

ART IN VIDEO
IN LIVING



Anytime. Anywhere. Any Day ...
Scott Bryant, Agent
 1810 Madison Street, Clarksville, TN
 931-648-3071
 scott.bryant.c0w2@statefarm.com
Call my office for a quote 24/7


THE LEAF CHRONICLE

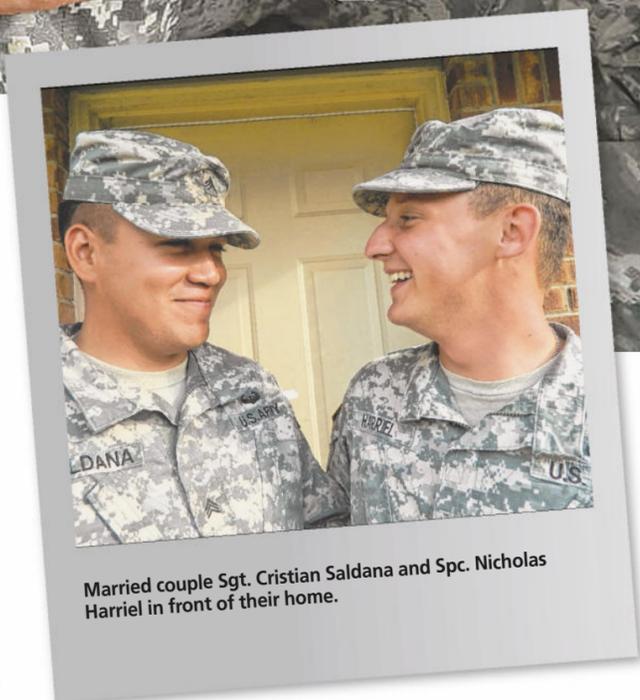
A GANNETT COMPANY

SUNDAY, JULY 20, 2014 • CLARKSVILLE, TENN.



As dust settles on policies, doors open for Fort Campbell gay soldiers

GAY SOLDIERS OPEN UP ON COMING OUT



Married couple Sgt. Cristian Saldana and Spc. Nicholas Harriel in front of their home.

Sarah Dixon
The Leaf-Chronicle

CLARKSVILLE, Tenn. — Spc. Corderra Dews, 24, was living in Austin, Texas, and openly gay before he joined the Army in 2011, a couple of months before the end of “don’t ask, don’t tell,” the policy that kept gay soldiers in the closet at the risk of losing their jobs.

“When you come out and you’ve been out so long, it’s hard to just go back in,” Dews said.

During basic training, people questioned his sexuality because he never spoke about

women. “I would just walk away instead of denying it,” Dews said.

But while Dews was still in Advanced Individual Training, DADT was repealed.

“I was really excited,” Dews said, “because in my head, I felt like eventually I’d be able to be myself at some point in time.”

Last year, with the overturning of the Defense of Marriage Act, or DOMA, the Army extended benefits to same-sex spouses, furthering the full inclusion of gay and lesbian sol-

See **SOLDIERS**, Page A4



ONLINE

» For a video, go to this story online at TheLeafChronicle.com.

FOR MORE

» OutServe-SLDN is an organization dedicated to bringing about full LGBT equality to America’s military and ending all forms of discrimination and harassment of military personnel on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Online: Go to www.sldn.org

Email: kentucky@outserve.org

For Obama, global crises become more challenging

By Julie Pace
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Surveying a dizzying array of international crises, President Barack Obama stated the obvious: “We live in a complex world and at a challenging time.”

And then suddenly, only a day later, the world had grown much more troubling.

The downing Thursday of a passenger plane carrying nearly 300 people spread the impact of the standoff between Ukraine and Russia far around the globe. The prospect of more Mideast casualties was assured when Israel launched a ground offensive in the Gaza Strip after efforts to arrange a cease-fire between the Israelis and Palestinians collapsed.

Yet there was a ray of hope elsewhere at week’s end with the announcement that the U.S. and its negotiating partners had agreed to extend nuclear negotiations with Iran for four months rather than allowing the talks to collapse as a Sunday deadline neared.

Still, there’s no guarantee of overcoming stubborn differences with Iran and reaching a

final agreement. Obama also will have to find a way to stave off pressure from members of Congress, including some fellow Democrats, who see the extension as a stalling tactic by Iran and are eager to further penalize Tehran.

“Increased economic pressure would strengthen our hand, but the administration opposes it,” said Rep. Ed Royce, R-

Calif., the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. “It should welcome congressional efforts to ratchet up the economic pressure on Iran.”

The cascade of overseas developments comes as the American public’s views about Obama’s foreign policy have soured, turning what was once

See **OBAMA**, Page A3

MERRIEL BULLOCK-NEAL CANDIDATE FOR JUVENILE COURT JUDGE

Attorney, Supreme Court Rule 31 Mediator, Educator & Psychologist, Practice Law in Juvenile Court, Circuit Court, Chancery Court, Court of Appeals and the United States District Court

UNIQUELY QUALIFIED TO SERVE

- Law Degree and Ph.D. in Special Education with support fields in Clinical Child Psychology and Family Therapy
- Perfect Qualifications to serve as Juvenile Court Judge to address the issues confronting our Youth, our families and our community
- 60% of the youth in the juvenile justice system have mental illness, behavior problems or other qualified disabilities

PREVENTION AND REHABILITATION

For every child we prevent from going into the juvenile justice system or rehabilitate if they are already in the system, that will be one less adult in the criminal justice system!

