

Conduct Unbecoming

by Lauren Biron

"In every case that I'm familiar with, and there are many, when it became known in a unit that someone was openly homosexual, polarization occurred, violence sometimes followed, morale broke down, and unit effectiveness suffered." – General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, 1993

He had tan skin, bright eyes, a cleft chin, and straight, white teeth. He had played football in Portland, New York, and been elected Homecoming King at his high school. He stood straight-backed with shoulders squared, aware of his surroundings. He wore dusty camo fatigues and stared out at Baghdad from under his helmet. He had pinned a bronze medal above the U.S. Army label, recognition for treating injuries under fire. He was a medic in a field artillery unit; he worked on bloody stumps and bullet holes. He was Sergeant Darren Manzella. And he liked men.

Under the 1993 "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, homosexual members of the military were in danger of a discharge if they at any time stated their true sexual orientation. But the law was generally ignored. Friends in his unit had met – in fact, had eaten dinner with – Darren's boyfriend, A.J. Darren was useful, a member of the team, a brother in arms, a stancher of wounds. But one day, an anonymous person started sending emails. You're being watched, the author wrote. Be careful. "Turn down the flame."

Darren went to his commanding officer for help, who promptly reported him to his battalion commander. An investigation began.

Darren was sick of hiding, so he held nothing back. He gave the investigators photos: he and A.J. were hugging, shirtless; a toothy A.J. wrapped his arms around Darren; A.J. pressed his hand against Darren's chest as Darren grabbed his waist. He gave the investigators a video: as Darren sat behind the steering wheel of a car, A.J. leaned over and kissed him on the lips; Darren grinned as A.J. rested his head on his pink shirt and nibbled at his earlobe.

It was 2005, and there were two wars on: one in Iraq, and another in Afghanistan. Medics, like everything else, were in high demand. The investigators reviewed the materials and passed judgment. There was, they told him, no evidence of homosexuality. "Go back to work. You're not gay."

"To win wars we create cohesive teams of warriors who will bond so tightly that they are prepared to go into battle and give their lives if necessary for the accomplishment of the mission and for the cohesion of the group and for their individual buddies." - General Colin Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1993

Until 1981, gays were simply not allowed to serve in the United States military. Homosexual status was grounds for a dishonorable discharge, typically in the form of a Section 8, a declaration that the soldier was mentally unfit for duty. Depending on the military's needs, many people who engaged in homosexual acts were allowed to remain in the service if they could prove it was a departure from their normal behavior. This became known as the "Queen for a Day" rule. To combat the Queen for a Day rulings, in January, 1981, the Department of Defense issued Directive 1332.14, which created stricter rules requiring discharge on evidence of homosexuality. Finally, with the election of President Bill Clinton in 1992, Congress made an effort to amend the military policy towards homosexuals.

When he first arrived in office, Clinton expressed the desire for an open military that would repeal the ban on gays once and for all. But when calls from angry citizens besieged Congressional phone lines, a compromise emerged instead. From March through July of 1993, streams of military commanders, gay rights activists, experts in military personnel policy, social scientists, interested civilians, and members of the armed forces testified before the Armed Services Committees of the House and Senate. The result was formally named "Title 10: Section 654 – Policy concerning homosexuality in the armed forces." Millions would come to know it as the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy.

The Don't Ask, Don't Tell law, in theory, is simple: commanders do not ask their troops about their sexual orientation, and the soldiers do not volunteer the information. The commanders cannot investigate someone without evidence that the soldier might be gay – and suspicion from other soldiers is not sufficient. Associating with homosexuals, frequenting gay activities or locations, or reading gay literature is also not grounds for an investigation. Soldiers, meanwhile, cannot engage in homosexual conduct, state their homosexuality, or attempt to marry a person of the same biological sex. Silence and celibacy are their responsibility.

The military, the policy contends, is not the same as civilian life, where couples can be open. Homosexuals, according to many of the more than 50 officials that testified when making the policy, threaten unit cohesion, morale, good order, and discipline, and thus the ability of the U.S. to successfully defend itself. Furthermore, the military standards of conduct apply to a member of the armed forces at all times that the member has a military status: off base or on, on duty or off. Thus, in practice, a soldier can never discuss his or her sexual orientation while in the military – through emails, phone calls, or letters to friends, family, or lovers, in discussion with fellow soldiers, or in "confidential" conversations with psychiatrists, psychologists, or chaplains.

