



## Out In The Army: My Life As A Gay Soldier

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## **Out In The Army: My Life As A Gay Soldier** James Wharton

Out in the Army follows the extraordinary career journey of James Wharton, one of the first 'out' soldiers in the armed forces as he becomes a man, joins the Army and learns to deal with his sexuality in a sometimes hostile environment prior to coming to terms with it and, in turn, helping the army itself come to terms with homosexuality. Wharton's experiences in the army form the bedrock to this astonishing tale, from serving in Southern Iraq and with Prince Harry in Canada, to being hospitalized in a homophobic beating, to helping at the 7/7 bombings and serving at the Royal Wedding. His story is told right up until the point where he leaves the army in 2013 after a ten year commitment. The Army is certainly a different place now to when James signed up and there's no question that he's helped change opinions and make life easier for gay service people in the future. James was the first openly gay person to appear on the front cover of Soldier magazine, the British Army's official publication. By being one of the first highly visible 'out' soldier James has helped the armed services to begin to address its institutionalized homophobia.

## **Out In The Army: My Life As A Gay Soldier Details**

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## From Reader Review Out In The Army: My Life As A Gay Soldier for online ebook

### JOSEPH OLIVER says

I don't think I have ever read either a biography or autobiography of any soldier - excluding Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. I always thought the bravado and constant mentioning of guns, bombs and tanks would be rather off-putting. It's because this one is fairly ground breaking that I decided to take a chance. And I'm very glad I did.

He carefully entwines his personal life with his life in the army - both in the UK and in combat. If you begin to tire of one you suddenly find that you are moving on to the other. It is sort of candid but the reader has to bear in mind that nearly all of his colleagues are very much alive and his superiors still in the army so the legal department of the publishers would hardly allow him to speak his mind freely. Generally he is quite polite about all of them. Maybe he just omitted the ones he couldn't say anything nice about.

Some have criticised his name dropping of Prince Harry but it is difficult to ignore someone so high profile working along side you. Was he to pretend the Prince wasn't there? Also it is his life story and it must have been quite exciting. Hardly something he could pretend didn't happen. And it takes up hardly any of the book anyway. One chapter and that was one month in his life on a training mission in Canada with Prince Harry as his second in command. He was stuck in a tank for days with him so not easy to ignore.

It is quite eye opening to see how uninterested most of his fellow soldiers were about his sexuality. I liked the bit where they painted 'Killer Queen' onto his tank to cheer him up. It's a readable book and it will give you a better insight into the day to day life of being a soldier in a modern army. It's not glamour and glitz anyway.

On a negative note he does rather make a mountain out of a molehill and you really think that some aspects of army life revolved around him. I suppose from the outside looking in he was just one of hundreds of soldiers guarding the Queen but to him it was intensely personal. It is his life story so he is entitled to say how he feels. If you come from a Republic you may find these little vignettes a bit embarrassing. I found the story of having to buy Prince Harry's birthday cake a trifle over the top. It was just a cake.

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### Martin Belcher says

James Wharton's memoir of his life in the British Army, coming out and his subsequent experiences as a gay soldier makes for an absolutely riveting read. From first experiences of being 'different' growing up in a small town in north Wales to joining the Blues & Royals regiment and being stationed in central London and taking part in regular royal duties such as the state opening of parliament, trooping the colour and a royal wedding. Seeing the Queen at first hand and meeting the Prime Minister at no 10! Wharton takes us on a no holds barred journey of discovery, not only of his own sexuality but of the consequences of coming out amongst the British Army, still seen as one of the most homophobic of institutions. After some initial bullying and homophobia, Wharton finds the army and his regiment accepting of his sexuality in a way he could never have imagined. He details some very scary moments whilst on tour in Iraq and some laugh out loud moments on exercise in Canada working along side none other than Lieutenant Wales (Prince Harry to you and me). He finally enters into a civil partnership with the love of his life Thom and uses his new found media popularity to campaign in schools against homophobic bullying.

I absolutely loved this book, I smiled, laughed, got angry and filled up with emotions. Just like myself and thousands of other gay men & women, I can understand the journey Wharton has taken and the homophobia that you have to combat in your life, luckily this is getting less and I guess we are extremely lucky to live in Great Britain one of the most free and tolerant countries in the world. I highly recommend this book whatever your sexuality, it is a memoir of a vivid and rich experience and James Wharton should be extremely proud of himself. Wonderful.

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### **Robert says**

this book will change my thoughts on love and homosexuality. James had me hooked from the first chapter which I had read cover to cover within one day. I felt overwhelmed with the emotions which I experienced whilst reading his stories.

