



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on July 23, 2012

## Homosexual Couple Celebrates First Same-Sex “Marriage” on Military Base

Last month, the U.S. military celebrated its first on-base “wedding” ceremony for same-sex couples when an Air Force sergeant “married” his homosexual partner at a base in New Jersey. Tech Sgt. Erwynn Umali and Will Behrens, a civilian, “married” June 23 on the grounds of Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst in New Jersey, where Umali was stationed. “It was a decision that would have been unthinkable just nine months ago, before the law requiring them to keep their relationship a secret was repealed,” reported [ABC News](#).



“We are so honored to be a part of this historic moment to be one of the first gay couples allowed to unite in a civil union on a military base,” the two men expressed in a statement following the event. “We hope to be an inspiration to others in the LGBT community that struggle with the challenge of marriage equality.” The couple insisted that “this issue is not just about the military, but the equal sacrifice and shared burdens of our loved ones who are civilians.”

Complicit in the affair was Kay Reeb, a Navy chaplain and minister with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, who presided over the “wedding” ceremony. “I told them the same thing I tell every couple — love each other and trust in each other and in God, that’s what keeps us together,” Reeb said of the event.

In a Facebook chat sponsored by [Slate.com](#), the couple said that officials on the military base were very accommodating throughout the whole affair. “We asked [about holding the ceremony on the base], and they were very open about it, but [said], ‘No one has ever asked us this question before,’” Umali wrote in the chat. “We did not get any push back from the base or leadership. All they asked was that we be patient because this was the very first one.”

While news reports said that a few dozen family and friends attended the homosexual “nuptials,” the immediate families of the men did not approve of the partnership. “Both men grew up in strict religious families,” ABC News reported. “Behrens’ parents don’t approve of his homosexuality, and Umali’s parents in the Philippines are still struggling with his homosexuality.”

[Baptist Press News](#) reported that one Air Force chaplain who attended the “wedding” has since announced that he has dropped his affiliation with the Southern Baptist Convention, apparently because of his support of the homosexual couple. Chaplaincy leaders with the North American Missions Board (NAMB), the missions arm of the Southern Baptist Convention, “contacted Air Force Chaplain (Col.) Timothy Wagoner after an Associated Press article appeared in early July describing him as ‘watching supportively’ during the civil union,” reported BP News. “At the time, Wagoner indicated to NAMB that he did not support the ceremony. He also gave assurances of his support for the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 and for the biblical definition of one man, one woman marriage.”



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Wagoner apparently changed his story later, leading to his divorce from the conservative Baptist denomination. “Southern Baptists love and pray for our chaplains,” explained Kevin Ezell, NAMB’s president. “That being said, we only want to endorse chaplains who can support Baptist doctrine and belief without reservation. When it comes to what our chaplains believe and practice, we do ask and we do expect them to tell.” Ezell added that “if an SBC chaplain concludes he cannot conduct his ministry in harmony with SBC beliefs and doctrine, then it is best to part ways.”

In related news, on July 19 the U.S. House of Representatives approved an amendment to the 2013 Defense Appropriations bill that would bar the Department of Defense from using any money in the bill to violate the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) — the 16-year-old law that defines marriage as only between a man and a woman for the purposes of federal business. The amendment, introduced by Representative Steve King (R-Iowa), would effectively ban same-sex marriage ceremonies from being performed at military facilities, and prohibit any military chaplain from performing such ceremonies.

According to [TheHill.com](#), “King said the language, similar versions of which have passed the House before, is needed because of President Obama’s growing support for same-sex marriage. King said that support is permeating the federal government. ‘We saw the president of the United States make some statements along the way that his position was evolving on marriage,’ King said. ‘That seemed to be a signal to the Department of Defense, who issued two memorandum.’”

Those memos opened the door for same-sex marriage ceremonies at military facilities and for military chaplains to officiate at the “weddings,” a clear violation of DOMA, King pointed out. “The Defense of Marriage Act means this,” he explained: “Marriage means only a legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife. And the word ‘spouse’ only refers to a member of the opposite sex who is a husband or a wife. Pretty simple statute being contravened by the president of the United States as exercised through the Secretary of Defense. This amendment prohibits the use of military facilities or the pay of military chaplains for being used to contravene the Defense of Marriage Act.” The amendment was opposed by rank-and-file House Democrats, and has no chance of success in the Senate.

Meanwhile, the Defense Department is trying to muzzle military chaplains whose opinions are at odds with the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” and who oppose the attempts to normalize the homosexual lifestyle among America’s fighting force. “If you express difficulties as a chaplain you are specifically ordered by your commanders that you do not speak to the press about your concerns about the repeal process,” Col. Ron Crews, a retired Air Force chaplain and executive director of the Chaplain Alliance for Religious Liberty, told the online [Christian Post](#). “I think there is a double standard. If you are in favor of the repeal and how things are going you can speak publicly about it. If you have problems with it you cannot speak publicly about it.”

While the Pentagon has been able to keep a lid on most opposition to the new tolerance for homosexuality, Crew told the Christian Post that “the jury is still out on how this policy will impact the ministry of chaplains long term, particularly those that hold biblical views on homosexuality.... We’re still in the relatively early stages of this and we still don’t know the long term impact that this policy change is going to make on recruiting and retention of our defense forces, not to mention the chaplain input.”



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