



THE  
**F**ORWARD **O**BSERVER

THE NATIONAL NEWSLETTER OF AMERICAN VETERANS FOR EQUAL RIGHTS, INC.  
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## Historic Twentieth Anniversary Wreath-Laying Ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery



President Danny Ingram Escorts WWII Veterans to Tomb



Father McNeil, Mr. Strouss, Dr. Kameny and President Ingram

## Local Chapters Celebrate Pride Across Country



Seattle



Albuquerque



Chicago



New York City

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## FROM THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Members of American Veterans for Equal Rights are not lobbyists, researchers or politicians. We are not paid staffers, interns or pollsters. What we are is an all-volunteer group of United States military veterans who are proud of our service and dedicated to the success of the armed forces and the equal treatment of all those patriotic men and women courageous enough to answer the call to serve their nation in our military. *Our* military. When members of AVER talk about the lives of LGBT members of the military family, we are not relating someone else's story.

We are telling *our* story, a story that comes from the heart, genuine, unpolished by a speech writer or augmented by a strategist. And the people who hear our stories, especially other veterans and service members, know they are hearing the truth from one of their own. It is a truth that they can trust, because vets know each other and understand the common bond that we share as soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines. And that is the reason, fellow veterans, why AVER is unique among the many groups working to end the dishonor of the ban; and why your voice and your defense of our nation's freedom are still vitally needed today.

We are all experiencing the challenges of an economic downturn. I know that many of us are having to look hard at the organizations we support and make difficult decisions about where our limited resources will go. There are many excellent groups working to lift the ban. I hope you will consider your membership in AVER as a valuable part of your personal commitment to restore the honor of our military and end a policy that undermines the mission of our nation's armed forces, jeopardizes our national defense, and directly endangers the lives of those young men and women who took up the torch of freedom  
*(continued on page 12)*



## FROM THE MANAGING EDITOR

As you can see from the many articles in this newsletter, this spring and summer have been extremely busy times for AVER. From veterans lobby days to Operation Golden Eagle and the Arlington National Cemetery wreath laying, to the Washington, D.C. Pride Parade, to the Pentagon survey and AVER's response, to the widespread participation of AVER chapters in pride parades across the country—and to the continuous press coverage of the “don't ask, don't tell” policy there has been no time to rest. We all should be so thankful that AVER has an excellent national board of officers and has been able to respond in a timely fashion to this whirlwind of activity and publicity.

September is dues time. Our dues are \$35.00 a year and payable every September. AVER has no paid staff. We are all volunteers. We depend upon your dues and donations to keep the organization going. Let me take this opportunity to thank you in advance for your continued support. “Don't ask, don't tell” will not disappear on its own. Your continued support is what will eventually topple it. Please send your dues to your local chapter.

Thank you for continuing to serve your country.

Respectfully,  
Jim Darby, Managing Editor  
jamesdarby@aol.com





## Gay Vets Applaud Ruling Against Ban

American Veterans for Equal Rights (AVER), the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender national veterans service organization, applauds the recent ruling by a California judge that the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy violates the U.S. Constitution. On September 9, 2010 U.S. Federal District Court Judge Virginia A. Phillips ruled that the policy violates the 1st and 5th Amendment rights of gay and lesbian service members in a case brought by the Log Cabin Republicans, a national organization of LGBT members of the Republican Party.

"We were particularly pleased with the grounds on which Judge Phillips reached her decision," said Danny Ingram, national president of AVER. "The judge noted in her decision that 'it defies logic that the purposes of the Act could be served by suspending the investigation [of suspected LGBT service members] during overseas deployments, only to discharge a service member upon his or her return to a non-combat station'. AVER has been saying all along that the best proof that 'don't ask, don't tell' hurts the military is offered by the military itself, which regularly ignores the policy and retains known LGBT soldiers in combat situations, to discharge them only when the unit rotates home again. If the military really believed that openly gay personnel 'damaged unit cohesion and morale' they would get them out of the unit immediately, but they don't, because commanders on the ground know that the real damage to a modern military unit comes from losing a critical member of the team. 'don't ask, don't tell' jeopardizes the mission. As proud veterans of the U.S. military, AVER strongly supports the repeal of 'don't ask, don't tell,' not only because repeal is the right thing to do, but because the policy damages the military and places the lives of service members in jeopardy

by removing mission critical skills from the battlefield."

The case now faces a potential appeal by the Obama administration before the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. While President Obama has repeatedly promised to end the "don't ask, don't tell" ban, he has continued to have the Justice Department defend the rule of law. "President Obama may be caught between a rock and a hard place," said Ingram. "We hope that the Commander-in-Chief will take the high road and allow the law to expire, but if he doesn't, he can at least place a halt to discharges until the Court has had an opportunity to hear the case."

## Senate Nearing Vote on Repealing "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"

As Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Senator Carl Levin said on July 22, the full Senate is scheduled to consider the repeal of "don't ask, don't tell" this month after lawmakers return from their August recess.

