

**Gays in the Military: How America Thanked Me**  
Photographs and Interviews by Vincent Cianni

PROPOSAL

Prompted by a November 2009 interview of Pvt. Nathanael Bodon's mother, who described her son's discharge from the Army while serving in Iraq as an 'outing' by a fellow soldier in his platoon, I was moved to explore how many lives have been affected as a result of homophobia in the military and "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT), implemented in 1993 during the Clinton administration. Although DADT has been repealed, there have been considerable effects from the ban on gays in the military over the years. The real issues, as organizations such as the Human Rights Commission state, follow a long history of human rights abuses that gay and lesbian people have experienced. Harassment and discrimination based on sexual preference resulted in lost careers and personal lives. In many cases, these men and women - highly skilled, well educated, patriotic, courageous and productive - attained high rank, received numerous medals and held top-level jobs that were essential to the military. And yet, as one former IT Navy Specialist stated, certain officials from the top down continued to pander to prejudice that was still rampant in the armed forces "to get rid of the dead wood in the military."

Hundreds of stories exist. Thousands have gone untold. DADT (and historically the ban against homosexuals) failed to protect the human rights of a significant portion of the military and at times penalized and prohibited them from receiving an honorable discharge to retain benefits accorded them for serving their country, sometimes under extreme conditions of a combat zone. There was no recourse; their devotion to country went unnoticed and jobs were lost due to unjust policies. Many came from disadvantaged backgrounds and many experienced the same medical, physical and psychological effects of serving during wartime.

I have been interviewing and photographing an array of gay service members, recording experiences of discrimination and recounting the effects that the ban had on their career in the armed forces and their life afterwards. I have amassed a list of over 100 subjects through social networking sites, word of mouth and referrals from agencies providing legal assistance to gay military personnel. They include people from varied socio-economic, ethnic and racial backgrounds, from all ranks in the military.

Beginning May 2010, I traveled the coasts of the United States over a ten-week period recording oral histories and making portraits of 50 veterans and service members. The interviews were conducted on audio equipment and the photographs were made with a medium format camera using black-and-white film. My intentions are to use the funds from the Puffin Foundation to help defray costs of travel during June 2011 to continue photographing the subjects, specifically those around the Washington, D.C./Virginia/West Virginia and Ohio corridor. I will apply to other granting institutions to cover the costs of travel to other areas of the country - the central plains, south and southwest.

My intention is to print the photographs in three editions of 100 images and edit the audio interviews to develop the oral histories and photographs into a multi-media exhibition. One set of interviews and photographs will be archived at the Rare Book, Manuscript and Special Collections Library at Duke University, where my documentary work is housed in a study collection. I will also place one set in a collection focusing on LGBT history and culture, i.e. The

New York Public Library, The Hormel Collection at the San Francisco Public Library. The third portfolio would remain with me and used to exhibit in public and private venues with the recorded voices.

The exhibition of the work is slated for March 2012 and/or 2013 and will focus on individual stories of service members who represent thousands of men and women who have suffered from – or have risen above - the injustices of the ban on homosexuality in the military. Imagine entering a large darkened empty space with 100 individual overhead speakers emitting the edited interviews and 100 portraits on dimly lit walls around the periphery of the room. The ambient sound would initially be heard as a hushed dissonance of voices symbolizing the mandatory invisibility and secrecy that restrictive policies have placed upon gay men and women. When one walks under each speaker, individual voices become distinguishable and the stories and faces of the men and women illuminate and become real. Each person's experience varies depending on one's choice of where to walk, how long to listen, and what is heard.

Expected audiences range from academia, human/civil rights, the GLBT community, politicians and government officials to the general public - sometimes in areas where tolerance for homosexuality is limited - to give visibility to those service members who served their country. Hopefully, this would put a face to a community who repeatedly experiences discrimination, prejudice and misrepresentation. I intend the exhibition to travel in order to reach a wide variety of audiences.

The photographs will also be offered to (and have been utilized by) organizations that worked for the repeal of DADT and GLBT issues, e.g. Human Rights Commission, Servicemembers Legal Defense Fund, gay and lesbian centers, veterans' organizations and government institutions for use in public spaces, web sites and offices (in many cases, these would be smaller 'exhibits' of digital images and transcribed video interviews.)

