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Ex-Navy Man is an Ex-Army Woman

By Shearlean Duke
Los Angeles Times

Los Angeles

Chief Petty Officer Michael Clark spent nearly 12 years in the Navy. He accumulated a folder full of letters of commendation and was well liked by his colleagues.

Sergeant First Class Joanna Clark spent nearly two years in the Army Reserve. She, too, accumulated a folder full of letters of commendation and was well liked by her colleagues.

Michael Clark and Joanna Clark are the same person — and possibly the only person in the country ever to serve in one branch of the armed services as a man and in another branch as a woman.

Michael Clark served in the Navy from 1957 to 1969, when he was honorably discharged. In 1975 he underwent a sex operation and became, legally and biologically, a woman named Joanna Clark.

Several months after the surgery, Clark enlisted in the Army Reserve, where she served for nearly 19 months as a sergeant first class.

She joined the reserve because she had liked the military and, with nearly 16 years in the naval reserve, hoped to accumulate a few more years of service toward military retirement benefits.

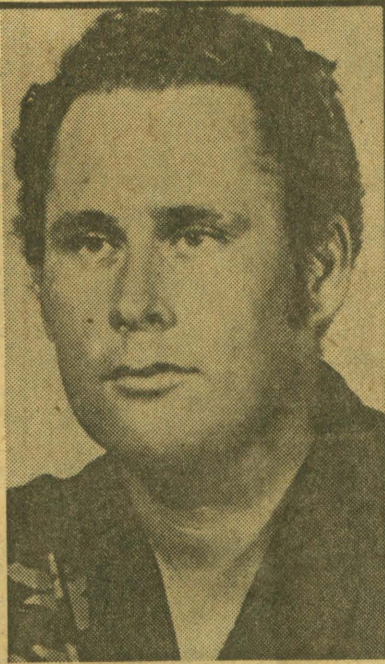
When Clark walked into the Army Reserve Center in nearby Los Alamitos nearly two years ago, she did not hide the fact that she was a transsexual — and Art Wolford, a retired Army lieutenant colonel who was an administrator for the 49th Medical Battalion, assured her the sex-change operation didn't matter.

"I'm the one who enlisted her, and she made absolutely no attempt to hide her background," Wolford said recently, a few days before he received orders from Sixth Army headquarters not to discuss the case with the press. "It didn't bother me one bit. She was a person qualified to do the job we needed done."

But Wolford, an Army civilian employee, obviously was wrong about the sex-change operation not mattering. Officially, the Army took a dim view of having a transsexual in its ranks.

So on Aug. 10, 1977, after 19 months of Army service, Sergeant Clark received a letter informing her she was being released.

The official statement from the



Joanna Clark as she looks today (above), as she appeared as Michael Clark (top right) before the surgery, and in Army uniform after that operation

office of the chief of legislative liaison reads:

"In accordance with current Army Regulation 40-501 an individual with abnormalities and defects of the genitalia such as change of sex is disqualified for enlistment. It is the Department of the Army policy not to waive this disqualification due to the requirement for continuing maintenance therapy and the high incidence of psychological problems associated with the condition."

Why was Joanna Clark allowed to serve for 19 months before the regulation was enforced?

The answer to that question is under investigation by the Army

inspector general's office in Washington.

"We won't get any comment from them until that investigation is complete," said Lieutenant Colonel Hugh Waite, chief of the news branch in the Army's office of public affairs.

When that investigation will be complete Waite does not know.

All this has left Joanna Clark confused and angry. She says that as long as she is able to do her job she should be allowed to stay in the reserve. She had hoped to spend enough time in reserve duty to bring her total number of years of military service to 20, entitling her to retirement benefits.

Clark, who is doing clerical work through a temporary employment agency in Orange county, has been trying to fight the Army's decision to release her.

She believes that Army regulation 40-501 should be done away with — or, at least, waived in her case.

There are others who share her opinion.

One of them is Captain J. C. Smith, a Navy doctor in Long Beach who is often called on to do Army physicals. After being asked to complete a physical examination of Clark in July, Smith recommended she be allowed to remain in the service.

"I found no reason, physically or mentally, that she couldn't perform her duties," Smith, a doctor at the Naval Regional Medical Center

borne out by the numerous letters of commendation I received."

Clark, 39, is a thoughtful, articulate woman with red hair and blue eyes. She is 6 foot 1 and weighs nearly 190 pounds.

Her sex-change operation two years ago was the result of years of frustration and confusion, she says.

"As far back as I could remember, I couldn't understand what it was I felt or why I felt that way," she said.

"All I knew was that I was different from other boys because I

didn't enjoy the things they did. I did do them, of course. Society is a very good teacher in making you conform. So I learned very quickly the things I could do and the things I couldn't do."

One thing that young Michael Clark of Pontiac, Mich., learned to do was become "macho."

"I was often described as being almost too macho," Clark recalled. "It was as if I had to prove something."

That's one of the reasons, Clark says, she joined the Navy, where she served as an aviation anti-submarine warfare technician.

Clark also claimed that it was attempts at conformity that led her into two unsuccessful marriages, one of which resulted in a son, who is 16.

Her first marriage, right out of high school, lasted for 11 years.

"I can describe it simply," Clark said. "I made her miserable and she made me miserable. But in my generation you stayed married, regardless."

But Clark's marriage did eventually end in divorce in 1970.

She says she made a last-ditch effort to conform by remarrying two years later.

"We had problems, too," she recalled. "And I finally told her that I thought I was a transsexual. And she said, 'What's that?' And I said, 'I think I'm just as female as you, inside.'"

After making that admission, Clark went to see a psychiatrist and eventually entered a program for transsexuals at Stanford University, where she underwent psychiatric evaluation.

Because of financial problems, she later left the program and moved to Orange county to live with her parents. She eventually got a job and a few months later left for the Oklahoma Gender Identity Foundation, where the sex-change surgery was performed.

Clark doesn't feel her size is a problem. "I know who I am and I'm comfortable with it," she said. "But you don't learn how to be male or female overnight — no matter how you feel inside. For example, walking down the street ... a woman walks with her hips. A man walks with his shoulders. That's a learned process."

But Clark says she is accepted as a woman by her co-workers, her friends and her parents.

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"I found no reason, physically or mentally, that she couldn't perform her duties," Smith, a doctor at the Naval Regional Medical Center, told the Los Angeles Times.

"Personally, of course, it was my feeling that since they (the Army) knew about her and she had served that long — she wasn't trying to hide anything — I felt a waiver could be granted. She is able to do her job and she has shown she can do her job. A waiver could be made, it but it would have to come from the Army."

Wolford, the man who signed Clark up for the reserve, also believes she should be allowed to stay.

Wolford, a 30-year Army veteran, is one of Clark's most enthusiastic supporters.

Clark believes the Army's position not to grant a waiver is based on fear and the need to save face.

"I served with honor and distinction during my Army Reserve career," she said, "without physical or psychiatric impairment. This is

borne out by the numerous letters of commendation I received."

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