

The New York Times

August 12, 2012

Woman Becomes First Openly Gay General

By **MATTHEW L. WALD**

WASHINGTON — An Army officer being promoted to brigadier general openly acknowledged her homosexuality on Friday by having her wife pin her star to her uniform, thus becoming the first openly gay officer of flag rank in the United States military.

The officer, Brig. Gen. Tammy S. Smith, 49, a 26-year veteran of the Army, was promoted in a ceremony at the women's memorial at Arlington National Cemetery. The star was affixed by Tracey Hepner, who was a co-founder last year of the Military Partners and Families Coalition, which “provides support, resources, education and advocacy for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender military partners and their families,” according to its Web site.

The couple married in March 2011 in the District of Columbia.

The military dropped its “don't ask, don't tell” policy for gay service members on Sept. 20, 2011, after a change in federal law.

The Army said that General Smith was not available for an interview on Sunday. However, she said in a statement that the Defense Department had made sexual orientation a private matter, but that “participating with family in traditional ceremonies such as the promotion is both common and expected of a leader.”

Sue Fulton, a spokeswoman for OutServe, a two-year-old organization of lesbians and gay men in the military, said Sunday that it was “highly unlikely” that General Smith was the only gay officer of her rank. She called General Smith's public acknowledgment significant.

“I would say that it's important to recognize ‘the first,’ because then the next person doesn't have to be first,” said Ms. Fulton, a 1980 West Point graduate. “Once we get over each ‘first,’ each hurdle of ‘Well, that's never been done before,’ it makes it a nonissue going forward.”

Ms. Fulton, who was honorably discharged as a captain in 1986, said she left the Army because of the strains of maintaining a secret lesbian relationship. She called the promotion ceremony in which General Smith acknowledged being gay part of the best in Army tradition. Ms. Fulton quoted a speech last September in which the Army chief of staff, Gen. Ray Odierno, said that “the strength of our Army is our soldiers; the strength of our soldiers is our families.”

Ms. Fulton said she had no doubt that General Smith's superiors knew of her sexual orientation when they selected her for promotion.

As a colonel, General Smith was deployed in Afghanistan from December 2010 to October 2011 as the chief of Army Reserve Affairs. She currently serves in Washington as the deputy chief of the Army Reserve.