

16 April 1995

Dear Sir

This is a follow up letter to my last letter upon which I inquired if you could provide me with any information, material or input concerning gays and lesbians in the Canadian Forces for a book project that I am currently undertaking. In my last letter, I briefly touched upon the issue of same-sex common-law relationships in the Canadian Forces and how they should be implemented. This letter will deal specifically with this issue. As mentioned previously in my last letter, the issue of gays and lesbians in the Canadian Forces is very important to me and this additional concern of same-sex common-law relationships is ever more portentous and eminent to myself...and other currently serving gay members of the Canadian Forces.

Ever since the change in policy concerning homosexuals in the Canadian Forces was changed in October of 1992, this issue has been kept at very low key. No problems have been encountered, thus far, since the implication of the new policy and the new policy has not motivated homosexual military personnel to "come out of the closet" in bulk quantities. Mass resignations, lower recruitment, morale and cohesiveness quandaries, gay bashing episodes, and more open displays of homosexual behaviour-problems that had been anticipated prior to the change-have not and probably will not materialize. All in all, a smooth transition had taken place concerning an exceedingly sensitive and controversial issue. But did DND ever contemplate the issue of same-sex common-law relationships while tabling the change in policy which was instigated by the Federal Court of Canada because of the fact that it was contrary to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms? Did DND ever consider that homosexual members of the Canadian Forces are competent of carrying on monogamous and loving relationships and that we should be treated with the unequivocal same justice and equality-and I stress equality-as our heterosexual counterparts? The response to the preceding questions can be easily summed up in one and lonely word; no.

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According to DND officials-and you yourself can attest to this-the military does not plan to recognize homosexual marriages, same-sex common-law relationships or extend partner benefits until the civilian government resolves these current and ongoing issues.

But the year is 1995 and times are changing. Yes, Canada does not officially recognize homosexual marriages and does not recognize partner benefits for homosexual couples, but recent new court cases have been brought forward which challenge the government's stance on partner benefits. Some organizations, like for example Canada Post and the Toronto Dominion Bank, do recognize homosexual couples and partner benefits. Doesn't DND fathom that the military is distinct and therefore should be treated with total ignorance amongst the civilian side of Canada?

We, as Canadians, believe that "equality" is one of our basic values and this belief is reflected in our constitution and legislation. It is very obvious by the current and ongoing policy concerning common-law relationships in the Canadian Forces, that DND is not exhibiting any tantamount tendencies concerning this issue. I must stress once again, that the military is different from the civilian side of Canada and the excuse that DND officials state concerning same-sex common-law relationships, "no plans to recognize same-sex common-law relationships until the civilian government addresses the issue itself," is absolutely "hogwash." The Department of National Defence is sweeping this issue right underneath the carpet, probably never to be lifted again. Now tell me, is that fair? Did not God place us all on this earth to be treated equal? As far as I am concerned everyone should be treated equally regardless if you are gay or straight, black or white, a healthy person or a person with AIDS, a person with one leg or a person with no legs. Everyone should be treated the exact same!

What is the difference between myself and the hundreds, maybe even thousands of gay Canadian Forces personnel and our heterosexual counterparts? Other than our sexual preference, absolutely nothing. I, for instance, perform my job to the best of my ability. I must endure the hardships of ship life-lack of privacy and space, stormy weather and spending long periods at sea without stepping foot on land for weeks. I must suffer separations from loved ones. And, I must spend up to 5 months being away from my home in Canada and the person that I love. My heterosexual counterparts must also tolerate the previously mentioned factors, just like I do. So, I ask you again, what is the difference?

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The navy is just a minor breed of situations compared to the other elements. Gay members of the land element must spend up to 6 months in a war zone-Bosnia is a prime example of this. And what conciliations do they receive? Like myself, none. This is not just a naval problem. It is a Canadian Forces dilemma. The only reason I am using the navy as an example is that I am more familiar with the navy than the other elements. I am not speaking for myself but I am speaking for all gay members of the Canadian Forces and especially those in relationships who, just like myself, get frustrated and irate because they cannot be treated the same as their heterosexual counterparts.

Let me present to you two scenarios upon which the current policy concerning common-law relationships is unfair and should be changed to inhabit all members of the Canadian Forces, whether gay or straight. I will also present to you the reason why the military is so different-and I have emphasised that-from the civilian world.

