

Eli: Hello, and welcome to Queer as Fact! My name is Eli.

Alice: I'm Alice.

Jason: And I'm Jason.

E: We're a queer history podcast, bringing you episodes on people, places and things from around the world and throughout time.

[intro music plays]

E: So you'll notice that before our opening music I didn't say what the topic of this episode is. [laughs] Which was highly unusual – because we don't really have a topic for this episode. We're instead bringing you some... announcements. And if you sit through that then we will bring you a shorter story than we normally bring you, so hold tight, we'll do this quickly.

So we're coming up on our one-year anniversary, which we're very very excited about. And yeah, so we're very very excited that we've managed to survive for a year, and we've managed to survive for a year because of everyone who's listened to this and shared it and gotten other people to listen to it, so thank you very much if any of that applies to you, which I guess it by definition does if you're hearing this.

[laughter]

E: So thank you. Going into our second year we wanted to kind of rethink how we do things a little bit – I think the only real complaint we've ever gotten is that it's a very very long time to wait between the 1st and the 15th.

A: [laughs]

E: So we're gonna fix that, and we're going to trial some new content for you in our new year... It's not the new year.

[laughter]

A: It's *our* new year.

E: It's our new year. So we're gonna keep doing our episodes on the 1st and the 15th, and they're not gonna change, they're gonna be same format, on the same type of topics, in the same sometimes ridiculous depth that you've come to expect from us, but we're also gonna be doing some new things. So we're gonna be coming out on... what is it now? The 1st, the 8th, the 15th, and the 22nd...

A: Yes.

E: ...of every month. And we promise we'll never ever say that at the beginning of an episode.

[laughter]

E: And on the 8th and the 22nd we're gonna have some new formats.

A: So on the 8th of every month we'll be having mini episodes, and in those we'll be talking about people whose biographies couldn't fill full episodes.

E: Generally this is gonna be because there's no English biography of them.

A: Yep. [laughs]

E: Yep.

A: So for example we'll be talking soon about Willem Arondeus, the World War II resistance fighter, and we'll also be talking about myths in queer history, and either confirming or debunking those.

So our first mini episode for you is gonna be about whether Swedish people called in gay to work when homosexuality was listed as an illness.

E: And then on the 22nd we're gonna be having yet another format [laughs] for you, which is why there is a new voice in the Queer as Fact studio today. Which we're very....

A: [scoffs] Studio.

E: ...excited by. Yeah, studio.

[laughter]

E: My living room, and also *your* living room.

J: Hello! I'm Jason, and I am a housemate of Eli's.

E: Yep.

[laughter]

J: And also a media graduate who has spent significant time analysing the intersection of queer identities and media and on the 22nd, we're going to be starting up some episodes talking about the intersection of queer history and media, making episodes about both queer historical figures depicted in modern media, as well as pieces of queer media from history. So we have, for example, our first two episodes – the first one is gonna be presented by Eli, which is going to be about the 19th-century gothic horror novella *Carmilla*.

E: Mhm.

J: And our second episode, presented by me, which will be dealing with the 1996 Robin Williams film *The Birdcage*.

E: So hopefully you're as excited for all that as we are. I did say at the beginning that we will be trialling it, so we're gonna be doing it from April through to July, and we're just gonna see how we feel about the new format, and if people listen to them, and then we're gonna go from there and see how we feel about continuing it. So if you like the new formats, if you have any feelings on how they could be changed for the better, as well as if you have any suggestions for things we should cover in either of the new formats, or in our standard episodes for that matter, please do contact us – we'll have all our social media info at the end of the podcast.

So thank you for bearing with us through the announcements. Now, so this episode hasn't been a total waste, and we don't leave you hanging too much, we are gonna tell you a little bit of queer history. So I guess this should pretty much serve as an example of what you can expect from our mini episodes that will be coming out on the 8th of every month, and I'm gonna tell you a little bit of a story about the US navy during the 1980s.

So, this is gonna be very not-fun, and then there'll be a brief period of fun.

[laughter]

E: We will give a content warning for this little story, but it's just some period-typical homophobia, nothing too frightening – isn't that a nice change?

[laughter]

J: That is a nice change.

A: That may be the shortest... sorry.

J: I mean, he says, having never recorded one of these episodes before.

[laughter]

J: But I have listened to them.

E: Yes.

A: Yeah.

