

The FRONT PAGE

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Serving the Carolinas' Gay & Lesbian Communities Since 1979

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Year in Review: A Year of Political Normalization

By Bob Roehr
Contributing Writer

The year saw many small steps and consolidation of social and legal gains for the GLBT community across the country. While there were disappointments, there were no serious setbacks.

Wrapping up the year was an early Christmas present, when, on December 17, the New York legislature passed a gay rights bill. It ended a thirty year struggle to pass the measure and makes New York the thirteenth state to offer such basic protections to its citizens.

President George Bush continued to appoint modest numbers of openly gay people to positions within the administration and to groups such as the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS. The most visible appointee, Scott Evertz, was shuffled out of the "AIDS Czar" office, replaced by another openly gay man, Joe O'Neill, a physician and acknowledged master of federal AIDS programs.

Mary Matalin is perhaps the gay community's most influential ally within the White House. Unfortunately, she announced that she is stepping down from her position as special assistant to Vice President Dick Chaney at the end of the year.

In June, the President signed the Mychal Judge Act, making it easier for beneficiaries of public safety officers killed in the line of duty to collect a \$250,000 federal death benefit. It was named after the gay priest killed in the September 11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. It is believed to be the first time that the survivor of a gay partnership has become eligible to receive a federal benefit.

New leaders at the top of NIH, CDC, and FDA have impressed members of the community as being extremely competent and prepared to deal with the community's concerns in a fair manner.

But administration support for abstinence only sex education, the disappearance of information on condoms at the CDC website, and audits of AIDS organizations has fueled fears that social conservatives are calling the shots on these issues.

The Pentagon's antigay policy known as "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" remains all too much in effect. The latest round of expulsions of Arabic speakers — in light of the military's need for the likely war in Iraq and in the fight against terror-

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At the Center of the Fury

"Don't Ask, Don't Tell" Strikes at the Defense Language Institute

By Bob Roehr
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The utter foolishness of the Pentagon's antigay policy of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was demonstrated anew when seven language specialists recently were booted out of the prestigious Defense Language Institute (DLI) in Monterrey, California. These folks weren't studying your high school French or Spanish but difficult languages like Arabic, Korean, Mandarin (Chinese) and Farsi, where training is intense, six hours a day in the classroom, and lasts more than a year.

Last year the Army was able to fill only half of its 84 positions for Arabic translators, according to a report by the General Accounting Office, the federal government's investigative arm.

As a result, intercepted messages and other intelligence information often are not translated or analyzed on a timely basis.

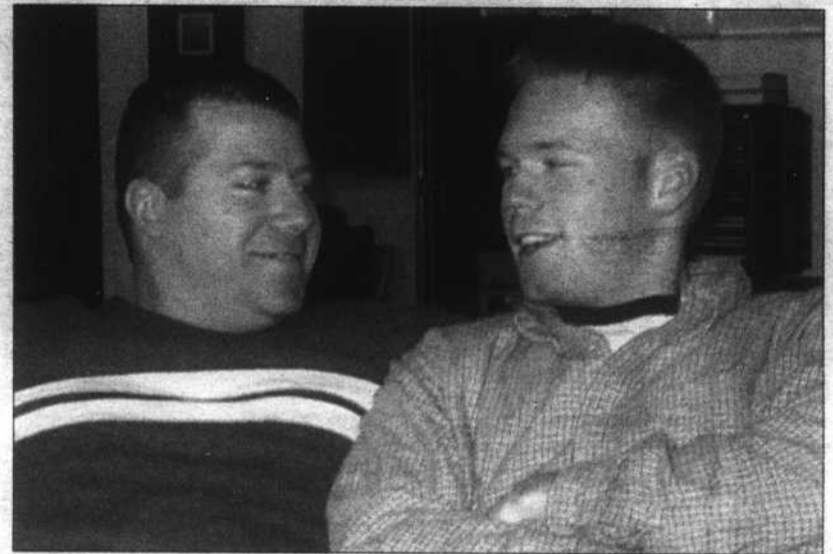
That can be fatal when information is the foundation of modern security.

The discharges brought an unusual amount of media coverage and a crescendo of editorials calling for a change in the policy. At the center of it all were Alastair Gamble and Rob Hicks, stoking the coverage with their stories. Bob Roehr sat down with the pair for an extended and candid interview.

The dark-haired Hicks, 28, grew up in Yampa, a very small town in northwestern Colorado.

He bounced around colleges, coming out in the process, and left just before completing his degree when relationship problems with another man "crashed down around me."

With \$37,000 in student loans hanging over his head, the Army's repayment program for a six-year enlistment sounded like a good alternative to "fifteen years of constant bill paying." Hicks had tested well for languages and the guarantee of further training would give



Alastair Gamble and Rob Hicks

Photo by Bob Roehr

him more than enough credits to get his college degree. "It was good for me all around."

"The more I was in the military, the more I fit into the discipline and the integrity of the life, but I went back into the closet." He didn't find it particularly difficult, "I've never been the most demonstrative person in the world." Being older, most people in training units like DLI are between 18 and 22, "I didn't worry about my personal life, I was more interested in my military career. I just worked my butt off." Learning Korean gave him plenty to work on.

Gamble, 24, grew up in Austin, Texas, where his mom taught English at the University.

They later migrated to Virginia Tech, then Alastair took off for college at Emory University in Atlanta.

He did some "experimenting" with men, in fact it became a regular pattern, but there were no real relationships and he didn't come out to his family.

At the same time, he began "getting fiercely interested in joining the military. Unfortunately I bought into the belief that the two were mutually exclusive."

Repressing those feelings came easy enough, especially when one is going through basic training and then the rigors of learning Arabic. He says, "I think I just buried

myself in my studies."

Love And Marriage

"We actually met at the gym, as stereotypical as that sounds," says Hicks. "We just connected. He didn't think that I was gay. So I invited him out to dinner." It was August 17, 2001. "We went for pizza. And he wouldn't talk to me. I had this one sided conversation. And he wouldn't eat, so I felt guilty eating and I ate only one piece of pizza."

Gamble says he was really uncomfortable, "This was the first time that I was dealing with a soldier at my own level who was gay, and I was going out with him. I had gone out on dates before but it was always with civilians. I was very nervous about the level of disclosure."

"It finally came down to the point where I said to myself, 'fuck it,' and asked him, 'How many relationships have you been in?'" says Hicks. "He kind of opened up a little bit after that."

Their first kiss came on the following date, walking on the beach on Monterrey Bay at night. Within a month they had fallen into a daily routine beginning with a 4:40 AM workout, their separate classes during the day, and three hours of study and relaxation, mainly in Rob's room until taps at 9:00 PM.

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