*"Vincent Cianni's photographs are beautifully observed and realized. Without judgment and through texts the viewer is brought to the reality of the types of boundaries and divides that exists or existed for each of the individuals photographed. He consistently explores the human drive to "carry on." "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" is an ongoing project that Cianni with sincere concern for the people who agree to be photographed and their stories. The work does not preach a position, but rather explores possibilities. Cianni's work questions our proclivities to pigeonhole and underestimate. It encourages us to find comfort in our ambiguities and emotions where we least expect it."*

Diana Edkins





## Gays in the Military: How America Thanked Me

### STAGE 1: PHOTOGRAPHING, INTERVIEWING AND PRINTING (FUNDED)

<b>A.</b>	<b>Supplies and Equipment</b>		
	Film: 500 rolls b/w 120 Kodak Tri-X film @ \$4/roll		2000
	Developing Film: 500 rolls @ \$7.50/roll		3750
	Mini-Discs: 100 Sony Recordable 74-minute @ \$2/each		200
	<b>TOTAL SUPPLIES AND EQUIPMENT</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>5950</b>
<b>B.</b>	<b>Travel</b>		
	Local Travel (2009-2011): New York City and environs, PA, CT, MA	\$	300
	 Road Trip 1 (2010) Washington, D.C., Charlotte, NC, Atlanta, GA, ., Alexandria, VA, Charlestown, WV, Ohio and Miami, FL	 \$	 1750
	 Road Trip 2 (July 2010) Los Angeles, San Diego, San Jose, CA, Seattle, WA, Salt Lake City, UT		 3040
	 Road Trip 3 (August 2010) Chicago, IL		 850
	 Road Trip 4 (May 2011) Houston, San Antonio, Austin, TX		 875
	 Road Trip 5 (July 2011) NY State, D.C, VA, WV, NC, SC		 1510
	 Road Trip 6 (July-Aug 2011) WY, ID, CO, NV, AZ, NM		 3140
	 Road Trip 6 (August 2011) NE, KS, OK, AK, LA, MS, AL, TN, KY, MO)		 4780
	<b>TOTAL TRAVEL</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>16245</b>
<b>C.</b>	<b>Office:</b>		
	Internet:		300
	Telephone		315
	Presentation Materials		200
	Inks and Paper		500
	<b>TOTAL OFFICE</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>1315</b>
	<b>TOTAL STAGE ONE BUDGET (FUNDED)</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>23510</b>

### STAGE 2 PRODUCTION

<b>A.</b>	<b>Developing, Scanning and Printing Negatives</b>		
	100 high-resolution scans (600dpi, 30x40inches) @ \$100 each	\$	10000
	100 30x40" artist proofs (for viewing and display) @ \$200 each		20000
<b>B.</b>	<b>Editing Audio</b>		
	Final Cut Studio	\$	1000
	Intern/Time-coding Audio (500 hrs @ \$15/hr)		7500
	Assistant/Editing Audio (60 days @ \$400/day)		24000
<b>C.</b>	<b>Image Storage/Retouching and Audio Storage/Editing</b>		
	Intern/Assistant Salary 100hrs @ \$15/hr		1500
	<b>TOTAL STAGE 2 BUDGET</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>64000</b>

**STAGE 3 POST- PRODUCTION: EXHIBITON**

<b>A.</b>	<b>Mounting Artist's Proofs for Exhibition</b>		
	100 Aluminum Mounts @ \$200 each	\$	20000
<b>B.</b>	<b>Audio Installation</b>		
	100 Secret Sound Overhead Directional Speakers@\$1200 ea	\$	120000
	<b>TOTAL STAGE 3 BUDGET</b>	\$	<b>140000</b>
	<b>TOTAL PROJECT BUDGET</b>	\$	<b>213510</b>

**FUNDING SOURCES RECEIVED:**

Faculty Research Fund Award, The New School University	\$	7500
The Palm Center		250
Kickstarter		9340
PERSONAL FINANCES		5000

