

NATIONAL news



Clearly, this officer is no gentleman

NATIONAL

Navy leaders were asked Oct. 12 to condemn and hold accountable military personnel aboard the USS Enterprise for anti-gay graffiti scrawled on a bomb used in Afghanistan. The British newspaper *Metro* ran a photo of the missile, which had the words "Highjack This Fags" written across the side.

"The message is insulting and inappropriate," said Sharra E. Greer, Servicemembers Legal Defense Network legal director. "It is also in clear violation of the United States military's stated policies on harassment and morale."

Historically, U.S. servicemembers often write messages on bombs before they are used. For example, some of the first missiles dropped in the offensive against terrorism carried messages of remembrance for the victims of the Sept. 11 attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center.

"The United States Navy would never allow racial epithets or derogatory graffiti based on gender or religion to be scrawled on American property," Greer said. "Messages like the one presented in this photograph only reinforce the ideas of hatred and division that our nation seeks to defend against. We must not emulate the intolerance of our enemies."

Rear Adm. S.R. Pietropaoli called the epithet "inappropriate" and promised "steps were taken to prevent a recurrence of this unfortunate incident." In a letter dated Oct. 17 he wrote, "I sincerely hope this isolated incident will not detract from the hard work and dedication of thousands of sailors and Marines serving our nation in this war on terrorism."

The Associated Press released the photo with a generic caption reporting that the soldier was "signing" the bomb but not addressing the slur that had been scrawled on it. Joan M. Garry, Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation executive director, called this irresponsible journalism.

"The AP decision... fails to acknowledge the central element of the image," she said. "Any media outlet that reprints this photo should present it in its proper context and report the response to its offensive content."

After several exchanges with GLAAD, the AP pulled the photo. Garry praised the timely response but said the story should not be hidden from view.

"By pulling the photo rather than exploring its content and context, the AP sends the message that anti-gay bias should be swept under the rug, not exposed and confronted," she said. "If a picture's worth a thousand words, the one word in this picture is certainly worth a story."

The Rev. Lou Sheldon, chairman of the anti-gay Traditional Values Coalition, urged the government and private relief agencies Oct. 4 to discriminate against gay victims of the last month's terrorist attacks by denying them disaster aid.

He told the *Washington Post* that relief organizations "should be first giving priority to those widows who were at home with their babies and those widowers who lost their wives." He added, "This is just another example of how the gay

agenda is seeking to overturn the one man-one woman relationship from center stage in America."

Lorri L. Jean, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force executive director, said: "Lou Sheldon's hateful rhetoric has again crossed the line. This is a time when everyone should stand united in support of the terrorism victims. Sept. 11 proved that heroism knows no sexual orientation. It is divisive and inhumane to suggest that relief workers turn

their backs on any victim of this horrible tragedy."

Sheldon's comments were in response to reports that agencies like the American Red Cross are providing disaster relief to all victims and their families, regardless of sexual orientation. He lashed out at gay rights organizations for working to ensure assistance is dispensed in a nondiscriminatory way and accused them of "taking advantage of this national tragedy to promote their agenda."

"Once again, Sheldon is out of step with the rest of the country," Jean continued. "He is taking the 'get back to business' mantra to the extreme by not skipping a beat in promoting the same narrow and hateful agenda that has been his trademark for years."

Kay Coles James, Office of Personnel Management director, is considering whether to include same-sex domestic partners in a new benefit offering long-term health insurance to federal employees and their families. Opposition is coming from U.S. Rep. Dave Weldon, R-Fla., the new chairman of the House Civil Service Subcommittee, which helps oversee the program.



Kay Coles James

"Rather than redefining marriage and family to include homosexual, lesbian and cohabitating nonmarried couples, I believe we should be taking steps to encourage traditional marriages," he said.

"Extending benefits to other types of relationships only discourages individuals from making a lifelong marriage commitment."

Inclusion of domestic partners has a measure of congressional support. U.S. Rep. Danny Davis, D-Ill., ranking member of the Civil Service Subcommittee, last month sent a letter signed by a bipartisan group of several House members to the office requesting same-sex life partners receive long-term care coverage.

In a bipartisan effort, the House of Representatives voted to boost funds for HIV/AIDS programs that will extend the lives of people living with the disease. Still, activists said the increase lags behind the true need that exists.

Meanwhile, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved Oct. 12 a bill funding many federal HIV/AIDS programs, including research at the National Institutes of Health, care and treatment through the Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency Act and prevention activities at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. However, the measure does not provide the same level of funding as the one passed by the House.

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