

My name is Akira Wyatt. I have served in the Navy for 8 years and am Hospital Corpsman 3rd class-Fleet Marine Force currently stationed at U.S Marine Corps base Camp Pendleton. I grew up in the Philippines and migrated to the U.S. at the age of 15. My father, a retired U.S. Marine, and my mother showed us that freedom fosters a person's chances for success and in bringing us here gave us the greatest gift: a chance to achieve high goals and to contribute to society.

The military has now become my extended family. For the entirety of my service, neither my sexuality nor my gender identity has led to any disruption among my comrades and peers. In fact, there's been nothing but positivity. Living our truths has made us all stronger and more devoted to our duty, with no secrets to hide behind we can be fully engaged.

Though I hadn't yet been afforded the opportunity to transition, there was a moment in 2014 that rocked me to my core and at the same time reaffirmed my commitment to service. In October 2014, PFC Joseph Scott Pemberton committed a brutal murder of Jennifer Laude when he discovered she was a transgender woman. At the time, my ship in Subic Bay contributing to joint training with Philippine forces. On sickbay duty, I was briefed that PFC Pemberton was to be escorted to the ship for follow up on care while in custody of the Philippine Police. I had only heard the headline "Marine kills transgender Pinay" and didn't think much of the visit. I was pretty naïve until I saw him face to face. During his work up, I looked into his eyes and it shook me. Cliché as it may sound, I saw darkness. He felt cold and was without remorse for what he had done. In his presence, I thought it could have been me and I felt the painful moments before Jennifer's death. Regardless, I had a mission to do as this marine's corpsman. It doesn't matter who I am, I'm here to treat everyone with the dignity, respect, and medical care they need. My duty is to be my Marine's "doc" and that is what I will always do.

Ironically, after that encounter I decided to transition regardless of the senseless violence that could be directed at me for who I am. I told myself I will transition and I won't be afraid to, even if I might face the same circumstances as Jennifer did that night... even if it comes from the hands of my marines.

I medically and socially transitioned in 2015. That year I was honored to be hand selected as 1 of the 2 corpsman to provide high-risk medical care at the 1st Marine Reconnaissance Course. During a field exercise, my Staff Sergeant said "I've never met someone who has more balls than you, Wyatt. I would deploy anywhere with you. I trust you with my life" I had enormous support from my superiors and peers. I was described in fitness reports as "A sailor who is mission oriented and focused, is an inspiring leader and motivator, and is focused on team goals".

My experiences with my Marine and Navy comrades show that unit cohesion and readiness are not adversely impacted by having a transgender service member included. I've formed incredibly tight bonds with the people I've worked with and I would follow them to the ends of the Earth to ensure they get the critical battlefield care they need to continue the fight.