AVER

The *Forward Observer*

National Newsletter of the
American Veterans for Equal Rights

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Photo Courtesy of Ben Gomez

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A Word from The President

Heroism. Duty. Honor. Country.

For those of us who've worn the uniform; who've pledged to defend our Country against enemies, foreign and domestic, words such as these will always carry special meaning in our hearts. After all, wasn't it a call to duty that led many of us to volunteer in the first place?

And what of honor? Who among us didn't feel honored to be serving our Country; one of the privileged few who'd risen to the challenge and earned the right to wear a uniform.

Hand in hand with these words, of course, is Patriotism – the love of ones country – which drew many of us to serve in the first place.

The question is, are these feelings any different in an LGBT individual? Different than any other soldier, sailor, airman or marine active duty or veteran? More importantly, are the feelings behind the words any less important to these individuals?

I hardly need to ask that question, for we already know the answer.

Then why is it, once a person is "discovered" to be gay or lesbian while in the service, they're all of sudden considered an undesirable element? Are gays and lesbians less patriotic–less duty-bound to serve our country? Less worthy of the term "hero?"

Again, we all know the answer to that question as well.

Having spent quite a bit of my second enlistment dangling at the end of a 150 ft... Rappel rope in the performance of one of hundreds of rescues over a four year period, I am fully cognizant of what it is like to "risk it all" in the performance of ones duty. Not to mention the time I spent with Marine Special Forces prior to that, ready, at a moments notice, to go into "harms way," if called upon to do so.

What of the other true heroes in our organization – men and women like Lt. Colonel Steve Loomis, Margaret Cammemeyer and Hank Thomas – people who've actually risked their lives in combat? The true tragedy is how these heroes were treated once it was found out that they were either gay or lesbian. Having experienced that particular humiliation myself, I can still remember how much it hurt to be suddenly regarded as an outcast by those whom, just days before, held you in the highest regard.

It is time society is made aware of our true value, and the atrocity *Don't Ask Don't Tell* is inflicting on both individuals and to our Country which we all love so dearly. It is time our government is held accountable for the huge waste in both human resources and money. More importantly, it is time that LGBT people are given the same respect and recognition due any other citizen of these our United States. Contrary to what our government may think, we are *not* second-class citizens. Our Constitution – the very document we pledged to uphold – guarantees us certain inalienable rights, among them the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. And the right to bear arms in the service of our country. Regardless of sex, race, color, religion–or sexual orientation.

This past Memorial Day, I had the distinct honor and privilege – thanks to all of you – of attending the wreath-laying ceremony at *Arlington National Cemetery*. First off, I want to thank everyone for allowing me the honor and privilege of representing – not only all of you – but all LGBT members of the Armed Services, past and present. The memories of that day still, to this day, bring goose-bumps to my flesh and a lump to my throat. Words fail me when it comes to describing what it was like to be there, as a representative of *AVER*, for such a solemn occasion. Not only did it give me renewed faith in what we are all doing, it also brought back, albeit all too briefly, that feeling of pride and belonging, something I haven't felt in a very long, long time.

These feelings, however, were mirrored by feelings of sadness and grief as the memories of being outcast surfaced once again, still surprisingly acute, even after all the years since I've been out.

It's for reasons such as these–both for what happened to me and to others – and to hopefully prevent the same thing from happening to anyone else – that I find myself so involved with such an organization as *AVER*. It's for people like yourselves – my LGBT "comrades-in-arms," that I find myself at the forefront in the battle for equality. And by equality I mean all equality, not just the right to serve.

True, while I've often said I don't need a document to justify my marriage to my husband of eight years, Jeff, it would still be nice to have our marriage legally recognized. However, living in what has long been considered the "hate-state," (Colorado was one of the first States to pass "anti-marriage" legisla-

tion when Vermont was first considering making it legal) I doubt it will happen here in the near future. Not as long as we have such people as Marilyn Musgrave, Ben Knight-Horse Campbell and Wayne Allard in office.

Speaking of, Pete Coors of *Coors* beer is vying for Senator Knight-Horse Campbell's soon to be vacant seat. Mr. Coors, in a rebuttal against a supposed smear ad against him, openly comes out against gay marriage, listing it as one of his positive selling points. Doesn't take much to realize what his stance on gays in the military would be.

Folks, this is the 21st century. It is long past time for this type of groundless prejudices and discrimination to end. I, for one, am tired of being considered a second-class citizen, particularly by those who have never worn a uniform in the service of their country. And now is the time to do something about it. It is time we remind those who seek to run for office that their desire to enter government service is exactly that – service. They are there to serve us – *We, The People*. Not the other way around.

How do we go about doing this? By continuing to be visible and vocal about who and what we are, and who we represent. By speaking out whenever we have the chance, whether it's to one person or a crowd. By making sure that the media continues to carry our message to those we'd otherwise be unable to reach. This includes making sure our stories our lent to worthy endeavors such as *Project Documenting Courage*, and the *Veterans History Project*.

In conclusion, I'd like to thank all of you who were able to attend our recent convention in D.C. I can't tell you what a pleasure it was meeting all of you. I always return from such events charged up and ready to continue our struggle for equal treatment and respect. In particular, I'd especially like to thank those in D.C. for making the entire thing happen.

I'd also like to thank each and everyone of you out there for the hard work and effort in representing all of us as you celebrate during this year's Pride festivals across the country. Keep up the great work!

Semper Fi

A.J. Rogue

Memorial Day
Arlington National Cemetery

AVER National President A.J. Rogue and Capitol Chapter Vice President Lara Ballard attend the Memorial Day Wreath laying ceremony at *Arlington National Cemetery* (*above*) Presenting the wreath (*below*)

Photos courtesy of Tony Smith

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OPERATION: *LIFT THE BAN III*
WASHINGTON, D.C.

AVER's annual convention, Operation: *Lift The Ban III*, held May 21–23 in Washington D.C., drew approximately 75 members and honored guests from all over the nation. Different for this year was the unique coinciding of this event with *SLDN's* annual *Lobby Days*, which took place immediately after the *AVER* convention.

The combined event, held at the *Radisson Barcelo* hotel in downtown Washington D.C., proved to be a huge success, thanks to the selfless efforts, dedication, and hard work of the members of the *AVER Capitol Chapter*. A hearty well done to chapter president Tony Smith, vice president Lara Ballard, and all the other members of the chapter who helped make this happen.

The event began Friday morning with registration, which was conducted on the main floor of the *Barcelo*, just outside of the National Gallery Ballroom A, meeting place for the convention. The convention began at approximately 0915 with the delivery of a welcoming speech by national president A.J. Rogue.

A three hour national meeting followed, during which time national officers gave their reports. After this came the introduction of the chapters and chapter reports, which were delivered – in most cases – by the chapter presidents.

Among those to give a report were members of the *American Legion's Alexander Hamilton Post 448* in San Francisco. Present also were a veteran couple from Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, as well as members and officers from the newly chartered Sacramento chapter. Also present were officers of the newly chartered chapters in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware and Atlanta, Georgia. A couple of members made the journey from Dallas as well.

Photo Courtesy of Michael Kilmer

National President A.J. Rogue greets attendees, kicking off Operation: *Lift The Ban III*

National business was briefly halted to allow time for a presentation by Laura Caulkins, Oral Historian and Assistant Archivist of the Vietnam Archive located at Texas Tech University.