Advocates have been anticipating a vote on the fiscal year 2011 Defense Authorization Bill after the Senate Armed Services Committee attached the repeal provision to the bill on May 27 and reported out the legislation to the floor.

Aubrey Sarvis, from Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, said that scheduling the defense bill for a vote in early September is "absolutely essential to move forward with repeal to finish legislative action before Congress goes into 'lame-duck.'"

[Editor's note: As this newsletter went to press, senators fell short of earning the 60 votes necessary to start debate on the 2011 Defense Authorization Bill by a vote of 56 to 43. Although this may be a near-fatal blow to efforts to repeal the military's "don't ask, don't tell" provision in the near term, we continue to persevere in our efforts for repeal.]

## Vets Group Encourages Gay and Lesbian Troops to Take Pentagon Survey

Danny Ingram, president of American Veterans for Equal Rights, commenting on the recent release of a long-anticipated Department of Defense survey regarding attitudes of active-duty and reserve service members toward serving with openly gay personnel in America's armed forces, said "the survey may very well reveal that today's patriotic young volunteers, honorably serving around the world today, are likely to show that they overwhelmingly believe in the equality they have sworn to defend and have not the slightest concern about serving alongside fellow soldiers who happen to be gay."

Ingram noted that other recent scientific surveys such as the 2006 Zogby poll of active duty combat veterans demonstrated that nearly 75% had no issues with serving alongside lesbian and gay personnel. "The current Pentagon survey [*2010 DOD Comprehensive Review Survey of Uniformed Active Duty and Reserve Service Members*] should reveal a similar result," said Ingram, who, along with other gay and lesbian veterans, met with the Department of Defense's Comprehensive Review Working Group at the Pentagon in May where the survey was discussed. "Secretary of Defense William Gates has ordered the Working Group to carry out this research," continued Ingram, "and DOD General Counsel Charles Johnson and General Carter Ham, who head up the Working Group, were committed to performing their duty as instructed. The questions are very extensive, and some of them have been viewed as biased, but AVER believes that a majority of today's service members will reflect an increasingly nondiscriminatory attitude toward gay service."

AVER encourages LGBT personnel to respond to the survey as part of the 400,000 active and reserve service members invited to participate. Some LGBT groups have warned gay and lesbian service members not to take the survey when invited, but participants are not asked about their own sexual orientation. LGBT personnel should refrain from indicating their orientation anywhere in the survey to protect themselves from discharge under the current “don’t ask, don’t tell” law which prohibits truthful and honest service by gay personnel. “There is nothing in the survey which even gets close to asking about whether you’re gay,” said Rear Admiral Al Steinman, an AVER member and one of the nation’s leading experts on the issue of gays in the military. “To deny the Pentagon the power of our voices on this critical issue is unwise,” continued the admiral. “If we fail to let the Pentagon understand what life under “don’t ask, don’t tell” is like for gay and lesbian service members by not giving honest answers to these questions, we only hurt ourselves by allowing the opinions of those who oppose our service to have undue weight. Repealing “don’t ask, don’t tell” simply means that all men and women who don the uniform in defense of their nation can serve under the same rules and regulations—that is not a difficult concept to understand.”

## Illinois Congressman Quigley Calls for End to “don’t ask, don’t tell”

On July 21, 2010 Democratic Congressman Mike Quigley from Illinois once again called for an immediate end to “don’t ask, don’t tell.” The complete text of his remarks follows:

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to reaffirm my commitment to an immediate repeal of “don’t ask, don’t tell.”

I applaud the Department of Defense for initiating a plan, but I remain deeply disappointed that instead of moving forward immediately, we’re on hold.

We’re spending millions on a thirty-two page survey, asking service members how they feel about the repeal when polls show that this is unnecessary.

What’s worse, as a country founded on liberty and equality, we’re denying basic human rights to some of our brave men and women who are defending those very principles.

Unlike twenty-five of our allies, including every original NATO signatory other than the U.S. and Turkey, we have not ended discrimination.

Experts say what is needed is not a study, but rather a quick and authoritative, top-down repeal. Our military leaders must act now before our pace destroys our mission.

Thank you and I yield back.

## Remarks by Dan Choi

First Lieutenant Dan Choi, one of the most outspoken gay critics of the military’s “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy was honorably discharged from the Army on July 23, 2010. He was arrested in March 2010 for handcuffing himself to the White House fence in protest of the policy. His comments about “don’t ask, don’t tell” follow:

This is both an infuriating and painful announcement, but my service continues. Remaining silent when our family and community members are fired or punished for who they truly are would be an unequivocal moral dereliction that tarnishes the honor of the uniform and insults the meaning of America.

