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Photos: P. 1, ASI Photo. P. 2, courtesy Sen. Jeffords' office. Pp. 3, 6 Euan Bear. P. 8 courtesy Jacknichols.com. P. 10, courtesy Bill Docker. P. 11, courtesy Brian Stoops. Pp. 16-17, courtesy Outright Vermont. P. 18, courtesy Mandy Vernalia. P. 21, courtesy Girlyman.com. P. 22, Carrie MacPherson.

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The purpose of Out In The Mountains [OITM] is to serve as a voice for lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender people, and our supporters in Vermont. We wish the newspaper to be a source of information, insight, and affirmation. We also see OITM as a vehicle for the celebration of the culture and diversity of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities here in Vermont and elsewhere.

Editorial Policy

We will consider for publication any material that broadens our understanding of our lifestyles and of each other. Views and opinions appearing in the paper do not necessarily represent those of Out In The Mountains. This paper, as a non-profit organization, cannot and will not endorse any political candidates. We reserve the right not to publish any material deemed to be overtly racist, sexist, anti-Semitic, ageist, classist, xenophobic, or homophobic.

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OUT in the Mountains (ISSN 1081-5562)

is published on the last Wednesday of each month by Mountain Pride Media, Inc. It is printed by the Press Republican, Plattsburgh, NY. The paper maintains offices at 34 Elmwood Ave in Burlington, Vermont. The bulk mail subscription rate is \$29 per year within the USA.
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www.mountainpridemedia.org is updated to include the current issue of OITM, generally by the 10th of each month, in our online archive. OITM is available in alternative formats upon request. OITM is printed on recycled newsprint containing 30% post-consumer and using 100% soy-based inks.

editorial

Absense Makes the Heart Grow...

It's been what I refer to as "a tough month." And I mean personally, for me — not even considering the political picture with nuclear options in the Senate over reactionary judicial nominees (all a rehearsal for when the first Supreme Court Justice dies or resigns), international wars, famine, and verbal attacks by right-wing anti-gay Fristians. Not even considering the discovery of a slippery piece of Bible-misusing propaganda on the front lawn of the Community Center.

When your family is away to tend to their family emergencies, nothing seems quite right in the world. Not even with email and phone calls. Not when the distance is more than you can drive in a day — or even two.

As I was bemoaning my bereft status because my spouse went to Wisconsin — for three weeks! — to help her increasingly frail mom move toward assisted living, the thought came to me: however bad this feels to me, it must feel a thousand times worse to any gay man or lesbian whose partner is serving in the homophobic military in Afghanistan or Iraq or Colombia or any of the many places where U.S. servicemembers come under fire.

These folks are away much longer than three weeks. They're hot, cold, dirty, tired, scared, hungry, gritty with dust and sand, and paranoid as hell, because they can't let it slip even to their best unit buddies that the person they hope is waiting for them to return, the person they miss the most is the same sex they are.

Yes, they chose this career. Yes, they made this bed in which they lie. Their reasons are complicated: the desire to be part of something bigger, the wish to serve their country, the simple need for a job and training and promised money for college, the craving for a ticket out of a small town and/or away from a stifling family of origin, and other reasons I couldn't begin to guess at or describe. Yes, they could get out of the military — minus all the benefits they'd hoped to accrue over a 20-year stint, if they survive — simply by announcing to the nearest senior officer that they are gay or lesbian.

Or maybe not. As long as U.S. military forces are continuously deployed in dangerous zones — whether in the service of oil barons or empire builders — com-

manders sometimes ignore the military's insistence that gay men and lesbians are not covered by its own "stoploss" order. Gay men and lesbians are admissible as cannon fodder, but not peacetime employees. So maybe they can't get out of the military right now, even if they disclose their orientation and the sex of the partner waiting back home.

I have a long history of being against wars — while I was in high school I started demonstrating against the American War (which is what the Vietnamese call it) of the 1960s and beyond. The issues were

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so clear, so easy then. Anyone who joined the military must want to kill without compunction or remorse, I thought. They don't know what to do without an order, and they never ever get asked whether they agree. So I thought then.

Without doubt there were some military folks like that, whether drafted or volunteers. And there are still — as witness the torture of Iraqi citizens held in squalid conditions; as witness inhumane treatment of Afghans held without charges or trials in the U.S. prison in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

There were also some soldiers, sailors, and aviators then who were brave and bright and fought more to save their friends than for any policy — ideological or imperial. And there many servicemembers like that now.

For whatever reasons, these gay

men and lesbians are in the Army, the Navy, the Marines, the Air Force, the Coast Guard. Many of them are far away from loved ones they can't talk about or talk openly to. They can't write of their love to their lovers, can't risk relaxing their guard.

And their lovers don't get the support that military wives and husbands get. There are no support groups for them, no military networks of officers' wives watching out for the gay families left behind. There's only doubt, loneliness, fear, and the need to keep busy. For some there may be consolations in the beds and arms of here-now flings. And that may even be okay with the absent partner. But still, there's the worry, always the worry about injury or death coming calling on your loved one in a war zone far away.

And there's the silence that must be maintained ...

Until the nation comes to its senses and reaches across the false divide between straight and gay and embraces the humanity of us all — pacifist and warrior,

family member and orgiast. All of us get lonely and scared when our loved ones are far away.

Don't Ask, Don't Tell is immoral and must be repealed. The Iraq war is immoral: bring the troops home. ▼

Euan Bear, Editor