



First openly gay military graduates say they find acceptance

By Carlos Santoscoy

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BALTIMORE, MARYLAND -- Gay students at America's military service academies ending the first year without "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" have described a smooth transition.

The policy, which ended in September, for 18 years threatened to end the military careers of gay students who did not hide their sexual orientation.

"For the most part, it allows us to be a complete person, as opposed to compartmentalizing our lives into different types of boxes," Air force 2nd Lt. Dan Dwyer, who graduated from the Air Force Academy this week, told the AP.

Cadets for the first time could take a same sex date to official events.

Andrew Atwill, a student at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, and his boyfriend, Nick Bonsall together attended Saturday's Ring Dance, an annual formal ball for third-year midshipmen.

"It's been really great, actually," Bonsall, 20, told [The Baltimore Sun](#).
"Everyone has been really accepting of us."

The couple told the [AP](#) that they were fully accepted at the event.

"Because they made us feel so comfortable for going to the dance with each other, we didn't have to worry about any negative consequences," Atwill said.

West Point cadet Kaitlyn Kelly attended with her girlfriend a Knights Out event in March marking the 100 days before graduation. Knights Out is the gay alumni group which first came to national attention in 2009 when Army Lt. Dan Choi promoted the group on MSNBC's *The Rachel Maddow Show*. The appearance led to his eventual discharge.

It was the first official event Kelly, 22, and her civilian girlfriend attended as a couple.

"It was a remarkable thing for me, because I had taken her to previous things ... but I had to do the ambiguous, 'Oh, she's my best friend,'" she said.

"My friends and I, we were so relieved that we didn't have to worry about that. Where we might not have necessarily worried about it 100 percent, it was still something in the back of your mind that you kind of always have to watch your step," said Kelly.