Nevertheless, since the passage of Don't Ask, Don't Tell, soldiers have come out to friends and officers. Like Darren Manzella, there are currently 500 gay and lesbian individuals serving openly in the military. Over 1,000,000 veterans are homosexual. Almost 12,000 soldiers have been discharged since the policy took effect in 1994, at an estimated cost of \$364 million, and 20,577 more were discharged between 1980 and 1993, bringing the total cost to more than \$606 million. An estimated 65,000 gays serve

silently. Julianne Sohn was one of them. For her, the experience under Don't Ask, Don't Tell was different from that of Darren. Every day she lived with the fear of being discovered.

"Homosexual service members [do] not pose a greater security risk than heterosexual personnel." Crittenden Report, commissioned by the Navy, 1957

Julianne was supposed to be a princess. The only girl out of four children, her father wanted to dote upon his little girl. Her mother and father had survived the Korean War, entered the United States, and graduated from prestigious universities. They had also planned out the perfect life for Jules: she would grow up in Fullerton, California, head off to college, complete law school, get married, settle down, and have 2.5 children with Prince Charming.

Jules, however, did not feel like a princess. Her father had to accept the fact that his only daughter was a tomboy. Yet part of her parents' plan did come true. She went to college. While studying anthropology and political science at the University of California, Los Angeles, Jules realized that the princess didn't always have to fall in love with a prince, which was a welcome but confusing change. She had dated boys throughout high school, but when they made out, she was bored. "How much longer is this going to take?" she always asked herself, staring at the inside of her eyelids. During high school, kissing girls never occurred to her as an option.

It was only at UCLA, when a childhood friend sat with her in the lounge area of the dorms and confessed that she was a lesbian, that Jules realized the potential. Actually, the overwhelming sense of being uncomfortable made her question herself. Looking for answers, she headed to the campus Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Center, and joined the mentorship program. There, she paired up with her mentor Jessica, a large, militant lesbian who stomped around proudly wearing leather boots and a flannel shirt. Jessica seemed to never have had a moment of doubt about whether or not she was a lesbian, nor did she appear to understand why Jules would feel ashamed or afraid. They met once a week for hour-long and decidedly awkward conversations.

Needing more of a support group that could understand the difficulty of being gay, young, and a first-generation Asian-American, Jules discovered Korean Q. The first meeting she attended was at a restaurant on the fringes of Koreatown. She sat parked her car across the street, debating whether or not to go in, paranoid that she might be recognized. Eventually, she entered the restaurant. As she was sitting with the other women enjoying dinner and passing around photographs, a woman sauntered in. Her hair was in a disheveled ponytail, and she was by no means dressed up, but Jules was captivated nonetheless – she seemed to radiate playful hilarity and cheer. At the end of the night, Jules had her number. But it was more than a month before she picked up the phone. Erica and Jules dated for two years, until graduation. For Jules, their first kiss was anything but boring.

“It is difficult not to conclude that a large number of undetected homosexual men and women are performing their military roles satisfactorily and that their sexual conduct does not come to the attention of their commanders.” – Defense Department commissioned study, the PERSEREC Report, 1988-89

During college, Jules joined the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) program. After college she entered Officer Candidate School, followed by the Marine Corps. She “clicked” with the Marine Corps, just as she had with Erica. She loved the strategy, creative problem-solving, and academic aspects, as well as the runs and hikes that pushed her to her limits on three hours’ of sleep. At less than 5 feet tall, she was often difficult to see, hunched under her ninety-pound pack full of gear. Other cadets nicknamed her “The Pack with Legs.” Fortunately, there was little time during boot camp to discuss dating prospects, as talk focused on the mission and how they could get the job done. Jules finished the Marine Corps boot camp second in her platoon, and shipped off to basic school as a second Lieutenant.

At basic school, Jules learned infantry tactics. She learned how to operate rifles, pistols, and Berettas, and was qualified as a marksman at 500 yards. As involved as she was in her training, she also felt the need for a gay community. During down time, Jules and a bisexual friend would head to Washington D.C. and slip into Dupont Circle, a gay district. There, they would meet up at Kramerbooks & Afterwards, a 24-hour café. Each weekend trip helped her get through the days when she couldn’t be herself. However, the emotional relief was accompanied by the fear that someone would recognize her.

