

## **Eva Belanger, USAF**

Raised in Napa, California, Eva Belanger entered the United States Air Force Academy Preparatory School in 1998. Upon completion in 1999, she entered the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs.

After her 2003 graduation and commissioning, she was assigned to the 31st Communications Squadron, Aviano Air Base, Italy, as the Officer in Charge, overseeing Ground Radio, Radar, and Meteorological and Navigation, which included NATO forces and operations.

Eva was deployed to Balad Air Base, Iraq, where she served in an Executive Office position, where she led vital morale and women support groups and volunteered in an Army hospital operating room. She was also assigned to the Air Force Research Laboratory, Kirtland Air Force Base, New Mexico, where she served as the Officer in Charge, Network Security.

After leaving the Air Force in 2007, Eva relocated to San Diego in 2008, where she turned her experiences under “don’t ask, don’t tell” and as a veteran, toward organic intelligence, somatic experiencing therapy, yoga, acupuncture and nature.

She is currently a licensed marriage and family therapist in Bankers Hill and the co-founder and executive director of the nonprofit, Warriors Live On.

Her commitment to community and “service before self” is evident in all she does, from assisting veterans in healing, to guiding youth at the Metropolitan Community Church, making Eva a true warrior on many levels. She is married to her lovely wife Vanessa Stahley.

## **Norman Braxton, USN**

Born in Norfolk, Virginia, Norman Braxton entered the US Navy in 1967 as a yeoman, and served aboard two San Diego-based ships, the submarine tender the USS Dixon (AS-37) and a destroyer, the USS Robison (DDG-12).

While stationed on the Robison, Norman saw plenty of action during the Vietnam War, deploying to the Gulf of Tonkin, for which he received the Vietnam Service Medal with one Bronze Star.

After his honorable discharge from active duty in 1971, Norman fulfilled two additional years of Naval Reserve time.

In 1973, when “cross-dressing” was still illegal, Norman became one of the first African-American drag entertainers in San Diego, performing as a member of the Showbiz Supper Club cast, under the stage name “Norma.”

This began an entertainment career that allowed Norman to travel the globe. He used his flair for entertainment and love of drag to become elected the 35th Empress of the Imperial Court de San Diego, one of the oldest LGBT fundraising organizations in the country.

Norman still contributes his time to his community by performing in benefit shows, giving his signature Diana Ross impersonation. He is one of the first and one of the oldest performers still on stage and very proud of it. He was recently featured in the KPBS-backed documentary film, “San Diego’s Gay Bar History.”

## **Tom Carpenter, USN**

Tom Carpenter is a distinguished military graduate of the class of 1970 of the U.S. Naval Academy, receiving a regular commission in the US Marine Corps. After completing infantry training, he attended flight school and became a Naval Aviator. While on active duty, Tom accumulated over 2,500 hours flying the A-4 Skyhawk.

He met his partner of 20 years, Courtland Hirschi, while they were both in the Marines. Because of the ban on gays serving in the military at that time, Carpenter resigned his commission in 1976, at the rank of Captain, and joined the Marine Corps Reserves.

From 1975-1977, Tom and Courtland lived in Carlsbad. Their home was a sanctuary for LGBT Marines and sailors stationed at Camp Pendleton. From 1978 through 1983, Tom was a pilot for Continental Airlines. He attended Golden Gate University School of Law in San Francisco. Graduating in 1980, he moved to Los Angeles where he was an aviation trial lawyer for 30 years.

Tom was a member of the board of Servicemembers Legal Defense Network (SLDN) from 1995-2010, serving as co-chair from 1998-2005. In all, Tom dedicated 15 years working towards the repeal of “don’t ask, don’t tell.”

He also played a major role in establishing OutServe and USNAOut. Tom is now co-chair of the Forum on the Military Chaplaincy, an organization fighting to allow LGBT service members and their families the right to exercise religious freedom.

Tom and his husband of 26 years, Art Andrade, reside in San Diego.

## **James Cassidy, USN**

James Cassidy served as a Hospital Corpsman in the US Navy from 1981 until his retirement as a Chief Petty Officer in 1998, when he took advantage of an early retirement authorization, due to a reduction in force experienced across all services.

