

## **Don't interject sexuality**

**Repealing 'don't ask, don't tell' could hurt combat unit cohesion.**

**By Mike Coffman**

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My combat experience during the Persian Gulf War makes me very reluctant to change the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy.

In 1990, I was a captain in the U.S. Marine Corps assigned as the executive officer for a light armored infantry company. In late December, the company was spread out along the Saudi-Kuwaiti border in anticipation of a ground war with the Iraqi army. Military analysts had estimated that a ground war with the Iraqi army could cost up to 30,000 lives among coalition forces. Because the Marines in our unit knew that light armored infantry, by doctrine, would most likely be the "first in," we fully anticipated taking a disproportionate share of those casualties relative to our numbers.

The stress of anticipating combat was unnerving. We were combat-ready 24 hours a day, seven days a week. At night we took turns sleeping in foxholes, but we never really rested. Until after the main ground attack was complete, we never left the front lines.

The determination to accomplish the mission, along with the will to survive, welded the unit into an effective ground combat team: An interdependent bond was formed between each and every Marine in the unit.

That strong interdependent bond held our ground combat team together and made us into an effective fighting unit. The bond was founded upon a mutual trust: Although each Marine could be singled out for a task that could put his life at risk, Marines would always have the confidence that the orders given to them on the battlefield were never tainted by any emotional bias.

U.S. Marine Corps ground combat teams are composed of men only. Interjecting sexuality into a ground combat team potentially creates an emotional divide between Marines that undermines confidence and prevents that interdependent bond from forming, ultimately compromising the combat effectiveness of the unit.

We need a very deliberative and reasoned approach before considering a repeal of "don't ask, don't tell," a proven policy that has served the military and the nation well since 1993.

*Rep. Mike Coffman, R-Colo., is a member of the House Armed Services Committee. He is the only member of Congress to have served in both the Persian Gulf War and the Iraq war.*