



THE  
FORWARD OBSERVER

THE NATIONAL NEWSLETTER OF AMERICAN VETERANS FOR EQUAL RIGHTS, INC.  
VOLUME 6                                      ISSUE 2                                      SEPTEMBER 2012



## 2012 LGBT Pride Festivities ...



## ... and DADT Repeal Anniversary Issue



**C**ONTENTS

President's Column - 1	Chapter Reports -5
Editor's Column - 2	Congressional Cemetery - 13
National Officer Reports - 3	Taps - 14

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For the latest information about chapters currently in formation or dormant chapters which are taking steps to reactivate, please see the AVER Local Chapters page at: <http://www.aver.us/chapters.php>

FROM THE

## PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Dear Fellow Vets, Service Members & Allies.

### *Repeal - One Year Later*

The world did not end. The United States Military did not collapse. The dire predictions of the powerful and well funded bulwark of anti gay groups proved to be as false as they were for all the other national militaries that lifted their gay bans decades ago. There have been no mass desertions, no mutinies, no harm to morale, mission, or recruitment. Nothing. Just as we said.

AVER testified before Congress that the “best trained, most professional, and most disciplined fighting force in the history of our planet” would have no problem accepting open service by gay members of the military. We were right. Perhaps the most unfortunate aspect of today’s military has been the deeply disturbing issue of sexual assault against women service members, a sad indication that undermines our claim that our fighting forces are above such challenges.

Lifting the ban did nothing for transgender Americans who want to serve in the military. That issue is in limbo and appears stalled, while discussions of what transgender service will look like seem to fade as the days go by, and issues of diversity not popular to pollsters get pushed aside in the midst of an election year. AVER remains committed to transgender service. We will leave no one behind. Not today. Not tomorrow.

The issue of LGB service members is crucial to the fight for marriage equality. Proof that lifting the ban did not hurt the military, despite the ardent claims of the opposition, is precedent that allowing same gender marriage will not harm the institution of legal union. The issues of same gender military families and their need for legal protections have drawn the attention of top military support organizations such as Joining Forces, First Lady Michelle Obama’s support organization for military families. Because members of the military are held in such high esteem by the American people, the need for LGB service members to protect their married spouses and dependents will help win the battle for marriage equality. Our soldiers deserve all we can give them. Same gender marriage protection is something they need in order to defend our freedom along with their heterosexual counterparts without worrying if their families will be protected back home. It’s an issue of justice and fairness. It’s an American issue.

There are wrongs to be righted. Many veterans, from World War II through Afghanistan, need to have their less than honorable discharges upgraded in order to access the benefits they earned from the VA. The largest injustice is the pensions lost by honored members of the military who were discharged for being gay. No one is discussing this issue. Men and women who should be receiving just retirement for their service to our nation have been dishonorably denied the pensions they earned.

But the first openly gay general has received her star, pinned on by her same gender legal spouse. The same sex marine kiss “seen round the world” passed without incident, “it’s your typical homecoming photo”, in the words of the USMC. The nation has changed. One year later, an injustice that stood for a century is largely forgotten. No major political candidates suggest reinstating the ban.

America has become freer. The largest, most respected employer in the United States no longer discriminates against LGB Americans, at least as far the right to serve. The precedent of having the highly honored institution of the US military clinging to a policy that discriminated against gay Americans no longer stands. The path towards same sex benefits and marriage equality has been made more open.

Still, America needs to “evolve”, to borrow a popular phrase, not just on LGBT issues, but on issues of diversity in general. America’s destiny to become the largest, most diverse society in human history to embrace equal rights, equal responsibilities, and equal respect for every citizen, should not be the battle of one minority after another. The culture of America needs to change in regard to minorities, and the United States Constitution needs to be honored by every American, especially by elected officials and members of the military who have sworn an oath to defend it. Americans need a better understanding and appreciation of what America is about and what it means to be an American.

The passing of the ban is more than just a soon to be forgotten footnote in military history. It should be remembered as a moment when America became more true to itself. And the long battle to remove it should be noted as the unfortunate struggle to obtain what is already guaranteed by the constitution, the very document which America’s military exists to defend. Most of all, it should be a reminder that “we’re not there yet” when it comes to diversity. America’s destiny should not be the battle of one minority after another to gain the freedom already guaranteed to every citizen. The dance must be open to all. One year later, let those of us taking our first two step not forget to invite others to the ball.

