

Military should exclude homosexuals

By WILLIAM J. GREGOR

American newspapers have been prattling about the exclusion of homosexuals from military service. The articles drip with indignation and conveniently vilify military leaders as bigots, hypocrites, or just plain dolts. At the risk of also being stereotyped, I would like to explain some of the considerations that shape recruiting policies and why excluding homosexuals is proper.

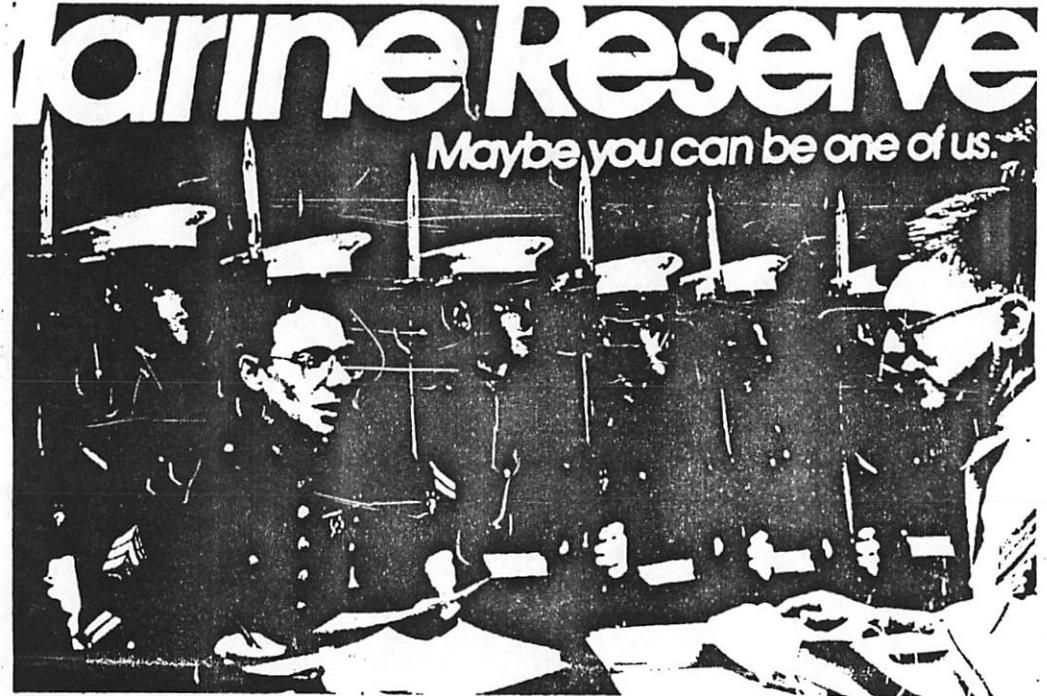
The Constitution grants the federal government broad and exclusive powers to raise and regulate armed forces. Those forces are raised to meet the needs of the state, not the ambitions or desires of individuals. The policy excluding homosexuals from the military is only one element of the general policy governing inductions and discharges and cannot be understood properly outside that context.

Because national military requirements and the means of raising the force change, the criteria for induction changes, depending on the manpower needs. Ideally, the military would pick only persons possessing adequate skills and suited for military life, especially the loss of personal autonomy. Unfortunately, it is easier to judge individual skills than to judge an individual's ability to adapt. Nevertheless, despite the difficulties and the approximate nature of the criteria, the Army must judge its recruits. In so doing, we choose to err on the safe side, excluding groups whose members have poor prospects for success, rather than worry about the infrequent individual who might have done well. This is proper because war is a collective enterprise and success in achieved by military groups, not individuals.

In this context, the recruitment of homosexuals is extremely unattractive. Persons who define themselves as homosexual have committed or desire to commit homosexual acts. Acts of sodomy are not only contrary to military law, but also are considered repugnant by a large portion of society. As a rule we do not induct individuals prone to violate military law or habituated to behavior contrary to military norms.

What this means in practical terms is that many, not all, homosexuals who join find basic training and the loss of personal privacy and autonomy extremely stressful. Many, not all, subsequently report themselves to their commanders and are administratively discharged. If homosexuality were not grounds for a discharge, then these individuals would be compelled to continue, and the commander would have to wait for an incident before taking action. This does not mean that a homosexual will sexually assault a comrade, but like others who have difficulty adapting he may become despondent or desperate and become a hazard to himself or his unit. It is as false to say no homosexuals have adjustment problems as it is to say all do. Nevertheless, the discharge rule must be uniform.

Homosexual behavior is also likely to cause disease and injury. Homosexuals not only have a high probability of contracting AIDS and hepatitis, but also may suffer injury to their bowels. Civilian soci-



ety dismisses this as a private concern. However, in the military, the commander, not the soldier, is responsible for ensuring the health and welfare of his unit. He is obligated to take steps to prevent disease and injury. Of particular concern is the integrity of the blood supply. Survival on the battlefield often depends on direct transfusions.

The armed forces have led the way in mandatory HIV testing. In six years of testing the Army has only 429 positives and the rate of HIV conversions continues to decline. This data suggests that the number of active homosexuals in the military is extremely small, but it does not mean surveillance is unnecessary. The HIV test cannot detect recent infection. Consequently, at the very least, homosexual soldiers would have to be identified and monitored, but serious concerns would still remain. The Army would be negligent in its duty to protect its soldiers if it regarded homosexuality as a private matter.

Last there is the matter of enforcing military regulations governing sexual conduct and fraternization. The relationships between soldiers is governed by Army regulation, not personal preference. The homosexual discharge policy is based on the Carter administration's position that homosexuals found in the military committing homosexual acts ought not be stigmatized by less than honorable discharge. Commanders are restricted to awarding only honorable discharges except in aggravating circumstances. However, those now advocating the recruitment of homosexuals urge instead dropping the exclusion and substituting more vigilant enforce-

ment of fraternization policies. I have no qualms about stern prosecution, but I don't see how this can be effective if the inclination to sodomy is innate, nor do I really believe Americans want to increase the number of military trials for sex offenses.

The army is shrinking. By 1995, over 200,000 men and women will be discharged. There is no operational reason to open the military to new groups, especially a group ill-suited for general service. Nor is it appropriate to consider the military service a federal employment opportunity, "a job." To call this policy an offense to human dignity is rubbish. In the United States, there is no opprobrium attached to exclusion from military service and exclusion has never been considered a deprivation of liberty.

The public is misguided if it believes soldiers can maintain privacy and personal autonomy. A citizen who wants to enjoy privacy ought to avoid military service. Civic society may choose to ignore homosexual behavior; the armed forces cannot. A soldier's conduct is often a threat to the success of his unit or the survival of his comrades. Absent pressing manpower needs, the difficulties of inducting homosexuals far outweigh any imagined benefit. The policy is necessary and proper.

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