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SUSPENDING THE GAY BAN WOULD HAVE HISTORICAL PRECEDENT

Scholars React to Potential Pentagon Decision to Allow Commanders to Retain Gay Soldiers for Current Deployment

SANTA BARBARA, CA -20 September 2001- Following the Pentagon's announcement this week that it has authorized each service secretary to implement a "stop-loss" order as the U.S. gears up for probable military action, scholars say that even though the inclusion of known gays and lesbians would be inconsistent with the peacetime gay ban, integration would not harm the military.

In remarks made to researchers at the Center for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military (CSSMM), a research center at the University of California, Santa Barbara, Charles Moskos, a military sociologist at Northwestern University, and a prime architect of the Pentagon's current regulations on gay soldiers, says the Pentagon suspends the discharge procedures during wartime to prevent straight soldiers from bolting. Moskos explained the Pentagon's rationale while acknowledging its inconsistencies: "People say, 'I'm gay, let me out.' So they put this stop loss in effect, which is kind of hypocritical."

Michael Desch, Associate Director of the Patterson School of Diplomacy at the University of Kentucky, says that the gay ban is unnecessary during wartime. Scholarship shows, he explained, "that during wartime, open homosexuality has been relatively well tolerated." He added that "a common threat and a single mission usually brings even disparate people together behind a common task."

Specialists on military personnel issues say that gay and lesbian soldiers have historically been allowed to serve in the armed forces during wartime. "This policy is consistent with previous wartime regulations," says Aaron Belkin, a professor of political science and Director of the CSSMM. "What's going on now is nothing new; known gays have always been allowed to serve when they are most needed."

Since World War II, when explicit regulations banning those with "homosexual tendencies" from the armed forces were first implemented, gay discharges have fluctuated according to the manpower needs of the military. In 1945, when the Army faced manpower shortages during the final European offensive, Secretary of War, Harry Stimson, ordered a review of all gay discharges and ordered



commanders to "salvage" homosexual soldiers for service whenever necessary.

In 1950, at the height of the Korean War, the Navy's gay discharge figures dropped from an annual average of 1100 sailors to 483. But in 1953, when the Armistice was signed, the number of naval discharges for homosexuality jumped up again to 1353.

During the Vietnam War, the military relaxed its restrictions on gay draftees and significantly slowed its gay discharges. In the three years prior to 1966, the Navy discharged over 1600 sailors each year for homosexuality. From 1966 to 1967, the numbers dropped from 1708 to 1094. In 1968, gay discharges fell again to 798, and they dipped to 643 at the peak of the military build-up in 1969. In 1970, the Navy discharged only 461 sailors for homosexuality. But discharge levels began to increase again in 1975.

The last time the gay ban was suspended was in 1991 during the Persian Gulf War, when the first Bush administration issued a "stop-loss" order through then Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney. According to the Wall Street Journal, the Pentagon allowed homosexuals to serve in the Persian Gulf despite a ban on all gay service, and later moved to discharge several gay veterans of that military conflict.

The Pentagon's efforts to retain for overseas deployments soldiers who would not be allowed to serve during peacetime, say military scholars, raises troubling questions about the military's criteria for serving in the armed forces.

"Such differential behavior draws into question the military's argument that gay and lesbian service members compromise the morale, cohesiveness and operational effectiveness of their units," says Belkin, "since it is during periods of conflict that morale, cohesiveness and operational effectiveness are most vital."

For information on how the stop-loss order will impact service members currently in uniform, please contact Steve Ralls at the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network at (202) 328-3244.

The Center for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military is an official research unit of the University of California, Santa Barbara. The Center is governed by a distinguished board of advisors including the Honorable Lawrence J. Korb of the Council on Foreign Relations, Honorable Coit Blacker of Stanford University and Professor Janet Halley of Harvard Law School. Its mission is to promote the study of gays, lesbians, and other sexual minorities in the armed forces.