Faithfully,

*Danny Ingram*



## FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Greetings! As you can see from the many articles in this newsletter this year has been an extremely busy time for AVER. From the first Pentagon Pride Reception to President Obama's first ever invitation to lgbt people to a White House Reception, and to the numerous AVER Chapter Pride Parades across the country. 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.

We look forward to September 20, the first anniversary of military Freedom Day, when DADT officially ended. We thank the many, many members of GLBVA/AVER who worked fearlessly over the years to bring us to this historic point in time. We also thank all those courageous politicians who, over the years were willing to stand up and be counted. Bravo!

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" did not come to its demise on its own. Your continued support is what eventually toppled it. Please send your dues to your local chapter.

Thank You For Continuing to Serve Your Country

***Jim Darby***

Managing Editor, *The Forward Observer*



### Attention Readers

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# National News



*AVER President Danny Ingram speaking with News media at the White House*

On Friday, June 15th, 2012 as National President of American Veterans for Equal Rights I had the honor of visiting the White House - twice. On Friday morning I was invited by First Lady Michelle Obama and Second Lady Dr. Jill Biden to attend a meeting of Joining Forces, the program they sponsor to support military families. There was a twist to this meeting - sitting around the table active duty military personnel with their same sex husbands and wives. It was wonderful to see, there were many big problems. We decided the best we could say is that they are good problems to have. Later I attended the President's Reception in Honor of LGBT Pride Month. I presented the President with AVER's Leonard P Matlovich Medal for Distinguished Service in Defense of American Liberty. I have been to the House of the President. I have drunk his wine. I have eaten his food. And it was good. ★

## ***Pentagon Holds LGBT Pride Event***

On Tuesday, June 26, 2012, the Pentagon held its first LGBT Pride event in the Pentagon Auditorium. The room was packed with LGBT service members and civilians. It began with a Presentation of Colors and the National Anthem, a truly formal military ceremony for the opening of the historic first Pentagon Pride Celebration ever.

President Obama gave a televised address. There was a showing of Secretary Panetta's speech. Jeh Johnson, the Defense Department's General Counsel, who was instrumental in the study and implementation of the rescinding of the policy spoke about the inequalities that still need to be resolved.

The program concluded with a panel of lesbian and gay active duty and veteran speakers. They each spoke about their own experiences in the military. West Point graduate and KnightsOut Executive Director Sue Fulton, Marine Cap-

tain Matthew Phelps, and Gordon Tanner, former Air Force JAG Officer all spoke. Many of us are still pinching ourselves, wondering if this was all just a dream. What a historic moment for all of us. ★

## ***SLDN/OutServe Merger***

AVER congratulates Service members Legal Defense Network (SLDN) and OutServe on their recent merger. "When organizations in the LGBTQ military community unite their efforts, our service members and veterans benefit from their combined resources," said AVER National President Danny Ingram. "AVER is proud to support our sister organizations as they join together, and we remain committed to working with them to ensure that all service members and veterans receive the full benefits, equal treatment, and just respect due them as America's patriotic warriors. We are confident that this merger will strengthen that mission."

American Veterans for Equal Rights is the nation's LGBTQ chapter-based 501 © 3 Veterans Service Organization, providing a home for proud vets who support their nation's military and those who serve to defend our freedom. AVER Taking care of those who serve. Welcome Home. ★

## ***New Brigadier General first openly gay Flag Officer in U.S. Military***

Former Army Colonel Tammy Smith has become the first openly gay flag officer to come out while currently serving in the U.S. Military. Col. Smith was promoted to the rank of Brigadier General in a private ceremony which took place August 8 at the Women's Memorial in Arlington National Cemetery. BG Smith received her stars from her wife, Tracey Hepner.

Sue Fulton from OutServe said "It is a great day for our military and for our nation when this courageous leader is finally able to recognize her wife for her support and sacrifice in the same way that all military families should be recognized for their service to our country."

