

## CASES IN COURT

# Homosexuals —New Battle for Military

By **MICHAEL SEILER**  
Times Staff Writer

The U.S. Navy thinks there must be something wrong with Melinda.

She is six feet tall and weighs 165 pounds. She wears her dark brown hair cut short, loves drinking beer and watching football on TV.

Melinda doesn't mind a bit getting her hands dirty—in fact she likes her job working on the innards of jet aircraft engines. Melinda does not spend a lot of time worrying about the condition of her fingernails.

She has bigger problems. Her employer, the Navy, says Melinda is a homosexual and although the San Diego-based sailor insists that she is not, the Navy is in the process of discharging her.

"If you're a woman with short hair and you're tall and you like sports and you work in a male-oriented job, you're dead," says Melinda, who, when interviewed recently, asked that only her first name be used.

### Growing Problem

Melinda, and thousands of men and women like her—homosexuals, bisexuals, and people who *appear* to be homosexual—represent a growing problem not just for the Navy, but for all branches of the military service.

Last month's hearings aboard the Norton Sound at the Long Beach Naval Station—in effect, a trial of eight women crewmembers on charges of homosexuality—was one in a long line of similar procedures designed to rid the military of homosexuals.

The Norton Sound cases, with their sometimes lurid, occasionally ludicrous testimony of alleged lesbian lovemaking at sea and ashore, almost monopolized the interest of the news media this summer. But there were indications of a larger battle looming that may take the question of the military's ban on homosexuality as far as the U.S. Supreme Court, the White House, and Congress.

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### Other Forces at Work

For, while the Navy was trying to unravel the sex lives of the Norton Sound 8, other forces were at work:

—A half-dozen cases pressed by people who had been discharged from the military because of alleged homosexual activities are slowly making their way up the federal court system amid signs that ultimately the Supreme Court may have to rule on the constitutionality of the military's anti-homosexual regulations.

—One such case, that of Vietnam veteran Leonard Matlovich, surfaced earlier this month when a federal district court judge in Washington, D.C. ordered the Air Force to reinstate him. The Air Force plans to appeal, but Matlovich, now a gay activist in San Francisco, says he will continue his homosexual life style once back in the service.

—The Army turned down a request by a Washington gay organization to lay a wreath on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery shortly after Memorial Day. But some quiet politicking by gay-group lobbyists with White House officials led to pressure on the Pentagon to overrule

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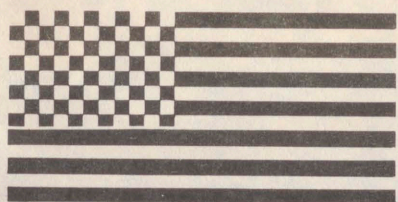


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