[laughter]

E: So as you guys would remember, because this happened in our recent history, until the Obama administration, you could not be openly gay in the US armed forces. Before that, from 1994 to 2011 the “don't ask don't tell” policy was in force, which is pretty self-explanatory. Before that it was kind of vaguer and more nebulous. Officially, gay people could not be in the military, or in the armed forces, rather, at all. So yeah, it had been the case that you could not be gay in the navy, but basically people either chose to enforce this or didn't. During the 1970s there had been several quite high-profile discharges of gay personnel and these gay personnel had decided that that was nonsense, and they'd taken it to court. And they hadn't been very successful, but it was kind of this like, changing feeling where there was more of a push for gay people to potentially be allowed to be in the armed forces, so in 1981 the navy issued new regulations surrounding discharging gay service personnel, basically not really changing their position too much, but really just kind of solidifying that “Nope, we've never allowed gay people in the navy, and we're not allowing gay people in the navy now.” So they have this there for when these court cases came up, to really solidify their position.

A: So when they were taking them to court, was that just an anti-discrimination case?

E: Yeah, I guess.

A: Okay.

J: Yeah, I mean, perhaps not all that surprising that they weren't successful given that the US military tends to exist somewhat outside regular legal structures, I believe, in US law. I know this has been the case for harassment lawsuits as well where military tribunals often sit and it makes it harder both for legal decisions to be made that are a bit more progressive, as well as, y'know for coverage to come out about and for public pressure to build up.

E: Yeah, the feeling I got was that it was much more about creating media presence about this than it was about really hoping that you'd, like, y'know, then get back in the navy and be promoted as expected.

J: Mm.

E: So, Direct 1332.14 comes into place and it read, “Homosexuality is incompatible with military service. The presence in the military environment of persons who engage in homosexual conduct or who, by their statements, demonstrate a propensity to engage in homosexual conduct, seriously impairs the accomplishment of the military mission.” Which is some homophobic nonsense.

J: Yeah, it's the same argument that was used against, like, mixed-race regiments.

E: Mm. And –

J: As per that one West Wing episode that deals with this exact topic.

[laughter]

A: So you didn't even have to be having gay sex, you just had to say things that made it obvious you were a gay person?

E: Yeah, I mean, I think the idea is that it's the done thing that they ask you if you're gay when you're enlisting, and if you say yes, they then have the right to say we're not accepting you.

A: Yep.

E: Or if they ask you later and you say yes then they can just kick you out, end of story. However, that wasn't actually the done thing necessarily.

A: Mhm.

E: That you were asked, and that if you then said yes, you were not accepted to the Navy.

A: Yep.

E: Because they weren't actually all that interested in expelling all gay people or keeping out all gay people because there are quite a lot of gay people. They were more interested in being able to say that they did this, and also from preventing gay people from rising too high up the ranks.

J: Mhm.

E: So there were a lot of gay people in the navy right now.

A: Mmkay. So the Navy is stereotypically a very gay place.

E: Yes.

A: Is there, like, a higher percentage of gay people in the Navy than, say, the Army?

E: I don't know.

[laughter]

A: Okay, I didn't really expect you to know that, I just thought it might have come up in your research.

E: I do know that in 1981, there were like 2000 people that were discharged from the US armed services for being gay and half of them came from the Navy.

A: Okay.

E: So that doesn't necessarily mean the answer to your question is yes but...

A: That's some evidence that could support that being the answer.

J: Yeah, and I mean, I suppose possibly the structure of naval life would lend itself more to gay people being found out and discharged...

A: Mm.

E: Yeah.

J: ...given that it's a more cramped space given you're on a ship.

A: Yeah.

E: Yeah, that's a thought. I think regardless of whether there were more gay people in the navy, there was a perception by some people higher up in the navy or by the government that there were a lot of gay people in the navy...

A: Mhm.

E: ...partially because of some stuff we're about to talk about, hence them like, extra looking for gay people in the navy.

A: Okay

J: Yep, yep.

E: But if you're asking why the Village People have a navy song, I don't know.

A: Okay.

E: I don't know how this became a gay thing.

[laughter]

J: I mean that may actually pre-date, like, modern navies.

A: I think it does, I think it does. Like, there's that rum, sodomy, and the lash quote about the British Navy from like, the...

J: Mm...

A: 19th century? Early 20th century? So it's an old thing that navy is gay.

E: Ships are gay.

A: Ships are gay.

