



UNHEARD VOICES

Stories of LGBT History



Kendall Bailey and “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”

Introduction to the Interview (Running Time: 2:01)

Kendall Bailey joined the U-S Marine Corps in 2001. Five years later he was a sergeant assigned to a recruiting office in Virginia and was considering becoming career military.

At StoryCorps, Kendall told his friend, Don Davis, how because of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell those plans changed.

Questions to Discuss with Students Following the Interview

- Kendall says that when the staff sergeant looked at his text messages, the atmosphere immediately changed. What would you have done in Kendall’s situation? What do you think motivated Kendall to come out to his commanding officer? What were the potential risks and benefits of that decision?
- When Kendall came out, the sergeant major said that it was “a phase” and that Kendall needed counseling. Do you think sexual orientation is something that’s changeable in a person? Why or why not?
- What do you think it felt like for Kendall to be isolated and then discharged with such swiftness and finality? Have you ever been excluded from something that was important to you? How did the experience affect you?
- After his discharge, Kendall says his life changed dramatically because he was able to be open about his relationship with his boyfriend. What toll do you think it takes on a person to hide an aspect of their identity from the world?
- Even though Kendall could finally be open after his discharge, he hid his sexual orientation from his family for a while and pretended to still be in the military. Why is it particularly difficult for some LGBT people to come out to their families? In what ways is the process of coming out a never-ending one?
- Looking back, Kendall says that his feelings toward the military haven’t changed and he would go back if he could. Does this surprise you? Why or why not? How is it possible to maintain respect for an institution that doesn’t accept you?
- How do you think Kendall must have felt when the law was changed in 2011 lifting the ban on LGBT service members? If you were Kendall, would you reenlist? Why or why not?

Suggested Activities and Assignments for Extended Learning

- Ask students if they have ever been excluded from a group that was important to them. Have them create a piece of artwork, poetry, reflective writing, etc., that explores how that experience impacted them. Have volunteers share their reflections. Discuss how their personal experiences with exclusion relate to Kendall Bailey’s experience with the military.

- Assign students to investigate the story of an LGBT service member who came out and/or fought against the military's ban on LGBT people. Have students create a portrait or collage of their subject that includes newspaper headlines, images, and personal reflections about what they have learned. Some possible subjects include Colonel Margarethe Cammermeyer, Petty Officer Keith Meinhold, Navy Lieutenant Zoe Dunning and Army Reserve First Lieutenant Steve May (also a member of the AZ State House of Representatives).
- Ask for student volunteers to conduct an interview with a current or former service member who they personally know. Work with students to develop interview questions that explore the subject's experiences with LGBT service members and their views on the military's former ban, the current law and the impact of open service on unit cohesion. Have students share portions of their interview (in written form or audio/video excerpts) and discuss the varied perspectives from members of the local community. If possible, invite one or more of the interview subjects into your classroom to discuss their views directly with students.
- Until the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," the military was the only federal job in which you could get fired due to your sexual orientation. Ask students to look into whether or not employment protections exist for LGBT people in their state or city. Have them create a graph illustrating which states or major cities currently have employment non-discrimination acts or ENDAs (a national ENDA has never been passed). Debate the pros and cons of your state law and have students write letters to their government representatives expressing the reasons they support or oppose the law.
- Have students research and write a report on past efforts to integrate African Americans and/or women into the armed forces. After students share their findings, create a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting the experiences of Black, female and LGBT Americans with regard to efforts to gain acceptance within the military.
- Women and people of color were discharged disproportionately under "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." Have students create a chart or graph illustrating the discharge rate for women versus men and people of color versus white people. Conduct a discussion about why these groups may have been targeted more frequently under the military's ban.
- In response to the military's ban on gay and lesbian service members, many schools across the country protested by prohibiting the military from recruiting on campus. Have students research this practice and prepare for a debate on the issue. Assign half the class to take a stance supporting a school's right to deny access to recruiters if they object to certain military policies, and the other half to argue against a school's right to do so. (Alternatively or in addition, have students debate the No Child Left Behind Act's provision that requires high schools to turn over private information on students to military recruiters.)
- Currently more than 25 countries have opened military service to LGBT people. Create a class map illustrating which countries have done so. Divide the class into small groups and assign each group one of the countries. Have them find two to three articles exploring the response and effects of LGBT inclusion in their assigned country, and discuss worldwide trends as a class.



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Student Handout



Kendall Bailey

Kendall Bailey joined the Marine Corps in 2001 and quickly moved up the ranks, becoming a sergeant within his first five years of service. “I thought that I could make a career out of it,” reflects Kendall. “I could do 20 years, I could do 30 years, I could retire.” But all of that changed when a staff sergeant scrolled through Kendall’s cell phone and found messages he had sent to his boyfriend. Within a couple of months, Kendall was discharged. “It’s a hard thing to take,” says Kendall, “when you want to do something that badly, you’ve put five years of blood, sweat and tears into it and then all of a sudden it’s not really an option for you anymore.”