For the convention "widows" – the spouses and friends of the convention attendees – a guided tour of the Dupont Circle neighborhood was thoughtfully provided.

After lunch, a workshop on "Grass-roots Organizing," presented by Hans Johnson of the *Gill Foundation's Democracy Project*, led off the afternoon's agenda, followed by a discussion panel on LGBT Veteran's benefits. Among the distinguished members of the panel were such historical figures as Dr. Lawrence "Bopper" Dayton, Chief consultant for Public Health for the *U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*, David Addlestone, Esq., General Counsel to the *National Veterans Legal Services Project* and former legal counsel to Leonard Matlovich, Richard Weldman of the *Vietnam Veterans of America*, who recently filed a lawsuit against the *U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*, and Denny Meyer, New York chapter president and the national vice president for Veterans Affairs. Moderating the discussion was Liz Seaton from the *Human Rights Campaign*.

Photo Courtesy of Michael Kilmer

Former National President Jim Donovan mingles with Puget Sound member Tracy Steen

Friday's events concluded in style with a reception at *HRC's* new headquarter building, located a brief walk from the *Radisson*. There, attendees partook of a buffet consisting of a variety of cheeses, cold meats, and fresh fruit as they listened to a variety of guest speakers. Chief among them were Rear Admiral Alan Steinman, MD, MPH, USCG (Ret.) and Cheryl Jacques, HRC's new Executive Director. *AVER* national president A.J. Rogue delivered a rousing speech of his own before conceding the podium to Rear Admiral Steinman.

Included in the festivities was a birthday celebration for WWII combat veteran and long-time gay activist Dr. Frank Kameny, who turned 79, followed by an a cape la singing performance by the *Potomac Fever Gay Men's Chorus*.

A VIP discussion led things off early Saturday morning with a panel featuring such distinguished members as Mark Agrast – former staffer to Congressman Gerry Studds, Senior Vice President for Domestic Policy, Center for American Progress; Nathaniel Frank from the Center for the Study of Sexual minorities in the Military (*CSSMM*); Major Jeff Cleghorn, USA (Ret.), Executive Director of *MEI* (Military Education Initiative; David Mixner from the *Campaign for Military Service*, 1992-93;

C. Dixon Osburn – Executive Director, Servicemembers Legal Defense Network (*SLDN*); MCPOCG Vince Patton, USCG (Ret.), former Master Chief Petty-Officer of the Coast Guard; and Urvashi Vaid, former Executive Director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (*NGLTF*), 1989-92, Director of the *NGLTF Policy Institute,* 1997-2000, and author of *Virtual Equality* (1995).

Photo Courtesy of Michael Kilmer

A well-dressed National Secretary Ben Gomez poses with lover Jeff Redondo during *SLDN Lobby Days*

The lively, informative and often moving panel discussion was expertly moderated by Professor Bill Eskridge, Professor Emeritus, Yale Law School.

For lunch on Saturday, attendees were treated to a catered affair in the Phillips Ballroom, during which time Brigadier General Keith Kerr, CSMR (Ret.) gave a moving and at times emotional recounting of his time in the military as a closeted officer, moving many to tears with the memories of his now dead lover.

Afterward, attendees split up into two groups, some attending a media relations workshop conducted by Tim Rusch of *GLAAD*, while the others sat in on a discussion about transgender military and veteran issues featuring Paula Neira, USNA '85, Persian Gulf War Veteran, and former *SLDN* staff attorney; and Kitt Kling a/k/a Alex Fox, Women's Army Corps Veteran (1972-74) and head of the *Transman's Information Project,* and moderated by Mara Keisling from the *National Center for Transgender Equality*.

Saturday afternoon, immediately after lunch, members gathered together once again to attend

Photo Courtesy of Michael Kilmer

Convention and *SLDN Lobby Day* attendees Sharon Alexander, Paula Neira, and Tony Smith

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OPERATION: *LIFT THE BAN III*
WASHINGTON, D.C

Photo Courtesy of Michael T. Kilmer

(continued from page five)

a Media Relations workshop conducted by Tim Rusch of *GLAAD*. Following this was a workshop on "How to start an *AVER* chapter," facilitated by *AVER's* own Michael T. Kilmer, formerly of Puget Sound, now residing in San Diego.

The workshops concluded at 1700 hrs in order to allow time for the convention attendees and guests to prepare for the joint *AVER/SLDN* Military Ball, which was held at the nearby *Hamilton Crowne Plaza Hotel,* located at 14th and K. Streets.

The Ball, which began promptly at 1900 hrs with the presentation of Colors, was a smash, with members and guests splendidly turned out in either formal wear or dress uniform.

A group of distinguished speakers stepped up to the podium to deliver a few words following the presentation of Colors, among them *AVER* national president A.J. Rogue, *SLDN* Executive Director C. Dixon Osburn, and Brigadier General Virgil H. Richard, USA (Ret.)

Afterward, the crowd was treated to the wild comedic ranting of well-known comedienne, Marga Gomez, whose spirited routine kept the audience roaring with laughter.

This was followed by a brief Award Ceremony before the dancefloor was relinquished to couples eager to kick-up their heels. One ball attendee, moved by the spectacle of what he saw before him, was heard to say, "Wow, I never thought I'd see a male lieutenant and a male captain dancing in uniform together."

Unfortunately, as all things eventually do, the magical evening of camaraderie and socializing wound down to a reluctant end, with some attendees returning to the hotel for a night's rest, while a few others chose to venture out and sample a bit of Washington D.C.'s legendary night life.

The convention itself began its wrap-up on Sunday, beginning with national business in the morning, during which time the entire issue of Nancy's removal from office – and Jim Darby's replacement as newsletter editor, was once again rehashed. As a result, not much national business was accomplished, other than the choosing of next year's convention site, the honor going to chapter president Ed Westrick and the members of *VETERCARE* in Los Angeles. Mark your calendars. It's never too soon to begin planning.

As with many of the conventions, this one ended with a memorial service led by Captain Robert M. Rankin, USN (Ret.). The service, which was held at the Congressional Cemetery gravesite of Sgt. Leonard Matlovich, USAF, drew approximately 35 people to the somber, moving event.

Later that afternoon, those staying for the *SLDN Lobby Day*s gathered together to attend *Lobby Training 101*, thus beginning the second phase of the joint venture between *AVER* and *SLDN*.

As was evident by the great turnout, this event turned out to be a huge success as well, with, according to Christopher Neff of *SLDN*, double the attendees of the previous year's *Lobby Days* – holding the event in conjunction with *AVER's* annual convention proving to be a worthwhile endeavor for both organizations, thus furthering their combined cause to end the discrimination of patriotic gays and lesbians who wish to serve – or are currently serving – their Country.

Photo Courtesy of Judy G. Rolfe

Photos Courtesy of Judy G. Rolfe

(*Top to bottom, left to right*)
Marga Gomez entertaining the crowd.
National President A.J. Rogue greets Ball attendees while C. Dixon Osburn, *SLDN* Executive Director, looks on.
Brigadier-General Virgil A. Richard shares a laugh during his keynote speech.
The "Brass" poses for a picture: Brigadier-General Keith Kerr CSMB (Ret.), Brigadier-General Virgil A. Richard, USA (Ret.), and Rear Admiral Alan M. Steinman, MD. MPH.,USCG (Ret.).
C.Dixon Osborn presents Lara Ballard, D.C. chapter vice president, with an appreciation award.