Jules finished basic and Military Operations Schools in 2000 and was deployed into the Media and Publication field. She shipped out to Okinawa, “The Rock,” Japan, an environment still hostile towards Marines even though it had been five years since the Okinawa rape scandal. It was also the site where, in 1994, 21 Okinawa Marines were questioned about their sexuality; one of them ultimately was criminally prosecuted and confined to the brig for over a month. Jules acted as a spokesperson for commanders, created press releases, dealt with the media, and collected historical documentation of Marines in Japan.

Second Lieutenant Jules also trained and commanded a group of marines. “I’ll never ask you to complete a task that I cannot do,” she promised them. Every pull-up that a Marine did was matched with one of hers; every step on every hike could be placed into one of her footprints. While Jules was primarily stationed at the Public Affairs Office of the Third Marine Expeditionary Force, she and her troops deployed elsewhere. They made a trip to Yongsan, Korea, the same place where her father had learned English from an American G.I. They hiked deep into the jungles of Thailand, where Jules ate a cobra at the behest of a foreign Colonel. She and her troops also headed off to mainland Japan to support combined military exercises.

While Jules enjoyed the military work, it took months of silence while testing out her new acquaintances before she could locate someone she could talk with honestly. The lack of a personal connection with anyone weighed her down, and, given that she was

deployed there from 2000 to 2001, an eight-month period of cultivating alliances meant that she was largely on her own. In addition, people began to wonder why a good-looking Marine woman like Jules, with her short black hair, muscular body, and mischievous brown eyes, wasn't dating anyone. Rumors spread: "I think Jules might be a lesbian."

"In civilian life, people are not compelled to live with individuals who are sexually attracted to persons of the same sex, and the committee finds no military necessity to compel persons to do so in the military." Senate Armed Forces Committee, 1995

One of the most popular arguments of opponents of gays in the military was that forcing straight men to shower with homosexuals was tantamount to having them shower with women, morally objectionable, and particularly unacceptable to the generally conservative men who joined the service. This ignored the fact that gays had served in the military, albeit quietly, for decades.

The Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy was implemented in 1994, but despite training in all military branches, it was violated from its very inception. The Servicemembers' Legal Defense Network, an organization that directly handled complaints from gays in the military, issued a series of investigative reports cataloguing the successes and failures of the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy. It also documented various gay soldiers' experiences. Reports stated that a Navy officer asked a sailor, "You're not going to tell me you're a fucking faggot, are you?" A security clearance investigator said, "I'm not going to ask you if you're homosexual, but if I did ask, how would you respond?"

The Servicemembers' Legal Defense Network acknowledged that the growing trend from 1998 to 2001 was one of "lesbian baiting." Women who turned down dates from male personnel were suddenly rumored to be lesbian. Other female military members that brought up charges of sexual harassment, misconduct, or rape faced the same treatment. So did those who reported domestic violence or filed for divorce. Rumors or evidence appeared, and hundreds of women were investigated.

As long as America was not at war, the number of discharges grew. The government discharged an estimated 617 soldiers during the first year of the policy. The number rose almost every year until, in 2001 alone, 1,273 people were dismissed. Between 1994 and 2001, the discharge list totaled 7,987 people. This number failed to take into account the number of individuals that opted not to join the military because of the policy, or chose not to reenlist, which was estimated at 2,500 per year. Over 300 linguists were discharged.

"'Bukra issaah zephr' in Arabic is one of the easiest phrases to translate into English [for] an Arabic linguist. It means 'tomorrow is zero hour,' but it was not translated into English until two days after 9/11 because there were not enough translators." – Alex Nicholson, Military Linguist, 2006

Upon her return from Japan in 2001, Jules became the public affairs officer for the 6th Marine Corps Recruiting District, headquartered in Parris Island, South Carolina. This was, and is, the only training ground for female Marine recruits. It is located in the south, where 58% of people believed gays should be allowed to serve openly in the military, as opposed to the national average of 79%. Jules also knew that she was stationed in a location with a reported history of “lesbian witch hunts.”

Women made up only 6% of the Marine Corps. When, in the 1980s, officials began questioning Marines about their sexuality, women were discharged at a rate seven times that of men. Books would later gather the experiences and recollections of female Marines. Agents staked out spots in the woods to photograph the inside of a staff sergeant’s private home, searching for lesbian activity in the Jacuzzi. Women were placed under review for asking others what they had been interrogated about. Others were separated from the military with less than honorable discharges because they associated with homosexuals.