J: Ships are gay culture now.

[laughter]

E: I do also want to note before we go any further that this is disproportionately affecting gay men in the armed services, because the story I'm about to tell is about gay men.

A: Mhm.

E: Not about also lesbians. In 1990, Vice Admiral Joseph S. Donnell issued a memo about how to recognise lesbians in the navy that quite amused me.

A: [laughter] I'm so ready.

J: Oh boy.

E: Yeah. Saying that, "Experience has shown that the stereotypical female homosexual in the Navy is hardworking, career-oriented, willing to put in long hours on the job and is among the command's top professionals."

A: [laughter]

E: So.

J: So, I mean that just sounds like a way to stop women from progressing in the Navy.

A: Yeah.

J: By just accusing any successful ones of being gay.

A and E: Yeah.

E: I think it's the thing where like, being competent at being in the navy is viewed as an inherently masculine trait that therefore means that you were potentially a lesbian.

J: Yeah.

E: And I know, like, he used this in the same memo that he urged lesbians be discovered and discharged from the navy, this is coming from a deeply homophobic place, but when you take a part of this out of context, it really just sounds like, wow, lesbians are doing great lately, aren't they?

[laughter]

E: And I quite enjoyed that.

J: Yeah y'know, I'm happy that from his experience the lesbians in the navy were quite successful

and good at their jobs.

E: Yeah.

J: So.

E: Lesbians were also being discharged from the navy but at a lower rate, and the story we're about to tell now is specifically about gay men. I just didn't want to ignore lesbians. So with all that background in mind, we can actually tell this story now.

[laughter]

E: In 1980, a man named Mel Dahl enlisted in the navy, and as he was enlisting in the Navy, they asked him if he was gay, and he was very candid about this and he goes, yep, I'm gay. And they ignored people and they enlisted him anyway.

A: Is this just because they needed people?

E: I don't think... I think it depends partly on what interviewer you get.

A: Oh yeah.

E: And yeah, they're not actually really keeping gay people out of the navy, as I said.

A: Yep.

J: Yeah, the US military pretty much post-Vietnam is pretty desperate for enlistees.

A: Uh huh.

J: Like, to this day.

E: And he seems to, I don't know a lot about Mel Dahl and what he'd already been doing or like how switched-on he was or anything like that, but by the next year he was interviewing for a security clearance in order to study cryptography, so I assume that he was like, pretty good at his job.

J: Mm.

E: Um, and while he was doing this interview, they again asked him, "Are you gay?" and he said, "Yes."

E: And this time the interviewer was much less sympathetic. He terminated the interview straight away and Mel was informed that he was going to be discharged. And Mel was not going to take this, so he started a legal battle with them over it, and during the trial, he mentioned that there were tons of gay men at the Great Lakes base that he'd been stationed at, and that case doesn't really go anywhere, as cases tend to not do at this time.

J: Mm-hm.

E: But the reason we're interested in it is because the Navy responded to that claimed with great alarm.

A&J: [laugh]

E: And started a full scale investigation to find these men. And part of what they did was they sent investigators to gay bars in Chicago to try and find gay sailors. And they noticed while they are at these bars that a lot of the men there identified themselves as being "friends of Dorothy".

A: [laughs]

E: So the intelligence service deduced that Dorothy was a real woman who served as an information hub for the gay community and if they found her, they could find the names of a lot of gay men, which would lead to the names of more gay men, and they could solve their problem.

J: I...have a suspicion that perhaps Dorothy is not a real person.

E: No, no.

J: [laughs]

A: I do enjoy imagining Dorothy as a real person though.

E: Me too.

A: [laughs]

E: And so the NIS tasked men with going back to these bars and covertly asking about Dorothy, where is Dorothy? And they failed to turn anything up, and they had a lot of conversations where these men were like, "What? What are you talking about?"

[laughter]

E: And they wasted a lot of time and a lot of taxpayer money.

A: So this is the fun part you mentioned.

E: Yes. Dorothy is, of course, in the phrase "friend of Dorothy", generally understood to be Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz. Ah, the euphemism has been around since the 1940s. There's a few conflicting stories about exactly what Dorothy it refers to, but generally it's understood to be that Dorothy, because Judy Garland was a gay icon, and the film had cult status in the gay community, because it had these messages of inclusivity despite difference and those types of things.

J: Yeah, it came up in a list of top 50 queer movies when I was doing some research for our upcoming media episodes, and I was like, "Well, not quite what I was looking for, but..."

