

Life on a seesaw

Dr. Mary Ann Humphrey, a former captain in the U.S. Army Reserve, is one of many people to experience discrimination, military style

BY KAMILA AL-NAJJAR

In January 1986, I'd been back with the Civil Affairs Unit [a U.S. Army reserve unit] about two months. One day, 45 minutes before the drill was over, I was called into the commander's office. Sitting in the room were three men, all lawyers in civilian life.

"I was never read my rights. I was asked to sit down, and one of them said, 'We have some personal things to discuss with you. It's just a friendly meeting. Jon [Haub] is here to take some notes. You don't have to worry about anything.' [Haub is the chief prosecutor for Oregon City.]

"Jon proceeded to say that a former colleague of mine had accused me of being a practicing homosexual. If I were given to levity I would have said, 'I don't need any practice, I've been doing it for years.' But my response on the record to them was, 'That's ridiculous.' In this situation I wasn't going to say yes and get kicked out. I know the regulation is against homosexuality. I've always been professional and never let that enter into my military career. My private life was my private life and it never crossed over.

"They proceeded to ask me very personal and embarrassing questions: Have you slept with a woman? No. Have you slept with a man? Yes. When was the last time? What do you do? I chose not to answer the questions about women but I would answer the questions about men. Other questions were dirty kinds of things, and I didn't answer those either. Before I got home Jon Haub was on the phone to my lover asking her the same kind of questions, to which she answered, 'I don't know.'"

Dr. Mary Ann Humphrey, who held a position as an Equal Opportunity-Affirmative Action Officer in her Civil Affairs Unit, is one of the many gay people to experience discrimination, military style. Humphrey said, "The military thinks that a gay person is going to affect the morale of the rest of the troops."

"They think all you do is stay in bed. They think when two people are gay and in a relationship, and when the couple has their family and friends over, they just fornicate on the floor. I think that is part of the mentality of the general public, also," she said.

Humphrey's troubles began before the day she got called into her commander's office. A physical education teacher since 1973 at Portland Community College, Humphrey was one of the teachers chosen to get cut from her department for the 1985-86 school year due to budget problems.

"The chairman of the physical education department at PCC-Sylvania had already predetermined that I was going to get rified by making a statement in an open committee meeting. He said, 'We need to rife someone in the department and we should get rid of Mary Ann because we don't need that kind of sexual orientation around here.'" Humphrey pointed out that PCC cannot openly discriminate on the



basis of sexual orientation. She also said that at the time the chairman made that statement, she was teaching at Rock Creek, and he had no jurisdiction over her.

"The statement was made a year before it happened, and then when it actually happened, it was me and a man from Sylvania who were rified. After that I proceeded to justify my position; I had more seniority and education than any of the people below me.

"So I went to the president of the college and said 'This is a good-old-boy decision and either something is done about the situation or I will go elsewhere.' That night the president of the college was in touch with the president of the union to figure out the problem.

"I told the man next in line [Carl vonTagan], 'I'm sorry, Carl. I am not the one to be rified. You are less in seniority than me and it's nothing personal but I'm going to prove that this decision is wrong.' Carl knew in his heart that he should not have been held because he had almost two and a half years less seniority than me."

Humphrey and vonTagan had been friends for 13 years and had shared similar interests, and vonTagan also knew about Humphrey's sexuality. Humphrey said that it was common knowledge in her department that she is gay.

Humphrey got her job back, and vonTagan was rified in her place. Before the final decision vonTagan told many of his friends that if Humphrey got her job back, he would inform the military.

"He blamed me for the loss of his job when in fact it was an administrative decision. If they had done it correctly initially none of this would have happened," Humphrey said.

In January 1986 vonTagan went to Humphrey's commanding officer in the U.S. Army Reserve with enough information to prove she is a lesbian. He supplied them with

names, places and an ex-lover with an ax to grind. He came back to the unit several times to make sure that his wishes were being carried out, according to Humphrey.

After nine years of military service and a blocked promotion to major, Captain Mary Ann Humphrey was removed in November 1987 with an honorable discharge. She did not fight against the military; instead, she has taken another approach to voice her dissatisfaction with discrimination based on sexual orientation.

For the past year Humphrey has been working on a book to be called *The Lavender Corps — The Untold Story of the Military Gay*. The book will have personal interviews with gays and lesbians in the armed forces, and the stories will range from World War II to the present day, representing almost all levels of rank and branch.

"I feel that what I am doing in the book is much more productive and is going to help out a

lot more people. At least it may get the public to be more aware of what the military does to individuals. I am talking about total devastation in somebody's life. Marianne Ben-Shalom of Wisconsin spent \$200,000 and 12 years to get reinstated to the military for a period of six to eight months. During the span of 12 years she lost her house, her child and her home."

Humphrey is still seeking stories for her manuscript. Veterans from pre-World War II to the present, all branches, all ranks, those who have been involved in "homosexual purges," have been otherwise investigated for sexual orientation or have received a less-than-honorable discharge, as well as present active members or those who have completed service under honorable conditions, all are encouraged to respond. Strict confidentiality will be maintained. Write to Manuscript Subject, PO Box 2370, Portland, OR 97208. •

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