Some women stopped participating in sports, or were compelled to “throw like girls.” Other women let their short hair grow longer, became pregnant, or married secretly gay men to avoid suspicion. Individuals resigned if their names came up during other interrogations; one committed suicide. Women were told they would be granted a form of immunity if they named other lesbians in the military. By the end, three women had been imprisoned, 18 had been formally discharged, more than 50 resigned or chose not to reenlist, and 10% of the female drill instructors were gone.

Jules arrived on Parris Island twenty years after the discharges, but was still paranoid about having her true orientation discovered and being separated from her beloved Marine Corps. In a new location, she undertook the lengthy process of finding people liberal enough to not turn her in for sharing her true feelings with them. They were slow in coming.

To celebrate their promotions to First Lieutenant, Jules met up with her friend from Officer Candidate School in New York for a “wet down.” The two women and their friends coasted through four days of drunken debauchery that consisted of hitting the clubs for hours, sobering up at diners, catching a nap, and doing it all again. The wet down was also where Jules met Francesca, an openly lesbian middle-school teacher who worked in Harlem and loved holding hands. When Jules went back to South Carolina, she began a long-distance relationship with Fran. After six cautious months of phone calls, emails, and scattered visits, Francesca went back into the closet and moved to Savannah, Georgia, an hour away from Parris Island, to live in secret with Jules.

The house proved to be a partial oasis. Inside, Jules could be herself. She could and did tell Fran, “I love you.” When she stepped out of the door, however, she once again had to fear that she would be spotted. Even though they lived an hour from the base, soldiers found their way to Savannah on weekends. While she was at work, the other women would share stories about their lives: they would discuss husbands, boyfriends, and romantic interests in addition to family and friends. When it was her turn to share, the

topic often changed to what movie she had seen recently. One of her deepest desires was to be able to share someone she thought of as family with her friends and colleagues. If soldiers in 20 out of the 25 militarily involved countries in NATO could do it, why couldn't she? More than anything, she wanted to be able to walk outside without fear, holding hands with Fran.

Then, in 2002, rumors began to circulate, just as they had in Okinawa. "How can an attractive Marine be single?" people asked. One day, her close friend and legal officer of the unit stepped into her office and closed the door. "Oh shit," Jules thought. "Either one of my Marines is in trouble, or I am." James, though he was friends with Jules, was still the one who carried out investigations for violating military policy. He sat across from her.

"Jules. I can't legally ask you this, and you can't legally answer, but..."
"Stop. I know where you're going. You're half right."¹

Now he knew the truth. Jules prepared herself for her discharge. But it didn't come. Instead, James, recognizing her as a good officer and friend, quashed the rumors and became her confidante on the base. But the stress of living the lie, avoiding questions, and denying her true feelings began to show. Previously able to run miles or pass a physical exam with ease, Jules watched as her blood pressure steadily rose from the stress. Something had to give. She started applying to graduate schools, and in 2003, headed off for the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, accompanied by Fran. She took with her one thing she loved, but, in leaving the Marines, she abandoned another.

Jules remained in New York until 2005, when the military needed more bodies to work in the Middle East. She was activated from the Individual Ready Reserves and placed, once again, on duty in the United States Marine Corps. An acquaintance, upon hearing that Jules was being sent to Iraq, gave her a suggestion.

"Don't go to Iraq – tell them you're gay!"

Interviewer: "What do you think would happen if a unit with a gay person went out into a combat situation?"

*Daniel Davis, Gulf War Veteran, and specialist in battlefield tactics: "In my view, men are going to die, units are going to fail, that would otherwise not fail, or would otherwise not die...If I have a moral or religious issue you cannot order me to bond and cohes[e] [sic] with that person, because he is morally repugnant to me."
-2007*

Early in 2005, Jules was dispatched to Fallujah Camp, about three-quarters of a mile outside of Fallujah proper. Sand as fine as baby powder swirled around women swathed in black and caught on eyelashes above dried corneas. Insurgents occasionally lobbed explosives into the camp, and every trip down a dusted highway was in danger of enemy fire. Once, when trying to get from Fallujah to Camp Blue Diamond at Ramadi, Jules

¹ At the time, Julianne identified herself as bisexual, though she was in an exclusive relationship with Francesca.

was bumped from her helicopter flight. She hitched a ride with a convoy, crammed into a militarily-equipped Humvee for the five-hour ride. Even if the Lieutenant squished next to her had been a talkative one, Jules could not have discussed Fran. As the convoy inched down the two-lane road, her vehicle swerved around an odd-looking shopping bag, while radioing trucks behind to do the same. Seconds later, it blew up in front of the larger semi-truck in back of her. She watched the explosion in the side mirrors, a bomb that could easily have taken her life and made one of Fran's greatest fears a reality.

