

interview any roommates I might have before letting my children visit. "Why shouldn't she?" I responded.

Then they asked me if I had a roommate now. I said yes. Then came the clincher. "Is he gay?" they asked. They had no reason at all to ask that question, and, once again, I found myself in that same situation I had been in a few years past. Again, I found myself almost frozen with emotional conflict.

And, sadly, once again, I found myself lying. "No, he is not," I said, "he is just a roommate." I glared at them. Now I was pissed. Then more questions. I finally told them that if they wanted to know anything else, they would have to ask my ex-wife as she had the decree drawn up with her lawyer.

They tried, too. But she refused to talk to them. She knew, as well as I did, that the alimony and child support would disappear if I suddenly were discharged for being gay.

I finally had the opportunity to retire with only 19 years of service due to a downsizing authorized by Congress. I jumped at the chance and finally broke free from the loop that seemed to be slowly closing in on me.

I have often thought about the courage of those around me who were standing up and telling their military service that they were gay. There seemed to be so many of them at the time that I felt distinctly uncourageous and selfish.

But the sad fact remains that gay men and women are still being rounded up and boot-ed out of the military, in spite of a policy that is supposed to prohibit it.

I am not especially proud of how I handled being gay in the military when I was there. But I am proud of all those gays, lesbians, bisexual and others who served and still serve. And they don't deserve to be treated the way they are.

In the year 2000, 1,212 men and women

were summarily discharged solely because of their sexual orientation. That's over a thousand people whose lives were suddenly and sadly uprooted and redirected in spite of their talents and abilities.

Over 1,100 of these discharges occurred because the service member merely stated his or her sexual orientation.

In 1999, a gay soldier, Pfc. Barry Winchell, 21, was beaten to death in his barracks at Fort Campbell. While two soldiers were convicted of his murder, no officers were held accountable, and officials declared there was no atmosphere of homophobia on the base.

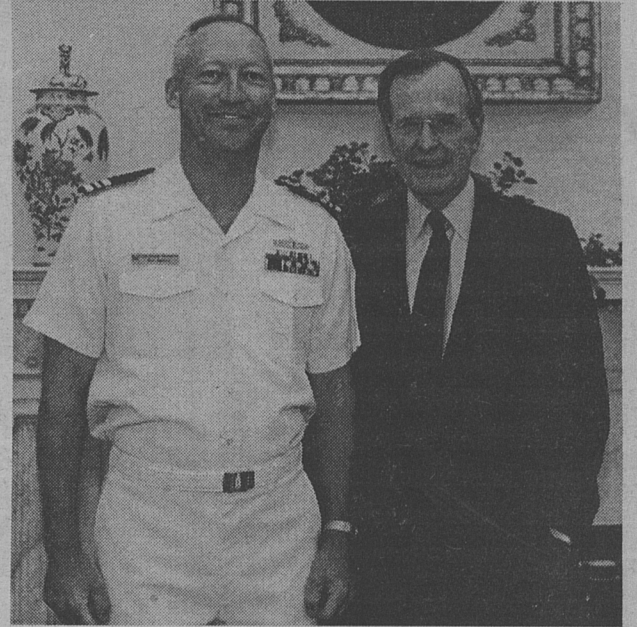
Add Pfc. Winchell's name to an all-too-long list of those who have been killed in the military simply because they were gay, let alone the tens of thousands who have been summarily discharged.

I can recall many, many times and accomplishments of which I am very proud during my service in the Navy. Being gay never made a difference. However, the times I did not come out when I was challenged are not part of these fond memories.

Today I live in the shadows of hundreds of heroes. While I was never one of them, maybe it's not too late to lift up my voice to champion their cause. ▼

*Chuck Franklin, Commander, U.S. Navy (Retired), lives in Colchester, Vermont, and works as a waiter at the Burlington International Airport restaurant. His two teenage sons live in South Burlington.*

*For more information on the rights of gays and lesbians in the military see [www.smln.org](http://www.smln.org), the web site of the Service Members Legal Defense Network.*



(1) Would President George Bush (Sr.) have allowed this picture to be taken during the summer of 1992 in the Oval Office with then Lieutenant Commander Franklin if he knew Franklin was gay?

(2) Commander Chuck Franklin talking with an unidentified officer (l) in California during the spring of 1996, along with Linda Tripp (r). Tripp was his last supervisor prior to his retirement and knew Franklin was gay but never told.

“

”

Give  
queer Youth a **Voice**

▼ **Outright Vermont**

3rd annual  
**Silent  
Auction**

Cook Commons  
Billings Student Center  
UVM Campus  
March 22, 2002 • 7-10pm

Admission: \$15-50

MORE INFO 865-9677  
[WWW.OUTRIGHTVT.ORG](http://WWW.OUTRIGHTVT.ORG)