

Discharged gay sailor called back to duty

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Bob Roehr

A Navy sailor who was discharged under the anti-gay policy known as "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was later called back to duty and is currently completing a one-year tour of duty in Kuwait.

The story of Petty Officer Second Class Jason Knight ran prominently in the May 6 issue of *Stars and Stripes*. The daily newspaper has European and Pacific editions. It is backed by the Pentagon but operates with complete editorial freedom.

Knight said that on his wedding night in July 2004 he came to terms with his being gay, immediately told his wife and they had the marriage annulled. He also explained the situation to the Navy and was discharged.

"I spent four years in the Navy, buried fallen service members as part of the Ceremonial Guard, served as a Hebrew linguist in Navy Intelligence, and received awards for exemplary service," Knight wrote in a letter to the newspaper. "However, because I was gay, the Navy discharged me and recouped my \$13,000 sign-on bonus."

"Nine months later, the Navy recalled me to active duty. Did I accept despite everything that happened? Of course I did, and I would do it again. Because I love the Navy and I love my country. And despite [Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Peter] Pace's opinion, my shipmates support me."

His supervisor backed that up. Petty Officer Bill Driver said, "As open as he is now, it was under wraps for quite a while. It wasn't an issue at work."

According to *Stars and Stripes*, it was unclear whether Knight's recall to active duty was the result of a clerical oversight or what some claim is an unwritten change in policy to keep more gay service members in the ranks at a time of war. He received an honorable discharge when he was kicked out of the Navy in April 2005, the paper reported.

The paper also reported that Knight was promoted to his current rank and sees no reason to hide his sexual orientation.

Steve Ralls, spokesman for the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, believes that Knight's case is unique. While others who have been kicked out under DADT subsequently have received recruiting letters, "This is the only case that I am aware of where a dismissed gay soldier has been reinstated to active duty."

In a statement, SLDN said that the Navy has declined to comment on the case.

In previous years, reservist Austin Rooke was working for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force when he was called to active duty as an intelligence officer and deployed by the Army to Qatar. And Steve May, an openly gay member of the Arizona legislature, was recalled to duty by the Army, only to be prosecuted under DADT.

Ralls said the Knight case "shows, unambiguously, that there are those within the Pentagon who know full well that lesbians and gays make good service members. It shows the policy for what it is: a charade and a federal government excuse for maintaining discrimination and prejudice in the United States."

Republican presidential candidate Senator John McCain (Arizona) is fully supportive of maintaining that policy. In an April 16 letter to SLDN he wrote, "I do believe that any policy requiring the armed services to accommodate a particular lifestyle of whatever description is misguided."

"I believe polarization of personnel and breakdown of unit effectiveness is too high a price to pay for well-intentioned but misguided efforts to elevate the interests of a minority of homosexual service members above those of their units," McCain added. "Most importantly, the national security of the United States, not to mention the lives of our men and women in uniform, are put at grave risk by policies detrimental to the good order and discipline which so distinguish America's armed services."