James served before and during the “don’t ask, don’t tell” era, in various fleet and Marine Corps assignments. He was recognized with 3 Navy and Marine Corps Commendation medals, 4 Navy and Marine Corps Achievement medals, one Naval Meritorious Unit Commendation, and 4 Good Conduct medals. At his retirement, the Flag officer remarked that “Chief Cassidy averaged a Navy Commendation medal or Navy Achievement medal for every two years of service,” an achievement that was not usual for that time.

In 2003, Jim relocated to San Diego, where he joined Dignity of San Diego serving as chapter vice president from 2003-2004 and president from 2004-2005.

Upon the repeal of “don’t ask, don’t tell,” he became a founding member of the American Military Partner Association (AMPA), currently serving as vice president. Starting with just 15 members, AMPA has grown to more than 50,000 members and supporters from all over the world and is now recognized as the largest LGBTQ organization connecting military service members, their families, veterans, and allies.

Jim also served on the advisory council for the LGBT Veterans Wall of Honor for five years, serving as co-chair in 2015 and 2016. He is also on the Joint City/County HIV Housing Committee, having served as co-chair for four years, and on the AIDS Memorial Task Force, tasked with locating and selecting a memorial for San Diegans who have succumbed to, or been affected by, AIDS/HIV.

## **Wayne Dietz Jr., USN**

When Wayne Dietz Jr. joined the US Navy in October 1975, it was his ticket to freedom; not only out of the steel mills of Johnstown, Pennsylvania, but to his sexual identity. He attended boot camp and Hospital Corpsman "A" School at Great Lakes, Illinois.

When he received his first set of orders to 3rd Field Service Support Group — which included Field Medical Service training at Camp Pendleton in June of 1976 and then a 13-month tour in Okinawa, Japan — he wanted to cry. Despite his initial fears, Wayne blossomed in Okinawa, being awarded Sailor of the Quarter and subsequently nominated for Sailor of the Year.

He rotated back to Camp Pendleton until May 1978, when orders arrived for urology school in Portsmouth, Virginia. In February 1979, he again headed back to Camp Pendleton, this time as leading petty officer of the Naval Hospital's urology clinic, where he was again awarded Sailor of the Quarter and soon earned the rank of First Class Petty Officer in 1981.

His last tour, a four-year stint as a senior instructor at Naval School Health Sciences San Diego's urology school, was the most rewarding.

Since leaving active duty in 1986, Wayne has continued his career in urology. He was also able to get even more involved in the local LGBT community.

A founding member of Bears San Diego, Wayne also spent many years actively involved with the San Diego leather community and the local Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. He has held titles Empress 25 Roxie Bleu and Emperor 30 Wayne with the Imperial Court de San Diego and as a longtime board member, has mentored many other titleholders.

Through each of these organizations, Wayne has raised money for the local San Diego LGBT community for over 30 years.

## **Courtland Hirschi, USAF**

Courtland Hirschi was the son of an Air Force pilot and Judge Advocate General. He graduated from the University of California, Riverside, in 1971, with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science. During college, he participated in the Marine Corps Platoon Leader Course and upon graduation, was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Marine Corps. He attended The Basic School at Quantico Virginia, learning the skills of an infantry officer.

In 1972, Courtland was selected to become a Naval Flight Officer. He became a Radar Intercept Officer flying the F-4 Phantom. He was then stationed at Marine Corps Air Station, Cherry Point, North Carolina, where he fell in love with another Marine pilot, Tom Carpenter, who was to be his partner for almost 20 years.

While stationed at MCAS Iwakuni, Japan, Lieutenant Hirschi was accused of being a homosexual. He was presented with two options: endure a General Court Martial or resign his commission for the good of the service. To protect his partner, Tom, avoid the risk of prison, and save his family from the embarrassment of a court martial, he chose to resign.

In 1975, Court and Tom lived in Carlsbad. During the next two years, their home was a refuge for gay Marines and sailors stationed at Camp Pendleton, providing them support and counseling on how to avoid discharge under the ban that existed at that time.

Courtland became a successful attorney, practicing in Los Angeles and Riverside County. He died in 1992 as a result of complications from HIV.

## **Clay Kilpatrick, USMC**

Clay Kilpatrick enlisted in the US Marine Corps in January 1984 and completed Basic Training at Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego. After completing Stinger Missile Gunner training at Fort Bliss in El Paso, Clay reported to 1st Forward Area Air Defense Battery, Okinawa, Japan, in June 1984, where he deployed in support of multiple exercises throughout Far East Asia.