A&E: [laugh]

A: One day you can watch it.

E: Honourable mention.

J: Yeah.

E: So, the Gay Times, for example, has an article about the phrase "friend of Dorothy", and talking about why the Wizard of Oz is a gay movie, despite not really being a gay movie, in which it said, "Dorothy's three companions on her trip to Oz have long been read as gay and for good reason. The Tin Man, the Scarecrow and the Cowardly Lion are misfits who do not conform to their perceived roles. The Scarecrow isn't able to frighten anything, crow or otherwise, the Tin Man constantly needs lubing up, and the Cowardly Lion seems to prefer mincing to roaring. This ostracisation is familiar to many gay guys who are often accused of being less masculine than straight guys. The book *The Road To Oz* also has a pretty famous quote that gay publications and things like to use, ah, in which Dorothy responds to someone saying that she has queer friends with the famous line "The queerness doesn't matter, so long as they're friends."

A: Aww. That's very cute!

E: So, that's pretty much the end of my story.

A&J: [laugh]

A: That was good, that was good. I enjoyed that story.

E: Yes.

J: Yeah, no, that's quite interesting.

E: I will note that I saw this a lot on the internet, and I was fully prepared to believe it was a lie, because most things that get said on the internet...

A: Are lies.

E: [laughs] And I found that all of them that led back to a source all led back to an article that led back to an article that led back to an article that led back to a source pretty much all came from Brandy Schultz's book, *Coming Out Under Fire*.

A: Oh yeah.

E: Which is a history of gay men and lesbians in the US military. And he got it from a oral history interview with Mel Dahl. I have no other source.

A: Okay.

E: So, I'm still like 10% suspicious to be honest.

A: Yeah...

E: But...

J: Look, to be honest, every weird story I've ever heard about the US intelligence service...

A: [laughs, apparently just at the existence of the US intelligence service]

J: ...has turned out to be true.

E: Yeah. Like, I think it's believable. Um, if it is true, which I'm leaning towards I guess, um, there must be more evidence out there.

A: Mm.

E: Such as a very embarrassed report.

J: I mean, a very embarrassed report that is probably scheduled for release in 2075 or something like that.

E: Yeah, and has heavy Sharpie annotations.

A: [laughs]

E: I just love how dumb the government can be.

J: Yes.

A: [laughing] It's very satisfying.

E: Yeah, there was one little sub-story within this, where they pulled in a young man who was trying out for the Navy, and they asked him if he was gay, and they put him into a room and they were like, "We know about Dorothy! Where is she?" And he was like young enough and new enough to the gay scene that he didn't even know the word "friends of Dorothy".

J: Yeah...

E: So he was like, "What is happening??"

A: [laughs]

E: And I just love picturing that interview.

J: I do kind of hope that there was someone in the intelligence service who was gay and/or aware of the phrase “friend of Dorothy” and its meaning...

A: There would’ve been!

J: ...and was just trying to stifle their laughter the entire time that this investigation was going on.

E: Yeah.

A: [laughs]

J: ‘Cause there were probably several of them.

E: Mm.

A: Yeah!

E: Well, as Mel Dahl says, there’s tons of them. They’re all over the place.

J: Yeah, and I think that’s equally as true of the intelligence service as it is of the military.

A: Yeah.

E: I really like the idea of there being a movie where this group of gay people is like, “No, let’s just send them on this massive chase for as long as we can, so that they can’t spend their time and money kicking out actual gay people”.

J: Mm.

E: And then the Benny Hill theme song is in there somewhere.

[laughter]

J: Yup. The Benny Hill song plays for the next two hours.

E: It loops very well!

J: Yeah.

E: That is it! I hope you enjoyed this little taste of what our media episodes will be like, and I hope this is enough to tide you over until our next full-length episode, and then all of this new content starts happening. Yep. With that I’ve been Eli.

A: I’m Alice.

J: And I’m Jason.

E: We’ll be back on the 1st of April talking to you about the writer of Frankenstein, Mary Shelley. In the meantime you can find us on social media. We are on Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr as queerasfact. You can also find us on iTunes as Queer As Fact, and if you do listen to us on iTunes we would very much appreciate it if you left us a review. If you want to email us more directly you can find us at queerasfact@gmail.com. Thank you very much for listening, and we’ll see you next time.

[outro music plays]