"It is indeed a new era in America's military when our most accomplished leaders are able to recognize who they are and serve the country they love at the same time. Brigadier General Smith made history today - not only as an exemplary service member who renders outstanding service to our nation with integrity and honor - but as a proud lesbian acknowledging the tremendous sacrifice her family makes in order for her to serve and advance," said Aubrey Sarvis, Army veteran and Executive Director of SLDN ★

## Remembering Our Service

This year will be the 50th Anniversary of the War in Vietnam. Many, if not most of the members of AVER served in Vietnam. There will be large celebrations held across the country. We urge members of AVER to participate in these events. We also served.

This year will mark the 67th Anniversary of the end of World War II. Nearly every chapter of AVER still has members who served in World War II. Victory in Japan was September 2, 1945. Take the time to thank these heroes while they are still with us. ★

### FORGOTTEN

In the corner of the nursing home, next to the artificial palm, sits an old man, strapped in a wheelchair, slumped over, as dusty and forgotten as the plastic plant. He sleeps. Drool slips unnoticed from his ancient lips. Dreams pass through his silent mind. Clutching, clinging, grasping hands of sand as bullets pop all around, ringing off his steel helmet. Men yelling, falling, everywhere, cries of pain. Mother, Blasts, explosions, showers of sand sting his face. Screams of shells rip overhead. Red blood in white surf. He prays, pulling forward, looking for a shelter on the open beach. Gripping, crawling. Deafening, dying. D-Day. First landing. Omaha Beach. First on the beachhead. Unending. Longest, eternal day. Finally, darkness breached. At last. And soon to fall. Hero. Champion. Liberty. Light. Here now sits freedom's mighty ward. Silent, soiled, neglected.

Danny Ingram, President, AVER

## AVER Public Affairs

AVER Public Affairs provides media interviews, coordinates with other organizations and agencies, as well as with production companies, prepares press releases and updates on AVER news and events in coordination with AVER's President, and promotes AVER wherever possible. In June we were interviewed on NPR, and coordinated with and publicized AVER's participation in White House events. We are currently exploring focused partnership projects with other veterans groups and have coordinated AVER's participation in a university research project.

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## AVER Veterans Affairs

AVER Veterans Affairs continues to provide support, advice, information, and referrals to LGBT service members and veterans across America and deployed overseas. In March we were honored to attend the Change of Command Ceremony of LTC Adam Hackel USAR along with his partner and their baby daughter. We are increasingly hearing from LGBT service members regarding coming out decisions and from our veterans regarding discharge upgrades.

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## AVER Region I - Northeastern US

AVER Region 1 is currently seeking to develop chapters in Philadelphia / SEPA / SWNJ / Northern DE; and Rhode Island/New England. Veterans interested in participating in those area chapters should contact AVER Region 1 at: region1vp@aver.us



Rocky Mountain Chapter color guard at Denver Pride Fest 2012

# Chapter News

## Albuquerque - Bataan AVER

The New Mexico Bataan Chapter of AVER in Albuquerque publishes a monthly bulletin, High Desert Signals. Please contact Steve Loomis for information at [swloomis@swcp.com](mailto:swloomis@swcp.com)

At the April meeting new Officers were elected. The AVER Color Guard again led the Albuquerque Pride Parade on June 9th. Steve Loomis said "It was a great day under the hot New Mexico sun to be gay. Bright, sharp, energetic, dedicated future of gays in our active military worked with gracefully aging vets who have fought the hard fight of our recent past to show our Pride at the 2012 Albuquerque Parade and Pridefest. Members of the Bataan Chapter of AVER coordinated with OutServe so that all LGBT Veterans and Active Duty in New Mexico could march as the Grand Marshals of the Parade." Well over 10,000 people applauded as the Parade moved up old U.S. 66. At the Pridefest booth AVER was joined by OutServe, SLDN and the Military Religious Freedom Foundation.

In August, the Bataan Chapter will celebrate its annual End of Summer Pool Party & BBQ. Contact Steve for information.

The dates for the Bataan chapter vary, but they alternate between Board meetings and General meetings. Most meetings are held on weekends at Steve Loomis' home. More info is available from Steve at: 505 301 1737

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## Chicago Chapter

In May, for the 19th year members of AVER held a Remembrance Ceremony at the grave of Allen Schindler. In May we also participated in two other Memorial Day events. AVER, along with the Lakeside Freedom Marching Band marched in the City of Chicago's huge Memorial Day Parade. And this year, Congressman Quigley, one of our greatest supporters marched with us. That is a first.

