

A lesbian officer at the Portland Police Bureau says she was subjected to a sexually hostile work environment as the only female member of the elite Special Emergency Response Team, the *Portland Tribune* reported Oct. 2.

Liana Reyna, 32, filed a legal notice with the city March 22 indicating she might file a lawsuit within two years. The next day, Chief Mark Kroeker temporarily deactivated the team, a 29-member unit that responds to hostage and other crisis situations.

Reyna filed the same complaint May 8 with the state Bureau of Labor and Industries. She claims the discrimination stemmed from her gender as well as her sexual orientation.

The allegations outline a series of initiation rituals and hazing activities that former Chief Penny Harrington called "vile," "disgusting" and "demeaning." According to documents filed with the city and federal governments and obtained by the *Tribune*, Reyna claims she was forced to:

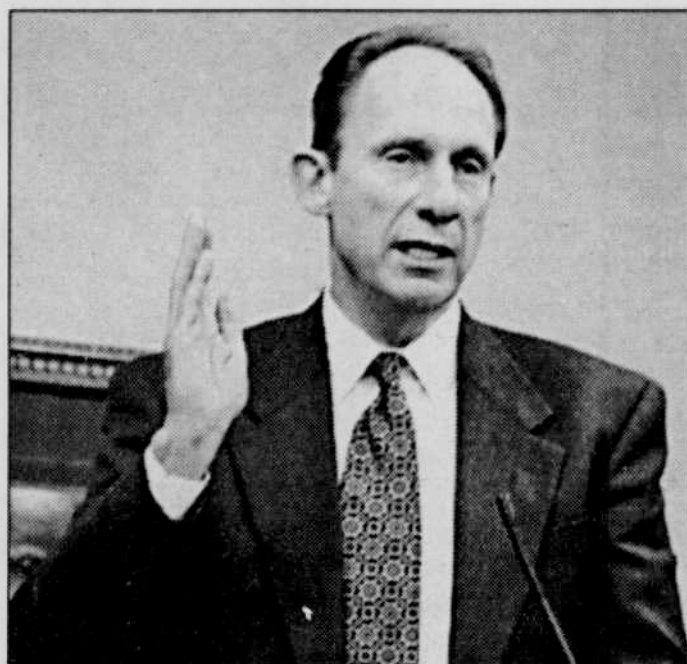
- Take home a "birthday idol" consisting of two men performing oral sex.
- Wear "rodent gear"—a plastic army helmet, a seashell necklace and a wooden boot—in restaurants and before and after training.
- Perform menial tasks such as making coffee, setting up firing range targets and cleaning the range.
- Sing a cheer with lewd sexual terms adapted for her as a woman.
- Participate in skits in which male members danced in G-strings and coconut bras.
- Attend skits in which two members wore only thong bikinis and their gun belts and rookies performed a striptease.

In May 2000, Reyna claims, a sergeant told

## GOOD COP, BAD COP

Lesbian officer accuses Portland Police Bureau of sex discrimination

by Jim Radosta



Mark Kroeker

her that teammates see her "like they do their wives." Another officer allegedly said, "Because you are a woman, you should be working harder than anyone."

Reyna ended up resigning from SERT last November because she said members started spreading rumors that she had a seizure disorder. She since has been reassigned to the North Precinct.

SERT was reinstated May 11, but the inquiry still has not been completed. According to the

*Tribune*, the investigation involves interviews with more than 80 individuals.

"We want to make sure that if there's lessons to learn, if there's ways to improve on this, the entire management has the benefit of learning those lessons," said Sgt. Brian Schmutz, a spokesman participating in the probe. "The mere fact that the chief took six sergeants and a lieutenant from the police bureau and removed them from their assignments and placed them on this investigation exclusively...is an indication that the bureau took the concerns seriously."

*Tribune* columnist Phil Stanford quoted a high-ranking officer who suggested the inquiry has been dragged out because several members of Kroeker's command staff are former SERT members. "If this were just about a bunch of low-ranking cops and sergeants, you can bet it would have been over and done with in 90 days, and those guys would be down the road," the source said.

A Portland Police Bureau officer, who spoke to *Just Out* on condition of anonymity, described

SERT as a good old boys club fueled by testosterone and stupidity. "It's upset me for a long time. It's why females haven't been all gung-ho about joining that unit. They're only hurting themselves."

The officer understands the desire to promote camaraderie and teamwork. However, the source added that chauvinistic and sophomore behavior is not the way to form a cohesive unit.

"Use judgment," the officer said. "How does that make a female feel like she's fitting in?"

Asked about why the investigation is taking so long, the insider said a lot of people need to write reports, review documents and come to a consensus. "This is a high-profile thing....

There's no way to do it properly and have it be quick."

**"This really shouldn't go on anymore. It is demeaning to women, whether there is a woman there or not. It's just inappropriate to do that kind of stuff."**

—Portland Police Bureau officer

The officer does not believe SERT mistreated Reyna because of her sexual orientation. The bureau has been under heightened scrutiny since last year, when old anti-gay comments made by Kroeker were unearthed by the *Portland Alliance*.

The officer hopes the investigation results in a change in SERT's initiation process. "This really shouldn't go on anymore. It is demeaning to women, whether there is a woman there or not. It's just inappropriate to do that kind of stuff."

The officer mentioned U.S. criticism of Afghanistan and other Third World countries that mistreat women. "Are we treating our women any better?"

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