## Wreath Laying at Arlington National Cemetery, June 2010

*Last June AVER celebrated 20 years of working for LGBT equality in the U.S. Armed Forces. The celebration was called Operation Golden Eagle, a series of events*

*planned in conjunction with Capital Pride in Washington, D.C., the city where AVER was founded in 1990.*

*A main event of Operation Golden Eagle was the wreath-placing ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery on Friday, June 11<sup>th</sup>. The wreath-placing complement included AVER National President Danny Ingram, and three prominent gay World War II veterans: Father John J. McNeill, Dr. Frank Kameny, and Mr. Jack Strouss.*

*Jack Strouss is 87 years old. He was born in Atlanta, Georgia, where he still lives today. Following are Jack’s own words describing the Arlington Cemetery event. He wrote this for his family, but has allowed us to share it with AVER:*

The veterans organization to which I belong, American Veterans For Equal Rights—AVER—through the diligence of our national president, Mr. Danny Ingram, requested that our veterans organization be allowed to place a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknowns at Arlington National Cemetery in honor of our WWII veterans from our organization, living and dead. This honor was granted and the date of June 11, 2010 was given and to be held at 1:35 p.m. that date.

We gathered at the main gate of the cemetery well ahead of our schedule time as special permission had to be given for our vehicles to drive to the amphitheater area as our WWII veterans could not walk that distance up the long hill. With handicap tags for each vehicle (three) for our party of seven, we were given special tags that allowed our vehicles in the parking area nearest the Tomb of the Unknowns.

Once there it was a short walk to a receiving room under the amphitheater where we were to be inspected for proper dress at this hallowed site. We all had military uniforms or proper civilian or clerical dress. Two of our party were clerics.

At the time for our ceremony to begin, the sergeant at arms, who would lead us down the stairs and throughout the ceremony, came and explained in detail what we would be doing as we

followed him down to the Tomb. We assumed that he was one of the military who is assigned as a perpetual guard for the Tomb. He was quite tall, perfectly dressed in his uniform, and very careful with his specific spoken instructions that we were to follow.

With us that day were three members of AVER who are WWII veterans—one from Florida, one from Georgia, and one from the District of Columbia. They all served in the European theater of operations in WWII. They are: Father John J. McNeill, Dr. Frank Kameny and me, Mr. Jack W. Strouss.

We followed the sergeant at arms outside to the top of the steps that lead down to the Tomb. There we were placed two by two with Danny Ingram and myself as the two leads behind the sergeant at arms. Directly behind us were Dr. Kameny and Father McNeill side by side. The others in our party were allowed to follow down only to the last step. We four were only allowed on the terrace level with the Tomb.

Hundreds of tourists visit the Tomb each day and watch the sentinels as they march back and forth in 30-minute periods. Then the change of the guard occurs. The tourist area is restricted and is outside the stairs we used.

Fortunately I was placed to the left of Danny Ingram on whose left arm I steadied myself during the descent of the many steps to the Tomb Level. I had my walking stick, as did the other two veterans, but having Danny kept me from wobbling and even possibly missing a step on the descent.

Once on the Tomb level, we followed the sergeant at arms to the edge of the black rubber pad upon which the sentinels march back and forth. Our wreath had already been placed near the Tomb and the sergeant at arms then crossed the black pad and brought the wreath up to our side of the pad. He told us to place our hands on the wreath and to follow him. I indicated to him that I had a walking stick, and he

then said, *hand* realizing I could not use hands as he had instructed. So Danny and I put our hand and hands on the wreath. Then the sergeant at arms told us to follow him. He walked backwards over the black pad to the side quite near the face of the Tomb with us holding the wreath until he stopped and set it down.

It was only then that I could take a moment to look up and realize where we were, and we were so close to the Tomb that it seemed to loom over us. I had no idea it was so large or tall and seen from a distance, as everyone usually does see it, one has no feel for how large or small the Tomb is. I had been there before as a tourist and suddenly realized where I was standing. Then I could read the simple inscription on the side of the Tomb facing us: "Here Rests In Honored Glory An American Soldier Known But to God."

It is difficult to describe that moment now as I remember it, however I know that the names of several departed friends, my WWII buddies, flashed through my mind. There was total silence as the tourist area has clearly marked signs noting that "complete silence and respect is required." Then the sergeant at arms shouted his command: "Present arms!" We saluted and taps began to sound from the bugler just to our left.

I must admit that I had quite a few tears to shed during those moments. It was indeed a very emotional moment that only one who is in that exact spot at that time in the ceremony can experience—a moment that is clearly etched in my memory.

After taps faded away, the sergeant at arms shouted his "Order arms!" We broke our salutes and many tourists lowered their hands from over their hearts—all of this in complete silence except for the commands from the sergeant at arms and the sound of the bugle.

I then looked at the wreath before us and the inscription on the large

ribbon that was woven in between the flowers: "American Veterans For Equal Rights Honors Our WWII Veterans." This was not just for the three of us present, of course, but AVER members who have gone on before us as well.

Then the sergeant at arms softly told us to turn about. (Fortunately he did *not* call "about face!" since both Danny and I were in full uniform. He realized that with my walking stick such a move would be impossible, and for that I was grateful.) Then he simply told us to return to the steps for the return to the upper terrace where others of our party were waiting.

