale and cohesion of our Unit,” showing that her discharge itself harmed the unit. Another said that the separation proceedings have made many unit members “upset and angry.” Evaluations said that Major Witt’s leadership contributed to “increasing overall worldwide capabilities and mission readiness of each squadron member,” suggesting that removing her,

absent other substantial benefits, would undercut the readiness of her unit.

- A 2009 study published in the journal, *Military Psychology*, pinpointed the damage to cohesion that can result when gay or lesbian troops are forced to conceal their orientation. The study, which marks the first empirical analysis of the relationship between sexual orientation concealment and unit cohesion in the military, found that sexual orientation disclosure is positively related to unit cohesion, while concealment and harassment are related negatively. Thus that forcing troops to conceal their sexual orientation appears to reduce cohesion.
- In a 2004 report authored by Palm Center’s Senior Research fellow and based on in-depth interviews with gay and lesbian service members who served in Iraq or Afghanistan, nearly all the subjects reported that “don’t ask, don’t tell” impeded their capacity to bond with their peers, to develop trust within their units, to discuss basic

personal matters, and to achieve maximum productivity in their working lives as fighters and support personnel. Many reported that, due to the policy’s strictures on expression, they sometimes avoided socializing with their comrades, and were perceived by others as anti-social.

- The same report concluded that the policy frequently deprives gay and lesbian service members of access to support services, including medical care, psychological assistance and religious consultations, because they have no guarantee that personnel in these offices will hold their words in confidence. Reported hardships were exacerbated during deployment, when support networks and resources outside the military are less accessible.
- Research on foreign militaries summarized in a 2010 study finds that anti-gay discrimination policies result in “a climate of suspicion, paranoia, and harassment” and that “Policies restricting the participation of gay soldiers paradoxically make sexuality a more salient [and hence disruptive] issue.”¹⁶

THE COSTS OF DADT: THE MILITARY’S VIEW

“No matter how I look at the issue, I cannot escape being troubled by the fact that we have in place a policy which forces young men and women to lie about who they are in order to defend their fellow citizens. For me, personally, it comes down to integrity—theirs as individuals and ours as an institution,”

— Adm. Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, U.S Armed Forces

“This policy has had a significant cost in both personnel and treasure... and may do damage to the very unit cohesion that it seeks to protect.”

— Col. Om Prakash (USAF), Dir. of Operations for Industrial Policy, Office of the Secretary of Defense

“This odious and divisive policy is virtually unworkable... and demeans the military as an honorable institution.”

— Rear Adm. John Hutson, former Judge Advocate General, U.S. Navy

“Because of my separation and the regulation that discriminates against homosexuals serving in the military, young people choose not to think about the military as a career.”

— Col. Margarethe Cammermeyer, former Chief of Nursing, Army National Guard, discharged under DADT

“The morale of our members has been severely damaged because Major Witt is not allowed to continue to serve. Discharging Major Witt would be detrimental and I believe that our unit’s morale, cohesion, and good order would be severely jeopardized even further.”

— unit mate of Major Margaret Witt (USAF), former Chief of Medical Aircrew Standards and Evaluations, discharged under DADT

Damage to Morale and Readiness of Gay and Lesbian Troops

Many people believe that gays and lesbians should not need to share their sexual orientation, and that such details should remain a private matter. This section describes the experiences of over two dozen service members whose morale, careers, dignity, and even survival were badly impaired or destroyed as direct result of the

current policy. The episodes reveal the costs of forced concealment and persecution of people based on their actual or perceived sexual orientation in the military, and show that gay people are not seeking any level of expressive freedom greater or lesser than what is rightly expected by straight people serving their country in uniform.¹⁷

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- Airman Sonya Harden was accused of being gay by a third-party accuser with whom she was in an ongoing quarrel over money. Even though she insisted she was straight, ex-boyfriends testified on her behalf, and her accuser eventually recanted, Harden was discharged.
 - A witch hunt started at West Point when an academy counselor read and the army seized Cadet Nikki Galvan's journal, in which Galvan had confided private emotions about her sexuality. Feeling "violated and humiliated," and facing a discharge, Galvan resigned. The investigation expanded to over thirty other women at West Point.
 - After assaulting and threatening to rape a female U.S. soldier stationed in South Korea, a group of male soldiers spread lies that she was a lesbian. Her commander threatened to imprison her if she did not admit being gay and identify other service members suspected of being gay. Even after a military judge dismissed the case for lack of evidence, her commander continued to pursue her discharge until the SLDN intervened and she obtained a transfer.
 - Accused of rape of another man and other charges, Airman Bryan Harris faced life in prison. Air force lawyers reduced his sentence in exchange for the names of all of the men he had had sex with in the military. These men were promptly investigated, and the five who served in the Air Force were fired or court-martialed.
 - Midshipman Robert Gaige wore a red ribbon in solidarity with AIDS victims, a gesture that is supposed to be entirely protected under DADT. Gaige's instructor, Major Richard Stickel, began to harass him and

encouraged others to do so as well. Eventually Gaige acknowledged his sexual orientation and was fired.