In March 1986, he was meritoriously promoted to Corporal and that June he transferred to 3rd Low Altitude Air Defense Battalion at Camp Pendleton. The following year he was promoted to Sergeant and then reenlisted in February 1988. In October 1988, he completed the Drill Instructor course, graduating fourth in a class of 45. Clay's final duty assignment took him back to Okinawa, with 1st Low Altitude Air Defense Battalion, where he served until his honorable discharge in February 1992, just prior to the establishment of the "don't ask, don't tell" policy in 1993.

After his Marine Corps career, Clay received a BS in Computer Science from Texas A&M, and eventually an MBA from San Diego State University.

In 2015, Clay was asked to be part of San Diego Pride's Military Contingent, to organize, coordinate and manage all the active duty, veterans, family, and supporters, who march together in the annual Pride Parade. Today Clay serves as co-chair for Pride's military contingent department.

Clay also spends time teaching and guiding active duty Marines and sailors on what it takes to step up and take on leadership roles, both large and small. By doing this, he is building the next generation of young LGBT military members, helping them develop the leadership skills that will serve them both in and out of the military.

## **Robert Pedrick, USN**

Robert "Bob" Pedrick was the first baby born on Jan. 1, 1935, in Lambertville, New Jersey. He graduated from Temple University School of Dentistry in 1961 and then joined the US Navy as a Lieutenant.

He served proudly as an accomplished Naval Dental Officer for over 20 years, which included tours in Vietnam, Japan, Thailand, and The Dominican Republic, as well as Balboa Naval Hospital in San Diego.

Over the years he witnessed the biased treatment of officers and sailors who served honorably but were exposed and discharged for being gay. Despite the Navy's homophobic policies, Bob received numerous awards for his outstanding service throughout his career.

Capt. Pedrick retired while serving as Clinical Director of Network Operating Center, Naval Base, San Diego, on Jan. 1, 1985. He was also a Certified Diplomate of the American Board of Prosthodontics.

He loved the Navy and loved going to sea, but retirement lifted a great weight from him. Until his retirement, he never fully understood the years of tension he experienced from the constant scrutiny and the threat of being turned in, while watching the careers of his friends ruined.

In retirement, Bob has been a dedicated volunteer with the San Diego Democrats for Equality since 1993. He has participated in numerous political campaigns for candidates who support full equality for LGBTQ+ Americans. Candidates like Senator Chris Kehoe in her first race for City Council and all her subsequent campaigns, along with Senate Pro Tempore Toni Atkins, and Rep. Susan Davis, to name a few.

In 2000, Bob met Jose Gusman and they became partners. In December 2014, they were married by Assembly Speaker Atkins. Bob and Jose live in Hillcrest.

## **James Seal, USAF**

James Seal enlisted in the US Air Force in 1970, during the height of the Vietnam War. Following basic training at Lackland Air Force Base, he transferred to Keesler Air Force Base, where he received special training as a Chaplain Services Specialist. James then fulfilled the remainder of his military service at Westover AFB Strategic Air Command in Massachusetts.

Following his honorable discharge, he returned to his hometown of Niagara Falls, where he attained a master of education and counseling from Niagara University.

James relocated to New York City in 1977, where his active involvement in the LGBT community began. Starting with the Metropolitan Community Church, he also attended city council meetings, and organized/participated in many marches, protests and civil disobediences in the ongoing fight for LGBT equality.

As a NYC probation officer in the early 1980s, James helped found the Gay Officers Action League, the nation's first fraternal organization for the advancement and protection of LGBT law enforcement and first responder professionals. He also served on Mayor Koch's Council of Gay and Lesbian Concerns.

While active in NYC's Heritage of Pride organization, he was the first to introduce the rainbow flag to the city and distributed over 30,000 flags to LGBT businesses and individuals that first year. He also worked closely with the late, world-renowned artist Keith Haring, to design the trademarked logo for Heritage of Pride, which is still in use today.

His final community efforts in NYC were necessitated by the onset of the AIDS epidemic. Volunteering with the Gay Men's Health Crisis, he helped provide direct care and counseling for patients and respite care for caregivers.

Since arriving in San Diego in 1989, he has served the following organizations within the local LGBT community: MCC San Diego, San Diego Pride, South Bay Pride, North County Pride, Golden State Peace Officers, and San Diego County Diversity Committee, and currently serves as board president of the Fellowship of Older Gays.

