

LGBTQ+ History Month

Being LGBTQ+ in the military



I joined the Royal Army Medical Corps (Reserves) in 1993, 7 years before the ban was lifted, and showed no signs of being lifted. Having joined up as a student nurse, I then re-badged to the Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps (Reserves) once I qualified. Being in the Army when it was still not permitted to be gay in the Forces made life interesting and I vividly remember filling in my application form. It doesn't feel great to know you have to lie to get a job you dearly want, or to always have the risk of getting kicked out in the back of your mind. The ban was lifted in 2000, 2 years after I left.

As well as my hospital work, which I do three days a week, I am doing my Professional Doctorate in Public Health. I am exploring how a hospital attendance is experienced by Trans* patients, their significant others and the healthcare staff providing their care. Patient experience is extremely important to me, and I feel it should be the central focus of our work in the hospital.

I'm a Sexual Health Nurse specialist, and this area of healthcare really feels like home, where everyone is accepted as who they are, and everyone works to be inclusive for patients as well as staff. I miss being in the Army, every day, and I'm so grateful that service personnel are able to be open about themselves, and are offered the same support and legal protections inside the Forces as we are as civilians. It was a long, long time coming.

What does the military look like now?



"I'm LCpl Hewitt and currently working at 158 Provost Company. I started my career off ATC Pirbright before heading to the Defence School of Policing and Guarding to complete my phase 2 training.

My job sees me working daily on different investigations and working to maintain service discipline across the military. I chose the RMP due to every day being different and the satisfaction of being able to help people on a daily basis.

I have always been openly gay, ever since a young age, but before joining the Army in 2019, I was worried that my sexuality would hold me back or that I wouldn't fit in amongst my peers. I was convinced to put in my application by a bisexual friend who was serving who said he was having a blast. Since joining, all of the

worries and anxieties I once had have totally gone and I realised that the only person holding me back was me! I have never experienced anything but support and encouragement from my peers – nobody really cares what your sexuality is and you truly made friends for life.

The army provides an amazing networking system for LGBTQ+ soldiers and there are truly some inspirational people amongst the ranks who are dedicated to supporting positive change and continuous development. The army is a place to serve openly and provides soldiers with many opportunities to get involved with the LGBTQ+, such as marching at pride events and attending seminars. I have enjoyed every single part of my short time in the army and I feel extremely proud of what I have achieved and the uniform I wear.

I am happy to say that I serve loud and proud and am able to be my true self. The support you receive from your Chain of Command is overwhelming. I currently represent my regiment as an LGBTQ+ Rep to help promote inclusion and diversity across 3 RMP. I look forward to representing my regiment at future LGBTQ+ events and look forward to bringing positive change amongst our ranks!



“My name is Lt Col Jim Turner, I’ve been a soldier for just over thirty years and I’m currently serving as the Commander of Catterick Garrison. Looking back, it’s fair to say that the experience of the LGBTQ+ community in the Army has changed completely and very much for the better. I served my first ten years under the ban. I was a junior Infantry officer, learning my trade and enjoying the challenges of Army life in Cyprus, Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Canada and lots of other places besides. I certainly wasn’t unhappy then, but I was buried deep in the back of the closet. It’s only with hindsight, that I appreciate the impact of not being able to be my real self.

I vividly remember the sense of relief when the ban was lifted in 2000. By then I’d already come out to family and friends; quite a few of them were also colleagues and I never got anything other than understanding and support. That said, I still wasn’t ready to be ‘out to all’. That took a bit more time and the arrival of a young officer in our Battalion who was openly gay. Seeing how well-received he was, I realised that there was nothing left to be cautious about and so came out at the end of a gloriously drunken mess dinner to absolutely no one’s surprise whatever. (Thank you 2Lt, now Maj, Mike Brigham).

I think that it is in the last ten years that the Army has made the most significant progress, not just for the LGBTQ+ community, but in recognising the value of Diversity and Inclusion in its widest sense. When I joined the Army, conformity was an all-consuming requirement; we’re a better organisation now that isn’t the case. I am very grateful to everyone in our Network who has led the way and to the senior officers who have given such sterling support – Generals Everard and Saunders really made a difference.

I have a couple of years of service left before it’s time to retire. I can honestly say that I regret virtually nothing about my time in the Army. It has given me a sense of purpose and belonging, the opportunity to live and work in places that you don’t find in travel magazines as well as a range of jobs, training and education no other employer could offer. Above all it’s

about people: the magnificent people that we meet, serve alongside through thick and thin and get to call friends and comrades. That's why I still love being in the Army."



Hello there! My name is Natalie, I'm 24 years old, and I'm a transgender woman. In this blog I'm going to be talking about my time transitioning within the British Army and why Trans visibility is so important.