- After a shipmate's wife discovered Senior Chief Officer Timothy McVeigh's sexual identity through his AOL profile, investigators sought and obtained private information from AOL. A federal judge concluded that the navy had deliberately violated federal law and stopped McVeigh's discharge; McVeigh was allowed to retire with benefits intact.
- A friend saw a letter from PV2 Alexander Nicholson, a multi-lingual human intelligence collector, to an ex-boyfriend and reported the details to others in the unit. Hoping to contain the damage, Nicholson spoke with a superior, who turned the information over to the command. After being threatened with interrogation and a probing investigation into his private life, Nicholson was pressured to accept separation in exchange for an honorable discharge.
- After Airman Jennifer Dorsey reported an incident during which two women punched her repeatedly in the stomach while yelling, "You sick fucking dyke," her commander, Major Richard Roche, did not discipline the attackers but instead threatened an investigation into Dorsey's sexuality. Dorsey made a "voluntary" statement that she was gay and left under a "don't ask, don't tell" discharge.
- Coworkers of a member of the Coast Guard routinely accused him of being gay. One member of his unit threatened "If I ever find out for sure you're a fag, I'll kick your ass." The victim had little recourse to end the torment besides leaving the Coast Guard.

- After being called “faggot” by his drill sergeant and threatened by other unit members, a private first class in the army was beaten with blankets and soap in the middle of the night. He eventually told his command he was gay and was fired.
- Airman Sean Fucci “voluntarily” left the air force at the end of his service after facing extreme harassment, including notes that said, “Die fag” and “You can’t hide, fag.” Torn between protecting his safety and facing a possible discharge investigation, Fucci reported the events. An investigation into the threats was opened, but to no avail; Fucci was unable to provide sufficient evidence for the search to go anywhere because he was still in the closet and carefully had to watch what he said.
- In the tragic case of Private First Class Barry Winchell, a unit mate who suspected he was gay, Calvin Glover, goaded Winchell into a fist fight and lost. After suffering derision from his peers for having “his ass kicked by a faggot,” Glover took a baseball bat to the bed of Winchell and bludgeoned him to death as he slept.
- During Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, an infantry soldier, Fred Fox, was unable to speak openly with army counselors due to “don’t ask, don’t tell” and was later diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder.
- When her partner was diagnosed with lung cancer, Captain Monica Hill explained the minimum details of her predicament necessary to request a deferred report date. The air force investigated her sexual orientation and discharged her a year after her partner died, while also trying to force Hill to pay back the cost of her medical school scholarship.
- Lieutenant Colonel Peggy Laneri took an early retirement in order to adopt a daughter with her wife and look after the needs of her family without putting her job and future retirement benefits at risk.
- Captain Austin Rooke said that while serving, he “never would have gone to clergy to discuss anything about my particular issues with my sexuality.”
- Army Specialist Wendy Biehl opted for a discharge when her tour ended, having decided that the policy did not allow her to be herself. She said of her time in the military, “I really wasn’t happy and that became a problem for me.”
- Brian Hughes, an army ranger who was part of the team that rescued POW Jessica Lynch, decided not to reenlist because of the family life, since his partner was unable to come to events or plug into support networks that others took for granted.
- After hearing other commanders say “All fags should get AIDS and die” and trying to maintain a forbidden relationship, Army Staff Sergeant Brian Muller decided to come out. Muller, who had earned twenty-one medals at war in Bosnia and Afghanistan, said he was driven to leave by fear and uncertainty about the policy.
- Robert Stout, an army combat engineer who was out to most of his twenty-six-member platoon, served in three combat tours and earned three Army Achievement Medals, a Good Conduct Medal, and a Purple Heart. In April 2005, he announced that he would reenlist if he could be honest, but instead had to sign an agreement saying he would not (further) violate the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy and served the remaining weeks of his contract.
- Patricia Ramirez, a language student at Defense Language Institute, came out to her commander after her and her girlfriend Julie Evans, also a DLI student, decided they could not tolerate a separation but couldn’t request to be placed together like a married couple could. Her commander deemed her statement not credible, and Ramirez and Evans were not discharged until after this commanding officer left the military.
- Bleu Copas, an Arabic linguist in the 82nd Airborne Division who graduated from the Defense Language Institute, was outed by a string of anonymous emails, which inquiry officials theorized were from a jealous lover.
- Stephen Benjamin, a cryptologic interpreter who was out to nearly everyone he worked with, was called in for questioning for making a comment on the government computer system: “That was so gay—the good gay, not the bad one.” Benjamin stated that, when he was discharged, “the only harm to unit cohesion that was caused was because I was leaving.”

