

Appendix A

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Discharged Gay Colonel Pins Hopes on Clinton's Promise By Lou Cannon, Washington Post Staff Writer

Former Army colonel Margarethe Cammermeyer is awaiting the inauguration of President-elect Clinton in confidence that he "absolutely" will carry out his promise to end the ban against homosexuals in the military.

Cammermeyer, who served 27 years in uniform and won the Bronze Star in Vietnam, has been fighting a different kind of battle since she was discharged six months ago for acknowledging during a 1989 security-clearance interview that she is a lesbian.

During his campaign, Clinton saluted her at a televised town meeting and told her that he would end the ban against homosexuals in the military if elected.

Ever since, Cammermeyer has been advising homosexuals in uniform to hide their sexual orientation from their superiors until the regulation is changed. Recently, she said, a young soldier who thought that it "might make a difference if one more person came out" told her that "everybody in my battalion knows that I'm gay" and said he wanted to tell his commander.

"Don't tell the battalion commander because he will be forced to take action just because the regulation exists," Cammermeyer said she advised him. "The fact that your buddies know will make it easier when the regulation changes."

The Norwegian-born Cammermeyer, 50, is the mother of four boys, all of whom are supporting her efforts to win reinstatement in the National Guard in Washington state, where she was a highly commended chief nurse. She was divorced in 1980 from her husband, an Army tank commander whom she had met in Germany. She said she knew that she was uncomfortable in the 16-year marriage but did not realize until years afterward that she was a lesbian.

Cammermeyer said she is convinced that ending the ban on homosexuals will make the military a more honest institution in which "good soldiers" will be free of "witch hunts" that have nothing to do with military performance. "The military has nothing to fear from how gays will perform in the foxholes," she said. "They have been there all along."

She believes that opposition to homosexuals' service is based on confusion between sexual orientation and "inappropriate conduct" that could be controlled even after the ban is lifted. But she said the absoluteness of the current regulation declaring that "homosexuality is incompatible with military service" forces homosexuals to lead a double life.

In the military, homosexuals "are under continuous threat of the loss of a job, of having to play a role, of not saying anything," she said. "If you're ever thinking of who will stand up under stress, it's probably going to be gays and lesbians because they have lived through stress in ways that straight persons probably wouldn't have any idea."

Cammermeyer's military credentials are not in question.

She enlisted in the Army nursing corps in 1961, volunteered to serve in Vietnam and was awarded the Bronze Star for her care of soldiers seriously wounded in the bloody 1968 Tet offensive.

She was forced to leave the service a year later after she became pregnant with her first son because of Army regulations that banned women with dependent children. But she reenlisted in the Army reserve in 1972 after regulations were changed.

In 1985, she was chosen from 34,000 candidates as the Veterans Administration Nurse of the Year. The board that recommended her discharge praised her "superb leadership" and declared her "a great asset to the military." It also recommended that her case be reconsidered if the regulation is changed.

Cammermeyer, interviewed in her modest, two-story home in a quiet suburb of Seattle, said she never intended to become a public symbol of the struggle of homosexuals to attain equality in the military.

This chapter in her life started when she applied in 1989 to attend the Army War College, wanting to strengthen her candidacy to become chief nurse of the entire National Guard. Because admission required a top-security clearance, she was asked if she were homosexual and told the truth.

"I was not then aware of the specifics of the regulation and didn't realize that just saying I was a lesbian was grounds for discharge," she said. "But I refused to retire when that was proposed to me. I was absolutely adamant that I was not going to hide or deny my existence."

Cammermeyer, who has sued for reinstatement, said she was unprepared for the attention her case would receive. Family and friends rallied to her support. She received more than 500 letters, the vast majority of them favorable, she said. But there have been bad moments, the worst coming when a woman yelled at her after a speech, "I wished you had died in Vietnam!"

Cammermeyer was born in Oslo in 1942 during the Nazi occupation. When she was a baby, according to a family story, her mother hid guns in Margarethe's carriage and delivered them to resistance fighters.

The Cammermeyers emigrated to Washington, D.C., after World War II, and her father, Jan, became a physician for the National Institutes of Health. He is now retired and lives in Bethesda; her mother is deceased. Cammermeyer also has two brothers and seven nieces or nephews living in the Washington area.

Cammermeyer has lost some military benefits because she refused to retire, but she retained her civilian job as head of the sleep and seizure disorder clinic at the veterans hospital in Tacoma, Wash. If Clinton does away with the ban, she plans to reenter the service "to show by example" that things have changed.

"I want to go back in the military," she said. "I've had a number of people tell me that their children are angry by what happened to me and don't want to go into the military because of this, and I don't want this to happen.

"Maybe if I go back in, I can contribute to changing the stereotypes about gays and lesbians Maybe when I tell them my own kids have a normal heterosexual life, it will take some of their fear away.

"Maybe it will make them stronger and tell him that they don't have to use prejudice to show how macho they are."

GRAPHIC: PHOTO, FORMER ARMY COLONEL MARGARETHE CAMMERMEYER "ABSOLUTELY" FEELS CLINTON WILL END BAN AGAINST HOMOSEXUALS IN THE MILITARY AND ALLOW HER TO RESUME HER CAREER. MIKE LUTZKY FOR TWP