

AMERICAN VETERANS FOR EQUAL RIGHTS NEW YORK



AMERICAN VETERANS FOR EQUAL RIGHTS

718 849-5665 averny.tripod.com POB 150160, Kew Gardens, NY 11415 gltvetsnyc@yahoo.com

May 5, 2008

The Council of the City of New York Committee on Veterans
Re: Resolution 2007-1170
to Rescind the current "Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Don't Pursue" policy

Testimony by Elmer Lokkins
A Gay WWII Veteran
Member, American Veterans For Equal Rights New York

I am SGT Elmer Lokkins, a World War II veteran. I am a gay man who is proud to have served my country in the South Pacific during World War Two. Having participated in the D-day Invasion of Linguyen Gulf in the Philippines, I can attest that bullets and mortar shells do not discriminate. Being gay made no difference during firefights. I was fired upon and fought back, simple as that. And I have survived to tell the tale.

I urge the New York City Council Committee on Veterans to pass the resolution which would tell the President and Congress to repeal the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy so that gay patriotic American may serve openly and in Pride.

I thank the Chairman of the Committee, Council Member Monserrate, for his leadership in co-sponsoring this resolution.

AMERICAN VETERANS FOR EQUAL RIGHTS NEW YORK



AMERICAN VETERANS FOR EQUAL RIGHTS

718 849-5665 averny.tripod.com POB 150160, Kew Gardens, NY 11415 gltvetsnyc@yahoo.com

May 5, 2008

The Council of the City of New York Committee on Veterans

Re: Resolution 2007-1170

to Rescind the current "Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Don't Pursue" policy

Testimony by Denny Meyer

President, American Veterans For Equal Rights New York

I would like to tell the Committee about a gay World War II Veteran, Sgt. Elmer Lokkins, and his life partner Gus Archilla. These boys have been together for sixty three years.

Elmer served in the US Army, in I Corps, in the South Pacific Campaign. As "I Corps" island hopped through New Guinea, Goodenough, and Hollandia, he volunteered to be in the forward echelon of the Invasion of the Linguyen Gulf, Luzon, in the Philippines. On January 9th, 1945 he came ashore on an LST, at General Swift's side, under heavy mortar fire. As a veteran of the Normandy Invasion once told me, "The enemy shells and bullets didn't discriminate between gay and straight American soldiers." For his WWII service, Sgt Elmer Lokkins was awarded a Distinguished Unit Badge, an Asiatic Pacific Theater Ribbon with Two Bronze Battle Stars, a Philippine Liberation Ribbon with One Bronze Battle Star, and a Good Conduct Medal, among others.

As WWII drew to a close and the United Nations met for the first time in San Francisco, Elmer Lokkens journeyed home from battle and came to New York. What followed is a classic New York City love story. On Sunday September 16th, 1945, the day that the Japanese garrison in Hong Kong surrendered to the Allied Forces, Gus Archilla was headed home from a music lesson in Carnegie Hall when he and Elmer first met eyes at Columbus Circle where Elmer had been listening to soapbox speakers at the southwest corner of Central Park. They have been together, living in uptown Manhattan, ever since! They married, in Canada, in 2003.

If Sgt. Elmer Lokkins, a decorated member of America's Greatest Generation, had been discovered to be gay in 1945, he would have been discharged in disgrace from America's armed forces. Today in 2008, more that sixty years later, America's young patriotic gay and lesbian volunteers serving courageously in Iraq and Afghanistan face the same situation; having to hide who they are, serving in silence.

The time is long past for change and progress so that American patriotic volunteers may serve our nation in pride without discrimination, without having to hide whom they happen to love. The committee is urged to pass the resolution asking Congress and the President to Rescind the current "Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Don't Pursue" policy.