We also co-sponsored a Memorial Day Ceremony at Space Park in Boys town.

June began with the Chicago Chapter's annual Beer Bust & Barbeque at Buck's Saloon.

In June Chicago members marched in the City of Chicago's annual Pride Parade. We mounted a full Color Guard,



*Chicago Chapter of AVER marches in Pride Parade*



*Chicago Chapter President Jim Darby speaking at GLASS meeting at Great Lakes Naval Base*

and also had 38 people who carried our giant 50 foot flag. It is always quite an adventure. We also set up a booth for the two-day Pridefest.

OutServe and GLASS (Gay, Lesbian and Supportive Sailors) from Great Lakes Naval Base also marched behind us. It was such a great thrill to see at least 25 sailors exuberantly marching down Halsted St. The crowd went wild.

In June AVER provided a Color Guard for a Memorial service for departed member Randy Williamson. The event was held in conjunction with SAGE at the Center on Halsted. There were close to 100 attendees on the 4th of July for the 2nd time, Jim Darby read the Declaration of Independence at the Chicago History Museum.

On Monday, June 25 Chicago AVER celebrated the 10th annual "Salute to LGBT Veterans" in Daley Plaza.

The Chicago Chapter meets the 1st Thursday of every month at 7:00 p.m. at the Center on Halsted

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## ***Denver - Rocky Mountain Chapter***

The Rocky Mountain Denver Chapter has been dormant for several years. The return of the RMC has been the dream of John Kelly (former Air Force) along with the dedicated support of Luisa Fritz Bohitz (former Army). Together they recruited and organized a new LGBT Color Guard with the support of the Colorado LGBT Center.

From the first appearance of the new LGBT Color Guard as Grand Marshals of the 2011 Denver Pride Parade, the group knew they were on to something important. Now, after marching in three parades, they have become true representatives of our national service members.

Denver has always been an important and integral part of AVER, having hosted two national conventions over the years.

We are hoping that John will share some of his secrets to this amazing rebirth. Could it have anything to do with the free corned beef and cabbage offered to veterans at Charlie's Bar?

Contact John Kelly at [jjkellyii@aol.com](mailto:jjkellyii@aol.com)



*AVER FLA and the American Legion step; off for the Ft. Lauderdale Fourth of July Parade*



*AVER FLA President Marshall Belmaine, Vice-President Charles Egan, Treasurer Richard Crouner, Secretary Angel Acevedo*

## ***Florida Gold Coast Chapter***

Photos were taken at the American Legion Post #36 as AVER and the American Legion were ready to step off for the 4th of July Parade. The irony is that both groups were celebrating the 4th of July for different types of Independence!

FGC 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 contact

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## ***Georgia Chapter***

### ***Annual Memorial Day Taps Ceremony***

AVER Georgia held its annual Taps and Wreath Placing Ceremony on Memorial Day. This year's ceremony honored Vietnam veterans on the 50th anniversary of the conflict. The Atlanta Chapter of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence was the honored guests of the ceremony this year. The Sisters donated the flag which will fly over the Veterans Memorial in Atlanta's Piedmont Park for one year and be retired the following Memorial Day. The Sisters donated the flag in memory of one of their chapter who served in the military and passed away this year.

Members of AVER GA participated in the first ever Veterans Administration LGBT Pride Month Commemoration. The VA officially celebrated Pride at their centers across the country in June. At the VA in Atlanta the programs included a screening of the film "Tell" (which includes a number of AVER members including Denny Meyer) and a discussion led by AVER National President Danny Ingram.

AVER Georgia to Partner with the Atlanta Police Department for Pride

AVER Georgia will be partnering with the Atlanta PD for Atlanta's 2012 Pride event which will be held in October. The APD has received a special grant to hire LGBT veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. The APD's liaison with the LGBT community contacted AVER to request the partnership to help recruit veterans for their project. The APD has had a difficult relationship with Atlanta's LGBT community following a controversial raid on Atlanta's Eagle Bar on September 10, 2009. APD Chief of Police George Turner participated in AVER Georgia's taps ceremony in 2011 in a successful attempt to help repair the damaged relationship. AVER Georgia will be participating in Operation Oath Keepers and distributing copies of the United States Constitution which were donated by Atlanta Congressman John Lewis. AVER National President Danny Ingram has been named one of the



6 Grand Marshals of the 2012 Pride Parade. Danny will be invited to speak from the Coca-Cola Stage during the Pride Festival where AVER GA will conduct its annual Pride taps ceremony, an event which Atlanta Pride values as an important part of its annual celebration.

