

My Navy Too

by Beth F. Coye, (CDR, US Navy, Ret.)
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Excellent! A well-written and thought-provoking fact-based story about the U.S. Navy leadership's resistance to incorporating women as equals. The perspective is that of a lesbian woman's experiences with the Navy's distrust of women and rampant policy of homophobia. It is presented as a compilation of diary entries and letters to (and from) family and friends over her 27 year career, beginning in 1960.

Tucker Fairfield, the narrator, is a Navy Junior – that is, the child of a Regular Navy officer. She has always had high regard for the Navy. Her exposure to Navy brass while traveling billet to billet with her Admiral father has created a strong desire to serve.

Because of constantly moving from one place to another as her father's orders changed, Tucker has had little opportunity to make lasting friendships as she grew up. Four years at Wellesley – then still an all-women's school – developed her already analytical mind while allowing her to make lasting friends. She finished in the top of her class.

After a short stint with the League of Women Voters in Washington, Tucker is accepted into the WAVES Officer Candidate School in Newport, RI. From the very first, her strong liberal feelings put her at odds with Navy policies and regulations. While she feels a strong attachment from almost her very first experiences and a WAVE officer, she also finds herself inwardly rebelling against the chauvinistic attitudes expressed through both Navy regulations and many of the male officers she meets or with whom she serves. She is denied well-earned plum postings repeatedly simply because she is a woman. Still, this is her chosen career, and she performs at top of grade in whatever billet she is assigned.

In addition to her struggles with the Navy's distrust of women in the military, Tucker must deal with extreme homophobia. The story shows through her common workday daily experiences how homophobia (including the current Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy) insidiously damages rather than strengthens the establishment. As many in the GLBT community are quite aware, there is tremendous mental stress generated by hiding an integral part of oneself from everyone around you. It is particularly difficult when you must also enforce homophobic regulations against good employees – in this case, WAVE sailors. If our military (and our country) was not so brutally homophobic – i.e., GLBT people had no fear of outing – the typical “security risk” rationale for disallowing their full participation would disintegrate into nothingness.

The Navy (all our military), during this period, allows inconsistencies while being inflexible regarding unjust, unnecessary policies and regulations that allow no room for the needs of the individual. Even though the Uniform Code of Military Justice (at the time) considered both homosexuality and adultery cause for discharge, homosexuality was relentlessly pursued and summarily punished. Meanwhile, flagrant violation of regulations about men in the women's barracks (or vice versa) and adultery were routinely disregarded.

The book also demonstrates inconsistencies between “Official Policy” and local Command attitudes and enforcement. Many commands were more interested in achieving their goals than enforcing regulations. Several commands are described as

accepting and protecting their gay and lesbian personnel because of their excellent performance.

Over time, Tucker finds herself increasingly more uncomfortable hiding her attraction for certain women she meets and works with. After suppressing these feelings for years – and attempting to develop similar feelings for male associates – she accepts that she is lesbian. She enters surreptitiously into intimate relationships with women she meets in her work. But the strain of hiding this VERY IMPORTANT part of her life is too much. When she is tagged for promotion to Captain, she recognizes her need for a secure and open personal life. Instead of accepting the promotion, she resigns.

This is insightful, intelligent book that should make all readers think. I recommend it highly.

*Reviewed by Dave Parker, President
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