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### **Rosemary says**

James Wharton was the poster boy for the British Army's new gay-friendly policy in the 2000s, appearing on the cover of Soldier magazine, going to Pride in uniform as soon as it was allowed and getting involved in recruitment. In the end it sounds like he wanted to continue to be "the gay soldier" while his commanding officers thought they'd made their point and wanted to drop it, but this is an interesting account of how attitudes were changing at that time, though it's not the story of the average gay soldier by any means.

At the same time he had a career in the Household Cavalry that makes an interesting story in itself, including guard duty at Buckingham Palace, a tour of duty in Iraq, manoeuvres in Canada with Prince Harry and being on duty for the royal wedding in 2011. He makes the most of the royal connection, plays it to death in fact, but you can't really blame him for that since he must have seen it as a big selling point for his book.

The writing style is not very polished - it reads as if he's written it himself rather than having a ghost writer, which both adds and detracts in different ways. He's very careful not to offend anybody, to the point of making it sickly sweet at times (surviving family members are all wonderful, officers are fair and supportive, ex-boyfriends are beautiful and never at fault, etc etc). So it does have its faults but definitely worth reading if you're interested in this kind of life experience.

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### **Rachel Palmer says**

How to describe my feelings on this is rather difficult. I found it an amazing read and could relate easily to his youth and difficulty with his sexuality because only being a few years younger it was similar in some ways. But I laughed and cried through this book. It was real and so very truthful it took me less than 24hrs to read and I'm so glad I did.

I'm glad he found a new passion once he filled everything he needed to from the army. I hope and wish him all best.

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## **Martin says**

I wouldn't normally choose to read an autobiography of a soldier. I've never been comfortable with the blokes' world of beer, football, women and cars; none of which interest me greatly. But Out in the Army was heavily discounted on Amazon and in the blurb there were some positive comments from people Like Stephen Fry. So I gave it a go. I am glad I did.

James Wharton comes out as gay after joining the army at the age of 16. It charts his acceptance by his comrades and superiors and it follows his army career from training to coming under fire in Iraq and guarding the Queen at state occasions.

Wharton's simple story telling and his apparent honesty makes for a strong, emotional autobiography. There are times when I wanted to weep. He is tough on himself, forgiving of his enemies and understanding of bigots who, at times, make his life hell.

Above all, this book demonstrates that being gay is just one aspect of a person. Their sexuality should not matter when it comes to employment. A job does not a define a man and vice versa.

The other important point is that we all perform better when allowed to be open and honest about who we really are.

For me, it was another reminder that equalities legislation is vital in a civilised society. Without it, attitudes will be very slow to change indeed.

This is a story of a brave man who stands up for his principals on the battlefield and in his life.

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## **John says**

3.5

An interesting read. A bit wooden in places and some of the syrupy stuff about the Royal family wasn't entirely to my taste, not that I've anything against them; HRH Harry in particular, seems a likeable, sensible and worthwhile human being as portrayed here.

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## **CherryPop says**

A wonderful read and very eye opening to how things used to be in the army (I'm hoping things have changed at least). I found the sections about his personal life and relationships to be a joy to read, and hearing about prince Harry was a fantastic and unexpected touch. My only small gripe was a few chapters did drag on a bit and there were a few spelling mistakes that took me out of the story, one in particular made laugh out loud in a good way.

Overall a very good read. I'd give it a 4.5 if the ratings would let me.

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## Richard Beaven says

Inspiration story about James and his army and personal life as a gay man. Funny, tear jerking and real!  
Great book

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## Mikeslinky says

James Wharton's story of being gay in the army was a very interesting read. In simple, straight forward prose, James recalled his experiences in the army and the impact of being gay. First of all, thank you James, for serving your country. You should be very proud of your achievements as a soldier. Being gay while serving could have been disastrous both personally and professionally. However, it seems your self belief and strength, and a little luck to be surrounded by what seem amazingly accepting guys, got you through. Good on you! Your book is very amusing and I particularly found the tales of life in the army very interesting!

I hope it helps many others in the forces who are having difficulty with their sexuality. Lets look to the future when being gay isn't an issue in any job but in the meantime, I think you book is an important step in that direction.

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## David says

I found this book to be a great read even though the army or the royal family are not subjects that I am usually interested in. The first half of the book was great, I actually enjoyed the raw, honest and even naive style of writing and found the story of Wharton's coming out really gripping. However the second half of the book lost it for me. It once again highlighted the pointless destruction of war. Wharton described the Iraqi's he was fighting as the 'bad guys' which considering we invaded THEIR country on false pretences and killed scores of innocent civilians, I think might be missing the point slightly. Also his overly sycophantic love for Prince Harry was a little hard to stomach at times. However, despite the immature feel of the book, and the sometimes overinflated sense of importance in some areas of his activism, I enjoyed learning about a different section of society and think the story really adds to the debate surrounding sexual minorities. Being a gay soldier is definitely the definition of being brave!

