

*Patricia Baillie**

When I joined the Air Force in 1978, I had been out for almost 10 years. I identified as bisexual, so when they asked me if I was gay, I could answer “No” in good conscience. At basic training, lesbian technical instructors spotted me right away. When I headed for officer training school, they arranged for me to meet several high-ranking women officers—both active and retired. They talked to me about how to survive in the military and what some of my options were.

I hadn’t been much of an activist in my life. I voted and went to pride but hadn’t really gotten involved. I began to get involved in gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (“GLBT”) groups. I couldn’t take the lead but I could help in the background and educate other military members. I also found a GLBT community within the military. I played softball on the base teams with many other lesbians. When a witch-hunt would start, I wouldn’t get called in for questioning because I was an officer, but I could connect the other team members with gay men in the community. They would talk and create cover stories about their dating and their lives and the security investigators would back off.

The only time that I was investigated, I found out later, was when I was in Alaska. Apparently the investigation was dropped when I was reassigned to a different duty station. Other than that, the first 12 years of my career were quiet and successful. I was selected for the Air Staff

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This essay first appeared as part of *Documenting Courage: Veterans Speak Out*. This project is designed to educate the Executive branch, members of Congress, and the public on the contributions of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender veterans. *Documenting Courage: Veterans Speak Out*, Human Rights Campaign, at www.hrc.org/Content/ContentGroups/Documenting_Courage/Stories2/Documenting_Courage_Veterans_Speak_Out2.htm (last visited April 12, 2004).

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Training Program at the Pentagon and worked in the Joint Chiefs of Staff offices. As my military career progressed, I was also becoming more involved in the GLBT groups. I even changed my religious affiliation to United Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches ("UFMCC") in 1988 on National Coming Out Day. I was the volunteer coordinator for a GLBT community center. This was when I was in a very high-security job with a high-level of clearance.

My partner, at the time, was a Metropolitan Community Church pastor and, as required by Air Force regulations, I reported that she was living with me. When my security clearance update came up, I was asked if I knew that the woman I lived with was the pastor of a gay church. My first response was that I was also a member of that church and didn't think my religious beliefs were part of a clearance update. The investigator then asked if I was a lesbian. This was in 1989, before President Clinton and "don't ask, don't tell." I knew I shouldn't answer the question and said as much. That ended the interview, and I started my wait. I was pretty sure the investigators weren't going to let it go but had no idea when it would come.

Two weeks before Operation Desert Storm, I got a call to come down to headquarters. When the war started and my boss had a heart attack, suddenly I was acting commander. The interview was canceled, I continued to serve and was even decorated for my service.

Then, three weeks after the war, the call came and I had to meet with security. It was a strange interview. It was a theoretical discussion of why didn't I get out and work as a civilian where I could be out as a lesbian. I made it clear that after 12 years, I wanted to stay in and retire. I continued to refuse to answer any questions. I had talked to a law firm in San Francisco and said I would answer the questions in writing if they would mail the questions to them. It was a standoff and although I was terrified inside, I didn't blink.

I went back to my duty station, with my clearance not revoked but—by now—expired. For the next three years, I waited for the next call. There were several calls from staff members and I believe one of them was a gay brother. He asked if I would answer the questions, I said I wouldn't. He volunteered that if I said "Yes," I would be discharged, if I answered "No," I would be given a lie detector test and discharged for lying. I missed a couple of good assignments because my clearance was in limbo.

I took an assignment with the Navy, as it was clear I was in a dead-end at my Air Force job. Of course, the Navy then started looking for my clearance. After several calls back and forth between the Navy and the

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Air Force, I received a message stating that my clearance had been renewed. It took every bit of control I had in the meeting to not get up on the table and cheer!

I had won this round but saw that if I stayed in the Air Force, I could end up not getting promoted to lieutenant colonel and be forced out due to the Air Force's "up-or-out" promotions system. When Clinton announced the "don't ask, don't tell" policy and the Air Force was doing a reduction in forces and allowing early retirement at 15 years, I decided it was time to go. I retired in October 1993 and came out to my last commander, attended a statewide GLBT veteran's event at the state capitol and submitted an article to the *Air Force Times* on leaving because of the military's position on GLBT service.

I was one of the lucky ones who was able to survive the system, serve honorably and get a retirement check each month. I take that check as a reminder each month to be politically active and remember those who never had a chance to complete their careers. I continue to support and advocate as a veteran and speak out—whenever I can—about a system that drives good GLBT military members out of service.