



Marine ready to end career to protest policy change

By Michael Hedges
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Marine Corps Maj. Charles B. Johnson, a decorated veteran of Lebanon and the Gulf, refused in January to accept the Pentagon order altering policy on homosexuals. He offered to resign.

Barring what he terms a "miracle," the 17-year Marine, who also holds a Ph.D. in policy analysis, will leave the Corps on July 15 and become a tangible example of the costs of President Clinton's drive to integrate homosexuals into the military.

For the 40-year-old Maj. Johnson, a father of three, it was at once one of the hardest decisions of his life and one of the easiest.

"To change the policy is not only stupid, it is illegal," he said. "It will cause unnecessary deaths in combat of soldiers, sailors and airmen. Those will be capricious deaths that won't accomplish anything, and that makes them illegal.

"This is not a big choice. If you see it as unlawful, you have a duty to the oath you swore to resign."

The decision was conveyed in a one-sentence letter he wrote to the Corps on Jan. 29. "The new interim policy on homosexuals serving in the military consti-

Photo by Andrew Curtis, The Washington Times

a stand: "This is not a big choice," Marine Maj. Charles Johnson says of his resignation in the face of change military's policy on homosexuals. "If you see it as unlawful, you have a duty to the oath you swore to resign."

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tutes an illegal order, I therefore tender my resignation at the government's earliest convenience."

There are no figures on how many officers will resign or take early retirement if the Pentagon policy on homosexuals is changed.

A Pentagon spokesman said the military does not keep records on why officers resign. But interviews with military personnel indicate the number will be high, especially in the Marine Corps.

Former Marine Corps Commandant Gen. Robert H. Barrow, a four-star general who retired as head of the Corps in 1983, said his talks with young officers reveal it to be their gravest concern.

"You have a universal, or very nearly universal, disapproval of homosexuals in military service within the Marine Corps," he said.

Gen. Barrow said he has talked with many young officers who said they wanted to leave the Corps if current policy prohibiting homosexuals is changed.

Asked what he would tell a young officer contemplating leaving the service over the issue, the general said, "I'd say I respect you enormously for having those convictions, but I'd ask you not to do it."

Gen. Barrow said he has told officers: "It is an individual choice. But I reminded them if there was more good in an institution than bad, they should seek to make the good better and turn the bad around."

On a personal level, the former leader of the Corps said, "I think this [lifting the homosexual ban] is one of the cruelest, most ill-advised, despicable acts perpetrated on an institution that has a certain purity to it."

Other officers agreed the issue is a preoccupation inside the Corps.

"It is practically all anyone has talked about in months," one Marine colonel said recently. "People who would have led the Corps, guys who I never thought would leave, are checking civilian opportunities for the first time ever."

Experts inside and outside the military come down on all sides of

the issue, some saying the long-term impacts would be minimal and others saying they would be dramatic.

Interviews with other Marines indicated that Maj. Johnson, while rare in agreeing to speak on the record, represented a deep sentiment inside the officer corps.

In the January issue of the Marine Corps Gazette, a publication of the Marine Corps Association, Maj. Arthur J. Corbett wrote a piece frequently referred to by Marines.

The article was headlined "Disband the Marine Corps." Its subtitle: "It would be better to disband ... than see it dishonored and its virtues and values destroyed."

"The young officers who attempt to explain how homosexuality is an alternate, instead of a deviate lifestyle will quickly lose the respect of their Marines and a bit of their own honor in the process," Maj. Corbett wrote.

In resigning, Maj. Johnson will leave the service without a pension.

He won a meritorious service medal and other commendations as an infantry company commander in Beirut in 1983, and a combat action ribbon in the Gulf.

In February, 1983, then-Capt. Johnson backed down three Israeli tanks that tried to force their way into a sector controlled by Marines.

This week he declined to talk about his experiences except as they had shaped his decision to resign. Leading an infantry company, along with policy analysis, led him to his assessment of the consequences of introducing homosexuals into combat units, he said.