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### **Greater Los Angeles Chapter**

Over the last few months the Greater Los Angeles Chapter has been extremely active trying to increase its membership. As AVER's most recent Chartered Chapter, as of July 4, 2012, AVER-GLA is on the move to big things in the coming months. On May 18-19, AVER-GLA participated in its first ever Pride event in Long Beach, CA. At the Long Beach Pride Festival, the Chapter partnered with Marriage Equality USA and SLDN to work together and spread the word about each other's organizations.

On June 30 the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence hosted the 1st Annual Military Ball at Oil Can Harry's in Studio City with AVER-GLA being the primary beneficiary. This was the first time the LA sisters had ever conducted an event solely for Veterans/Military, and it was well received by the LA community. AVER's National President, Danny Ingram, flew in to attend the event, and present AVER-GLA with their Official Charter. Preparations are already under way for next year's ball.

The AVER-GLA Board has been working closely with several other organizations, such as the West LA VAMC, Long Beach VAMC, LA VARO, LA County Dept of Military & Veterans Affairs-Veterans Commission, CA Assembly member Holly Mitchell's Office, SoCal Outserve, Operation Gratitude, the CA CAL-VET Secretary, local Veteran Employment Committees and various American Legion, DAV and VFW Posts to help get the word out about AVER-GLA, and the problems faced by the LGBT Community during and after military service.

For more information about what AVER-GLA is doing, please visit them at [www.aver-gla.org](http://www.aver-gla.org) or contact them at:

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*The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence co-sponsor a Military Ball with members of AVER-GLA.*



### **NEO AVER - Cleveland-Akron-Canton**

On Friday August 3rd, NEO AVER and the LGBT Community Center of Greater Cleveland hosted side-by-side information tables at the Wade Park VAMC Multicultural Fair. As a result of the fair, AVER member Marie Ann Bohusch was invited to speak about LGBT veterans issues at a monthly 2-day staff continuing education in-service called ICARE (Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, Excellence). The programming covers general issues that apply to all vets, plus focuses on minority groups the VA has identified as broadly underserved, currently: LGBT veterans, veterans with Military Sexual Trauma, and veterans with severe mental illness(es).

Also as a result of the fair, the VA will host an information meeting just for LGBT veterans concerning being "out" to providers, safe reporting channels if a veteran experiences discrimination at the VA, and the LGBT veterans support group that is currently in proposal. This meeting will take place on Friday October 26th from 2-3pm, in the Rockefeller Room 1F-160 of the CARES Tower of the Wade Park VAMC campus at 10701 East Blvd, Cleveland, OH 44106.

Marie Ann Bohusch  
[www.neoaver.org](http://www.neoaver.org)





*AVERNY President Denny Meyer, NYC Council Speaker Christine Quinn and AVERNY Treasurer Claude Ashby, Jr. at Winter Pride*

### ***New York Chapter - AVERNY***

In February, AVER-NY attended the annual NYC “WinterPride” event, an evening dinner dance held indoors in the ice cold heart of winter, where we network with members of Congress, City and State elected officials, and leaders of local and national LGBT organizations. We remind them to remember that the battle for equal rights for LGBT service members and veterans is far from over. And we gain about 50 pounds overindulging on NYC’s most outrageous food feed. Think calamari bathed in cream sauce, brisket in brown gravy, roasts and pasta; and those are just the appetizers, seriously! But, of course, we just go there for the opportunity to advocate for our rights, seriously

In early March, the guest speaker at AVERNY’s monthly meeting was retired Col. Terrance Holiday, the Commissioner of the NYC Mayor’s Office of Veterans Affairs, who spoke about equality and offered to provide our AVER Chapter with our own office space, alongside other veterans groups in Veterans Hall in a City building. We completed the paperwork at his invitation; and as of this writing, we are sad to report,



*AVERNY at New York City’s LGBT Expo at Javits Center*

we have not heard back about it at all. It seems that there may have been some horror, among ‘traditional’ veterans groups, at our potential presence among them. Yes friends, our battle for equality is far from over.