Highlights of the HRC reception held in their newly acquired headquarters building in Washington, D.C.
(photos courtesy of Michael Kilmer)

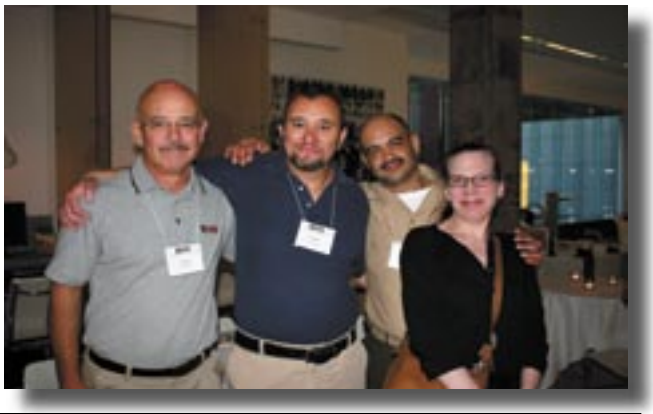
HRC Executive Director Cheryl Jacques

SLDN's Christopher Neff poses with *AVER's* Michael T. Kilmer, former Puget Sound Chapter President

Long-time gay activist, WWII combat veteran, and birthday-boy Dr. Frank Kameny mingles with other convention attendees during the *HRC* reception.

Members of the *Potomac Fever Gay Men's Singing Group*

RADM. Alan M. Steinman addresses those gathered at the *HRC* reception.



Tracy (Puget Sound), Sam (Denver), A.J. (Denver) and Marie (Ohio).

Photo Courtesy of Michael Kilmer

Lara Ballard (D.C.) and Steve Loomis (New Mexico) with Captain Rankin next to the wreath left at the Matlovich grave site during the memorial ceremony Sunday morning.

In Memory of our Brothers and Sisters Who Have Served Before Us

Headstone over the grave of Sgt. Leonard Matlovich, USAF.
Inscription reads:

"When I was in the military, they gave me a medal for killing two men, and a discharge for loving one."

Photo Courtesy of Michael Kilmer

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San Diego

Chapter president Bob Lehman has stepped down and since relocated to Chicago in order to be closer to an ailing family member. Therefore, in accordance with, and under the guidance of chapter and national constitutions, Ben Gomez has assumed the position as Chapter President until the chapter holds special board elections in the near future.

Listed below is a calendar of events, past and future, that the San Diego has either already, or will be, participating in.

–July 7, 2004 at 7 PM – Chapter meeting at the Veteran's Memorial Building (Balboa Park).

–July 17, 2004. Servicemembers Legal Defense Network fund-raiser in Hollywood, California (please visit www.sldn.org, and click "events" for more information).

–July 23, 2004 – USS RONALD REAGAN "Welcome Party" on Shelter Island. (Details to follow)

–July 31, 2004 – San Diego LGBT Pride parade. The San Diego *AVER* Chapter and San Diego *GSGRA* (Gay Rodeo) are the official parade flag contingent.

–August 11, 2004 – Chapter meeting at the Veteran's Memorial Building (Balboa Park)

–August 28, 2004 – *AVER* Region V conference in Sacramento, California. (Details to follow)

At our July 7th meeting we will discuss the upcoming parade and coordinate coverage at the *AVER* info booth and recruit members for our chapter. There will be free admission to the festival for our volunteers.

In addition, our chapter has been further nominated to sit in as Grand Marshall(s) for the upcoming Gay Rodeo by the San Diego Gay Rodeo Association.

Please also note the chapter's new web site address listed below.

The *San Diego Chapter* meets the second Wednesday of every month, beginning at 7:00 p.m., at the Veterans War Memorial building, 3325 Zoo Blvd., in Balboa Park.

Ben Gomez, acting President
1720 Madison Ave.
San Diego, CA 92116
(619) 459-1019
www.orgsites.com/ca/aver_sandiego

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

Veterans C.A.R.E counted 37 members for 2004, up quite a bit from the previous year. We are particularly grateful to have as new members, Commissioner Donna Groman, who is running for LA county Superior Court Judge this November, Thomas Carpenter, Esq., current co-chair of the *SLDN* Board of Directors, Frank Manis, who has worked tirelessly to start the MCC Veterans Ministry group, and Don Rector, who, five years ago, belonged to the Phoenix *GLBVA* Chapter.

We are also pleased to announce the return of four founding members (first members of *Veterans C.A.R.E.* from twenty years ago). They are: Steve Buxton, Craig Harvey, David Novak, and Ted Ott.

Our participation in the 34th Los Angeles Pride, the 30th *San Diego Pride Festival* and the *Latin LGBT Pride Festival* has given us a list of potential members whom we hope to soon enlist. While in San Diego we met Lloyd Flores of Fresno, who is interested in starting an *AVER* Chapter in the California "Raisin Capital." Plus we're looking forward to the *AVER* Region 5 Conference in Sacramento on August 28th.

We would also like to congratulate – with much parental pride – the *Sacramento Valley Veterans* for building a great new chapter, and for taking on the responsibility of hosting

our twice-yearly conference.

There is even planned a luncheon in the rotunda of the State Capitol building. How are we suppose to eat when our heads are tilted awkwardly upward to view the beautiful, historic artwork on the dome above?

Future plans include preparing to staff a booth at the *LA/Valley LGBT Awareness Festival* in October and the *Palm Springs Pride Festival* in November.

Preparations for the 2005 National *AVER* convention in February 2005 are underway. We're hoping the exciting agenda and round of fund-raising parties we are planning will motivate LGBT veterans to attend.

The next membership meeting is Saturday, September 11 at 10:30 AM. Following the meeting will be a memorial moment in honor of those innocent victims of the tragedy on 9/11, and socializing over a potluck lunch.

Call (909) 875-7178 for location information.

Veterans C.A.R.E. generally holds their meetings on the 3rd Wednesday of the month at Patriotic Hall.

Edward Westrick, Commander
PO Box 26485
Los Angeles, CA 90026-0485
909.875.7178
vetercare@hotmail.com

Palm Springs Gay Veterans

Greetings from the *Palm Springs Gay Veterans* Chapter. Following is a list of events, past, present, and future (subject to revision).

–*Flag Day* Rally & Worn US Flag Collection- Sunday; June 13. 10:00 AM `till 2:00 PM, in front of Cathedral City Hall ** PSGV will have an info table and will sponsor a worn flag collection box for an official Flag *Retirement Ceremony* to be conducted at a later date.

–Wed, June 16 - 6:00 PM - PS Gay Vets June Pot-Luck Social Meeting, Desert Pride Center: 611 So. Palm Canyon Dr.; Palm Springs Agenda: D.C. Nat'l Convention Report w/ Organizational Literature & Photos. Pride Season Parade Unit and Festival Committee.

–LA Pride, June 19-20th Parade: Sunday - 6/20 11:00 AM * Line-UP: 9:30 - 10:00 AM @ Crescent Heights & Santa Monica Blvd.

–San Diego, July 31

–Palm Springs, November 6-7, 2004. Veterans Day Ceremony & Parade Unit.

