

ERIC FIDELIS ALVA

b. April 1, 1971

HERO/ACTIVIST

*"I joined the military because I wanted to serve.
I was patriotic, idealistic; I was also gay."*

Having survived a war injury, Eric Alva felt he'd been given a second chance at life. He discovered a new calling. "I had to use my voice," he says.

Retired Staff Sergeant Eric Alva was the first American soldier wounded in the Iraq War. He is a GLBT civil rights activist and a national spokesman for the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell."

Alva is a native of San Antonio, Texas. He inherited his middle name from his grandfather and father, both Marine veterans named Fidelis. "Semper Fidelis," the official Marine Corps motto, means "always faithful." Serving in the military was Alva's dream.

In 1990, the 5-foot-1-inch-tall Alva enlisted in the Marine Corps. He made it through the rigors of boot camp and went on to serve for 13 years. In 2000, he was promoted to Staff Sergeant.

In 2003, on the first day of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Alva was with his battalion in Iraq when he stepped on a land mine. The explosion shattered his right arm and damaged his right leg so severely it had to be amputated.

Alva received a medical discharge and was presented with a Purple Heart by President George W. Bush. He was the Iraq War's first Purple Heart recipient.

Having survived a war injury, Alva felt he'd been given a second chance at life. He discovered a new calling. "I had to use my voice," he says. "I had fought and nearly died to secure rights for others that I was not free to enjoy. I had proudly served a country that was not proud of me."

In 2003, Alva received the Heroes and Heritage Award from La Raza. People magazine honored him with the Heroes Among Us Award (2004). He received the Patriot Award from the city of San Antonio (2004) and the Public Citizen Award from the National Association of Social Workers (2008).

Alva earned a Bachelor of Social Work in 2008, and is studying for a master's degree in that field. He lives in San Antonio with his long-term partner, Darrell Parsons.



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