- During medical school, a male civilian began to stalk and harass Beth Schissel, an air force officer and physician specializing in pediatric emergency medicine, threatening to out her as a tool of vengeance against someone they both knew well. Terrified, Schissel came out in hopes of blunting the stalker’s weapon, and was discharged on September 10, 2001.

- Air Force Major Michael Almy was discharged after his private emails were searched based on an anonymous tip sent to his commander. He was removed from his job where he commanded 180 men and women in Iraq, stripped of his security clearance, and ultimately discharged despite never making a statement or

committing an act that violated the policy. Major Almy was deployed to the Middle East four times with a unit that took daily mortar attacks, one of which he watched strike his own comrade. Almy was named one of the top officers in his field for the entire Air Force, and was replaced by a junior Captain who was less prepared for the job and far less respected by his troops.

- Jene Newsome, an aircraft armament system craftsman who spent nine years in the Air Force, was outed by the local police force after they spotted her marriage license to another woman in her home while seeking to question her wife on unrelated charges. Newsome had never told anyone in the military that she was a lesbian.

Financial costs

Estimating the overall cost of discharging those found to be gay, lesbian or bisexual from the U.S. military carries with it several challenges. The military itself says it does not maintain figures on these costs. The Government Accountability Office has several times produced detailed reports aiming to estimate these costs, but the limitations that even the GAO have encountered are so substantial that it titled a 2005 report, “Military Personnel: Financial

Costs and Loss of Critical Skills Due to DOD’s Homosexual Conduct Policy Cannot Be Completely Estimated.” The figures discussed here must be seen as conservative, since the totals indicated in the GAO figures consistently omitted many costs, including the legal, administrative, and personnel costs of enforcing and defending “don’t ask, don’t tell” both inside and outside the military (i.e. in civilian courts).

- In February 2005, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report that found that during its first ten years, the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy cost the military \$190.5 million: \$95.4 million to recruit replacements for service members separated under the policy and \$95.1 million to train them.¹⁸ However, the GAO acknowledged that it had difficulties in coming up with its estimate.¹⁹ In its estimate the GAO did not offset any of these costs with the value recovered by the military through the time troops served prior to their discharge.²⁰ This likely resulted in a higher cost estimate than the actual number. GAO also appeared to underestimate costs by not including, for instance, the amount spent to train replacement officers, and by using inconsistent figures for the training costs they did include.

- In response to the GAO report, the Palm Center at the University of California at Santa Barbara organized

a Blue Ribbon Commission to study the GAO’s report. The Commission comprised high-level military officials and academic experts in military affairs and finance. The Commission found that errors in GAO’s methodology, including its failure to include length-of-training data and its misrepresentation of cost-of-training data, led to both over- and under-estimations of the total cost of implementing “don’t ask, don’t tell.” When these over- and under-estimations were reconciled, the Commission found that the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy cost the Pentagon at least \$363.8 million to implement during its first ten years, or 91 percent more than originally reported by GAO. Because the Commission used conservative assumptions, even these finding should be seen as a lower-bound estimate.²¹

- In 2010, the Williams Institute, a think tank at UCLA School of Law, updated the costs to account for the years since Palm’s earlier report was released. By applying

the per-person costs calculated in the 2006 Blue Ribbon Commission report to the additional discharge figures of the intervening years, Williams put the new overall minimum cost of DADT at \$555 million.²²

- According to a 1992 GAO report, there were 16,919 discharges for homosexual conduct between 1980 and 1990, with replacement costs totaling \$498,555,244. The Servicemembers Legal Defense Network has applied those annualized costs to the Pentagon's discharge figures

for 1991, 1992, and 1993, thereby bringing the total cost of replacing lost troops between 1980 and 1993 to over \$567 million. That puts the total cost of enforcing the policy since 1980, when President Carter's service-wide gay ban went into effect, at over \$1 billion, keeping in mind that this figure is certainly an underestimation, since, as the GAO report points out, the calculations do not include several relevant administrative and legal costs of enforcing the policy.²³

Notes

1. "Financial Costs and Loss of Critical Skills," GAO, February 2005.
2. "Financial Costs and Loss of Critical Skills," GAO, February 2005; the figures come from government data and published sources aggregated with knowledge of additional discharges confirmed in personal interviews.
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