–Monday, 6/28. *PSGV* Morris Kight / Herb King Memorial Scholarship Desert Rainbow Foundation Student Scholarship Awards Luau, Desert Palms Inn. 6:00 PM - Tickets $40 PP
We would like to organize a PSGV Table of 10PP

–Tuesday, November 2nd, 2004. VOTE!! National, State and Local Election Day

–Thursday, November 11th, 2004 Veterans Day Ceremony & Parade Unit

Having just visited with staff-members of our elected representatives in Washington D.C., it has become very clear that we have a lot of work ahead of us in an effort to keep our issues included among conversations between our lawmakers and their staff-members on Capital Hill. Please get involved and support ours and the causes of like-minded organizations, all of us are working together towards passing laws granting Equal Rights for ALL LGBT Americans.

Yours in Service,
Randy Schecher - President

The *Palm Springs Gay Veterans* meet on the 3rd Wednesday of each month at 6:00 p.m., at the Desert Pride Center, 611 E. Palm Canyon Drive, Palm Springs. Members bring a favorite dish to share during pre-meeting socializing.

Randy Schecher, President
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Celebrating AVER Pride Across The Nation

Bataan Chapter (NM) of *AVER* awaits the beginning of the Albuquerque Pride Parade 2004. From the left is VP - Mike Madlener, Martha Foster, President Steve Loomis, and Marion Crouse.

AVERNY marches behind a mounted Denny Meyer during the recent New York Pride Parade (*Denny featured above and below*)

BRAVER Ohio Pride-booth

Sacramento Valley Veterans

Since its inception, the Sacramento chapter has been very busy with various activities and fund-raisers, while at the same time managing to spread the word about themselves and national through a very aggressive marketing campaign which includes chapter pins and coffee mugs featuring their logo.

In addition, they've managed to participate in the *Lambda Freedom fair* held this past June. Things went well, with the chapter being well received. They even had a women from New Jersey stop by and get info on how to start her own chapter out there.

The chapter also held its first fund-raiser, *Operation Lift the Ban Canteen show*- which turned out to be a huge success, raising $900, not to mention the networking that was done between chapter members and local talents from the local Court: *CGNIE*. All in all, a lot of fun.

Ray Allen, chapter president, also had the honor of being interviewed by *GAY TODAY*, on cable broadcast and Interviewed by Q-Ragg our local gay paper, lots of exposer.

They recently held Sacramento's first LGBT Memorial Wreath Laying at the State Capitol in front of the Cal-Vet Memorial. General Kerr, Jim Maloney from MEI, A.J. Rogue, and Tom Swann were guest speakers. A luncheon in the Capitol the Regional 5 conference followed afterward.

In the works are a Booth at the Rainbow Fair, and participating in Local Stand Downs.

Raymond Allen, President
corporalallen@yahoo.com

San Antonio

Another *AVER* year is nearly over and I hope everyone survived all the Pridefest hoopla.

AVER-SA stepped it off with the 3rd Annual Austin Pridefest Parade on June 6th with over 30,000 spectators along its 1 and a half mile parade route. Then on Sunday we held a successful information booth at the Festival along side *SLDN*. Many people stopped by and we had 9 interested people to hopefully begin another *AVER* chapter in Austin. A big "Thank You" to Dave and David Guy-Gainer, Wes Giles, and Scott for all your help. Next we participated in the San Antonio Pridefest held on "Fathers Day" June 20th at Sunset Station. A very good day with great interest in our cause. We were able to obtain several new "Old" members back into our fold and got a few perspective members also. The day closed out with a small parade which members of the *Texas AVER Color Guard* lead with much cheering from the assembled crowd. The month ended with the Color Guard leading the *Hugh Houston Pridefest parade* down Westheimer Avenue. A total of about 10 members participated including some from the soon to be Dallas Chapter. All flags flew high, with the four Service flags also being carried.

On August 14th & 15th, Dave & David Guy Gainer and Bob Weeks traveled to Dallas for a very informative weekend meeting with the Dallas group and our Region 4 VP to discuss the conception of a "Texas Chapter". Thank-you, Dallas for a great weekend. The *Texas AVER Color Guard* will participate in the "Ross Allen" parade in Dallas on September 19th. We Hope to encourage more LGBT Veterans to become involved. *AVER-SA* will conduct its yearly officer elections on September 13th. Bob Weeks is relinquishing his position as Chapter President but he will not be going away. Hope to see many of you in February, if not sooner.

Monthly meetings are held on the first Monday of every month at 7:00 p.m., at *La Madelains*, on Broadway.

Robert O. Weeks, President
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Houston

Sadly, Mitch Rainey has made the decision to step down as chapter president, effective immediately. Because vice president Ernie Edge has been out of town a lot this past year, and is unable to assume duties as chapter president, chapter secretary Brent Clarkson will assume duties as chapter president until such time as elections are held this October.

The chapter meets the first Monday of every month at 7:00 p.m., at the Houston Gay and Lesbian Center, 803 Hawthorne Street.

Albuquerque Bataan Chapter

This year's *AVER* National convention, held in conjunction with the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network's (*SLDN*) 2nd Annual Congressional Lobby Days to end *Don't Ask Don't Tell*, took place in Washington D.C. 21-25 May, 2004, near Dupont Circle.

The Convention/*Lobby Day* joint venture was an opportunity to meet and work with *AVER* members from across the country; to educate congress on the need to repeal *Don't Ask Don't Tell*: and about the valuable service of our lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender service men and women.

Steve Loomis, *Bataan* chapter president, represented the New Mexico chapter at the convention and Lobby Days. Approximately 75 to 100 gay veterans from Boston to San Diego attended the joint event, with 90 members of Congress contacted during *Lobby Days*. Loomis visited with the staff of Senator Jeff Bingamon (D-NM), Representative Tom Udall (D-NM) and Representative Heather Wilson (R-NM). Each was provided information on the value that GLBT service has for our country and the abuses they must endure. Senator Pete Dominici did not respond to our request for a meeting.

A Military Ball was held on Saturday night. Veterans and numerous active duty service members from D.C. attended, all remarkable in their highly decorated dress uniforms.

Chapter elections will be held during the August Meeting. The offices of President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer will be filled. You are encouraged to consider serving in one of our positions. As a small organization it takes all of us to make it successful.

Albuquerque Pride 2004 was great fun for all, with the *Albuquerque Bataan chapter* of *AVER* once again providing color guard at the head of Albuquerque's Pride Parade on Saturday, 12 June 2004. As before, the applause and encouragement from the crowd was great! Our chapter booth at the Pride Fiesta provided information on *AVER*, our chapter and *Don't Ask, Don't Tell* to dozens of active duty, veterans and friends. Pat Baille (also Pride Co-Chairperson), Don Stevens and Steve Loomis displayed their service decorations in the Pride history building. Don Stevens, US Navy, is a Korea War era veteran. Major Pat Baille, USAF, was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal for her service on the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Lieutenant Colonel Steve Loomis was awarded the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart during his service in Vietnam. They demonstrated what we have all known; they were great soldiers!

Thanks to Martha, Steve, Mike, Pat, Marion and Don for making our participation successful.

Steve Loomis, President
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American Veterans for Equal Rights
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505-301-1737
www.orgsites.com/nm/bataan-glbva/index.html

Minnesota AVER

Things have been slow for the Minnesota chapter this past Summer. Despite this, chapter president Ken Sholes has managed to keep himself occupied, having attended the convention in D.C. while wearing the dual hat of *AVER* national vice-president, as well as representing the Minnesota chapter as president.

