

they made the announcement to let women into combat arms, so I was able to be the first female to work in the infantry unit, where I worked alongside a supply sergeant.

**“I didn’t want people to identify me as the gay sailor.”**

*Israel Sanchez*

The legal aspect was that I would have a dishonorable discharge, or other than honorable discharge, if I was caught, and there were plenty of people that wanted to get rid of me, just because they were intimidated by me. I had to prove myself to be ten times of a harder worker.

When I first checked into my seagoing squadron in 2009, one of my admin officers ended up asking me straight up, “Are you gay?” This was still during Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, and I told him if he valued his career he’d probably regret asking me that question. I was not the happiest person in the world, because of the fact that that was asked, but I reflect on that moment. It angered me, because I didn’t want people to identify me as the gay sailor. I’m a sailor first. My identity of being a homosexual has nothing to do with my job. Who I love shouldn’t have an impact on my career, and that’s one of the things that I’ve struggled with my entire time, is trying to live that double life and show people that just because I’m gay doesn’t mean I’m changed in any aspect. I’m still the same person. I’m still professional. I’m still going to provide compassion and quality care. And just because you’re coming in for an STD doesn’t mean I want to look at your junk. It’s that I’m trying to take care of you. They refer to us as pecker checkers, so they think that’s what we want to do, and it’s like, gross. You’re here for an STD screening, because you just walked out of a bar. That’s why I think I identify first primarily as a sailor, as a corpsman, before my homosexuality.

Being a corpsman, for me, implies a higher standard, because it’s one of those things that you earn your shield. You go through a process of earning the Marines’ respect. They don’t give it to you. You earn the respect. The moment that I met my Marines it was an instant bond, and since then it’s an unbreakable bond, and at that point I knew that I could be myself, and not have to worry about it, because I knew my guys had my back, because they knew I was going to take care of them regardless. I wasn’t going to look at them in any other way but as my Marine, my dude. That by far was the best experience.