Despite the tension and danger, Jules continued her mission in Iraq. Working within the Al Anbar province, she generated media coverage and helped to rebuild schools, roads, clinics, waste systems, and other forms of infrastructure. The military awarded her a Navy Marine Corps Achievement Medal for her work. She worked out of the Civil Military Operations Center (CMOC) to help start an Iraqi newspaper: *Al Fajr – New Dawn*. As one of few ranking female military officers, Middle Eastern male officials looked at Jules as an anomaly. However, when the U.S. Military needed to help set up clinics, schools, and buildings that were to be run by women, she was one of the few who could interact with them in light of gender segregation and decorum.

When media tours came through Iraq, it was Jules' job to keep them safe. Tall cameramen with bulky equipment made good sitting ducks. When a CNN news crew came through to film a local police station that was being remodeled, she noticed the first signs of an impending attack. The children that normally flock to military trucks for candy and toys didn't take a step towards the up-armored Humvee. The cameraman stood filming even after the first shots at them rang out. Jules shoved him into the truck and sped to safety. Another time, Jules and six other Marines set up a makeshift road blockade to allow press photographers and journalists access to a story. Jules focused her attention on the buildings on her side of the road block. She maintained her watch even as an unknown vehicle charged towards the blockade and a colleague shot at the engine block to send the driver in the opposite direction. Every excursion brought dangers that could separate Jules and Fran permanently.

"I think there's increasing recognition within the Armed Forces that this is a counterproductive strategy. We're spending large sums of money to kick highly qualified gays or lesbians out of our military." - Barack Obama, 2008

Communicating her feelings to Fran through channels patrolled by military personnel was a different kind of challenge. Officials monitored satellite phones, and anything written down, whether in emails, letters, or Instant Messenger chat boxes, was potential evidence. When Jules and Fran talked online, a rarity in itself, they couldn't say "I love you." Instead, they replaced it with "take care," even when Jules was talking to Fran online in her office. One day, Jules left suddenly in the middle of one of their conversations, saying she needed to check on something. A few hours later, reports came out of Iraq that it had been the "bloodiest day" for female United States Marines in Iraq. A suicide bomber crashed into a checkpoint, killing six female marines and wounding thirteen other individuals. All personal communication into and out of Fallujah stopped

for three days. Fran had no way to get in contact with Jules to see if she was safe, injured, or even alive.

In fact, given the sparse contact that Jules and Fran had, Fran rarely had a way to keep updated on her partner. She routinely scoured press releases to get a sense of the situation in Iraq, and checked the Department of Defense website to see if Jules's name showed up on a list of deceased soldiers. Fran would never be directly contacted by the military in the case of an emergency. Out of fear for her job, Jules could not list Fran as her next of kin, or as an emergency contact at all.

Instead, Jules concocted a system with the people she loved most. Her older brother, Thomas, was listed as the next of kin. In the event that something happened, Thomas would quickly inform his two other brothers and Francesca of the news. They made an oral contract that if Jules died, the four of them would divide her possessions.

Jules' inability to recognize Francesca as her partner caused other legal difficulties. The two could not take advantage of the free health care, housing stipends, low-cost life insurance, and legal protection that is afforded to straight couples. While the Servicemembers' Civil Relief Act protects military wives and husbands from both bank foreclosure and evictions from their homes when spouses are overseas, Fran could never receive this protection. Though the military offers courses on how to help a soldier transition back into civilian life, Francesca could not attend. She most likely would have been unwelcome at Military Spouse Appreciation Day, a celebration organized by the Department of Defense and the White House.