However, despite the summer hiatus, there are plans in the near future for actively pursuing membership growth and increased outreach throughout the Twin Cities area.

ksholes@krollontrack.com

AVERNY – New York City

After a yearlong campaign by *AVERNY*, a New York City Council resolution has been introduced to put the City on record as demanding an end to the discriminatory "Don't Ask, Don't tell" policy. Look for news on this in the coming weeks and passage this autumn.

AVERNY has had a fabulous Pride Parade season this summer, marching proudly in the Queens Pride Parade and the Heritage of Pride Parade in Manhattan with our biggest contingent ever. We also joined in the alternative, fully inclusive, St. Patrick's Day Parade in Astoria Queens.

On Friday August 13th, *AVER-NY* had its first *AVER* ARMY/NAVY NIGHT at the historic Stonewall Inn, where modern gay history began in 1969. It was a successful evening of food, drink, donations, and new members in the heart of New York's gay Greenwich Village.

AVER-NY is sponsoring the birth of its 'sister chapter' New Jersey *AVER* (*NJ-AVER*), with our first joint event on August 28 at the Jersey City Pride Festival -on the waterfront. We welcome Amanda Farrell, founder of *NJ AVER.*

Denny Meyer (*AVER-NY* Pres.) is undergoing chemotherapy for cancer, following his surgery in the spring.

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joeyken@nyc.rr.com

John Pulhamus
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Denny Meyer, President
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Washington, D.C.

Like many other *AVER* chapters, the *AVER National Capital Chapter* left the 2004 Convention filled with excitement and energy, ready for Pride Month. However, we had the little event called "Memorial Day" to attend to first. *AVER D.C.* members marched in the Memorial Day Parade with local gay civil rights icon and openly gay WWII veteran Dr.. Frank Kameny. We were the only LGBT contingent in a parade with mostly WWII veterans in town for the WWII Memorial Dedication. Several parade spectators waved and cheered and we walked by with the U.S. Flag, giant rainbow flag and our *AVER* Banner. One veteran came out from the crowd and presented a sharp salute to Dr. Kameny. After the parade, chapter president Tony Smith and vice-president Lara Ballard rushed to Arlington Cemetery to join *AVER* National President A.J. Rogue at the formal wreath laying ceremony. An event that is truly an honor for *AVER* to participate in with all of the other national veterans organizations.

In June we hit the ground running by staffing a booth at the D.C. Pride Festival, providing an honor guard to lead the Washington D.C. Pride Parade, sending a contingent to Baltimore Pride and a few local members venturing up to NYC to support *AVERNY* with their Pride Parade. All of these Pride activities resulted in significant growth in new membership interest.

Several members in the chapter also began researching and discussing ideas for official *AVER* uniforms for Honor Guards to help alleviate the confusion and concern over military uniform requirements and authorization for wear by veterans. *AVER* national leadership and other chapter members/officers have been brought into the ongoing discussion. Although many members are away on vacation during the summer months, we've continued having good attendance for our monthly

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happy hours and a Shenandoah River Tubing event. We've had an increase in active duty service-members attending social events, to include some couples who are facing deployment separation with partners going to Afghanistan and/or Iraq. Local *AVER* members are working with Military Community Services Network (MCSN) to create a facilitated local support group for partners of deployed service-members.

We are also looking at how to best support our growing number of active duty service-members attending events by providing a safe, enjoyable social environment while educating both veterans and the active duty attendees on public actions/ behaviors to avoid that may cause problems under *DADT*.

The autumn will most likely continue to be a busy period as we are planning attendance at the rescheduled Hampton Roads and Roanoke Virginia Pride events in our region to help stimulate interest in forming new chapters.

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

Tony Smith, President
National Capitol Chapter
PO Box 1490
2020 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, D.C. 20006
703.625.8475
glbvadc@hotmail.com

Puget Sound

Photo Courtesy of Michael T. Kilmer

The *Puget Sound Chapter* has remained busy since the departure of former president Michael Kilmer, who has since relocated to San Diego. Judi Carey, the current chapter president, appears to have seamlessly taken over responsibilities since Michael's departure. The chapter is in the process of finding a new webmaster and updating the web site. In addition, everyone's getting ready for elections. There are also plans in the works for a fund-raiser at our host bar. Plus, we've been working on putting together a color guard that will be available for public events and creating a list of speakers for the local PFLAG. We've also been coordinating with a couple local organizations that want to raise money.

In the meantime, various uniformed members have participated in 3 separate Pride events, including Seattle's Pride Parade held on June 27th, and been interviewed for a gay subculture TV show. Members have also spent time handing out informational postcards to mail to congressional reps, and interviewed veterans for the veterans history project, not to mention the work that our celebrity members have been doing nationwide (Al and Grethe).

There are also plans in the works for chapter president Judi Carey to attend the regional conference planned for the end of August.

Judi Carey
President, AVER Puget Sound
P.O. Box 19297
Seattle, WA 98109
425 -255-4916
seasii@aol.com

BRAVER – Ohio

BRAVER Ohio has been very busy since the last publication of the *Forward Observer*. After attending the annual convention in Washington, D.C., our *BRAVER* members participated in some firsts since receiving our charter last September, this, in addition to holding our monthly meetings. These included such things as attending the Memorial Day Observance with our Governor and the other VSOs of Ohio; to participating and marching with our newly purchased GUS-2 Flag in

three separate Pride Parades here in Ohio; to using the flag to open an annual softball event called "Bat-n-Rouge"; and setting up a booth for two gallery hop fund-raisers; placing two more information patriotic bulletin boards here in Columbus and a third in Dayton. Lastly, we added eight new members to our roster. So the months of May, June and July really took a toll out on all of us, and so we decided to take the last two weeks of July off to rest up.

Right now and during our Veterans Cycle, *BRAVER* will be contacting our Local, State and Federal Elected Officials to ask for their opinion for the removal of *DADT*, and we are preparing for a busy month in September.

On August 28th will be visiting the Vietnam War Experience. Then, during Labor Day weekend we will be opening the Midwestern Ladies Softball Tournament with our flags; on September 10th we will be hosting our first bar night at the newly renovated Woofs bar; and on the 18th we will be celebrating our first anniversary at the *Spaghetti Warehouse*. Finally, on the 22nd, we will be hosting a Meet and Greet at our Local Stonewall Columbus bldg. Still hard to believe the chapter is already a year old.

In October we will be participating – as an organization for the first time – in our annually held *Columbus Stand Down*, where we will be helping those Veterans and their families who can use an extra hand these days, and, of course, in November we will be marching in Columbus' Veterans Day parade.

I have to say I am so proud of our chapter members for all we have accomplished at the individual and collective level(s), and I would like to wish all the chapters of greater *AVER*. We still have much work to be done.

For now, take care from the *Great Buckeye State* and continue to *believe*. Salute!

Meetings are held on the first Saturday of each month at 2:00 p.m., at the Stonewall Union Building, 1160 North High Street, in Columbus

Todd Shinkle, President
614.777.4328
mshinkle@columbus.rr.com

Mid-America Pride St. Louis

Recently, the St. Louis Jewish Community Center requested *MAPVA* participate in their 9th Annual Jewish Film Festival. The festival ran from June 13 to June 17. On the evening of June 16, the festival aired the Israeli film *Yossi and Jagger*, a film about 2 Israeli soldiers who are in love but are in the closet. The film centers around the issue of Jagger's desire to come out of the closet while Yossi wants to protect his military career. Sound familiar?