GOALS

Provide fairness & impartiality, Uphold the rule of law & provide due process to all!



Pd for by the Committee to Elect Merriel Bullock-Neal for Judge, Sharon Edwards, Treasurer





Married couple Spc. Nicholas Harriel and Sgt. Cristian Saldana sit on the couch in their home. THE LEAF-CHRONICLE/SARAH DIXON

Soldiers

Continued from Page A1

diers in the military.

Dews, now a fueler with 2nd Battalion, 44th Air Defense Artillery, 101st Sustainment Brigade, is one of seven gay male soldiers who've served at Fort Campbell who recently opened up about their experiences serving in the Army before and after the end of DADT and DOMA.

While Dews was able to walk away, some went through more serious measures to hide their sexuality in the days when exposure could mean the end of a career.

Leaving the secrets behind

Spc. Brian Scott, 28, is in the Army Reserve, but he was active-duty at Fort Campbell from 2009 to early 2011 in the 187th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne as a fire support specialist. He is also the chapter leader for Kentucky's OutServe-SLDN, a national organization dedicated to LGBT equality and ending harassment and discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity in the military.

Scott wasn't always so open — he was married to a woman for several years in an effort to conceal his homosexuality.

"It was a way to cover myself in the military and my family," Scott said. If he could have married a man, Scott said, he more than likely would have.

"I definitely had that fear of not being complete and still having to hide that part of me," Scott said. "You've got to lie to yourself and lie to the person you're with."

The Army is a reflection of America, and much like America, it is a melting pot. People from all parts of the country and different walks of life come together to serve a common goal.

"You have people from so many areas," said Staff Sgt. Chris Swan, 26, with the Army Dental Corps, who comes from a military background.

"People will join the military from a small town. Some of them haven't seen a black person, some of them haven't seen a Jewish person, some people haven't been around a lot of different minorities, and they have to learn how to adapt."

Breaking stereotypes

Sgt. Kyle Johnson, 29, is now in the Army Reserve but was active duty from 2009 to 2013 at Fort Campbell in 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team. Johnson has wanted to be in the Army since he was a little boy.

"I always wanted to do it," Johnson said. "I love it. I love everything about it. My entire room is shelves of international affairs, defense strategies, foreign policies. I want to know every minute detail about it."

He worked in politics for many years before deciding to enlist. In four short years, Johnson became qualified in Air Assault, Pathfinder, received a Combat Action Badge, went to language school for Dari (a variety of Persian Farsi spoken in

Afghanistan), and was a sniper team leader for a scout platoon.

"I want to be seen as a person and what I've accomplished and the hard work I've put into things," Johnson said, "not what I happen to do in the privacy of my home."

"People see me and what I accomplished and they find out later (that he's gay) and are like, 'What?' Not every gay person bends their wrists and wears pink shirts and flits around. That's a very small sect of that community."

Stereotypes of gay people remain prevalent and deep-rooted, particularly about gay men.

"Everyone expects them to be very, very flamboyant," Scott said.

Sgt. Cristian Saldana, 23, gets similar reactions. Saldana is in communications with 326th Engineer Battalion, 101st Sustainment Brigade, and he is married to Spc. Nicholas Harriel.

"I always get the comment 'You're not the stereotypical flamboyant gay guy — you're not flaming,'" Saldana said.

Many also associate being gay with weakness. "Everybody looks at you, and then when your PT (physical training) is not as high as anybody else, 'Oh he's the gay kid — don't expect him to run that fast,'" Johnson said.

Swan agrees, especially when it comes to physically demanding Army roles.

"I know a lot of guys that are in infantry and they're still closeted because of their job field," Swan said. "In that environment, it's a very high-testosterone, pro-masculine environment. A lot of people don't associate being gay with that."

With the repeal of DADT, however, gay soldiers have been able to openly challenge those stereotypes, helping to educate straight soldiers who didn't think they knew any gay men.

"We weren't that new species anymore," said Harriel, 23, a medic with 86th Combat Support Hospital. "I think the repeal of DADT allowed us to expose ourselves. It allowed us to come out because we don't have purple dots on us. It's not obvious. So whenever you don't see something, it's easy to fear something you haven't seen."

While many veterans say they knowingly fought side-by-side with gay soldiers going back to World War II, it was mostly unspoken. For some, particularly civilians, that meant it wasn't there.

"I guess maybe people felt like because it wasn't allowed in the military, people didn't think it was in the military," Harriel said. "Maybe people just didn't realize that (gay) people have been serving for a long time and hiding that part of their lives from other people."

Soldiers first

Like any other soldier, gay soldiers find their value not in their sexual orientation but in how they perform their job.

Dews won his battalion's Soldier of the Quarter almost three months ago and soon will be competing for the 101st Airborne Division's Soldier of the Year.