In 2006 Kendall joined a long line of soldiers in the U.S. who were told that they were unfit to serve their country because of who they love. As far back as 1778 General George Washington approved the dishonorable discharge of a lieutenant caught in a romantic encounter with another man. For the next 200 years the military enforced a strict ban on homosexual behavior and gay and lesbian people in the armed forces. It wasn't until the civil rights era of the 1960s and 1970s that LGBT people began to more forcefully demand equal rights and “gays in the military” emerged as a hot button political issue.

In 1991 then-presidential candidate Bill Clinton vowed to end the military's ban on gay and lesbian service members if he were elected. The brutal murder in 1992 of Seaman Allen Schindler—beaten to death by fellow sailors because he was gay—forced the issue to the forefront. Ultimately, however, Clinton's efforts to lift the prohibition were blocked by military and Congressional leaders, and a compromise was reached in 1993 that came to be known as “Don't Ask, Don't Tell” (DADT).

The policy recognized for the first time that gay and lesbian people can and do serve honorably, but prohibited service members from being open about their sexual orientation. In exchange for a “zone of privacy” in which military personnel would not be questioned about their sexuality or unfairly investigated, LGBT people were required to keep their identities a secret.

From the outset, confusion and resentment of the new policy led to frequent harassment and illegal investigations. A memo from the Navy, for example, instructed psychologists and healthcare providers to turn in gay service members who requested counseling; and an Air Force Judge Advocate General instructed investigators to question the parents, siblings, close friends and roommates of those suspected to be gay.

Throughout the years of DADT, the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network (SLDN) recorded numerous disturbing incidents. In Hawaii, a Senior Petty Officer was outed to his command when a Navy investigator improperly obtained information from his AOL user profile. In South Korea an enlisted woman was

threatened with criminal charges for being a lesbian after reporting a sexual assault. And in Maryland, an Airman was questioned about his sexual orientation and forced to move off-base when he reported ongoing harassment, including notes that read, “Die fag” and “You can’t hide, fag.”

The rising tide of harassment under DADT culminated in the brutal murder of Private First Class Barry Winchell in 1999 at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. After four months of anti-gay taunts and intimidation – which commanders knew about and ignored – Winchell was beaten to death with a baseball bat in his sleep. As a result of this tragedy, some military leaders began to publicly admit that anti-gay harassment was a problem that needed to be addressed.

A number of brave soldiers stood up for their rights and helped to change public opinion during this period. Colonel Margarethe Cammermeyer, a Vietnam veteran, successfully challenged her discharge from the Army National Guard after a security clearance investigation revealed that she was a lesbian. And Petty Officer Keith Meinhold—who came out on ABC World News—became the first openly gay man returned to active duty after he fought the military’s ban. Both soldiers received support from their colleagues and served openly until they retired.

Kendall Bailey may have found the courage to come out to his commanding officer due in part to the achievements of people like Cammermeyer and Meinhold. But after writing a letter stating that he was gay and unable to serve under DADT, he was told to seek counseling and an investigation was launched. “I was in limbo for about a month,” explains Kendall. “They sent me home. I couldn’t show up for work [or] do anything...They basically segregated [me] from the rest of the unit. It was demeaning...the way they handled it.”

In order to avoid negative media, Kendall was quietly given an honorable discharge in 2006 with the understanding that he would not speak to the press. “My life changed dramatically when I got out [of the military],” he recalls. I was able to...hang out with my boyfriend...and hold hands walking down the street. It was a big change.”

Kendall was one of over 13,000 service members discharged under DADT between 1993 and 2010. As news of harassment and high levels of dismissal became more widely reported, public support for the law declined. Studies revealed that the U.S. government had spent over \$300 million to enforce the discriminatory policy while more than 25 countries opened military service to LGBT people with no unfavorable effects.

In 2008 Barack Obama promised to end DADT as part of his presidential campaign. A 2009 article in Joint Force Quarterly concluded that “there is no scientific evidence to support the claim that unit cohesion will be negatively affected if homosexuals serve openly.” By 2010, a CNN poll showed that 72 percent of Americans supported a repeal of the law.

On December 22, 2010, President Obama made good on his campaign promise and signed a new law that allows gay and lesbian people to serve openly for the first time (though transgender people are not included in this law). Encouraging those kicked out under the old law to reenlist, the president stated, “We are a nation that welcomes the service of every patriot...a nation that believes that all men and women are created equal.”

A year before the new law was signed, 26 year-old Kendall reflected on his experiences. “My relationship and my feelings toward the military really didn’t change. Obviously I’m very disappointed that I can’t serve...If I could go back I would.” Today Kendall has that option.