Following the airing of this critically acclaimed movie, the festival committee planned a discussion panel which was attended by more than 100 people. Philip Deitch, a local GLBT activist, moderated the panel.

The panel members included:

Dr. Dean Rosen, President, *PFLAG* St. Louis, who spoke on how staying in the closet affects families;

Arlene Zarembka, Attorney at Law, who spoke on the legal issues involved with closeted couples;

Rabbi Susan Talve, who spoke on the spiritual affects of remaining in the closet; and,

Craig Musser, President, *MAVPA*, who spoke on *Don't Ask Don't Tell*, the affects of discharging GLBT service men and women on national security, and the affects that remaining in the closet can have on our service men and women.

Musser provided a factual accounting of *DADT*, while appealing to the emotions of the audience with stories about witch-hunts and investigations. Musser concluded his remarks with the following statement:

> *Being young can be hard enough ... being in the military can be hard enough ... but to ask our sons and our daughters to fight honorably for their country, yet force them to lie about who and what they are, is wrong. They deserve better. Gay or Straight, they are part of "We the People".*

Following the opening remarks by each panel member, the floor was open to the audience to ask questions.

The panel was a huge success. Many in the audience admitted they really didn't understand what the issue of gays in the military was all about until they viewed the film and listened to the discussion panel. Both the film and the panel opened a lot of eyes.

Following the panel, several

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people came up to Musser to ask more personal questions about his experiences with being gay in the military and to express their desire to end all discrimination, including that caused by *DADT*.

MAPVA generally meets the last Tuesday of each month at 7:00 p.m. at the AMF Western Lanes, 4041 Bingham Ave, in St. Louis. Please call 314.832.2442 for more information.

Craig Musser, President
PO Box 58628
St. Louis, MO 63158
314.631.1427

Chicago

It has been an incredibly busy season for the Chicago Chapter of *AVER*. Activities have been non-stop since Memorial Day, when we marched in the City of Chicago's Memorial Day Parade, followed by our 11th Annual Remembrance Ceremony at Seaman Allen Schindler's grave. Our South side BBQ followed this, in turn.

Then, on Tuesday, June 8th, several of the members attended Mayor Daley's *Reception for the GLBT Community*.

On Saturday, June 12th, we had a great turnout for our annual Beer Bust & BBQ at Buck's Saloon on Halsted St. We thank everyone at Buck's and also Miller Brewing Co.. for their generosity to Chicago's GLBT veterans.

The City of Chicago's 2nd Annual Salute to GLBT Veterans was held in Daley Plaza on Tuesday, June 22nd, and the mayor issued a Proclamation making June 22, 2004, Salute to GLBT Veterans Day in Chicago.

On Monday the 21st, a good number of vets were there at StarGazer Bar to lend their support to the City's Lesbian and Gay Hall of Fame.

Pride weekend started with setting up a table at the Center on Halsted on Friday, June 25, and setting up a table again the next day at Chicago's 2nd Pride Festival.

The culmination of a month of activities ended with the Pride Parade, where Chicago vets provided the Color Guard, and also carried *Gus*, our giant flag.

Thanks to everyone who helped with all of these activities, and especially the 'kindness of strangers' who helped carry *GUS*. We had 36 flag carriers. More than $100 was tossed onto *GUS* during the parade, and also an 18-carat gold wedding ring. If that was a mistake, the owner can claim it by calling Jim Darby.

Final summer activities include North Halsted St. Market Days, August 7th & 8th, and the All Groups Picnic in Busse Woods on Sunday, August 29th.

"What an honor it is to be in a city that understands that our service was not motivated by gain, not motivated by thoughts of profit, that we serve simply because we love the United States of America. We knew that we were not welcome and still we came."

Remarks in Daley Plaza, on June 22, 2004 by former Sgt. Miriam Ben-Shalom, one of six founders of the *Gay, Lesbian & Bisexual Veterans of America*. Sgt. Ben-Shalom fought against the military for years for the right to remain in the military. And won.

The *Chicago Chapter* meets the first Thursday of every month at Ann Sather's restaurant in Belmont, at 7:00 p.m.
Angela Colella, President (currently on sick leave)
Contact: Jim Darby, Vice President
PO Box 29317
Chicago, IL 60629
773.752.0058
jamesdarby@aol.com

Delaware

It has been a quiet summer for the Rehoboth Beach Chapter, with unusually rainy weather putting a damper on many of the chapter's planned summer activities.

However, still enthusiastic after their visit to D.C., those members who attended the national convention are eager to carry on the tradition carried forth by the other chapters by proudly representing *AVER* during Delaware's upcoming Pride Parade, which will take place this September
Rich Arnold, President
rcarwh1@aol.com

On Goes Veteran Pride

Atlanta, Georgia

Led by chapter president Jeff Cleghorn and vice president Brian Muller, the newly formed Atlanta chapter has –despite it's relatively small roster number of eight members–managed to keep busy over the long Summer months.

This past Memorial Day, chapter members, joined by two representatives from Georgia's State Legislature, gathered together at the site of an old, now gone, VFW post to lay a wreath at the foot of the still-standing flagpole. Being proper veterans, the members first retired the long flying American Flag before raising a new one in its place.

Despite its relative "newness," within the organization, the chapter has wasted no time in establishing itself within the Atlanta gay community, having already made a name for itself by proudly leading Atlanta's Gay Pride Parade, for which they were well received.

Future plans for the chapter include a vigorous membership drive, and establishing a plan to reach out to the estimated 34,000 gay veterans residing in or near the Atlanta area. Outreach also includes actively pursuing the possible formation of a Savannah, Georgia chapter as well.

Short-term plans include marching in this year's *Atlanta Veterans Day Parade*, and participating in the upcoming *Atlanta AIDS Walk* this October.

www.averga.org

Patriotic Veterans from Sacramento take a moment from manning their booth to pose for the camera (*above*)
BRAVER members and volunteers carry *GUS* during the Dayton Pride Parade (*below*)

Denver

The *Rocky Mountain Chapter* has continued to struggle over the past few month, having lost yet another member to another chapter. And, while it is a huge loss for the Rocky Mountain Chapter, thankfully, James Apedaile, who recently relocated to St. Louis, plans to continue to stay involved with *AVER*, with plans to transfer membership to *MAPVA* as soon as he's able, while still seeing to his responsibilities as Region 4 VP.

Despite this recent loss of key personnel, the chapter has still managed to field enough bodies to participate in both the Denver Pride Parade, and the Colorado Spring Pride Parade, held in Denver's sister city to the south.

Unfortunately, *PrideDay* did not come about without some obstacles, the first one being the discovery that those responsible for having a covered booth for the chapter and their booth-mate; Sharon Alexander from *SLDN*, had dropped the ball: no booth.

The bad luck didn't end there, either. As it turned out, *SLDNs* shipment of T-shirts and literature had apparently been broken into while waiting to be picked up, leaving very little for the booth.

Fortunately, an empty booth turned up just a couple of stalls away from where they were supposed to be at, thanks to a no-show. Between that and Sharon's sheer determination at finding a table to use–to the point of single-handedly carrying a large wooden folding table across a large grassy area–and with some *SLDN* literature leftover from last year, the chapter was able to salvage what they could of the day and get the word out about both *AVER* and *SLDN's* combined missions and purpose for being there.

