

PRESS RELEASE



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Gay, Lesbian & Bisexual Veterans of America, Inc.

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GAY, LESBIAN & BISEXUAL VETERANS OF AMERICA **MEET WITH PENTAGON OFFICIALS**

For the first time in U.S. History a national non-profit organization for gay, lesbian and bisexual veterans has met with top Pentagon officials to discuss issues of concern to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered veterans of the United States Armed Forces. Representing GLBVA in the meeting, which was held May 5, 1997 inside the Pentagon, was James Darby, National President; Mel Tip, Treasurer; Edward Clayton, VP Public Affairs; Cliff Arnesen, VP Legislative Affairs; and Terry Tobias, GLBVA Veterans Advisory Council. Representing the Pentagon were Frederick Pang, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Force Management Policy and Colonel David Schreier, Principal Director and Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Personnel Policy.

During the meeting, which lasted over an hour, GLBVA officers presented a slate of five issues to Assistant Secretary Pang and Colonel Schreier. While expressing general dissatisfaction with the current DON'T ASK, DON'T TELL, DON'T PURSUE policy, the group pointed out that homosexual related discharges have increased dramatically under this policy to an all-time high in 1996 when 850 servicemembers were discharged due to their actual or perceived sexual orientation. The group also called for an independent military review board to be established to investigate reported or suspected violations of the DON'T ASK, DON'T TELL, DON'T PURSUE policy and hold base commanders responsible for violations which occur within their commands.

Additionally, the group of veterans called for:

- * the repeal of Article 125 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice pointing out that this article, commonly known as "the sodomy clause", is disproportionately used against gay and bisexual servicemembers
- * the end to efforts by the military to seek recoupment of expenses for training from servicemembers who are discharged for being gay, lesbian or bisexual
- * improvements in the treatment of veterans with HIV and AIDS at Veterans Administration hospitals; and
- * the upgrading of less-than-honorable discharges to the status of "honorable" in all cases where servicemembers were separated solely on the basis of their actual or perceived sexual orientation.

In response, Assistant Secretary Pang acknowledged that the Pentagon is aware that there are severe problems with the implementation of the current policy and that they are studying the problem. He also stated his objection to the establishment of an independent military review board saying he felt it was too early to undertake such an elaborate action but would rather wait to see the results of a review which is currently underway within the Pentagon.

Pang did tell the group that preliminary data from that study seems to reveal that the highest rate of discharges under the current policy appear to be among servicemembers who are in their first term of enlistment and stationed at a training command. He said that the study should be completed in about four to six months and assured the group that GLBVA would receive a copy of the report and afforded the opportunity to return to the Pentagon to discuss the study and offer suggestions on the improvement of the implementation of this policy.

GLBVA, Inc. is the only national non-profit organization for gay, lesbian and bisexual active duty, reserve and veteran members of the United States Armed Forces, their families, friends and supporters.