

## **Statement of Michael Almy**

Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Senator McCain, senators.

My name is Mike Almy, I served in the United States Air Force for thirteen years, where I attained the rank of major, before I was discharged under "Don't Ask, Don't Tell". I am honored to be here today to share my story with you.

I come from a family with a rich history of military service. My father is a West Point graduate, taught chemistry at the Air Force Academy, flew helicopters in Vietnam, and ultimately retired as a senior officer from the Air Force. One of my uncles retired as a Master Gunnery Sergeant from the Marine Corps, with service in World War II, Korea and Vietnam. Another uncle retired from the Army, with service in Korea.

My family's military service inspired me to follow suit. When I was growing up I didn't really know what civilians did -- I just knew I would follow in my father's footsteps and become a military officer. I joined Air Force ROTC in 1988, and earned a scholarship through ROTC. In 1991, I went through Army Airborne training at Fort Benning where I earned my jump wings. In 1992, I graduated from ROTC in the top 10% of all graduates nationwide. In 1993, I went on active duty, just as "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was becoming a law, and was stationed in Mississippi. I then had assignments to Texas, Illinois and Oklahoma, where I was named the officer of the year for my unit of nearly 1,000 people. Next, I was one of six officers selected from the entire Air force to attend Professional Military Education at Quantico, Virginia. Following

this I was stationed in Germany for four years, where I led the communications directorate for an air control squadron.

During my career I deployed to the Middle East four times in support of our efforts in Iraq. In my last position in the Air Force I led a team of nearly 200 men and women who's mission was to operate and maintain the systems used to control the air space over Iraq. On this deployment we came under daily mortar attacks, one of which struck one of my Airmen and also caused significant damage to our equipment. Towards the end of this deployment to Iraq, I was named one of the top officers in my career field for the entire Air Force.

During my time in Iraq, the Air Force restricted access to all private email accounts. As such, we were authorized to use our work email accounts for personal or morale purposes. Shortly after I left Iraq and had returned to Germany, someone in the unit that replaced mine did a routine search of our computer files for continuity materials and found my personal emails, written from a combat zone to family and friends, including a person I had dated. Some of these emails were forwarded to my commander. In Iraq, during the height of the insurgency, someone in the Air Force ordered a search of my private emails solely to determine if I had violated "Don't Ask, Don't Tell", and to gather whatever evidence could be used against me.

After my unit had been back in Germany for about six weeks, my commander called me into his office and demanded I give him an explanation of the emails. I refused to discuss them because I considered them personal and private. I told him I

would not make a statement until I had first consulted with a lawyer. I was relieved of my duties, leading nearly 200 Airmen, my security clearance was suspended and part of my pay was terminated. Even as my commander was relieving me of my duties, he assured me this was in no way a reflection of my performance or my abilities as an officer.

After that day, I was in limbo for 16 months. I was still in the Air Force, but I was given a meaningless make-work job, while the process ground slowly forward. In my discharge proceeding, several of my former troops and one of the squadron commanders I worked for on the base wrote letters urging that I be retained. They expressed the greatest respect for me as an officer, wanted me back on the job as their leader and were stunned at how the Air Force was treating me.

Ultimately, after 16 months, I was discharged from the Air Force. The severance pay I received from the Air Force was half what it would have been if I had been separated for any other reason. As a final insult on my last day of active duty I was given a police escort off the base, as if I were a common criminal or a threat to national security.

“Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” failed me, despite the fact that I upheld my end of this law by never disclosing my private life. Never once in my 13-year career did I make a statement to the military that violated “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”, despite pressure from my commander to do so.

The law also failed the Air Force. There was a considerable disruption to my squadron's unit cohesion after I was fired and replaced by a far more junior officer, with less training and experience. This had a negative effect on morale and unit cohesion and the mission suffered as a result. Approximately a year after I was relieved of my duties, my Wing Commander recommended I be promoted to Lieutenant Colonel, even though the Air Force was actively pursuing a discharge for me.

Being relieved from my duties as a 13-year career officer, enduring a 16-month administrative proceeding and finally being discharged, was devastating to me. I felt betrayed by my country and treated as a second class citizen, after I had repeatedly risked my life in its defense on foreign soil. I understood the constraints of living under DADT, and never imagined I would become a statistic, since I abided by its basic premise, of never disclosing any aspect of my private life.

My DD-214 discharge paper from the military categorizes the reason for my separation as "homosexual admission". I refused to sign this form as I never once acknowledged anything to the military. Any time I have applied for a federal job, potential employers now see this on my military record. I am now considered unfit for military service, and yet our nation has actively recruited convicted felons, drug abusers and high school dropouts. As a result of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" and how the Air Force discharged me, I am now forced to reveal aspects of my private life to complete strangers, or to lie about why I am no longer in the military.

I only recently decided to tell my story as an example of a career of service to this country cut short by this law. Multiply my story by more than 14,000 and you begin to understand the magnitude of this discrimination. Since I've gone public with my story I've received numerous emails thanking me for giving a voice to those who have none on this issue. Some of these service members are currently serving in harm's way.

My greatest desire now is to return to active duty as an officer and leader in the United States Air Force, protecting the freedoms of a nation that I love; freedoms that I myself was not allowed to enjoy while serving in the military. This is my calling in life, please allow that to happen.

Thank you.