



CANADA

# Armed and gay

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*Homosexuals in the military face an uneasy welcome*

**T**he 36-year-old supply technician remembers locking eyes with one of his Canadian Forces superiors at an Ottawa-area gay bar last year. As Cpl. Joe Martin (not his real name) approached the man, the startled warrant officer slipped out the door without a backward glance. Martin, whose past service has included peacekeeping duty in the Middle East, has since noticed that the officer avoids him whenever possible and seems uncomfortable in his presence. Martin says that he understands the warrant officer's behavior, having only recently reconciled his own sexual orientation with his military career. And although the Canadian Forces recently lifted its ban on gays in the military, Martin acknowledges that the stigma of being a homosexual in the Forces is likely to remain for some time. "While some of my colleagues do know I am gay, I am not going to go around telling other people now just because it is permitted," says Martin. "Gays will still be careful—but they are happy with the rule change."

case initiated by a lesbian, former lieutenant Michelle Douglas, ruled that the longstanding ban on homosexuals contravened the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Since then, headquarters staff in Ottawa have been draft-



MIKE PINDER

**Anderson: drafting regulations against harassment**

It was a change that came without the raucous public debate that has broken out in the United States over President Bill Clinton's promise to allow homosexuals to serve openly in the U.S. military. The Canadian Forces quietly altered the regulation last October—just after the Federal Court of Canada, in a human rights

ing guidelines to supplement the new, more tolerant policy towards gays by discouraging harassment in the workplace. Douglas, for one, applauds the new measures. "It is clear that the Canadian Forces are truly acting on the changes," she said in an interview.

"There has been no real backlash by soldiers—and so far there is no moral decay."

But Douglas, 29, acknowledges that gays in the Forces still face a difficult fight—as her own experience attests. She joined the Forces in 1986, graduating from basic training with top honors. Carefully concealing her sexual orientation, Douglas made the rank of lieutenant and in 1988 was posted to the Special Investigation Unit of the military police. But her career prospects began to sour that year when, because of a complaint by one of her colleagues, she herself came under surveillance. After being questioned about her sexual orientation, she was summarily discharged from the Forces on the grounds that she was "not advantageously employable." Douglas, who now works in central Ontario as a federal public servant, took the military to court—and last year won her landmark case, as well as a court-ordered settlement of \$100,000 from the department of national defence. Although that settled the legal issues, homosexuals still face more than a century of tradition and ingrained practices. Says Douglas: "Attitudes in the military will be the most difficult thing to change."

In fact, gays and lesbians who are currently serving in the military say that they still routinely encounter prejudice. Although several agreed to speak to *Maclean's* about their experiences, none wanted to be identified. One lesbian corporal, a 13-year veteran of the forces now stationed in Ottawa, recalled trying to pass herself off as heterosexual early in her career by taking male friends to military social functions. She added that rumors about her sexual orientation were at the root of hostility she felt in previous postings—and that in spite of the Forces' new rules, her lesbianism stands in the way of any further promotions. "Because of the macho mind-set of



PARENT/MONPRESE

the army, gay men must have had a more difficult time than women, especially in the field," she says. She notes that both women and men have suffered unfairly: "Attitudes here are hard and nasty."

Few heterosexuals in the military appear willing to discuss openly their feelings towards gays. But one army major in his late 40s who spoke to *Macleans*' said that many soldiers believe the department's decision "is morally wrong and will damage the discipline and effectiveness" of the Forces. For his part, a crew member serving on a Canadian destroyer raised the spectre of sexual assaults taking place in ships' showers or living quarters. "On a ship, things are pretty intimate and you get to know everybody pretty well," said the 33-year-old sailor. "I wouldn't feel comfortable knowing that some of my shipmates are gay and might be watching me while I am washing up."

Most gays dismiss such fears as ludicrous. "They say gays might see them in the shower," said a 28-year-old officer cadet who is stationed in Quebec and has moonlighted during his eight-year military career by posing for gay magazines and working part-time as a nude dancer in gay bars. "I tell them they've already been seen in the shower, so get over it."

But attitudes in the Forces are slowly evolving, in part because younger soldiers and officers are often more liberal than their long-serving counterparts. In late February, the department of national defence's consultative committee on social change held a forum at CFB Gagetown in New Brunswick. During the discussion, one non-commissioned officer in his mid-40s loudly denounced the prospect of having to deal with homosexuals on a daily basis. He was challenged by a young officer who said that as Canadian society changes, so must the armed forces. The clash reminded committee member Albert

Geddry, 52, of discussions among his fellow soldiers about homosexuals in his early army days. He predicts that as young recruits move up in the ranks, anti-gay sentiment in the forces will diminish. "The older men don't like it and no manner of discussing it is going to change their minds."

Still, Canada's chief of defence staff says that there is little, if any, active resistance to the new rules. While conceding that more senior officers likely opposed the change than supported it, Admiral John Anderson told *Macleans*' that those same officers clearly understand that no wavering on the policy will be tolerated. "They have said, 'I have a personal opinion, but I understand the change

last year's presidential campaign, Clinton promised to allow open homosexuality in the military. In January, facing a storm of controversy, he backed down somewhat and issued a temporary order to suspend the decades-old policy of asking recruits about their sexual preferences, but maintaining the practice of expelling those who publicly declare their homosexuality.

The issue has stirred impassioned debate. Last week, retired general Norman Schwarzkopf, the Gulf War commander, appeared before a Senate committee and declared his opposition to homosexuality in the military. Another witness, U.S. marine colonel Fred Peck, said that he had spoken to Canadian soldiers in Somalia and it was clear that they were disappointed with the new policy. Said Peck: "They said no gays would dare assert themselves and it would be barracks justice in a very inhospitable environment to step forward."

Meanwhile, having won the right to join the Canadian Forces, gays and lesbians are pressing for more rights, including making same-sex partners eligible for survival benefits and pensions. Another issue is on-base housing, specifically the family-sized homes that are currently available only to married and common-law couples of different sexes. One lesbian soldier said that several years ago she and her partner at the time—also a member of the Forces—considered challenging the rules by applying as a couple for housing. Concern about their careers, she says, stopped them from doing so. But, she adds, "Is it not cheaper to house two people in one home than in two?" First, though, the Canadian Forces must deal with another kind of coexistence: ensuring that gays and heterosexuals can work together within the military with as little conflict as possible.

## COMPARING THE RULES

<b>CANADA</b>	Ended its ban against homosexuals last October, just after the Federal Court of Canada ruled that it was unconstitutional.
<b>GERMANY</b>	No restrictions, although complaints about an individual's behavior could still lead to an investigation and possible discharge.
<b>UNITED STATES</b>	President Bill Clinton has vowed to lift the current ban. Congressional committees are now holding hearings on the issue.
<b>FRANCE</b>	No restrictions, but the military will investigate complaints about an individual's attitudes and actions.
<b>BRITAIN</b>	Gays are barred from the armed forces. Individuals who are discovered to be homosexuals face discharge.
<b>AUSTRALIA</b>	Officially ended its ban against homosexuals on November 26, 1992, largely because of the Canadian example.
<b>THE NETHERLANDS</b>	No restrictions since 1974, although recruits are still asked their sexual orientation for statistical purposes.

and I will support the policy," Anderson said.

Anderson says that the Canadian experience has already led to extensive consultation between senior DND officials and their counterparts in the United States. During

LUKE FISHER in Ottawa