

G

Don't Ask Don't Tell:

An Ethical Dilemma?

By

MSG Mark A. George

Student #337

FA SGM Michael Huffman M08

18 October 2005

Mark A. George

SGM Michael Huffman

L564

22 October 2005

Don't Ask Don't Tell: An Ethical Dilemma?

Does the military's don't ask don't tell policy really work? This question has been addressed many times in the last decade. In December 2003, two retired Generals and one retired Admiral publicly acknowledged their sexual orientation. After openly revealing that they were gay, the three retired General officers were joined by thirteen other retired senior military leaders including former Assistant Secretary of Defense Lawrence Kolb in issuing a statement condemning the Military's ban on gays. From the time of its inception in 1993, the United States Military's "Don't ask don't tell" policy has come under intense scrutiny from many sides. Gay rights advocates have continually criticized the policy as a violation of civil rights that not only violates many states laws, but federal laws as well. Proponents of the policy believe that homosexuals serving openly in the military would have a direct impact on the morale and cohesion of the services and would adversely affect their ability to accomplish missions. To date, there has been no evidence presented to support the latter claim. Indeed, there are many who believe that the problem with homosexuals in the military does not stem from the homosexuals themselves, but from the heterosexuals beliefs and feelings toward those with sexual orientations that differ from their own. Regardless of ones beliefs, the issue of gays serving openly in the military seems to have become an ethical dilemma for which there are no clear answers. There are however answers to this issue for those who are willing to ask the questions. In order for us to come to a fair and impartial solution to this perceived dilemma, we

must explore a few areas that are pertinent to the subject. Is the policy justified by the arguments brought forward by its proponents? What role does religion play in impacting the beliefs and feelings towards homosexuals in the military? Finally and most importantly, what effect does this policy have on military readiness?

Is the Policy Justified?

In 1993, Congress said that military service by those who have demonstrated a propensity to engage in homosexual acts creates an unacceptable risk to morale, good order and discipline, and unit cohesion. How they determined this is a mystery. How did they come to this conclusion without conducting any type of realistic study of the problem? Furthermore, out of 535 congressmen who voted on the policy, only seven have children who serve and a very miniscule portion of those making the decision had a military background. This statement should be treated as an assumption and not a fact. The fact is, that historically, the military did not officially exclude or discharge homosexuals from its ranks. Homosexuals were allowed to serve when personnel shortages dictated it during WWII, but as the need diminished towards the end of the war, anti homosexual policies were enforced with increasing vigilance. This hypocritical treatment of homosexuals persists even in today's military and is easily identified in the following excerpt from AR 600-20 21; a persons sexual orientation is considered a personal and private matter and is not a bar to entry or continued service unless... The policy of don't ask don't tell is filled with this type of open-ended statement that leaves the reader wondering just what the true intent is behind the policymakers determinations. Although much of the evidence presented supports the idea that the policy has no negative effects on the military, there are still many who do not support a policy that would allow gay Americans to serve openly. In order to

understand the reasoning behind this attitude, we must explore where this deeply rooted feeling against homosexuality truly originates.

Religions Impact

Rabbi Schmuley Boteach states “Homosexuality and sodomy are not ethical sins.

Homosexuality is a religious sin, analogous to other Biblical prohibitions, like not eating the carcass of a dead animal”, something that a large percentage of our population does on a regular basis. As a society that is deeply rooted in Christian values and morals, it comes as no great surprise that a large percentage of the population view a homosexual lifestyle as unacceptable and even repulsive. Unfortunately, many of these attitudes are based on interpretations of the Bible that may not always be correct. One of the primary examples of this is Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. The original Hebrew version states, “Two men must not engage in homosexual activity on a woman’s bed; it is ritually unclean”. As you can see, this verse does not prohibit male-to-male sexual behavior, it only limits where it can be performed. The New International Version interprets this passage as such, “Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable”. Based on interpretations such as this, it is easy to understand how individual’s beliefs can be affected and brings about an ethical dilemma. As Americans, our beliefs and values are deeply ingrained since a very early age. In order to change our beliefs, we must have an open mind and be willing to accept the fact that what we perceive to be is not always so. Changing ones religious beliefs may be an insurmountable task, but as soldiers we must also take in to consideration the welfare of our country and how certain beliefs or behaviors may impact our military readiness.

Effect on Military Readiness

One of the most common arguments used by advocates of don't ask don't tell, is that allowing gays openly in the military would have an adverse impact on recruiting efforts. In a poll taken in October 2005, seventy six percent of potential recruits said that lifting the ban on openly gay service members would have "no effect" on their decision to enlist. As we know however, polls are not always 100% accurate and will therefore never be used to determine policies. On the other hand, there is solid evidence that the policy itself may have a negative impact on readiness. Since 1993 when the policy was first put into place, 9,488 individuals have been discharged from the military. Of those who were separated, 757 held critical job skills such as translators and 322 spoke foreign languages to include Arabic and Farsi. It is estimated that these separations cost the U.S. taxpayer over 300 million dollars. In a time when recruiters are struggling and retention is experiencing difficulties, the effect on readiness caused by these discharges is definitely negative. We cannot however, ignore the impact that gays serving openly in the military would have on morale. In 1999, PFC Barry Winchell was beaten to death with a baseball bat while he slept. The soldier who killed him was sentenced to life in prison. Would PFC Winchell have been killed if he had been allowed to live openly with his sexual preferences? Although this question will never be answered, we must wonder what affect this incident had on the morale of his unit. If gays were allowed to serve openly, there would obviously be much more attention given to their treatment, and policies such as EO and sexual harassment would be modified to protect them. Finally, the argument of allowing gays to serve openly can easily be made by looking at another group of Americans who at one time were not allowed to serve. I am of course referring to African Americans. Once they were allowed to serve, their worth as soldiers and leaders has been demonstrated in every conflict our country has seen.

Conclusion

As we have seen, there are many arguments for allowing gays to serve openly in the military while the arguments against have little evidence to support them. We have discussed religion, beliefs and values as reasons behind the policy and understand that change is always difficult. The impact on military readiness is of the utmost importance and to date, no valid arguments or facts have been presented which show a negative impact on readiness due to gays serving. The one inescapable fact is this. We are all Americans regardless of race, religion, sex or sexual preference and should be allowed to honorably serve our country without having to hide who we really are. The strongest argument against this policy was written in a document in 1776 by a few very wise men. It states in part "We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness". These words of course are from our own Declaration of Independence. Finally we must ask ourselves honestly, do these words pertain to everyone? In the end the answer seems clear.