Again Danny's right arm, this time, allowed me to steady myself on the slow climb back up those many steps. We did not try to move fast and finally reached the top. Then we went back into the reception room (a memorial room in the amphitheater) to meet with our party and a few invited well-wishers and photographers. Many flashes were popping about and we three WWII vets were asked to step up on a small raised platform in front of a large flag display for more photos of us.

After perhaps 15 to 20 minutes, we were finally able to gather our party together and leave that room. At the request of our AVER photographer, we went to a shaded lawn area for more photographs in an entirely different setting.

Our photographer, and others in our party, took photos all during the formal ceremony. They had to do the best they could because they were not allowed on the Tomb level, and had to either take photos of our backs, or our fronts using a telescopic lens on the camera.

Fortunately it was not a very hot and humid summer day as is often the case in D.C. We were comfortable in 85 degrees with low humidity as we made our way back to the vehicles for our return to the city.

I felt that, since my memory was still sharp just a week after the ceremo-



ny, I should make this written account for myself and anyone else, either now or in the future, who might wish to read about this great event that AVER took part in on Friday, June 11, 2010.

—Jack Strouss, WWII veteran and member of AVER



*Operation Golden Eagle was a tremendous experience for LGBT veterans of all ages from all eras. Most of all, AVER is about honoring service and we had the opportunity in June to say thank you to all LGBT veterans for your service and your dedication to helping end the injustice of the ban. In Washington, D.C., on the weekend of June 11–13 we had the privilege and opportunity to honor our WWII generation, and we celebrated the camaraderie unique to those of us who have served in the armed forces.*

*There is an organization for you as an LGBT veteran, and it is AVER. Come see what we are about and consider membership in the only LGBT veterans service organization recognized by the Department of Veterans Affairs.*

## Veterans Lobby Days 2010

As president I represented American Veterans for Equal Rights on Monday and Tuesday, May 10 and 11, 2010, at veterans lobby days on “don't ask, don't tell” in Washington, D.C. Servicemembers United and Human Rights Campaign sponsored the event, in partnership with over 70 other LGBT organizations from around the nation, including AVER, Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, Transgender American Veterans Association, and many other groups. Four hundred twenty-five LGBT veterans representing all branches of the Armed Forces participated in the event which culminated in a massive lobbying of Congress on Tuesday, May 10. The event has been labeled an “unprecedented phenomenal grass roots effort” by the president of Servicemembers United, Alex Nicholson.

I arrived in Washington, D.C. on Sunday, May 9, and had the great honor of taking Dr. Frank Kameny to dinner that evening. Eric Cox of AVER's National Capital Chapter joined Dr. Kameny and me. The three of us had dinner and talked for about two hours. Getting to meet the legendary Frank Kameny, one of the original founders of the modern LGBT movement and a WWII veteran, was a remarkable experience for me. What a sweet, fascinating and courageous gentleman he is. Dr. Kameny was one of three WWII veterans to be honored at AVER's 20th anniversary event in Washington, D.C. in June. This event is becoming increasingly important as I will explain later.

On Monday morning, May 10, I joined 40 other participants in an extremely rare opportunity to meet with the Comprehensive Review Working Group of the Department of Defense in the Pentagon. The Working Group has been charged with developing an overall strategy of *how* to implement the repeal of “don't ask, don't tell.” I emphasize the word *how* because it indicates a very important distinction. The meeting was hosted by Charles Johnson, General Counsel of the Department of Defense and General Carter Ham, Commanding General, U.S. Army Europe, who is in charge of the Working Group. All together there were 32 stars on various shoulders in the room, certainly the most I have ever seen in one location. General Ham asked that the discussion be off the record. I will simply say that the Working Group greatly valued the opportunity to hear from a group of gay veterans, a voice they have not previously heard. The Group seemed genuinely committed to accomplishing the mission they had been assigned. It was a very positive experience to hear a four star general use the words *gay* and *lesbian* comfortably. General Ham also noted that he preferred the phrases *serving honestly* and *serving truthfully* to *serving openly*. Most important message: Congress needs to untie the military's

hands and let them implement a policy of non-discrimination. All the military needs is a go-ahead.

One of the many luminaries who participated in the event was the ever charming First Lieutenant Dan Choi. I told him that I didn't recognize him without his arm chained to the White House fence. He was much more energetic and humorous than the last time I met him in Fort Lauderdale when he spoke at the AVER national convention in October 2009.

On Tuesday morning, May 11, we heard from a number of speakers including Joe Solmonese, who is the president of the Human Rights Campaign, and two polling data experts. Not surprisingly, data shows that straight troops still don't want to serve with LGBT people. Age appears to be an important factor in acceptance.

The more than 400 veterans attending Lobby Days were divided into teams by states for pre-scheduled meetings with their state's congressional representatives. I was the only veteran from Georgia, so I had a busy schedule. The most important point I made was: “We want to see ‘don't ask, don't tell’ repealed this year.” I also told my personal story in these meetings being one of the first to have been discharged under “don't ask, don't tell” in 1994.

We all marched over to the capitol building where we were greeted by Senator Lieberman who is the sponsor of the Military Readiness Enhancement Act in the Senate. He gave us our commission to go lobby like crazy and off we went along with Emily Sussman, an attorney from the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network.

