

## **BULLDOG PRIDE FUND RECEIVES 3 ANONYMOUS GIFTS TOTALING \$625:**

~ In Honor of SSgt. Eric Alva ~ United States Marine Corps



### **Defending His Country, but Not Its 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' Policy**

By Jose Antonio Vargas, *THE WASHINGTON POST*

Once a Marine, always a Marine. That pretty much sums up the life of retired Sgt. **Eric Alva**, who was sworn into the Marine Corps at 19, stationed in Somalia and Japan and lost his right leg when he stepped on a land mine on March 21, 2003, the first day of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

As the war's first injured soldier, Alva was an instant celebrity. He was on "Oprah." President Bush awarded him the Purple Heart. Donald Rumsfeld visited. And strangers in Alva's native San Antonio still insist on paying for his dinner. Last fall Alva, 36, contacted the **Human Rights Campaign**, the gay [and lesbian] rights group, and asked to be involved in its lobbying effort. Today [Feb. 28, 2007]

he'll stand alongside Rep. Martin Meehan (D-Mass.) when he introduces a bill to repeal the military's "Don't ask, don't tell" policy on gay, lesbian and bisexual military personnel.

Q. *Why didn't you come out sooner?*

A. Eventually my notoriety -- "the injured soldier" -- will wear off. And I can almost hear it now -- "Oh, yeah, he's that gay Marine." I'm okay with that. The truth is, something's wrong with this ban. I have to say something. I mean, you're asking men and women to lie about their orientation, to keep their personal lives private, so they can defend the rights and freedoms of others in this country, and be told, "Well, oh, yeah, if you ever decide to really meet someone of the same sex and you want the same rights, sorry, buddy, you don't have the right." That's one factor. The other factor is, we're losing probably thousands of men and women that are skilled at certain types of jobs, from air traffic controllers to linguists, because of this broken policy.

*You come from a military family?*

I come from a family of servicemen. My dad, Fidelis, is a Vietnam vet. My grandfather, also named Fidelis, was a World War II and Korean War veteran. I was named after them. My middle name is Fidelis. [In Latin, Semper] Fidelis means "always faithful." [Semper Fidelis is also the USMC's motto].

*What does sexual orientation -- gay, straight, bisexual -- have to do with being a soldier? A Marine?*

First, thanks for recognizing that I am a Marine. Second, to answer your question, I have tons and tons of friends that were in the military at the time who knew I was gay because I confided in them. Everybody had the same reaction: "What's the big deal?" . . . The respect was still there. Your job is what you're doing at its best. Your personal life, your private life, is something you do after work. What's funny is, when I was based in San Diego, Calif., people would go to a gay club and everyone would have a haircut like mine. They had their dog tags on. But come Monday morning, nobody talked about it, nobody dealt with it, everybody was back to work.

*So when you were applying to be a Marine in 1990, before "Don't ask, don't tell" was implemented, the application asked for your sexual orientation?*

It did.

*What did you put down?*

I lied, I lied. The lying is what I hated most -- why I had to do it, why I had to keep on doing it, the toll it took on me.

*You're wearing a wedding band. What do you tell people when they ask you about your wife?*

That happens all the time. It just happened on my way here to Washington, waiting on the plank as I boarded a plane. This very nice woman next to me said she recognized me. She looked at my ring and asked about my wife. I told her I have a partner. His name is Darrell. She paused and said, "Good for you."



~ Originally Published in *THE WASHINGTON POST* ~ Feb. 28, 2007 ~

The **Bulldog Pride Fund at Fresno State** graciously accepts tribute and memorial gifts, as well as donations in the form of securities, real property, corporate matching gifts and bequests. All gifts are 100% tax-deductible.

**Give today. For tomorrow and beyond. ~ bulldogpride.org**