

Chicago veteran reacts to gay Marine homecoming kiss

By GoPride.com News Staff February 29, 2012

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CHICAGO, IL -- "Bravo. It's about time," James Darby, an 80-year-old veteran and head of Chicago's American Veterans for Equal Rights, said of the photo of a Marine kissing his boyfriend upon returning home from a tour of duty.

Marine Sgt. Brandon Morgan, 25, was visibly thrilled to see his partner, Dalan Wells, 38, when he returned home to Hawaii on Feb. 22 from a deployment in Afghanistan. A friend snapped a photo of their welcome-home kiss and posted it online.

Reposted on the Gay Marines Facebook page, the photo quickly went viral and has been viewed tens of thousands of times on blogs and Facebook.

The photo has been met with a great deal of enthusiasm, especially from gay servicemen and women, who have only recently been allowed to serve openly in the military.

"I'm so happy for these two guys. I can only imagine the exhilaration when they finally saw each other," Darby told ChicagoPride.com.

Most people commenting on the Gay Marines Facebook page left notes of encouragement.

"Welcome home Marine!" wrote one. "Thank you for your service! As a veteran of the U.S. Army it brings tears to my eyes to see you be able to express your love without fear."

But not all responses were as supportive.

"I read some of the comments and they really made me angry," said Darby. "I was drafted in 1952 during the Korean War. I could have easily opted out by saying that I was gay, but I chose to go in and serve my country. And I did for four years. I wish I could have had a hug like that."

Darby and his partner, Patrick Bova, made their 47-year-old commitment official during a <u>2011 public ceremony</u> on Millennium Park's Wrigley Square. The men were among 35 same-sex couples who gathered on the first day Illinois legally recognized same-sex civil unions.

The Don't Ask, Don't Tell Repeal Act, which overturned the discriminatory Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy, was signed into law by President Obama on Dec. 22, 2010, and was implemented on Sept. 20, 2011.