

Cammermeyer Discharged

But now Lt. Thorne wants to go public and to bring to the country just how archaic and absurd this law is. Several months ago, General Colin Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and an African-American, was quoted on his stance about lesbians and gays in the armed forces. He thinks it would be detrimental to put openly gay men in the armed forces where they would be living in close proximity with straight men. That would make life very uncomfortable for straight men and cause dissension. Tracy Thorne's reaction to General Powell's comments were: Just a few years back, when blacks and others were beginning to fight for the integration of the armed forces the argument against it was that no white soldier would be willing to take orders from a black man. "Isn't it ironic that now, I and every other white soldier in the armed forces takes our orders from a black man." Lieutenant Thorne added that he has the utmost respect for General Powell.

The armed forces of the U.S., like the armed forces of any other country is approximately 10% gay. Lesbians and gays are in the armed forces, whether they are closeted or not.

America will remain a land with archaic laws and mostly closeted gays and lesbians until some of the highly visible politicians, athletes, actors and actresses who happen to be gay come out of the closet.

Anyhow, hooray for Tracy Thorne for overcoming that fear and for taking a chance. You are a brave soldier Lieutenant. ▼

Tracy Thorne is not the first member of the armed forces to come out publicly and defend his or her right to serve. In fact the first was a woman, former Army reserve Captain Dusty Pruitt. Pruitt was discharged from the Army reserves in 1983 following publication in the *Los Angeles Times* of an interview about her ministry with the Metropolitan Community Church. Last August the Ninth Circuit Court ruled that Pruitt must be allowed to continue her lawsuit challenging the policy banning gays and lesbians from serving in the armed forces.

Most recently, Colonel Margaret Cammermeyer, earned the dubious distinction of being one of the highest ranking members of the armed forces discharged from service because of the Pentagon's policy against lesbians and gays. Cammermeyer, chief of nursing for Washington State's Army National Guard, has served in the military for 26 years. She served 14 months in a war zone in Vietnam, winning a Bronze Star. Three years ago, during a top security clearance investigation needed to take courses at the National War College, Cammermeyer disclosed that she was a lesbian. As a result, a military board recommended that she be honorably discharged. The commander of the Washington State National Guard said he must carry out that recommendation despite the "personal anguish" he says it is causing him.

Colonel Cammermeyer stated, "I am being discharged for my honesty and integrity. Had I lied, I might have achieved my ambition of becoming Chief Nurse (of the U.S. National Guard)." ▼

Out in the Mountains

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