Also in March, AVERNY had its annual booth at the giant GLBT Expo in NYC’s Javits Convention Center where we met many new LGBT veterans and a few other friendly folks.

In June AVERNY marched in two of the eight scheduled Summer Pride parades held in the New York Metropolitan region. Imagine 8 parades on one city! In the big NYC Heritage of Pride Parade in Manhattan, we were cheered as always by the 3 million spectators as our marchers and “Disabled Veterans Vehicle” moved down 5th Avenue into Greenwich Village.

Denny Meyer, AVER-NY  
718 849-5665 [www.averny.tripod.com](http://www.averny.tripod.com)



### ***Palm Springs Chapter***

The Palm Springs Chapter continues rolling along under the great leadership of Mel Tips who founded the Chapter nineteen years ago.

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

Mel hosted an old fashioned 4th of July event at his palatial home in the desert with 1/4 lb. hot dogs, burgers, potato salad, etc.

Palm Springs Pride Parade will be held the first weekend in November. Retired Marine Corps Staff Sergeant Eric Alva, the first American soldier wounded in the Iraq War, will be honored as the 2012 grand marshal.

Mel Tips  
PO Box 5012  
Palm springs, CA 92263-5012  
760 329 6560  
[miltips@aol.com](mailto:miltips@aol.com)

## ***Sacramento Valley Veterans***

Sacramento Valley Veterans (SVV) has been very active on many fronts over the 2012 summer. With the current board, SVV has established itself as the go-to organization for Veteran-related information and resources. SVV's Board currently has Ty Redhouse as President, Michael Williams as Vice President, Gene Silvestri as Secretary, and Charlie Peer as Treasurer. Since May 2012, the chapter has been working to represent the LGBT Veteran and Service member community in the Sacramento Valley through advocacy, outreach, and camaraderie.

Throughout the summer, SVV President Ty Redhouse and Vice President Michael Williams regularly trekked out to the CA State Capitol to provide testimony in support of AB 1505, the Equality for California Veterans Act, co-authored by Assembly member Dr. Richard Pan (D-Sacramento) and Senator Christin Kehoe (D-San Diego). SVV is a co-sponsor of the legislation along with Equality California (EQCA) with support from Swords to Plowshares, AMVETS, and the Veterans Democratic Club of Sacramento County. Most recently, AB 1505 passed the CA State Senate Appropriations Committee with a unanimous vote of 7-0. The chapter will continue to provide support for the bill as it moves forward. SVV's President was interviewed regarding the bill and can be viewed here: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=LqBrRoYeBB4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LqBrRoYeBB4)



*SVV Members at 1st Annual Courage to Stand Event*

SVV provided outreach to the community by engaging in different activities while developing ties with community organizations. In early-June, SVV provided Color Guard for the 1st Annual Courage To Stand event honoring our nation's LGBT Veterans and Service members. The event was hosted by the Sacramento Gay & Lesbian Center and involved stories from LGBT Veterans who served under "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." SVV Secretary Gene Silvestri contributed his story and SVV member Anthony Loverde generously donated his DADT photography thesis for use at the event. The following day,

SVV stood up and marched in the Sacramento Pride Parade before posting the Colors at the Opening Ceremony. While handing out Veteran information at the day-long event, the chapter developed ties and gathered contacts from community leaders to collaborations to help our LGBT Veterans and Service members.



*SVV members at Sacramento Gay Pride*



*SVV members at Sacramento Gay Pride*

Most recently, SVV represented at the 3rd Annual Veterans Appreciation Picnic in the predominantly conservative area of Citrus Heights. Our reception was very positive and many visitors were surprised that a LGBT Vet group would be out and about in such a suburban area.

Overall, the summer was a positive experience of speaking to the community about Veterans issues while providing representation to the area's LGBT Vets.

SVV rode the wave of summer blockbuster movies with a host of days out at the movies. Starting with "Battleship," we gathered for "Prometheus," "The Amazing Spider-Man," "The Dark Knight Rises," "Total Recall," and "The Bourne Legacy." We rallied up in front of the theatre before heading

in. After the movie, we would hit a local eatery and discuss the films and other things. The chapter is looking forward to planning more events as the summer movie season ends with bowling, laser tag, and, quite possibly, some paintball action. SVV really strives to provide ample opportunities for our Veterans, Service members, and Supporters to come together and have a great time!