I made our first visit to one of my local Georgia representatives, David Scott. I am the treasurer of the DeKalb County Democratic Party in Georgia. DeKalb County touches the districts of three representatives, including that of David Scott. Of course we didn't meet with Congressman Scott, but rather with a staffer. The strategy in the House

is to attach the Military Readiness Enhancement Act as an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act. The amendment will then be voted on. Either they keep it or they don't. Scott will likely vote for the amendment, but he is too cautious to sign on as a sponsor. I'll work on that.

Next we went to see Republican Senator Saxby Chambliss, who has already stated his opposition to the bill, saying during a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing that repealing the rule would pave the way for allowing "alcohol use, adultery, fraternization, and body art" in the military. We met with his aide. The strategy of the opposition was becoming clear. Those who opposed the bill to repeal "don't ask, don't tell" wanted to wait until the Pentagon Working Group releases their report in December, claiming that the report was in fact a study to determine *whether or not* to repeal "don't ask, don't tell," rather than *how* to repeal "don't ask, don't tell." As we went along, we began to see more and more signs that it was no coincidence that the Working Group's report deadline was after the November elections.

Our next visit to Republican Senator Johnny Isakson revealed the strategy had already been circulated. Isakson's aide, however, seemed to be moved by my personal story. There were other arguments that appealed to him. My personal favorite is that a soldier who is wounded on the battlefield would rather have a gay medic save his life than die. That argument could not be denied, and I used it all day. Another important point is that "don't ask, don't tell" discriminates against women, who are discharged at twice the rate of men, in addition to the fact that minorities are also discharged at disproportional rates. Another fact that we brought up on our congressional travels regards ROTC scholarships: many thousands of young people are denied the opportunity of an

increasingly important college education because "don't ask, don't tell" denies them access to an ROTC scholarship if they are gay or lesbian.

Next we met with the chief staffer for New York Representative Nadler. This was when I learned all about *whipping*. Whipping is getting fellow representatives to sign on at the last minute to make sure they vote the way you want them to vote. Nadler will be doing some whipping for the bill. A positive experience. We were energized.

Did you know that there are mini subways under the Capitol? We rode them a lot. We got lost a lot. We were escorted out at one point. We went through many security scans and changed badges. I wanted to see the inside of the Capitol dome. I saw it briefly and rapidly. We passed through the many hallways and many tunnels, all at a rapid pace in an attempt to see everyone. We ate lunch in one of the underground cafeterias. If you've read Dan Brown's latest book *The Lost Symbol*, which is set in D.C., let me tell you a lot of those tunnels really are there!

Next was my representative, the legendary John Lewis, who has an office in the Capitol because he is the chair of the Budget Committee. We met with his chief staffer, Miguel Martinez, whom I have talked with on the phone many times. Congressman Lewis' office looks out dead center on the National Mall. Nancy Pelosi's private balcony is directly below. I asked, but they don't open the window to pass notes down. Lewis is a cosponsor of the bill. His staff members see all civil rights issues as exciting, and they were looking forward to the "don't ask, don't tell" battle. Lewis will be using his *dignitas* to influence other members of the House.

Next to see Representative Hank Johnson, whose district also touches DeKalb County, so my Democratic cap was on again. He is also a cosponsor. He and Lewis are the only two cosponsors

of the bill in Georgia. I thanked him for his work as a representative and for his cosponsorship of the bill. He said he would be there for us.

We were fortunate, also, to speak with Maine Representative Chellie Pingree. She is very supportive. Representative Pingree pulled Colorado Representative Jared Polis out of the meeting so we could speak with him. He, of course, is also very supportive.

Bottom line: Inclusion of "don't ask, don't tell" repeal language in the defense authorization has a 50/50 chance. The argument to "wait to hear from the military" is very compelling, even if it is misleading. Many congress members may buy the argument. If they can stall until after the November elections when Democrats may lose one or more houses, the chance to lift the ban may be lost for several years, even though lifting it certainly seems inevitable at this point.

What you can do: if you live in Florida, bombard Senator Bill Nelson with letters, faxes and phone calls. We need his vote. Same for Jim Webb in Virginia. Your voice as a veteran counts more. I have said that all along. Our representatives need to hear the voices of LGBT veterans. They do not hear the voices of LGBT service members because those service members are discharged when they speak up. I have said repeatedly that we must be their voices. In this case, it is literally true.

Regardless of what happens with the House and Senate bills, the presence of three distinguished WWII veterans lending their voices to the battle was very important when AVER participated in D.C. Pride in early June as the final bills were working their way through the process. We hope that Frank Kameny, John McNeill, and Jack Strouss have had a profound influence on the battle to beat the ban.

—Danny Ingram, *National President*



# News from AVER's National Committees

## Public Affairs

In the past year AVER Public Affairs has received dozens of interview and information requests from news media and documentary productions, students, and organizations. We have been asked to speak about “don't ask, don't tell” issues, to provide veterans for local interviews, to provide speakers at events, to give background to students writing papers about “don't ask, don't tell,” to provide advice and liaison in treating LGBT vets at VA facilities and civilian helping agencies, and to provide advice and testimony to governmental agencies and advocacy organizations.