## **Al Smithson, USN**

Al Smithson served as an officer in the US Navy from 1960 to 1967. He attended the Naval Justice School in 1963 and 1964 and thereafter served as a legal officer in multiple assignments and deployments. He was awarded the National Defense Service Medal and the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal and promoted to the rank of Lieutenant.

Al recognized that as a gay man in the 1960s with a passion for community activism, he could not pursue that goal and remain in the Navy; thus, he resigned his commission in 1967.

After serving as a law clerk to the U. S. District Court in San Diego, he entered private practice as an attorney for the next 42 years.

A San Diego LGBT community pioneer, some of Al's accomplishments are as follows:

Founding member of the Metropolitan Community Church of San Diego in 1970; serving as board member and vice moderator ever since.

Founding member and former chairperson of the board of the San Diego LGBT Community Center.

Founding board member and member emeritus of the Greater San Diego Business Association (GSDBA), now the San Diego Equality Business Association.

And charter member and former vice president of the San Diego Democratic Club, now the San Diego Democrats for Equality. He was also the first openly gay delegate from San Diego to the California Democratic Central Committee.

Al has also donated legal services over the years to MCC, The Center, Dignity of San Diego, SAGE, and San Diego Physicians for Human Rights, among others. He aided most in obtaining their 501(c)(3) status.

## **Robert Wheeler, USAF**

Raised in Southern California, Robert Wheeler enlisted into the US Air Force in the early 1960s, post-Cuban Missile Crisis. He was assigned to the Defense Language Institute at Syracuse University for an intensive training program in the Russian language.

He then attended Air Force survival training, which included simulated capture and interrogation by the Soviets, and assigned to Rhein-Main Air Base, in Frankfurt, Germany.

The assignment included flying reconnaissance missions along the “Iron Curtain” and Eastern Bloc to monitor Soviet military broadcasts and activities.

His skills were also called upon at Incirlik Air Base, located in Adana, Turkey, to complete missions to Tehran, Iran, which at that time, was an ally of the United States.

After his honorable discharge in 1967, Robert first returned to California, earning a bachelor’s of science in history at UCLA, then moved east to earn a Master of Laws in Taxation from Georgetown University, and a law degree from Catholic University, also in Washington, D.C., before entering service with the IRS.

Robert’s sense of community has always shown through, with involvement and support of organizations such as the Gay Men’s Chorus of Washington, D.C., Diversionary Theater, San Diego Gay Men’s Chorus, Fraternity House, The San Diego LGBT Community Center, Lambda Achieves, Human Dignity Foundation, and the San Diego History Center LGBTQ+ San Diego: Stories of Struggles and Triumphs exhibit.

Robert has also donated countless hours of tax center organization and advisements to almost every community he has resided in. Robert is married to his husband Darrell Netherton.

## **Will Williams, USN**

Will Williams served 5 years in the US Navy as an Intelligence Specialist, from 2007-2012, and was the first sailor to earn the Enlisted Information Dominance Warfare Specialist designation.

Serving during a time when the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy had been lifted for gays and lesbians, Petty Officer Williams served in silence as a Trans man. He was assigned to duty stations at the Naval Amphibious Base Little Creek in Virginia Beach, and the Naval Amphibious Base in Coronado.

During his years of service, Will was awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal, and recognized for his volunteerism with the Military Volunteer Service Medal and as a member of a command that received a Meritorious Unit Commendation.

Since leaving the military, Will has contributed greatly to the betterment of San Diego’s Transgender community by volunteering with and mentoring grassroots organizations and education initiatives.

His service to the San Diego LGBT Community Center, Hillcrest Youth Center, Transforming Families, and San Diego Pride, has focused on serving youth as a young adult ally by modelling boundary issues, direct communications, facilitating group discussions, chaperoning events, and referring young adults and family members to needed services. He also spearheaded the inaugural Trans Pride celebration in 2014, now an annual event held in Balboa Park.

In 2015, he helped lead the effort to open a Transgender Community Resource Center. He was instrumental in planning and executing a two-day, community-focused conference at the Sherman Heights Community Center, where the hopes, wants and needs of the Transgender community were identified. While the goal of the effort was not realized, many of the needs articulated were absorbed into, and championed by The LGBT Community Center, resulting in many of The Center’s current Transgender services.