Since she was public affairs officer, Jules was also responsible for putting out a monthly newsletter that contained the location and activity of the soldiers in her unit. It was meant to comfort the spouses of soldiers, particularly since it was a direct message from the unit. Fran never received one. On the Bloodiest Day, Fran wanted to escape the media reports coming out of Iraq, useless reports that told her nothing about whether Jules was alive or dead. She spent the next forty-eight hours crying and running six-mile loops through Central Park, until Jules' brother Paul finally called with the news that Jules was fine.

“Would we risk doing away with this system that works, where American families sit around the dinner table and they make a decision that their young man or young woman is going to go into this military because they share the values of that military, or should we experiment at a time when our military is totally volunteer, when it's extremely capable, and perhaps lose that capability, or perhaps lose those numbers, perhaps lose those re-enlistments, and perhaps lose that effectiveness?” Duncan Hunter, Chairman of House Armed Services Committee and Republican Congressional Representative of California, 2007

2006 was a difficult year for United States Army recruiters. In order to meet their goal number of recruits, military employees lowered mental and physical standards, allowed convicted felons to serve, and gave double the number of bonuses to enlist. It was also

the year Jules returned from Iraq and moved back to California, without Fran. After being ambushed, shot at, and nearly blown up, spending more time with family seemed like the logical thing to do. Still eager to serve her community, Jules remained in the inactive reserve, and joined the Los Angeles Police Department. She completed training at the top of her class, and started working a beat that included San Pedro, Wilmington, Koreatown, and the Harbor Gateway.

In September of 2007, an inattentive driver slammed into her police cruiser, crushing it against a two-foot tall brick wall. Jules's legs were damaged, and she took time off of work to recover. She was lying on the couch, her crutches nearby on the floor, when the phone rang. On the other end, a Colonel informed her that an anonymous individual had tipped them off that Julianne was a homosexual. An investigation would be under way shortly. He read Jules her Article 31 rights, entitling her to silence and a lawyer.

Julianne had two options: she could go before an administrative board, tell them that she was not a homosexual, and attempt to prove it, or she could resign her commission, with the possibility of receiving an honorable or general discharge. The separation form, a DD214, would follow her to every job application after. At 30 years old, Jules would have to present something that displayed her sexual orientation to future employers, and, since it was the reason for her discharge, bring her sexual conduct in as a hiring factor. It read, "This resignation is based on homosexual conduct, as evidenced by statements by me that I am a homosexual, or words to that effect. I do not wish to challenge the presumption that statements by me demonstrate that I engage in homosexual acts or have a propensity to engage in homosexual acts."

The traditional version of this separation document also included: "I understand that I do not rate nor do I desire a reserve commission." Jules could not bring herself to sign the paper. Instead, she wrote a new draft. The ending read:

"I understand that I do not rate a reserve commission. I would like nothing more than to continue to serve as a United States Marine. However, due to the current policy, this is not possible. Under the current policy, a Marine Officer who also happens to be an Ivy League graduate, Iraqi war veteran and LAPD Officer is not qualified to hold a Commission in the United States Marine Corps Reserve. It is my hope that someday the absurdity of this last sentence will empower our leadership to make changes which will allow otherwise qualified individuals to serve and to continue to serve." - Julianne H. Sohn, 2007

Jules received a response from the military concerning her altered forms in May of 2008. Her commanders accepted her letter and granted her an Honorable Discharge, which is branded with the equivalent of a scarlet letter – "Q," for Queer. She continues to serve in the Los Angeles Police Department, but knows that if Congress changed the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy, she would enlist in the Marines yet again. Friends offered words of support when they learned that Jules was dismissed:

"I am sorry integrity has a price but I am honored to be your friend."

“You have an opportunity to make sure that the injustice that was done to you, and to two other servicemembers every day, never happens again.”

“You served with honor, and I consider it an honor to have served with you. *Semper Fidelis.*”

Meanwhile, Darren Manzella returned to Fort Hood, Texas, where response from peers was overwhelmingly supportive. Hundreds of supportive emails from military servicemembers, both past and present, gay and straight, poured in. Six months after telling his story and openly announcing his sexuality on *60 Minutes* in 2007, military commanders discharged him, ridding themselves of a potential liability that once provided medical aid to fellow soldiers, Iraqi National Guardsmen, and civilians.

"I do believe the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy has been very effective. We've got the best military we've ever had. I think it's logical to leave this issue alone." – John McCain, 2007

*Jessica, Erica, James, Thomas, and Paul are pseudonyms.