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ESTIMATED SIXTY-FOUR GAY AND LESBIAN SERVICEMEMBERS KILLED SINCE 2003

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SANTA BARBARA, CA, April 4, 2008 - After it was confirmed recently that a gay soldier, Maj. Alan Rogers, died in combat in the Iraq War on January 27, the Palm Center has learned that an estimated sixty-four gay and lesbian service members may have been killed since the war began in 2003. The Pentagon announced that the number of U.S. deaths from the Iraq War passed 4000 last month, and that 98 of these were women. According to Gary Gates, senior research fellow at the Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law, approximately 1.4 percent of active duty men and 9.3 percent of active duty women are gay. If the deaths among gays and lesbians are proportional to the deaths from the Iraq War of the rest of the military population, that would mean that fifty-five men and nine women who died in uniform were gay.

The sexual orientation of service members is a private matter. But the nation must recognize that gays and lesbians are among those giving their lives for their country, a fact that can be obscured by the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy, which bars service members from being truthful about who they are.

Confirmation of the number of gay deaths is not available because of the policy’s strictures on speech about sexual orientation. But the estimates offered by Gates, who is a demographer and statistician who works with census and other data to estimate figures of gays and lesbians in the American population, are the most precise available and are widely viewed as reliable calculations.

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The Palm Center, formerly the Center for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military, is a research institute at the University of California, Santa Barbara. The Center uses rigorous social science to inform public discussions of controversial social issues, enabling policy outcomes to be informed more by evidence than by emotion. Its data-driven approach is premised on the notion that the public makes wise choices on social issues when high-quality information is available. For more information, visit www.palmcenter.org.