"It shouldn't be about who I am, it should be about my work



Spc. Corderra Dews with his re-enlistment flag. THE LEAF-CHRONICLE/SARAH DIXON

ethic and what kind of soldier I am," Dews said.

Sexual orientation is not an all-consuming factor in anyone's life. Gay soldiers want to be seen as soldiers first.

"A lot of gay people I knew in the Army, no matter what you did ... if you cured cancer, it wasn't 'Kyle Johnson cured cancer.' It was 'That gay guy that cured cancer,'" Johnson said. "Anything you do has to have 'gay' in front of it."

"Me being gay isn't the most important thing about me," Swan said. "It's part of me, but it's not who I am."

The pending of DADT and DOMA didn't bring in a wave of rainbow flags and glitter or the collapse of the military, although some thought it might. Instead, it brought job security, the possibility of marriage and the spousal benefits that were given to every other married soldier.

Sgt. Victor Valdez, 21, retired from the Army in May and worked intelligence in 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne.

"It's not something that I overly flaunt," Valdez said. "When we're at work, we keep it professional. We don't talk about our personal life like that."

Some growing pains

Before DADT ended, the fear of getting kicked out was very real.

"All it would take is one petty supervisor who pursued it, and whether or not they were successful, there was always that chance," Swan said. "Now there is no chance. I will not lose my career over my orientation. It makes me feel secure. It was one less thing to worry about."

The repeal of the policy doesn't mean everyone in the

Army wants or agrees with gay people serving. It also doesn't mean that being open about sexuality goes without incident or harassment.

"It may have been a policy put out, but it was still unspoken that it wasn't a good thing to still be gay in the Army," Dews said.

Although most soldiers who are aware of Dews' sexual orientation are supportive and accepting, there was an incident in which he had to file an Equal Opportunity complaint.

A noncommissioned officer in his platoon was continually harassing Dews, making gay slurs and derogatory comments for a month, paired with a constant look of disdain.

"The way he ... how someone can speak with their eyes, almost," Dews said. "It was like he was almost disgusted with me."

Even when the NCO was told to stop by other NCOs in the platoon, the comments continued.

"It stressed me out. I lost a lot of morale and confidence in the people over me," Dews said.

Dews eventually filed the EO complaint.

"I felt like I should stand up for myself and show him that wasn't the right thing to do," Dews said. "He's supposed to be training me, leading me, and he was putting me down."

The NCO was reprimanded and ordered not to speak to Dews unless giving an order. Dews was told if the NCO tried to retaliate in any way, to go to someone higher-ranking and the situation would be handled.

Before the repeal of DADT, Dews would have had no way to stop the harassment.

Pivotal moment

The way Dews' case was handled speaks volumes about the change that's taken place at

Fort Campbell from 15 years ago, when, in one incident, harassment of a gay soldier was allowed to continue to the point of death.

During Fourth of July weekend in 1999, 21-year-old Pfc. Barry Winchell was beaten to death with a baseball bat in his barracks by a fellow soldier. Before the incident, Winchell, who was in 2nd Battalion, 502 Infantry Regiment, was constantly harassed by fellow soldiers for being gay. His superiors didn't put a stop to the harassment.

The slaying happened six years after the DADT policy was put in place, and Winchell's death led to a re-examination of the policy and a serious examination of the leadership on post.

Today at Fort Campbell, harassment of gay soldiers is not taken lightly.

"Fort Campbell and the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) are dedicated to ensuring that everyone in our community is treated with dignity and respect, to include our gay and lesbian service and family members," said Lt. Col. Brian DeSantis, 101st Airborne and Fort Campbell spokesman, in a statement issued for this article.

Life in the open

Perhaps the biggest change is that gay soldiers are now able to openly take part in family life with their same-sex spouses.

"I figured maybe I would date someone, but it would always be secret," Harriel said. "I never thought I'd be out to anyone else until I left the military service."

He married Saldana this past year, and their marriage is a direct byproduct of the end of DADT and DOMA. Before, many soldiers were willing to either never have a partner or have a love life in total secrecy until they got out of the military.

"I'm so happy for the ones just coming in, because they never had to fear finding someone after coming in," Swan said.

"When (DADT) was in effect, it literally said you can't get married, so I would have been legally single the entire time I was in the Army. I was fully prepared to do 20 years. I looked at my career, and I think I married my career. That was always my joke, but it's depressing because I did marry my career."

The prospect of openly dating and of marriage is new to gay soldiers. Before, the concept was an implausible yearning, but it is now tangible and happening.

"I can do it now, and I won't have to put off the whole family thing," Swan said. "My goal is I want to find someone, date them for around a year, and if they're the one, get married. I want to do it how my parents did it."

In the post-DADT and DOMA era, gay soldiers are able to follow in the footsteps of soldiers before them, fully participating in family life after having given so much for their country.

"My hope as a gay soldier," Dews said, "is I really hope to get stationed somewhere nice, meet somebody, be able to bring them around, take them to balls, to be like any other spouse in the military."

Senior Editor Chris Smith contributed to this report. Sarah Dixon, 245-0248