So, what do we have coming up next? SVV is planning on getting some outreach going with events centered around our Women Veterans, employment, and a panel discussion on Transgender Veterans and Service members at Sacramento State University. We'll also be gearing up for Veterans Day where we hope to once again lead the parade for the city. To know more about what Sacramento Valley Veterans (SVV) is up to, visit us out at [www.sacvalleyvets.com](http://www.sacvalleyvets.com). We work to keep our site updated with the latest information regarding Veterans and the issues we face.

SVV meets the 3rd Monday of the month at the Lavender Library, 1414 21st Street, Sacramento, CA, from 6:30 PM until 8 PM. (unless otherwise noted). We're also on Twitter (@SacValleyVets) and Facebook. Check us out and connect!

Ty Redhouse  
[www.facebook.com/l/d745e](https://www.facebook.com/l/d745e)  
[www.sacglbtveterans.org](http://www.sacglbtveterans.org)

☆☆☆☆☆

## *More Photos from the AVER-GLA & Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence 1st Annual Military Ball at Oil Can Harry's in Studio City*





*AVER Georgia - Memorial Day flag ceremony*



*AVER Georgia observes Memorial Day at Piedmont Park*



*AVER President Danny Ingram at VA Pride*



*Palm Springs, CA - first exclusively LGBT veterans memorial*



*AVERNY at New York City 2012 Pride Parade*



*AVER-RMC: Presentation of Colors at the Denver PrideFest opening ceremonies.*

*Does your Veterans Affairs Medical Center, CBOC, or VetCenter have a support program tailored to veterans affected by the “Gay Ban” or the later “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell”?*

*Some do, but most still do not ... yet. If you are interested in learning more about who to contact and how to go about establishing such a program, contact the AVER VP of Veterans Affairs - Denny Meyer - at [vetsaffairs@aver.us](mailto:vetsaffairs@aver.us)*

**VETERAN PRIDE**

**What benefits are there for me to be “out” with my VA providers?**

**How do I access the “safe reporting” system if I encounter discrimination at the VA?**

**What could attending a VA Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Support Group offer me?**

For answers to these questions and more  
Join us for an informational meeting and discussion

**Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center**  
Wade Park Campus • Rockefeller Room • CARES Tower Room 1F-160 (1st floor)  
October 26, 2012 • 2:00-3:00 pm

10701 East Boulevard • Cleveland, OH 44106  
**FOR ANY QUESTIONS CALL 216-791-3800 ext. 3408**



*October 2011 - Empty Table Ceremony at the AVER National Convention in Albuquerque for members who died since the 2009 Convention.*

## For Immediate Release

**Contact: Nancy Russell**

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**Email: [Nancy@nlgbtvm.org](mailto:Nancy@nlgbtvm.org)**

**[www.nlgbtvm.org](http://www.nlgbtvm.org)**

A National LGBT Veterans Memorial Is Being Built At Historical Congressional Cemetery Located In Washington, DC

Military Veterans Announce Establishment Of The National LGBT Veterans Memorial In Washington, DC As A Visible And Lasting Testament To The Contribution Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual And Transgender Service Members Have Made To The Security Of The United States.

The Board of Directors of NLGBTVM has entered into an agreement with the Board of Directors of Historic Congressional Cemetery to establish the Memorial there and has purchased cemetery plots for the project. The plan includes the option to inter cremains for those veterans who wish to be memorialized on site. For those who want to have their service recognized but who do not want to bury their ashes, there is an option to buy a brick engraved with their service information.

The plan includes accepting designs for the Memorial/Monument submitted by artists nationwide. A committee will select from the designs submitted those that best meet the

*“I believe we must be the same activists in our deaths that we are in our lives. I urge those of you who are facing death to find a method of leaving a lasting record of your accomplishments - including the acknowledgement that you were lesbian or gay.”*

*~ Leonard Matlovich,  
Discharged from USAF in 1975 for homosexuality*

requirements and then those will be juried by a committee of professionals to select the winner of the design contest.

Nancy Russell, a retired Army LTC and Chair of the NLGBTVM Board of Directors said, “The time has come for those of us who were forced to serve in silence to honor our fellow veterans with a dignified and impressive memorial in our national capitol. The National LGBT Veterans Memorial will provide a fitting resting place where our veterans may, as Leonard Matlovich urged us to do, ‘leave a lasting record of our accomplishments’.”

