

Squids and the Inner Light of Being

By Fred Reed

It was an epochal moment for the military and perhaps for all of society. Screwing up her courage, Air Force First Lieutenant Kara-Ann McBee walked into her commander's office on the D-Ring of the Pentagon and announced that she was a giant squid.

Kara was slender and tomboyish, with an upturned nose, freckles, and an attractive brush-cut hairdo. She could have been Tom Sawyer's sister. She did not appear to be a giant squid.

"But I am, sir," she said, rigidly at attention and clearly nervous. "I've known it since I was a little girl. I...sir, I am a squid trapped in a woman's body. I'm trans-phylum, sir."

The commander, Colonel R. Boyd Gittim, was stunned. He was a compact, graying man in his mid-fifties, a combat flier who had slipped through the screening process to high position in what insiders called the Five-Sided Wind Tunnel. He was not well suited to the complex personnel issues of the modern military.

He had to say something. What, he wondered?

"Squids have lots of arms. Ten, I think."

"Yessir, ten. But...you see, sir, I feel their presence. Like ectoplasm or something."

Colonel Gittim sighed. He knew of course about LGBT, which he thought of as Lettuce, Bacon, and Tomato, and he knew there existed crucial military questions about whether boys could use the girls room. Squids were too much.

It wasn't his Air Force any longer, he thought grayly. Wars were fought by remotely-controlled drones now, and the best pilots were probably fifteen-year-old gamers with no social life. They could do it from home by internet. He decided to retire and drink himself to death.

But consequences were to follow this modest beginning. Kara-Ann, not particularly militant, said that just wanted to be respected as a cephalopod, although she did say that she thought the Air Force ought to provide her an aquarium to sleep in. But, inevitably, the affair came to the attention of DACOWITS. This was not a Polish mathematician, but the Defense Advisory Commission on Women in the Services. They were Boadiceas of social justice, fighting against the oppression, brutality, contempt and unremitting assault to which women were subjected everywhere, except anywhere that anyone could find.

Dacowits needed something to do. Things were slow in the trenches of discrimination. Most victories had been won. A woman commanded the SEALs, who had been disarmed to prevent violence. The new main battle tanks had changing tables, and urinals had been outlawed throughout the services or converted to flower pots to preclude uncomfortable spaces. The warriors of social justice needed a Cause.

Virtual squids were just the thing.

But what to demand? There was no point in having a Cause if you couldn't demand something outrageous and get coverage in the Washington Post. Perhaps, they decided, they could insist that Kara-Ann should

have uniforms with ten sleeves. After intense conferencing, they came up with “imputed tentacles.” After all, phylum was a social construct, and if Kara-Ann could be a squid without looking like one, then she could have tentacles without having any.

When an unwise major tweeted that the idea was “silly as hell and I don’t want to serve with any goddam octopus,” he was demoted. Wilhelmina Mikoyan-Gurevich, chairwoman of Dacowits, exploded. Who were men to decide how many arms a woman had? Did men know what it was to be pregnant? Women knew their own bodies. If they thought they had tentacles, then they did have them.

A few within Dacowits thought this was over the top, even in pursuit of social justice. Maybe something simpler would do. Could they demand special diets for virtual squids? They weren’t sure what squids ate. Something unpleasant, no doubt.

Restaurants and chow halls throughout the military were forbidden to serve calamai when Kara-Ann broke down in hysterical crying and said it was just too...too *horrible*, and requested counseling. Trans-phylum bathrooms were a slam-dunk, but what exactly would such a loo need? How did squids...you know...do it? A commission was formed to study the question.

Things became complicated as more servicepersons discovered their inner zoology. Two giraffes, a kudu, and a Brahma bull came out of the closet, the last requesting a feeding trough in the mess hall. The kudu, a goggle-eyed computer nerd from Defense Intelligence named Howie Osfeiser, said he wasn’t sure what a kudu was, but he figured he probably was one. He just knew it.

An unenlightened Marine general said “the whole business is crazier than three monkeys in a bag. What is this freak show coming to?” The Washington Post ran an editorial comparing him to Hitler and saying that his attitude would lead to a second Holocaust. Of course, the Post thought that everything would lead to a second Holocaust.

The State Department announced that it would fund a recruitment drive to find trans-phylum ambassadors, and would modify embassies correspondingly, for example by increasing headroom for imputed giraffes.

In his last days in office, President Obama ordered that all federal buildings be equipped with litter boxes, saying, “A country as great as America was—is—that all the world wants to be like, and wishes it was, cannot seem to penalize citizens who think they are animals, even if they aren’t—though of course they are. Who are we to decide what kind of animals other people are? Praise Allah.”

This clarion call to probity and fairness echoed around the world and was adjudged to embody the clarity and internal coherence characteristic of Obama’s speeches.

A veritable storm of justice had left its imprint in the Pentagon. Calm gradually returned. Glitches continued, but they were minor. The Army’s Chief of Staff, Priscilla-Robert McFarley, came out of the closet as a Bolivian anteater and was discovered to be having termites flown in from La Paz. The computer nerd who had declared himself a kudu figured out that if he discovered himself to be a three-toed sloth instead, the Army would have to give him more time to sleep.

The furor finally died down and the nation entered a time of healing. The matter of inter-phylum dating caused a brief flurry, but abated when it was pointed out that the practice was common in the sheep country of Scotland. And of course national attention was diverted when an Army person who gender-identified as usually or somewhat male was caught trying to have sex with a vacuum cleaner. Phylum-neutral bathrooms were hastily equipped with chutes for emptying dust bags and....