First a little bit of background about myself. I've now served for over 5 years, all within the REME as an aircraft technician. I have spent the majority of that time maintaining and fixing Wildcat helicopters as part of 659 squadron's LAD, 1 regiment AAC. I had always wanted to join the Army from a young age and I've always had a huge interest in aircraft. Along with this I've always been one to try to fix and repair things in my spare

time, so I feel like I'm currently in my dream job. I started my transition roughly 2 years ago from the time of writing and I socially transitioned around 18 months ago.

How did Transgender Visibility affect me from a young age? Like a lot of Transgender people, I knew something wasn't quite right with my assigned gender and my body at quite an early age. But when I was that age, someone being Transgender was still a taboo subject and there wasn't much information available to me at the time. So, like a lot of people, I bottled it up and let it eat away at me for years, because there was such little visibility, I felt like there wasn't anything that could be done for me. But as time grew on and as I got older, more and more information and Trans people started coming into the light. Because of the ever-increasing visibility of these people and information, I was able to see what I needed to help me. But unfortunately, even with the increased visibility a lot of the people around me didn't really know anything about being transgender, so I still felt like I couldn't open up to anyone. Then enough time went on to when I eventually joined the Army.

Once I joined the Army, I started seeing a few articles and news stories about transgender soldiers within the Army. So, in my downtime I started to look up and read these articles and it gave me a lot of hope. As I started reading and watching these stories, I started to see myself more and more. It made me realise that being transgender was okay and that it was okay to be transgender in the Army. But at the start of my career there still wasn't much awareness within the greater Army. Again the people around me still didn't really know much about transgender people and the policy for transgender troops was still evolving. Because of this I still tried to keep everything inside from the fear of people not accepting me. This kept me very timid and shy as I was still hiding my true self. But as my time in the in the Army grew on more awareness was spread through Army through Diversity and Inclusion training and the visibility of other transgender people within the Army. Eventually It got to a point where I felt the time was right and I could no longer hide anything.

When I Initially made the decision to first come out, I felt like I was quite prepared because of the Transgender soldiers making themselves visible to spread the information. I was able to find the policy for transgender troops easily and keep that to hand, so I was able to speak to all the relevant people in my Chain of Command. I went to my Medical Centre and my OC who were able to point me in the right directions on what I needed to do and speak to. I was

pointed in the direction of my unit's Diversity and Inclusion representative, who was amazing in helping square everything away, such as changing all my documents and arranging Diversity and Inclusion training for the unit. They made me feel like I was not alone, and they had gotten me a meeting with the regiment's CO, who then offered me the regiment's full support. I was really surprised that people were willing to offer so much help to me, and I'm still very grateful for all of the help they gave me. But there was still one big hurdle for me to cross, and that was the people around me who I was working with day in and day out.

Even though I had the unit's chain of command behind my back and willing to offer so much help, I still had the issue of the people around me and I had no idea what their reaction would be. But again I was hugely surprised. I decided to try and tell a couple of people slowly to work up to the day I came out. I had a plan on who I was going to tell but it turns out the first person I told was someone on a PT session who I had barely spoke to before by accident. Even though I didn't really know this person before they were extremely accepting and offered me a lot of support. They pointed me into the direction of other trans people in the Army and people within the LGBT network on base. Again I'm extremely grateful for what they did for me. Now I was able to talk to other transgender people within the Army and they immediately offered their support and they stayed visible for me to contact. I was able to meet them and finally talk about their experiences face to face and it helped prepare me for a lot of things. They even put on a brief at my unit to show that transgender people exist within the Army and that we are visible.

So then the day came where I was able to announce to the world and my unit that I was Natalie a transgender woman. And honestly, I was taken back at the amount of support everyone in the unit gave me. I was accepted there and then, and it made me realise that it was okay to be transgender. I was able to carry on doing the job I love, fixing helicopters and I'm still doing that to this day!

It brought me out of my shell, and I was finally myself and without the visibility of the transgender people before me, I don't think any of this would have been possible. Since then, I've always wanted to do the same for others for what those transgender soldiers did for me. I've always devoted time out of my day to answer any questions people have about me or my experiences, to offer support to other transgender people and now be visible to the world to show that it's okay to be trans in the Army and that the Army will have your back. Overall, the visibility of transgender people, has hugely impacted my life and I'm sure it has for countless others. I'd be naive to think that everything is perfect, because it's still far from it. There is still work to be done, and the Transgender Day of Visibility is important for everyone to help spread awareness to people that we exist and that it's okay to be transgender.

Before I end this, I'd like to again thank every single person who helped me transition, who put themselves in the public light and whoever made themselves visible for people to see that we exist.

Natalie.