"It has been proven in history that a battle is a function of a small unit, no bigger than a squad of about 13 men. The goals in battle are vicious and the stakes of success or failure are the ultimate stakes."

In the squad, said Maj. Johnson, faith in one another and in one's immediate superiors is everything.

"When you breach that faith, you have broken the cohesion of the unit and degraded its effectiveness. When the small unit is less effective, more casualties, including deaths, result," he said.

He said introducing homosexuals into combat squads would lessen group cohesion.



Charles B. Johnson, a Marine captain in 1983, explains how he used his service pistol against Israeli tanks invading a U.S.-controlled area in Beirut. UPI

"This is one of the few things I can think of that would strike at the core of faith within the infantry squad. To deny that is to deny human nature."

Maj. Johnson said his studies in policy analysis at Northwestern University and his work in planning and research in the Marine Corps convince him it is possible to predict the long-term consequences of changing the military's policy on homosexuals in the military.

"The effects will be systemic. ... It will destroy the Corps by our stan-

dards," said the Neenah, Wis., native. Asked about his plans, he said: "I'd rather not go into that. I'm working on it, but it is a strange situation. You are hoping in a lot of different directions, and you can't have your heart going in different directions."

He had hoped once only for a career of a Marine Corps officer. He still hopes for an "incredible miracle" in which Congress votes to keep the policy unchanged.

"If they did that, I'd be on my knees asking to retract my resignation," he said.

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the ban. They particularly objected to any policy that says homosexuality is incompatible with the military.

"That's totally unacceptable," said Tim McFeeley, executive director of the Human Rights Campaign Fund. "That just has to go."

"And we believe that people who conduct themselves according to the rules should not be dismissed because they're gay, no matter how people find out that they're gay," he said.

Rep. Barney Frank, Massachusetts Democrat, called a news conference yesterday and sent the same message to the president.

"The statement that homosexuality is incompatible with military service seems to me, on the evidence of some of the military leaders themselves, incompatible with the truth," Mr. Frank said.

"People don't expect to be satisfied, but there are degrees of dissatisfaction."

On the other side of the issue, some steadfast proponents of keeping the ban are starting to reassess their position after seeing the draft policy's language.

They signaled they may be willing to accept a compromise that retains the "incompatible" proviso and forces homosexual personnel to stay in the closet.

"I'm cautiously optimistic," Rep. Robert K. Dornan, California Republican and one of the House's strongest backers of an outright ban, said in a statement.

"The primary consideration is that any change in policy can be properly implemented and that there are no legal loopholes through which clever lawyers could thwart the order's intent of preventing homosexuals from disrupting the good order, morale and discipline of military units."

The key member of Congress in this debate, Sen. Sam Nunn, is on record as supporting some type of "don't ask, don't tell" solution to the highly emotional debate.

Sen. Dan Coats, the Indiana Republican leading the GOP drive in

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Experience

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- *"Why We Serve: A 5-Year Follow-up Study of Professional Identity of Junior Officers"*, Commandant of the Marine Corps Approved Research. Marine Corps University (1991)
- *"Society's Occupationalism and its Effect on the Professional Development of Junior Marine Officers"* Northwestern University Dissertation (1986)
- *"School and Class Size Implication for Private Education"* ERIC Publication (1985)

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- Research Fellow, Inter-University Seminar on Armed Forces and Society (1989-1994)

Awards: 1993 Defense Meritorious Service Medal, 1983 Meritorious Service Medal, 1986 Colonel Leo A. Codd Memorial Award for college teaching, St Mary's Athletic Hall of Fame and Alumni Achievement Award, 1991 Combat Action Ribbon, Navy Commendation Medal, Navy Achievement Medal, 1983 Second Marine Division Retired Officers Award for Valor.

Military Service: Company Commander of five Marine Corps Companies - 175 to 900 personnel, respectively; participated in U.S. operations in Beirut, Lebanon (1982-1983), Panama (1987), and Desert Shield & Desert Storm (1991-1992); completed two career level PME Schools/Colleges and held a variety of command, staff, instructor and policy planning positions.

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