NLGBTVM is targeting Memorial Day 2014 for a dedication ceremony. Those who want more information or to donate should go to the website at [www.nlgbtvm.org](http://www.nlgbtvm.org).

# TAPS

*Art Soper, Palm Springs Chapter Veteran passed away in May 2012. In lieu of an obituary we have decided to reprint an article about Art from the August 2001 issue of The Forward Observer. Art Soper - "One of Our Heroes"*

11 years ago, in 1991, Art Soper spoke at in Golden Gate National cemetery in San Bruno, California. This article begins with some of Art's words on that day.

"My name is Art Soper. I am a Vietnam Veteran. I was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1967 and served as an Infantryman in the First Cavalry Division (Airborne) in Vietnam from March through October in 1968. I was in the Tet Offensive, the Tet Counter-Offensive and the massive invasion of A-Shau Valley. I was wounded twice while in Vietnam, being decorated with the Purple Heart for both of these injuries, and subsequently spent nine months in an Army Hospital."

Earlier this year I spent an evening with Art asking him about some of his experiences in Vietnam. It turned out to be the first time that Art was willing to verbalize some of his experiences, and several times during the evening too many memories overwhelmed him and we had to stop for a while.

Art began by describing life back home in Big Springs, Nebraska He was one of 14 children, Vietnam was the farthest thing from his mind.

He opened up a box of mentos from Vietnam, which included a large photo of Ho chi Minh, and a painting of a Viet Cong man and woman. He also had several newspaper clippings with photos of himself on active duty in Vietnam. Among his many awards and certificates were two Purple Hearts. I

have to confess that I had never seen the real thing, and I was very moved by the experience.

He was with the 1st Airborne and Air Cavalry and described one of his first experiences in Vietnam. Secret operations had been planned for days in the A-Shau Valley. Everyone was to be flown in by helicopter. The helicopters would go very high, and then they would shut off their engines so they couldn't be seen. Once they had dropped to about 2,000 feet they would all start their engines at the same time. Some of the terrain was defoliated. The helicopters would hover briefly, and everyone would either jump out or they were pushed out. The Viet Cong were everywhere. Once on the ground, Art said the first thing he did was kill a Viet Cong soldier. He described it as a very frightening experience.

Another time he was in a helicopter that was hit by enemy fire. Everyone survived.

The first time he was wounded was in the mountains near A-Shau. "Fighting all the time, 127 days without a bath, weather was extremely humid - I could swim, but I always took the rope when we crossed the water - even so - body covered with leeches from head to toe - still have some scars today."

"Vietnam is a very hilly country. One night three of us were sent into the jungle to man a combat ambush site along one of the trails. My radioman, my machine gunner and I positioned ourselves at a curve in the trail where the Viet Cong usually came through. We sat there in the dark for nearly two hours. We began to hear some noises, and we could see scores of Viet Cong coming towards us. We waited until they were 20-25 feet from us and I gave the signal to fire. . I looked at Willie, my machine gunner and he was shaking and shaking. He froze. I took the machine gun from him and just started firing and firing." We stopped the interview at this point

because the memories overwhelmed Art.

After a break I asked about his other Purple Heart. Art said that several months later they were on a trail when the VC threw a mine at his men. Five of them were injured. One was hit in the chest and his lungs collapsed. Art put his fist in his friend's chest to prevent his lung from collapsing. He didn't know that he was hit himself. When he realized it he made a tourniquet for himself.

Another time when they were out by the ocean Art fell into one of the VC pungy pits - 'camouflaged holes in the ground lined with bamboo shoots and glass.' The glass cut the tendon and artery of his left arm, which required 5 operations in Vietnam and 8 months of physical therapy.

Memories of Vietnam still haunt him - so many wounded - so many mental cases - everything imaginable - legs, arms gone - bloody stretchers hosed down daily - squad leader blown up in front of him-

Art survives today in Desert Hot Springs, CA. A gentle soul, very bright. He recently participated in the dedication of the Palm Springs LGBT memorial. This was to be a long, in-depth article. Perhaps another time we can tell the rest of the story when some of these wounds heal. In the meantime, Art Soper is One of Our Heroes. -Jim Darby

