

Marines trying to weed out dykes

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Charges against two women at a South Carolina training base are seen as part of reaction to recent pro-gay court decision

By Chris Bull

PARRIS ISLAND, SC — The U.S. Marine Corps charged two female Marines Feb. 24 with committing "indecent sex acts with other women" at a training camp for women recruits. At least eight other women are under investigation in what military rights advocates are calling the military's latest anti-gay witchhunt. A court-martial hearing for Sgt. Mary Kite and Capt. Judy A. Gretch, who deny the charges, is scheduled for next week.

Several women recruits told a South Carolina newspaper, the *Columbus Star*, that male officers resent women in the military. "I think the big picture is that our femininity is in question here because we're doing the job we were brought down here to do," one of the women said. "They don't like the way some of us look." Repeated efforts by GCN to reach the women and their military lawyers were unsuccessful.

Several military observers accused the Pentagon of instigating an anti-gay crackdown across the country in response to an appeals court decision in California which for the first time denied the Army's claim that homosexuality is incompatible with military service. In that case the court ruled that Sgt. Perry Watkins was unconstitutionally denied security clearance because of his self-stated homosexuality.

Jim Klinasky, of the National Lawyers Guild, said the upper-echelons of the military have been in an uproar about the pro-gay *Watkins* decision. He predicted the military would "go after gays" in the next several months in order to show that there is a "serious moral problem" in the wake of the *Watkins* decision. Evidence of such a problem will be used by the military in its appeal to the Supreme Court to overturn *Watkins*.

Parris Island, where recruits spend 11 weeks in an introductory program, is the on-

ly all-female training camp in the county. Of 200,000 Marines in this country, only about 10,000 are women. Last year, 68 Marines were discharged for being gay. Eighty-eight were discharged in 1986, 105 in 1985 and 116 in 1984.

A 1986 report by the Defense Advisory Committee On Women in the Service (DACOWITS) — an independent group which advises the Department of Defense on military issues — cited homosexuality as one of the three worst "problems" facing women in the military. The report, based on a DACOWITS subcommittee tour of military installations in Europe and the Pacific Islands, also cited sexual harassment of women by men and a federal law excluding women from combat duty as serious problems for women in the military.

DACOWITS chairperson Jaqueline Davis has proposed coed dorms to combat lesbianism in the military. Segregated living conditions, she said, aggravate the "second team" mentality of women in the military and drive them to lesbianism. The DACOWITS report states: "The living situation contributes to conditions in which extremist behavior [lesbianism] is fostered and in some cases, supported by the chain of command particularly among non-commissioned officers who are supposed to be supervising their barracks. One barrack at camp Butler is widely referred to as 'lezzie land.'" Although DACOWITS freely criticized the military for treating women as second class citizens, it endorsed the military crackdown on lesbianism.

Pentagon spokesperson Major David Super told GCN that homosexuality is "incompatible with military service," although the military has "nothing against" homosexuality in civilian life. Asked about the DACOWITS statement that lesbianism

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is "extremist behavior," Major Super said "whatever." He added that the Pentagon has no intention of complying with the *Watkins* decision unless it is upheld by the Supreme Court.

Klinasky said the prosecution of women at Parris Island is typical of the way the Marine Corps treats women. A recent story in *Navy Times* said that women are three times more likely to be court-martialed for alleged homosexuality than men. Klinasky said male officers in the Marines "hate women. Women that refuse to have sex with officers are automatically labelled dykes. Then they get rid of you. It is that simple." Kathleen Gilberd, of the National Lawyer's Guild Military Law Task Force, said the military has increasingly "come down hard" on women doing traditionally "male" work — such as heavy maintenance on a battleship. She said secretaries are more likely to be left alone by investigators.

Gilberd said the military has no other "legitimate motivating force" than racism, homophobia and the devaluation of women. "How else would they get anyone to invade Grenada?" she asked. She warned that despite the *Watkins* ruling, the military is far from open to gay men and lesbians. However, she said the military does offer more opportunities to do physically and intellectually demanding work for some women than civilian life. While many women may find such opportunities in the military, they are not achieved without risk, said Gilberd. One of the accused women was quoted in the *State* as saying, "The qualities and traits that we demand (in ourselves) and are supposed to be training our recruits for, are the same traits that they're saying make us look homosexual."

☐ filed from Boston

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