

SEE YOU IN COURT

Lesbian cop alleges sexual harassment, files for damages

by Robert Raketty

Lesbian cop Liani Reyna filed a 10-page complaint July 24 in U.S. District Court seeking damages from the city of Portland, the Portland Police Bureau and Chief Mark Kroeker for years of sexual harassment and discrimination. In February 1999 she was the first and only woman ever appointed to an elite tactical force called the Special Emergency Response Team.

Reyna is requesting reinstatement to the position. She also is asking the court for lost wages, compensatory damages for emotional distress, punitive damages and attorney's fees, according to papers filed by Stephen L. Brischetto, a Portland-area employment lawyer.

The complaint details bizarre hazing rituals conducted during SERT training sessions at Camp Rilea. Reyna says she was exposed to a culture of masculinity that included constant crude behavior and sexually explicit references. The incidents were documented in a journal she kept.

The team cheer was required learning for all new inductees: "Rah, SERT team! Where every man's a tiger, a big fucking tiger, a big fucking tiger with a dick this big."

As a new SERT member, Reyna was expected to make coffee, set up targets on the firing range, clean up the range, pick up the "brass" and perform other menial tasks. She also was required to work overtime without pay during the days she drove the van used to carry equipment.

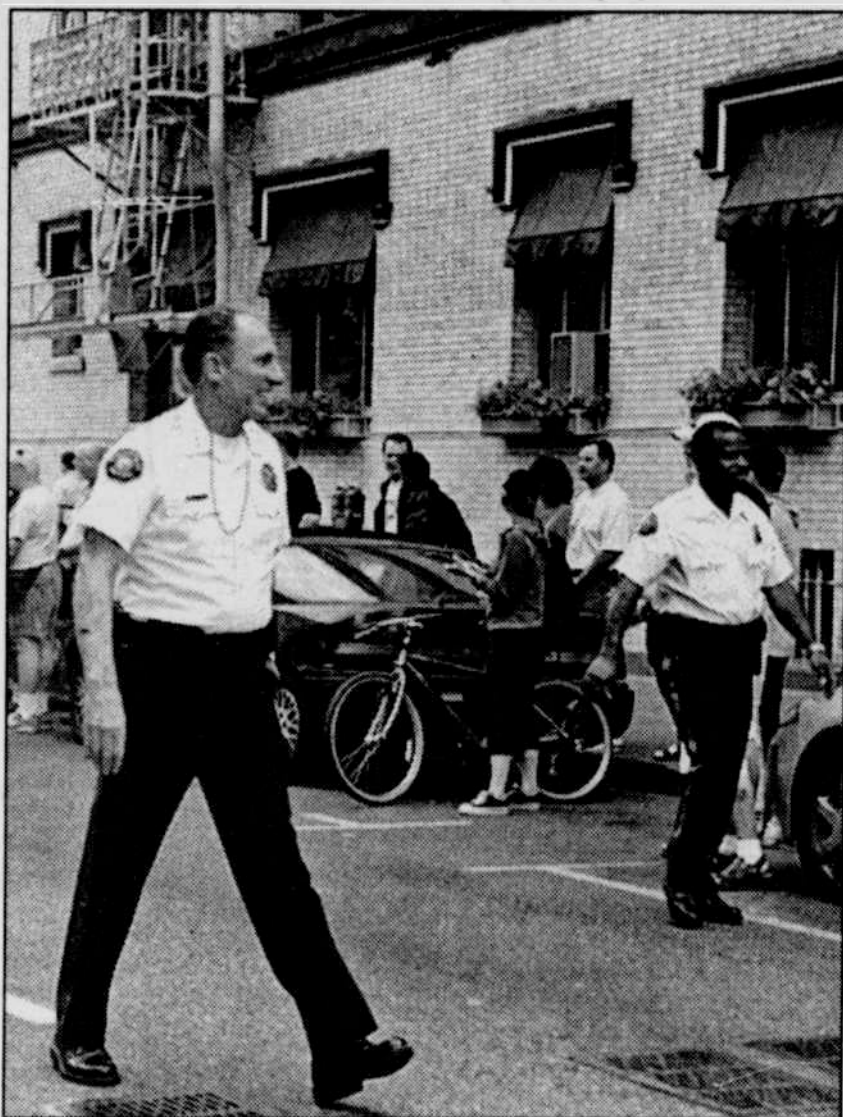
In May 2000 Reyna allegedly was called to a meeting in which a sergeant told her that many team members view her "like they do their wives" and that "because you are a woman, the men can't talk to you the way they do to each other. Some guys are afraid they will hurt your feelings and make you cry."

The team also had a ritual in which a "birthday idol" was passed around to each other, then displayed prominently on a member's birthday. The opaque statue depicts two men performing oral sex.

In September 2000 Reyna says she was required to attend a series of sexually oriented skits. One depicted two men performing oral sex. Another had men wearing "whore" dresses, wigs and makeup. During this skit, a sergeant allegedly made the comment, "I don't want you fucking queens coming near me!"

In addition, during a skit in which a group of men wore G-strings and performed a striptease, a sergeant allegedly said, "I see the overall theme is faggotry."

Eventually, Reyna had enough. She resigned



Police Chief Mark Kroeker (marching June 16 during Portland Pride 2002) is being sued by a lesbian officer

from the team in November 2000 and filed a complaint that led to an internal investigation.

As a result of Reyna's whistle-blowing, she received a written reprimand for her part in the skits, a fact she cites in her lawsuit. A total of 20 current and former SERT members were disciplined for inappropriate conduct.

The way the bureau sees it, the "complainant willingly participated in all Camp Rilea activities and was not required to do anything,"

Deputy City Attorney Stephanie Harper said. Many fear the case will discourage officers and bureau staff from reporting inappropriate actions that might reveal corruption or mismanagement.

The legal action taken by Reyna comes less than two months after an independent inquiry by the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries concluded

May 31. Investigators found that she indeed was subjected to a hostile work environment based on her sex and that the skits were discriminatory.

Apparently this is not the first time the bureau knew of the inappropriate conduct among its officers. A 1999 city memo to several higher-ranking officials, including lieutenants and captains who supervised SERT, reveals that bureau staff were instructed to "remind them of the responsibility that each leader has to set the tone for appropriate workplace behavior."

Reyna has worked for the Portland Police Bureau since 1993. She now serves as an officer in the North Precinct. **JR**

ROBERT RAKETTY is a staff writer for the Seattle Gay News.

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