I have been involved in a relationship for more than five years; and five years is a very lengthy time. I am presently on a 5 month deployment- and 5 weeks in the -and during this deployment we have the opportunity to use LTA to travel back to Canada. I am from Toronto. That is where my family is from and all the necessary documents concerning myself has Toronto as my home. My partner-of five years-is in Halifax. I want to travel to Halifax to see him vice Toronto where my family is from-no offence to my family of course! After seeing the Executive Officer three times and the Commanding Officer twice concerning myself flying to Halifax to see the person that I love, I was told that because of the current policy I could not fly to Halifax in the exact same manner as my heterosexual counterparts are travelling in. I was told that yes I could fly to Halifax if I had one of my family members travel to Halifax to meet me. I did not want to go through all that added crap. I just wanted to travel to Halifax in the same procedure as my heterosexual counterparts. Just like them I am travelling to see the person that I love. So why on earth do I-as well as other gay members of the Canadian Forces-have to go through all those unnecessary heartaches? I can tell you right now why. Because I am gay. And even though the Canadian Forces changed the policy-due to the highest court of law in this country-that is not good enough. DND must entertain every single member the same way. Oddly enough, another gay member onboard-a lesbian-presented the same avenue as myself and she was also met in the same direction as I was. I am visiting Toronto on my leave and my partner is flying down to meet me. Unfortunately for her, she is not travelling to Canada and therefore will not see her partner until the end of June. Now tell me is that right? Is that fair? Is that equal?

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Second scenario. And, in my point of view, the most vital. The reason for this scenario to be so fundamental because it has a sense of compassion mutilated to it.

Long deployments away from home like this current one I am on are getting more and more familiar to the navy and in turn elongated tours of duty for the other elements far away from home is no stranger to them neither. It is always imperative to make sure, before you depart, that everything has been taken care of, especially when it comes to financial matters. While a member is away doing his duty for his country there are times and instances where a financial crisis will occur at home. If this does transpire than the member's common-law girlfriend or wife could go to the local Family Support Center and inquire about a loan to get them through the crisis. If my partner is short of cash one month or worse still my allotment, for some reason, does not get deposited into the bank, what could he possibly do? He cannot go to the Family Support Center without being laughed at and asked to leave. Does he, or any other partner of a gay member, have to struggle to get through that crisis? Imagine, a partner of a gay member is struggling because of a missed allotment but the partner of a heterosexual member does not have to toil because that partner can just simply go to the Family Support Center and obtain a loan which will be deducted from the member's pay. I ask you, is that right? Is that fair? Is that equal?

The two scenarios that I mentioned are only a few of the rights and privileges concerning common-law relationships that are unfair when it comes to gay members of the Canadian Forces. But, by far, I feel that they are the most influential. The last scenario is especially poignant. Other issues such as separation allowance, travel on service air flights, and medical and dental treatment are equally significant.

Now does the realization come into effect that the military is different from the civilian world? After those two scenarios, you bet it does. So, what is DND going to do? Nothing. Nothing until the civilian government discourses this issue themselves and that may take a very long time. After those two scenarios, sir, I recommend that you realize that that excuse DND officials presented in 1992 concerning same-sex common-law relationships is nothing but a mere statement to bring a controversial and sensitive subject to rest. But, people like myself, will not let this issue be laid to rest especially when it deals with equality and compassion. And I believe that I should be treated the exact same way as my heterosexual counterparts in every aspect.

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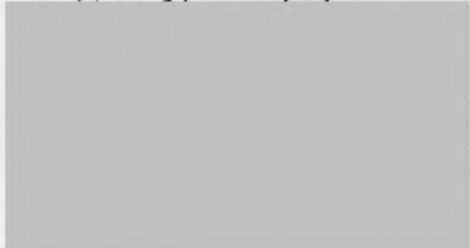
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Well after five pages, I think that I have made my point quite evident and clear. I have come to the conclusion that the current policy concerning common-law relationships hinders my rights as a human being. I do not know what my fellow gay members think but I am positive that they feel the same way as I do. As mentioned before, I am very determined in getting the policy changed due to the fact that it is very unfair and very, very unequal. This is all about "equality" and NOT "special" as so many people and organizations tend to ponder.

I honestly hope that this letter will not be ignored by yourself and the other key people and departments who I plan to send this to who govern this country. This is a very active and important issue and it should get the acknowledgment that it warrants. It has been almost three years since the change in policy and now it is time to take the next leap; the leap where same-sex common-law relationships are fully recognized.

In less than five years Canada will be entering the 21st century, I only see it fitting if the Canadian Forces can enter the next century where every single member is treated with "equality!"

Sincerely, / /



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