

Forces. The primary alteration has been that homosexual service personnel now have the option to reveal their sexual orientation without fear of discharge. Having this choice enables soldiers to confront comments or harassment by peers without having to worry about losing their jobs. Chief Petty Officer Nunn and Lieutenant Commander Griffiths both agree that service personnel were more receptive to a change in policy than MOD officials initially believed. Lieutenant Commander Griffiths declares:

The policy appears to have been put across as unwelcome but inevitable and the briefing officers seemed to be embarrassed by the requirement to tell their men and women of the change. Fortunately, the men and women seem to be much better able to cope with the change than senior officers were prepared to give them credit for and many of the men and women know friends or family outside of the Service who are gay. (Personal Communication, October 22, 2000)

For Chief Petty Officer Nunn, his assessment of the open-mindedness of the soldiers stems from both the reception he has received upon his return and the comments of his crewmates when he was discharged. When his co-workers originally heard that he was being dismissed, they expressed support for him:

In fact, all of them were coming up to me and saying 'if there's anything I can do, give us a shout', all this sort of stuff. And ... my commanding officer when he said goodbye to me, said that 'we can't afford to lose people like you, but my hands are tied'. And the attitude as far as I can see – certainly it's been proved since I got back - is that 'what the hell's the problem here?'. You do your job, and that's all they want from you. (Personal Communication, October 17, 2000)⁴⁴

At the same time, however, the servicemembers agree that negative stereotypes about homosexuals continue to be widespread among British soldiers. Because the Armed Forces is such an insular climate, many gay and lesbian soldiers still feel fearful of revealing their sexual orientation in a setting where anti-homosexual feelings remain

pervasive. For the RAF junior technician, the homophobia of his colleagues has made him wary of telling anyone about the people that he dates or other aspects of his private life:

And [the restrictive military environment is] difficult, and that prevents people from coming out, the fact that it's such an insular environment, where everybody knows everyone else... and no matter if you get moved, someone else will find out, and that's the big problem for people at the moment, is that we know it's quite homophobic, and we know that there's not an easy way of getting away from it. And that's the worry we face at the moment – is the general perception of gay people. (Personal Communication, October 22, 2000)

But, he adds, 'Gay people are just like any other people' (Personal

Communication, October 22, 2000). For Lieutenant Griffiths, changing

heterosexual servicemembers' attitudes about gay and lesbian people will take

time:

Overall, the [Royal Navy] seems to be treating the change in policy as a bit of a joke (I believe as an inherent defense mechanism) but this is likely to change as the numbers of openly gay people grow. I do not foresee a problem and the joke will stop once people get used to serving with lesbian and gay people. (Personal Communication, October 22, 2000)

For Corporal Blyth, such a change in attitudes has already begun:

Yes, there is less micky talking etc. We used to be a minority that was fair game to be the butt of someone's [sic] joke, but that is all changing. People are now aware that they used to serve with [closeted] gays and the ones I work with now know that they are serving with a gay man, [who] is proud of the fact he's gay. (Personal Communication, October 27, 2000)

IX. CONCLUSION

The British Services fought for a number of years to maintain its policy of excluding openly gay and lesbian soldiers. Even after the outcome of the European Court

⁴⁴ For other stories about positive responses by heterosexual colleagues before the policy change, see Hall (1995).

of Human Rights case appeared inevitable, the Armed Forces resisted calls to eliminate the ban. While the Ministry of Defense asked commanders to soften their enforcement of the ban in the months before the decision was handed down, it both refused to alter its basic policy and continued to dismiss soldiers for homosexuality. The last gay soldier was discharged from the military just three days before the ruling that overturned the ban on homosexual service. Service officials argued that the inclusion of open homosexuals would engender distrust, splinter working relationships, damage morale, and even harm operational effectiveness. Efforts to overturn the ban were deemed by some military officials to be inappropriate political meddling in military operations and harmful social engineering.

Once the decision was handed down by the European Court, however, the military acted quickly to put in place a policy that would both accord with the ruling and address effectiveness concerns. The Armed Forces enacted a new policy within three months of the decision by the European Court. It established a nondiscriminatory mandate that focuses on behavior rather than on personal characteristics. It emphasized the importance of equal application of the new social code of conduct and instructed commanders to intervene in soldiers' personal lives only when operational effectiveness might be compromised. It invited discharged soldiers to reapply and accepted back several former service personnel. The Services also reemphasized the policy of zero tolerance for harassment, bullying and victimization.

While the long-term effects of the elimination of the ban remain to be seen, the first ten months of the new social code of conduct and the more inclusive policy have been a clear and unqualified success. The Services' own internal assessment at six

months found that the new policy has “been hailed as a solid achievement” (Ministry of Defense, 2000e, p. 2). There have been no indications of negative effects on recruiting levels. The social code of conduct has been effectively incorporated into the military’s training courses. No mass resignations have occurred. There have been no major reported cases of gay-bashing or harassment of sexual minorities. There have been no major reported cases of harassment or inappropriate behavior by gay or lesbian soldiers. There has been no perceived effect on morale, unit cohesion or operational effectiveness. The new policy has been well received by soldiers, and the policy change has been characterized by a “marked lack of reaction” (Ministry of Defense, 2000e, p. 2).

The conclusions of the Ministry of Defense report have been confirmed by our conversations with more than twenty-five representatives from the military, academia, and non-governmental organizations. None of those interviewed know of any major problems associated with the policy change. No one has heard of any difficulties related to recruitment or training completion rates; recruitment levels are characterized as “quite buoyant” (Barnard, Personal Communication, October 13, 2000). There has not been a problem of mass resignations associated with the removal of the ban. None of those interviewed have heard of cases of serious homophobic harassment. Rank Outsiders, the only organization devoted exclusively to homosexual servicemembers, knows of only two cases of minor problems. The issues were quickly addressed by military personnel and effectively resolved. Out service personnel interviewed for this report and by other sources describe collegial treatment by their co-workers and other servicemembers.

Experts in all fields acknowledged that more work remains to be done, and new obstacles could still emerge. Homophobic attitudes persist throughout the Services, and

many soldiers therefore feel the need to remain silent about their personal lives. It is possible that some problems will develop as more gay and lesbian service personnel acknowledge their sexual orientation to colleagues, or if the Armed Forces relaxes its vigilance against harassment and inappropriate behavior of all kinds. Issues of equality such as pension, accommodation and partnership rights have yet to be addressed. Still, the distance that has been traveled over the past year is impressive. Concerns of dire consequences have been replaced by a general recognition that the transition has proceeded smoothly.

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