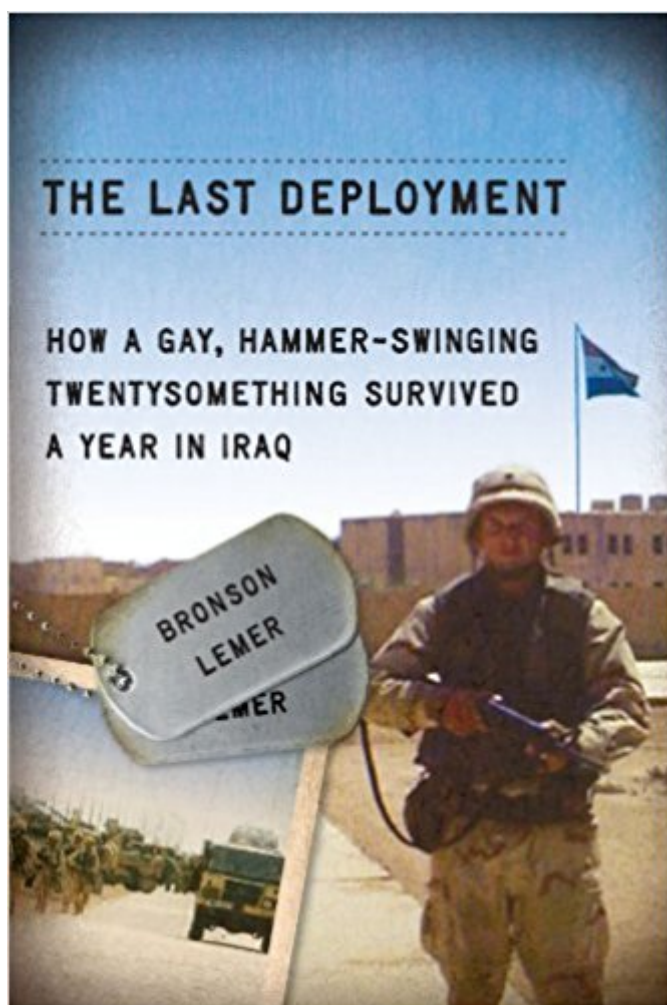


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The Last Deployment: How A Gay, Hammer-Swinging Twentysomething Survived A Year In Iraq (Living Out: Gay And Lesbian Autobiog)





Synopsis

In 2003, after serving five and a half years as a carpenter in a North Dakota National Guard engineer unit, Bronson Lemer was ready to leave the military behind. But six months short of completing his commitment to the army, Lemer was deployed on a yearlong tour of duty to Iraq. Leaving college life behind in the Midwest, he yearns for a lost love and quietly dreams of a future as an openly gay man outside the military. He discovers that his father's lifelong example of silent strength has taught him much about being a man, and these lessons help him survive in a war zone and to conceal his sexuality, as he is required to do by the U.S. military.

The Last Deployment is a moving, provocative chronicle of one soldier's struggle to reconcile military brotherhood with self-acceptance. Lemer captures the absurd nuances of a soldier's daily life: growing a mustache to disguise his fear, wearing pantyhose to battle sand fleas, and exchanging barbs with Iraqis while driving through Baghdad. But most strikingly, he describes the poignant reality faced by gay servicemen and servicewomen, who must mask their identities while serving a country that disowns them. Often funny, sometimes anguished, The Last Deployment paints a deeply personal portrait of war in the twenty-first century.

InSight Out Book Club selection
Bronson Lemer named one of Instinct magazine's Leading Men 2011
QPB Book Club selection
Finalist, Minnesota Book Awards
Finalist, Over the Rainbow Selection, American Library Association Top Ten 10 Gay & Lesbian Books of 2011

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“Lemer writes with clarity, temperance, and an eye for detail. . . . Without ever becoming polemical, the book shows graphically how ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ cruelly affects gay soldiers who play by the rules.” •David Bergman, editor of *Gay American Autobiography: Writings from Whitman to Sedaris* “An important contribution to this national debate. . . . A book we should have on the president’s desk as soon as possible.” •Tim Miller, author of *Body Blows* and *1001 Beds* “A well-written, often provocative memoir of the author’s struggle to reconcile military brotherhood with self-acceptance. . . . Regardless of how you feel about the war, this memoir is well worth reading.” •Lambda Literary “This is extremely touching material. Lemer describes the emotional turbulence of being gay in the military, tortured with the strong natural desire to connect with his fellow soldiers yet unable to reveal himself because of his sexuality. There is real pain in that kind of personal concealment, and it permeates this moving, substantive account.” •Bay Area Reporter “This book provides a poignant example of a gay man learning more about his place in the world. Lemer’s fears and joys highlight the humanity associated with being gay in the military, along with complexities of the discriminatory and soon to be ended policy of ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.’” •High Plains Reader “Lemer’s is a wonderfully descriptive, wryly humorous, heart-crushing story, and I couldn’t put it down. . . . If you love a soldier, your country, or both, *The Last Deployment* is a book you’ll want to tell everybody about.” •The Dallas Voice “A masterful balance of straightforward wartime reporting, anguished self-reflection and a wealth of absurd asides.” •Pittsburgh’s *Out*