News and documentary inquiries, and requests for interviews have come from the following sources: PBS, CNN, HBO, the *New York Times*, the Associated Press, news media in Spain, *Singapore Times*, the *Desert Sun*, the *Olympian*, the *San Diego Union Tribune*, college newspapers, internet radio programs, local TV stations in Texas, Florida, and Virginia, Wisconsin Public Radio, and *Time* and *Glamour* magazines, among others.

Dozens of graduate students have asked for detailed information; and we have begun to receive requests from high school students writing or making school presentations about “don't ask, don't tell.” We have also been contacted for information or liaison by the Pentagon Comprehensive Working Group, Rand Corporation, Victory Fund, and have given testimony on “don't ask, don't tell” to the New York City Council.

—Denny Meyer, *AVER Public Affairs*

## Veterans Affairs

AVER Veterans Affairs provides information, referral, and liaison to individuals and organizations. In the past year we have had requests for advice, information and referrals from dozens of LGBT veterans inquiring about benefits, partner benefits, and reporting discrimination at VA facilities. In addition to inquires from civilian and university helping organizations asking for advice on treating LGBT veterans, we have had over half a dozen inquires from VA facilities and Vet Centers asking for advice in treating LGBT veterans. An example of the sort of inquiries we now receive from veterans is one from a retired master sergeant who recently married his partner. He sought advice on how DEERS would respond when he applies for benefits for his legal spouse.

—Denny Meyer, *AVER Veterans Affairs*

## Gay Military Signal

*Gay Military Signal* is an independent webzine edited by Denny Meyer, featuring stories about patriotic LGBT veterans (“Profiles in Patriotism”), interviews with members of Congress, and commentary on “don't ask, don't tell” by historians and leaders in the “don't ask, don't tell” repeal movement. Current articles include interviews with First Lieutenant Dan Choi and First Lieutenant Robin Chaurasiya. Read *Gay Military Signal* at [www.gaymilitarysignal.com](http://www.gaymilitarysignal.com).

If you would like to tell your story on *Gay Military Signal*, please contact us at [gaymilitarysignal@yahoo.com](mailto:gaymilitarysignal@yahoo.com).

—Denny Meyer, *Gay Military Signal*

## Chapter Reports

### Albuquerque

At the April meeting of the New Mexico Bataan Chapter of AVER new officers were elected.

There was a presentation called “Duty to Honor for Our Country.” This is a new online presentation that includes photos of our chapter at the Equality Across America March in Washington, and our color guard presentations for the Veterans Day Parade and Albuquerque Pride Parade. Our color guard again lead the Albuquerque Pride Parade on June 12th.

This online presentation has been given at a local young men's group, at Prime Timers and PFLAG meetings, and at the Rainbow Vision retirement community in Santa Fe.

On August 14<sup>th</sup>, the Bataan Chapter celebrated with its annual end of summer pool party and barbecue.

We have made tentative plans to set up a GLBT booth at the state fair.

The dates for the Bataan chapter meetings vary, but our meetings alternate between board meetings and general meetings. Most meetings are held on weekends at Steve Loomis' home.

The Bataan Chapter publishes a monthly bulletin, *High Desert Signals*. Please contact President Steve Loomis for information at:

[swloomis@swcp.com](mailto:swloomis@swcp.com)

or at

President Steve Loomis  
Bataan Chapter of AVER  
P.O. Box 30625  
Albuquerque, NM 87190  
505 301 1737

[Bataan-AVER@swcp.com](mailto:Bataan-AVER@swcp.com)

—President Steve Loomis, *Bataan Chapter*

## Chicago Chapter



### Greetings

So much news about the "don't ask, don't tell" policy this year has generated a great deal of interest in the Chicago chapter. We are not lacking for publicity.

In April members of the Chicago chapter took part in the Illinois Warriors Summit at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Chicago AVER was one of the more than 100 veterans groups that participated.

In May, members of AVER held a remembrance ceremony at the grave of Allen Schindler for the 17th year. In May we also participated in two Memorial Day events. Chicago AVER, along with the Lakeside Pride Freedom Band marched in the City of Chicago's huge Memorial Day Parade. We were pleased to have Congressman Quigley come out and support us at the parade.

With the Lakeview Neighborhood Association, we sponsored a Memorial Day Ceremony at Space Park.

June began with the Chicago Chapter's annual Beer Bust and Barbecue at Buck's Saloon. Also, in June three Chicago members traveled to Washington, D.C. for Operation Golden Eagle, AVER's 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration. In June, AVER and HRC staffed a "don't ask, don't tell" panel at the Center on Halsted. Chicago AVER's two speakers were Marquell Smith, USMC, and Lee Reinhart, USN and USCG. Both are Iraqi veterans who were removed from the military under the "don't ask, don't tell" policy. Both are extremely well qualified in their fields, and both are stellar examples of how wrong this policy really is.

