

MARGARETHE CAMMERMEYER

b. March 24, 1943

“I wear my uniform at every inappropriate moment to remind people of gays and lesbians who have to serve in silence in the military.”

In 1992, Colonel Margarethe Cammermeyer became the highest-ranking military officer discharged on the basis of sexual orientation. Cammermeyer was dismissed as chief nurse of the Washington State National Guard after disclosing she was a lesbian during a routine security clearance interview. She challenged the U.S. military’s ban on homosexuals in federal court. In 1994, she was reinstated as chief nurse, making her one of the few openly gay or lesbian members of the military.

Cammermeyer was born in Oslo, Norway, during the Nazi occupation. Her parents sheltered Norwegian resistance forces. Cammermeyer credits her parents’ courage as her inspiration for defending civil liberties.

In 1951, Cammermeyer’s family moved to the U.S. She became a citizen in 1961 and joined the U.S. Army Student Nurse Program. After receiving her B.S. in nursing from the University of Maryland in 1963, Cammermeyer reported for active duty.

At her request, in 1967, Cammermeyer was deployed to Vietnam where she served as head nurse of a neurosurgical intensive care unit. She calls this time in her life “the most extraordinary experience any military nurse could have been a part of.” Cammermeyer was honored with the Bronze Star for Meritorious Service. In 1985, she was named Nurse of the Year by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

In 1964, Cammermeyer married a fellow soldier and had four sons. The couple divorced after 15 years. In 1989, Cammermeyer met her life partner, Diane Divelbess.

Cammermeyer’s autobiography, “Serving in Silence” (1994), received critical acclaim. The book was turned into a made-for-TV movie, executive produced by Barbra Streisand and starring Glenn Close. The film generated more than 25 million viewers and received three Emmy Awards and the Peabody Award. It was one of the first television movies about a gay person.

Cammermeyer retired in 1997 after 31 years of service. She serves on the Military Advisory Council for the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network and is an outspoken advocate for the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.”

A Vietnam veteran and Bronze Star recipient, Colonel Margarethe Cammermeyer won reinstatement after challenging the military ban on gays. She is an outspoken advocate for the rights of GLBT service members.



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