These little successes after such a miserable start, combined with a flock of dedicated volunteers, some who appeared literally from thin air, turned what could have been a disaster into a successful day, with quite a few signatures being collected on petitions to repeal *DADT*, and to keep Allen Schindler's killer behind bars.

A few weeks later, several of the members found themselves donning uniforms once again, this time to lead the Colorado Springs Pride Parade just to the south of Denver.

This year, the Color-Guard was given top-billing by being chosen to lead the parade, the area being one of the more popular to draw troops from for duty in Iraq and elsewhere.

Included with this honor was the equal honor of providing backdrop on the main stage for the singing of the National Anthem, at the conclusion of which A.J. Rogue, as AVER national president, was given the dual honor of being the kick-off guest speaker to address the crowd of Pride gatherers.

Future plans for the chapter include elections just as soon as potential candidates can be drummed up, and holding their annual fundraising dinner and show over the Veterans Day weekend.

It is unsure, as of yet, whether the chapter will march during the annual Veterans Day Parade, something they've participated in for the last several years. However, the few members that do remain are looking into the possibility of laying a wreath at the Marine Corps Memorial in nearby Golden.

Anyone interested in possibly relocating to Denver to help resurrect the dying chapter is more than welcome to do so!

A.J. Rogue, President
rkymtnveterans@aol.com
rockymountainaver.org

Denver chapter members ham it up behind their homemade photo backdrop

WASHINGTON – The Human Rights Campaign joined Servicemembers Legal Defense Network and American Veterans for Equal Rights today in releasing "Documenting Courage: Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Veterans Speak Out." The publication, available at www.hrc.org, features the stories of GLBT veterans who served under discriminatory policies.

"American soldiers are risking their lives for the freedoms of others while being denied their own," said HRC President Cheryl Jacques. "Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender service members deserve to be treated with the same respect as their peers, and HRC, SLDN and AVER will stand together in opposition to current policy until the day that becomes a reality."

Approximately 10,000 service members – linguists, infantry members, doctors, pilots, nurses, engineers, navigators, tankers, mechanics and members of virtually every other specialty – have been discharged in 10 years under "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." These discharges have cost taxpayers between $250 million and $1.2 billion, according to research by SLDN.

"Americans are paying dearly to subsidize military discrimination," said C. Dixon Osburn, executive director of SLDN. "With overwhelming opposition to the 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' policy, the nation's security at risk and a pressing need for Americans who are willing to serve, there are more than enough reasons for members of Congress to agree that the current laws are wrong."

The publication features the stories of 13 veterans – including Pfc. Franklin Kameny, who served in World War II; Lt. Col. Hank Thomas, who served two tours in Vietnam and also worked for both the Nixon and Reagan administrations; and Petty Officer 1st Class Cheryl Ann Costa, a transsexual who served in Vietnam as her birth sex and almost 20 years later was called on by the Navy to join the Reserves as a female – contrary to anti-transgender military regulations.

"These stories are amazing," said A.J. Rogue, president of American Veterans for Equal Rights. "Every page tells the story of a veteran who displayed courage, but also immense dedication to their country while serving in silence. Clearly, patriotism and loyalty know no boundaries of sexual orientation or gender identity. "

The Human Rights Campaign is the largest national lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender political organization with members throughout the country. It effectively lobbies Congress, provides campaign support and educates the public to ensure that LGBT Americans can be open, honest and safe at home, at work and in the community.

DIVERSITY IN *AVER*

By Lara Ballard, VP, *AVER D.C. Chapter*

At the recent *AVER* Convention in Washington, D.C., one of the most controversial topics of discussion was the removal of former *AVER* National President Nancy Russell. One of the accusations Ms. Russell leveled at the all-male National Board was that they removed her because she was a woman.

During my Army years, if there was anything that made me angrier than sexism in the military, it was female officers and NCOs using sexism as an excuse for their own poor performance. From my perspective, I didn't see that sexism was at all a factor in the decision to remove Ms. Russell from office. I believe that the leadership of this organization belongs with those who are most willing and able to lead it, regardless of their gender, race, sexual orientation or gender identity.

However, Nancy's remarks, and other remarks that were made during the Convention about minority representation, do raise the issue of whether *AVER* is doing enough to encourage diversity in its ranks. Yes, we do want only the best-qualified people to lead our organization, but we also need to ensure that our membership outreach brings in a sufficiently diverse pool of members from which to choose our leaders. So how are we doing on this front?

On outreach and inclusion of women, we're actually not doing too badly. Out of 75 registered attendees at the *AVER* Convention, 14 were female, and many more female vets turned out for the Military Ball. One thing to bear in mind when we talk about being female-inclusive is that the overwhelming majority of veterans are male. Women only make up approximately 10-13% of the U.S. Armed Forces at present, and in earlier generations that number was undoubtedly far lower. So an *AVER* membership that was 50% female would not be representative of the community of GLBT veterans. I got used to being outnumbered by men when I was in the service, and I don't have any problem with it now.

Minority membership, particularly among African-Americans, is another story. This is not unusual for veterans' organizations—go to the websites of *Amvets*, *VFW*, or the *American Legion* and you'll see primarily white faces. But it does need to change.

The *National Gay and Lesbian Task Force* recently released the results of a survey conducted of 2700 individuals attending Black Pride events across the country. They found that one in 50 of those surveyed were *current* members of the U.S. military. Every year when the D.C. chapter works at D.C. Black Pride, we meet dozens of vets and service-members who have never heard of *AVER* or *SLDN* and are very glad to learn that they exist. Clearly, this is a community we need to reach out to. Black Pride events are a great opportunity for outreach, because they tend to draw in crowds from across the country. Every *AVER* chapter that is located near a Black Pride festival should try to staff a table (and you can often share a table with *SLDN*).

There are other things chapters can do to make women and minorities feel more welcome in *AVER*. Gay white men need to understand that GLBT women and minorities are fighting battles against discrimination on more than one front. The *NGLTF* survey found that Black GLBT individuals overwhelmingly believe that HIV/AIDS is the single largest problem facing their community, and according to VA, approximately X% of the veterans' community is HIV-positive. That means there are probably a lot of HIV+ African-American vets in our community who could use our support. *AVER* chapters should consider building ties with HIV/AIDS organizations, through contribution of time or money. Lesbian and African-American organizations often have their own fund-raisers. *AVER* chapters should support them, by organizing "tables" at fund-raising dinners or by donating auction items. Even social events can be used to encourage diversity. Don't keep going back to the same old boy-bars month after month. Have a social gathering in a different part of town, go to a women's bar or a predominantly African-American bar, or do a brunch instead of an after-hours social event.

And of course, the best way to encourage new members, regardless of gender or race, is to ask them what they want out of a veterans' organization and be responsive to them. Not everyone wants to be a

political activist, and not everyone has the same needs and priorities as you do. Listen and learn from these prospective members, and we will be well on our way to building an organization that is much more representative of the over one million GLBT veterans living in the United States.

Documentiong Courage: Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Veterans Speak Out

AVER members are once again being asked to join forces with *SLDN* and *HRC* in producing the next in the *Documenting Courage* series, this one targeting Vietnam era LGBT Veterans.