Bronson Lemer served in the North Dakota Army National Guard for six years, including deployments to Kosovo and Iraq. His writing has appeared in *Blue Earth Review*, *The Reykjavik Grapevine*, and *Twentysomething Essays* by Twentysomething Writers. He teaches English and humanities courses at Turtle Mountain Community College near Belcourt, North Dakota.

"The Last Deployment..." is writer Bronson Lemer's account of his final year in military service (North Dakota National Guard), spent in parts of Iraq early in the second war there. Secondary to that experience, but important to Lemer's perspective and inner life is that fact that he was a gay man serving under the highly ambiguous "don't ask, don't tell" military rule. It's clear from his story

that what overshadowed everything during that deployment was his need to survive the hostilities and honor the military's first commandment requiring unit cohesion before anything else. His personal, inner life was put on hold, as were those of his compatriots of course, but Lemer was not able to openly plug into the stateside support system (wives, husbands, girlfriends, etc.) that everyone else could. That he came through the experience in apparent good mental condition is remarkable. Lemer's story has the feel of absolute authenticity when he talks about the dangerous, but often tedious daily routines of an enlisted man in combat conditions. And while I liked the honesty and feel of reality in this book, but I would have liked to have known a bit more about the writer's background--his relationship with his family and friends back home, and maybe something of how he has been adjusting to civilian life since leaving the military. This is an interesting person with an interesting story and that makes the reader want to know more.

This was an incredibly well-written book giving a powerful perspective on military and human experiences most will never have, nor fully be able to comprehend. It is incredibly depictive of both the internal and external forces at work in the simultaneous shaping of a soldier and civilian. One can appreciate Lemer's candid words and thoughts, bringing a tangible reality to internal struggle between a search for purpose/meaning in the midst of a conflicting humanitarian and political mission. This book wonderfully describes the paradigm between fitting into societal norms and being your authentic self at a variable cost. He beautifully paints the picture of how past experiences shape beliefs and how an introspective soul applies them both to current circumstances. One gains a wider view of the challenges in creating a cohesive team from a diverse group of men and women at different levels of consciousness. At times hilarious, at times frustrating, Lemer lends insight and appreciation for the mundane life luxuries and personal freedoms we take for granted.

You never know what its like to be somebody without walking a mile in someones shoes. This book is very detailed in the day to day life of a soldier. Not just any soldier, but one who has to work at keeping his sexuality a secret. I wouldnt of thought that it would be so hard to keep something like that under wraps, but reality says otherwise. How else do you form and keep relationships? A great informative book that should be picked up by everyone, especially in the military.

Excellent memoir.

This is an outstanding book. It's emotionally difficult to read in some places. I am so proud of

Bronson. WRITING this book is an act of love on so many levels.

The author of this story provides a moving account of the Iraq war, his identity as a gay soldier, and the dilemma he experiences hiding his identity from his fellow soldiers while becoming comrades. It is at times an endearing account and does a good job speaking to these themes. At the same time the story line grows somewhat stale and the text could have been better edited to make the book more readable.

Bronson joined the National Guard in his senior year of high school, mostly to compete with his brothers, who had been favored by his parents due to their many sports achievements. Bronson was not very athletic, somewhat shy, and harboring a secret; he was gay. He figured his "weekend warrior" obligation would be well worth it, not just in upgrading his status at home, but in allowing him to travel and relate to other men in an atmosphere where his sexuality could not be brought up as an issue. He got through a deployment to Kosovo, and was looking forward to the end of his six year enlistment, when he received orders that he would be deployed to Iraq in the final six months of that time, which would eventually be extended to a full year. He had to put off finishing college, and had the usual apprehensions about the dangers he could face. But Bronson was also going through a difficult time, still not completely over a relationship that had ended badly, and second-guessing himself on his part in the breakup. With no partner, a somewhat emotionally-detached family and few close friends back home, he also didn't have the support structure most of his fellow soldiers had, as most were married or had longtime girlfriends. It was one thing to avoid the subject of his own relationships when going for weekend drills or two week summer training, but it would be much tougher in the forced living situation he would face overseas for so long. Lemer's well-written memoir is a clear argument why the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy has to go, as well as an interesting and poignant look at the everyday lives of soldiers deployed in situations like this. No matter how you feel about the war, this is something you need to read. Five stars out of five.- Bob Lind, Echo Magazine

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