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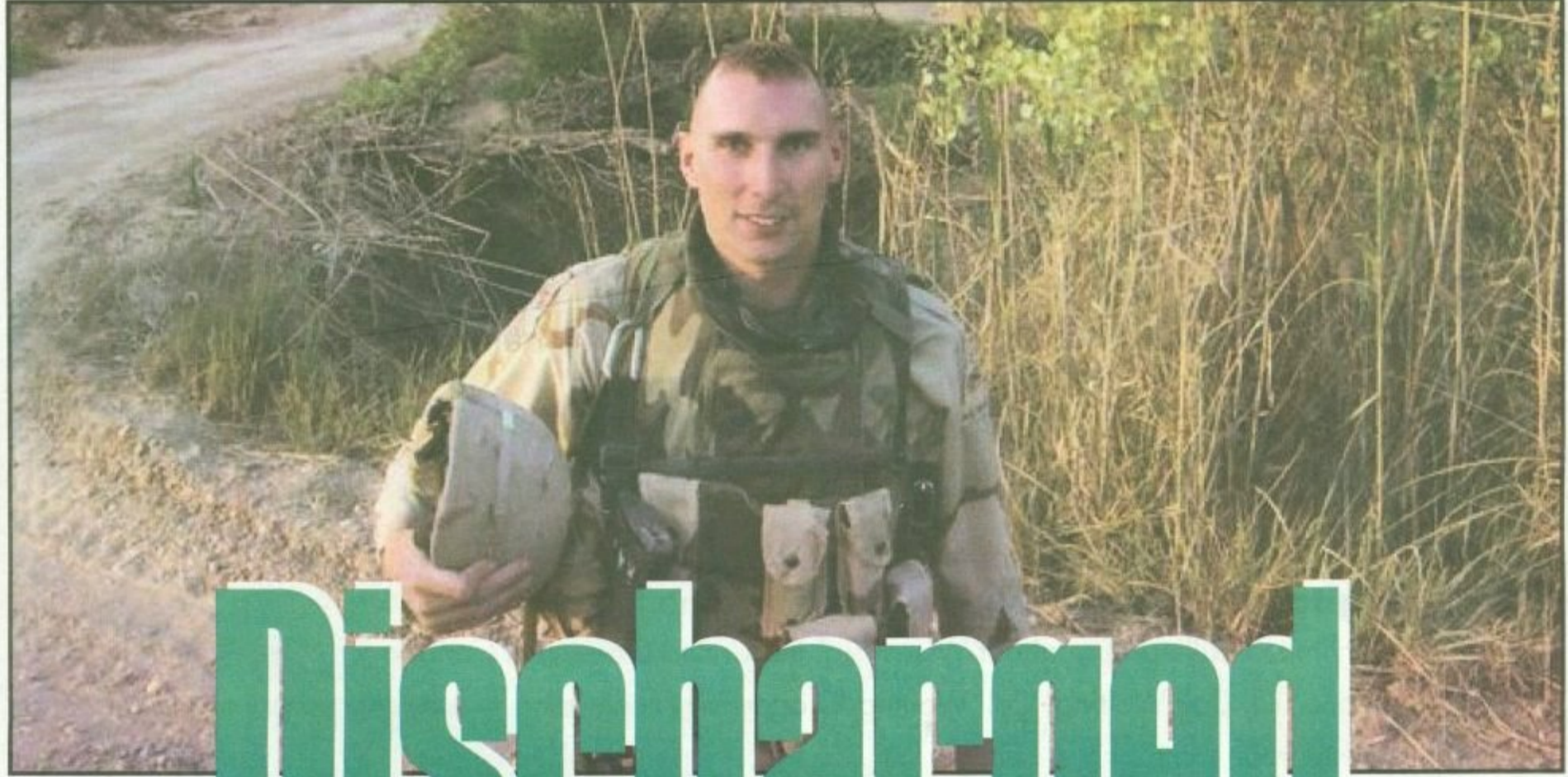
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Discharged

By Holly Grey

Uncle Sam boots area gay soldier from IRAQ

“It says I was kicked out for being gay. I’m not ashamed to be gay, but this follows me. I’ve been labeled as substandard. Future employers will know what happened. I was a good soldier and on my paperwork it says I was discharged for ‘homosexual activity.’ I’ve been stigmatized,” explained former Marquette University student and Army artilleryman Jeff Howe.

“Six months before my second tour was over in Iraq my boss woke me up out of bed, told me to get in uniform and took me to a secluded area. Here he told me I was being separated from my unit and the Army for homosexual conduct,” said Howe. “I was shocked. All of a sudden, I

am told to pack my stuff and I can’t tell anyone what’s going on. Everyone knew something was going on, but I couldn’t talk to anyone about it.”

Separated from his unit and buddies, Howe felt isolated, alone and embarrassed.

“I was embarrassed, not for being gay, but for being exposed as a liar,” Howe said. Under the military’s “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy, and to be accepted, Howe had to lie to his friends and colleagues about being gay. “When I talked to my co-workers, I would always say I had a girlfriend or say I met a new girl, even though I was really talking about a guy or my boyfriend. Friendships are based

on truth and I had to be a liar in order to serve my country.”

Even though he had been out for years, Howe knew he would have to go back into the closet to join the Army. “I left Marquette University and was working as a corporate marketing manager in San Francisco when the Sept. 11 attacks occurred. I started to do a little bit of soul searching and in the summer of 2002 I joined the Army to help out the country,” he said. “I felt like I needed to do something.”

Sacrifice for your country can mean a lot of things. Howe was prepared to give the ultimate sacrifice of his life for his country if necessary; however, throughout

his military experience he also had to sacrifice who he was in order to serve the country he loved so much.

On Aug. 3, Howe was honorably discharged under the military’s Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell policy. The Army uncovered Howe’s online profile on Connexion.org, an LGBT community site.

Paradoxically Howe’s experience transpired while the Army was experiencing one of the leanest recruiting years since it became an all-volunteer service three decades ago — missing its enlistment target by the largest margin since 1979.

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