In June Chicago members marched in the Chicago's annual Pride Parade.

We mounted a full color guard, and also had 38 people who carried our giant 50- foot flag. Marching with the flag is always quite an adventure.

We are extremely happy to report that both of our Illinois Senators, Senator Roland Burris and Senator Dick Durbin are on board in the Senate to end the "don't ask, don't tell" policy.

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

President Jim Darby  
Chicago Chapter AVER  
P.O. Box 29317  
Chicago, IL 60629  
773 752 0058  
jamesdarby@aol.com  
www.averchicago.org

—Jim Darby, President, Chicago Chapter

## Florida



On May 10<sup>th</sup> Dr. Phillip Greenberg, medical director from the Sunrise VA outpatient clinic, spoke to the Florida Gold Coast Chapter about the new outpatient clinic.

The Florida Gold Coast chapter also participated in a candlelight vigil for Courtney Bright who was strangled to death by her girlfriend's father. The vigil was sponsored by the Gay American Heroes Foundation (GAHF), a national organization whose goal is to build a national traveling rainbow memorial to honor those who have been murdered because of their sexual orientation.

Our color guard presented the colors at the Sunshine Cathedral memorial service for longtime member Betty Ann Priscak on Saturday, May 29. Andy Eddy recited the poem "Life Is but a Stopping Place," author unknown.

On Monday, May 31<sup>st</sup>, the Gold Coast Chapter participated in the Memorial Day events, which were held at the Ninninger Veterans State Nursing Home. Our color guard saluted three veterans who received the Purple Heart from Representative Kendrick Meek.

On June 4<sup>th</sup> we held our annual dinner, founded by Karl Clark, Andy Eddy and Dennis Delia. Members honored Mary O'Connor's life-long partner who presented Mary's American flag to the chapter.

On Sunday, June 20<sup>th</sup> the Florida Gold Coast Chapter color guard led off the Pride of Greater Fort Lauderdale Parade, and participated in the Stonewall Street Festival.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of July we held our annual cookout and fundraiser at the New Moon Saloon.

At the July 13<sup>th</sup> meeting, Ms. Sylvia Acevedo spoke about women in distress and the problem of human trafficking in Broward County.

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

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

—Andy Eddy, Secretary, Florida Gold Coast Chapter

## Georgia Chapter



The Georgia Chapter held its 6<sup>th</sup> annual Memorial Day Taps Ceremony on Monday, May 31<sup>st</sup> at noon at the Veterans Memorial in Piedmont Park.

It was quite an interesting ceremony, with a large turnout. The Georgia Chapter has succeeded after several years of fundraising in refurbishing the flagpole located at the site with a beautiful new gold eagle ornament and new hoisting hardware.

But how we might get all this equipment on top of the flag pole was a question. The City of Atlanta Fire Department volunteered the use of their ladder truck to examine the flag pole. It was found to be safe and serviceable and with the help of the fire department, we installed the new hardware.

Members of the fire department attended the ceremony and were honored for their crucial assistance in renovating the flag pole. Atlanta's Police Chief, George N. Turner, also attended the ceremony.

The flag pole is now named after the late Edward Goodwin Scruggs, an AVER member who passed away on November 13, 2009.

The retired colors were presented to Fire Station #15. Fire Chief Hill accepted on the station's behalf.

There were two other flags posted in memoriam for the police department and the fire department. Police Chief Turner posted the police department flag and Fire Chief Hill posted the fire department flag.

Many of our veterans are first responders. Including our local law enforcement personnel and first responders in our memorial ceremony only strengthens our community and helps to build a coalition with them.

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

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

[www.avergeorgia.org](http://www.avergeorgia.org)

— President Alex Lopez, Georgia Chapter

## New York



In May 2010 the New York Chapter of AVER presented its highest pride award to our life member First Lieutenant Dan Choi, who received the AVER-NY 2010 Leonard Matlovich Freedom Award For Speaking Out At Risk.

Lieutenant Choi spoke forcefully about our right to serve and our duty to speak out. He got the audience to its feet in a chant of self-respect and pride.

In the cold of winter, AVERNY participated in a panel discussion about "don't ask, don't tell" following the production of the off-broadway play *Yank! A WWII Love Story* about two soldiers who fall in love during their training and combat in the South Pacific during World War II. In one poignant scene, while discussing their future together after the war, the soldiers realize that they could never live together in suburban New Jersey in 1945, as they had envisioned, because of how relatives and neighbors would react. One says to the other, "Maybe not now, but times are changing. Someday soon it won't matter. It might take a while but by 1948 or 1950 things will be different..." It's enough to make you cry, isn't it?

AVERNY members marched proudly in two of New York City's four pride parades this summer.

—President Denny Meyer, AVERNY

## North Carolina

AVER NC is still in formation and is being spearheaded by Cecilio Orta, a veteran of the United States Army. And

what a great job Cecilio is doing. He already has a fantastic Web page on line. [www.avernc.org](http://www.avernc.org).