"I am very excited about the next phase of this project," said Dixon Osburn, *SLDN's* Executive Director. "We've had such great success with the first project, I can only imagine as to the impact this next one will have," continued Dixon. "It is important that we get these stories out, particular now, during such a critical time in our Nation's history, before the stories are lost for good. This is how we're going to defeat *DADT*. Like at our yearly *Lobby Days*, projects such as this one lend a face to the message we're trying to deliver–replace a statistic with an individual, something which is much harder to simply ignore."

Vietnam era LGBT veterans wishing to participate in the project are encouraged to contact *SLDN* via their website for further information. All of you who fit in this category are strongly urged to participate. Have yours be one of the powerful stories that helps defeat *DADT*.

Let Your Voice be one of those that is Heard this Next Election!

Don't Forget to Vote!

AVER Uniform Proposal

Thanks to the hard work and diligence of the folks in the D.C. Capitol Chapter, led by chapter vice president Lara Ballard, there is now a proposed uniform for those chapters with members who, for various reasons, are no longer able to wear a service uniform for such things as Color Guards and other such official AVER functions. The important thing to remember is that this is merely a proposal. The AVER patch shown in the photograph, however, is currently available for purchase. Contact Lara for more details.

As mentioned above, the idea for the uniform was to provide an alternative winter and summer uniform to chapter members. It does not replace the wearing of ones service uniform at such functions when wearing a service uniform is appropriate.

The proposed uniform was put together after much research into costs, etc., and after much debate back and forth between the members of the D.C. chapter and other members of *AVER*. Currently, we are featuring an eight-pointed, hard brimmed or garrison cap. Other alternative headgear was discussed as well, included the possibility of going with a beret.

Feel free to discuss the proposal with your chapter members, and forward your thoughts to Lara Ballard at ballard@earthlink.net. She can also be reached for other information such as cost and availability, or to order the *AVER* patches shown in the photographs.

(***photographs on page 12***)

Proposed *AVER* Uniform Gallery

(Write-up on Page 11)

Pictured from Top to Bottom:
(1) Proposed summer uniform featuring a short-sleeved khaki shirt with navy-blue shorts, (or trousers) khaki belt, and ball-cap.
(2) Winter uniform features a long-sleeved, pleated navy-blue shirt with khaki trousers and matching tie. An eight-pointed or garrison-style hard-brimmed cover (navy blue would be color of preference) is shown as possible head-gear. Also discussed, but not shown, was the addition of a rainbow colored aguillette.
(3) Close-up of *AVER* patch (*below*)

Other News

AVER AMERICAN VETERANS FOR EQUAL RIGHTS

National Elections

In addition to the many other things planned for during the upcoming convention to be held this February in Los Angeles, elections for national officers (president, vice-president, secretary and treasurer) will once again take place. Nominations are open to all *AVER* veteran members in good standing, in accordance with our constitution. All nominations, accompanied by a brief biography and photograph of the person being nominated, must be submitted electronically or in writing no later than two weeks prior to the fall/winter issue of the *Forward Observer*, scheduled to be released December 15, 2004. As before, there will be no open nominations during the elections. Electronic nominations may be submitted to avernews@aol.com Written nominations may be mailed to:

AVER
Box 1490
2020 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20006

Membership Reminder

Renewal memberships are due as of this month. Please make sure to compare your records with the records recently sent out by national membership chair Jim Donovan, to make sure that all your members are accounted for. Remember, delegate votes are taken from the national records. It's important that all documentation agree. Report any discrepancies to Chief Donovan as soon as you can!

AVER Region Five Conference Sacramento, California

AVER members from Region Five gathered together this past August to attend the region's annual conference, hosted this year by the newly chartered Sacramento chapter. Chapter president Ray Allen, with the help of a good group of volunteer members, managed a superb job in pulling off what many considered one of the best Region Five conferences ever held.

The conference began with an informal "meet and greet" at the *Mercantile*, one of Sacramento's watering holes.

Things kicked off officially on Saturday morning with a memorial ceremony celebrating the one year anniversary of the laying of the paver commemorating LGBT Veterans in *Capitol Park*, across from the Capitol building. Guest speakers at the ceremony, which was covered by local news, included veteran Marine Tom Swann, whose drive and dedication played a huge role in getting the paver there; Retired Brigadier General Keith H. Kerr, who braved the journey and the heat to be there, despite having just gone through hernia surgery days before; newly appointed director of the Military Education Initiative, Jim Maloney; and AVER national president A.J. Rogue.

The memorial service was well attended by Region Five members from San Diego, Palm Springs, Los Angeles and Sacramento, and included Commander Mario "Tony" Benfield from the American Legion Post 448 in San Francisco. Afterward, the attendees gathered together in a third floor meeting room in the Capitol building (thanks to the efforts of Sacramento members Sam and Eric) to partake in a lunch catered by local gay caterer *Refer a Chef,* and to conduct regional business.

Chief among the business was the election of a new regional VP, which meant bidding a sad farewell to Ken Osborn, who has admirably filled the role of Region Five VP since his election two years ago.

Randy Schecher from Palm Springs and Ray Allen from Sacramento were both nominated, with the election eventually going to Randy Schecher from Palm Springs, who, after some debate among those in attendance, chose Ray Allen to be his assistant. The two plan to split the responsibilities of the vast region between the two of them, with Ray being responsible for the northern half, while Randy concentrates on the southern half.

Then, later that afternoon, after a workshop on mission statements expertly facilitated by Ken's partner, Leo, attendees put their heads together in an attempt to come up with an *AVER* mission statement

(continued on page 24)

(***continued from page 23***)
worthy of submitting to the membership.

Because of time constraints on the room, the work on the mission statement was tabled until the following day in order for members to adjourn to the home of Ray and Paul for a pool-side reception/dinner gathering. Ray and Paul, in addition to having a beautiful home, turned out to be most gracious hosts as well, opening up their home to a total of six out-of-town guests.

Then, on Sunday, the remaining members, including national secretary Ben Gomez, former Region Five VP Ken Osborn, and national president A.J. Rogue, gathered together around the dining room table to continue hashing out a mission statement, the result of their efforts to be published elsewhere in this document.

The weekend came to a close later that afternoon, with many of the attendees saying their good-byes and making their respective ways home. All in all, a hugely successful and productive weekend, thanks to the efforts of Ray Allen and his group of dedicated volunteers. A

(*Panel at right, from Top to Bottom*)
A covered-up BG. Keith Kerr addresses those gathered at the memorial.
Marine Veteran and long-time activist Tom Swann graces the crowd with a few words of wisdom.
A.J. Rogue, Denver (*left*) and Charlie Peer, Sacramento (*right*) pause during the benediction after presenting the wreath next to the memorial paver.

Proposed AVER Mission Statement:

"AVER is a non-profit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Founded Veteran Service Organization whose purpose is to promote the Equal and Fair Treatment of all Active Duty and Veteran members of the United States Armed Forces, and to Honor the Service of all Veterans."

Ed Westrick (Los Angeles) presents Sacramento chapter president Ray Allen with the official chapter charter while *AVER* National President A.J. Rogue looks on. (*above*)
Leo expertly facilitating the mission statement workshop. *(right)*
Paver dedicated to GLBT Veterans. Inscription reads:
In Honor of Gay, Lesbian Bisexual and Transgender Veterans Killed in Action.
(*below*)

Submission Deadline for the Winter Issue of the Forward Observer:

1 December, 2004

National Contact Information

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