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## Chris says

A surprisingly disarming book, compelling largely due to its frankness. There's nothing wildly groundbreaking here; James Wharton was an ordinary boy from a deprived Welsh community, who joined the army (which must in and of itself be a story that has occurred thousands of times over). The twist, of course, is that James Wharton was gay, and one of the first openly gay soldiers in the era after it was authorised.

This isn't an autobiography of deep, incisive observation, indeed there's an almost breathless naivety to the writing. He falls in love as an ordinary boy in his teens, and writes about it as an ordinary boy in his teens. Time and again I felt like what I was reading almost *ought* to feel banal, but the frankness and simplicity of the narrative - Wharton's willingness to wear his heart on his sleeve - makes it frequently moving. There's a

passage whilst Wharton is in Iraq that describes an almost school boy-esque series of flirtations with a gay American soldier (closeted at the time due to "DADT"), that is made simply heartbreaking by the way in which the simple ordinariness of the human interaction slams headfirst into bigoted government policy.

My real complaint is just that I think he needed a bit more prompting from his editor. Certain passages - normally those involving preparation for military parades - are described in loving detail, but more often than not, there's an utter lack of specifics that creates a pervasive sense of *vagueness* throughout the text. Otherwise interesting sections (scouting in Iraq, for example, or night time wargames in Canada...) are rendered bizarrely unevocative as a result of dry prose, and there's a curious sense of anonymisation. When Wharton flies to Canada, the lack of entertainment on the military plane meant that he read "a book" from cover to cover during the flight. When he marries his civil partner "a national newspaper" bought the rights to the photographs. It's not that I expect any of these details were very interesting in and of themselves, but having that repeated throughout an entire book, makes the whole feel a bit bland.

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### **Jonathan says**

James Wharton came out while still a teenager, serving as a soldier in the Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment. Anyone familiar with the sight of the Blues and Royals in London, parading on their horses with their dark blue tunics and red plumed helmets, will be aware of the tradition and formality of this role, and it was naturally met with some trepidation when he realised most everyone in his regiment was aware of his sexuality.

This was ten years ago, when the British Army had only recently been told that they were no longer able to sack soldiers for being gay, so few officers had experience of dealing with this in a positive way. Certain experiences aside, James had a lot of support from the army while coming out, especially from his own circle of friends, something any gay person is grateful for, and as with some people, there was more tension involved with some of his family.

This is a great, important book, if only because it involves the story of a gay man honestly telling his story while working in a job that few people would associate with a gay man. It shows, if anyone needs a hint (and I expect some still do) that a person's sexuality has little to do with their ability to do any job, and indeed as James points out later in the book, by coming out and not being vilified in the army for it, he felt more able to perform better in the difficult and tense situation of being on the front line in Iraq.

This is more than a military memoir, or indeed a coming out story; it has great humour and many emotional moments. As Paul Gambaccini is quoted as saying at the beginning '...he brings you to the verge of tears not only when you expect him to but when you don't'.

James has now left the army, (hence being able to write this book), but not before having a full career, in combat in Iraq, helping to train other soldiers, appearing on ceremonial duty during the Trooping Of The Colour and the Royal Wedding. There are also some wonderful exchanges with Prince Harry while training in Canada. When Harry tells James that he and his brother have been told that they are gay icons, James tells him that he doesn't think he is. Well I think this book seals his fate as just that.

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### **Kath Middleton says**

This is the story of James Wharton who spent ten years in the army, only leaving recently to do some work

for Stonewall. He was determined that his time in the services should be 'authentic' by which he meant that he should be there as himself – a gay man. He only came upon one serious homophobic episode, a horrific beating with an iron bar. His mates seemed to take his sexuality in their stride and it gives hope for the younger generation. He was a member of the Household Cavalry and took part in many state occasions. He was also posted to Basra and sadly lost colleagues there. Eventually, on training in Canada, he spent a month as gunner in Prince Harry's tank and has evidently a great deal of respect and fondness for the prince.

The book taught me a great deal about the day-to-day operations of the army, particularly the Household Cavalry. It was told in a conversational, colloquial style which felt like someone telling his adventures to a friend. Whether you are gay or not, a member of the forces or not, this book has things to tell you. I enjoyed it a lot.

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### **Martijn Hartman-maatman says**

I love love love this book !!! This man is definitely my new hero. Being gay is hard enough, but gay in the British Army is even harder. And yet James pulls it off, making friends along the way, great adventures along the way and even meeting Prince Harry in real life.

And of course finding the love of his life Thom, and they live happily ever after.

Everyone should read this book, it is GREAT !!!!

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