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

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

Cecilio can be contacted at:

Cecilio Orta  
6701 Fishers Farm Lane  
Unit D1,  
Charlotte, NC 28277  
[info@avernc.org](mailto:info@avernc.org)  
704 900 2905

## Palm Springs

Memorial Day at the Desert Veterans Memorial was a memorable experience for all. It began with a wreath-laying ceremony at the GLBVA/AVER Obelisk. The mayors from Palm Springs, Cathedral City, and Desert Hot Springs all attended the ceremony. The Palm Springs High School Band played and the Desert Hot Springs High School Marine Junior ROTC performed.

After the ceremony Mel Tips and Brigadier General Keith Kerr were both interviewed by local TV stations.

On June 30, AVER members attended the Tolerance Education Center event in Rancho Mirage. AVER member Melinda Tremaglio was the moderator for a "don't ask, don't tell" panel. Excellent reports were also given by Media Director Julianne Sohn of the Service Women's Action Network and SLDN.

Mel hosted an old fashioned Fourth of July event at his palatial home in the desert with one-quarter-pound hot dogs, burgers, potato salad and so forth.

The Palm Springs Pride Parade will



be held the first week in November. (The temperature in June is usually over 100 degrees.)

Monthly meetings are held at the Golden Rainbow Center on Tahquitz Canyon Way on the second Friday of every month at 1:00 in the afternoon.

Unlike most other chapters, the Palm Springs veterans have a potluck with the main course put together by Mel.

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

### Puget Sound Chapter



Congratulations to the members for not only marching in Seattle's parade, but also the parade in nearby Bellingham in July. They received a warm welcome in both parades, and had great coverage from Seattle Gay News. Photos from their Pride Parade are up on their Web page.

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

Nick Jackman  
10115 Greenwood, Ave. N  
PMB 145  
Seattle, WA 98133  
206 428 1975  
www.averpugetsound.org

### Sacramento

Thanks to Ty Redhouse and Ray Allen, the Sacramento Valley Veterans Chapter is back up and flourishing.

On May 20<sup>th</sup> they attended the Harvey Milk ceremony on the steps of the State Capitol—all members were in "military swag." They also attended a fund-raising event at a local bar for

a veteran who was returning "to the sandbox."

On Memorial Day members attended a barbecue and potluck dinner at the Bolt Bar.

On Saturday, June 19<sup>th</sup>, the Sacramento Valley Veterans marched in the city's annual Pride Parade.

On Thursday, August 5<sup>th</sup>, members gathered together at the Tower theater for a screening of the film *Restrepo*.

On August 16<sup>th</sup>, at the general meeting, members discussed participation in several upcoming festivals.

On Saturday, August 28<sup>th</sup>, the Sacramento Valley Veterans chapter participated in the Chico Stonewall Festival.

Stanislaus Pride was held on September 18<sup>th</sup> in Modesto, California.

The newly elected board is President Ty Redhouse, USAF Vice-President Tina Stidman, USA Secretary Ray Allen, USMC Treasurer Charlie Peer, USN

The Sacramento Valley Veterans The chapter meets on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday of the month at the

Lavender Library  
1414 21<sup>st</sup> Street  
Sacramento, CA 95811

Contact info:  
Ty Redhouse  
916 436 7676  
www.facebook.com/1/d745e  
www.saclgbtveterans.org

### President's Corner (continued from page 3)

that each of us once had the honor of protecting.

At this time of year when we ask that you renew your commitment to AVER, please know that I am working hard to make sure your voices are heard by the members of Congress, by the military commanders, and by our LGBT active duty service members who wonder if they will ever share the freedom they are fighting to defend. You must be their voices for a while longer. Please continue to speak out for those who cannot speak for themselves. Please

consider joining or renewing your membership in AVER. We need your support and so do those young LGBT troops serving in silence around the world.

Victory is not far away. Please continue to stand proudly with AVER. Please renew.

Respectfully,  
Danny Ingram, National President  
president@aver.us

## Taps

### Betty Ann Priscak

Last May the Florida Gold Coast Chapter sadly announced the passing of one of our most wonderful AVER Associates, Betty Ann Priscak, who slipped away silently after a prolonged illness. She was the partner of long-time AVER member and director Jean V. Johnson,

Our thoughts, love, and prayers are extended to our friend Jean Johnson at this time.

### Alan J. Rogue

Last June former AVER president Alan J. Rogue, 51, died in Youngstown, Ohio.

Alan was born in Mexico City and had lived most recently in East Palestine, Ohio, coming from Denver, Colorado.

He had been employed by AT&T Wireless for three years. Prior to that, he operated his own construction company and served in the U.S. Navy as a medical corpsman. He was a member of Grace Lutheran Church and was also the chief steward for Communication Workers of America Local 4320.

In addition to his mother and step father he is survived by two brothers and his husband, Jeff Rogue.

Funeral services were held at the Grace Lutheran Church with burial at Little Beaver Cemetery where the East Palestine Honor Guard provided military honors.