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GAY SAILOR BRUTALIZED FOR TWO YEARS AFTER REFUSAL TO VISIT PROSTITUTE
Navy Promoted Supervisor Responsible for Violence

SANTA BARBARA, CA, September 3, 2009 – Youth Radio reported today that former Petty Officer Third Class Joseph Rocha was brutalized for more than two years at his base in Bahrain after unit mates first suspected that he is gay. The Navy promoted the Chief most responsible for the violence, even though Naval officials were aware of his role in creating the climate of abuse.

Official Navy documents confirm that after Rocha's unit mates first suspected that he is gay, they engaged in a two-year pattern of abuse including hog-tying him to a chair and pushing him, still bound, into a dog kennel full of feces. Rocha says that they forced him to simulate oral sex with a man more than thirty times, on video tape, as part of a training exercise to teach sailors how to respond to a hypothetical complaint about homosexual sex. And they hit him as hard as they could repeatedly while forcing him to bend over a desk. The documents are available at www.youthradio.org.

Rocha was a military police officer with anti-terrorism training who graduated at the top of his military class, and who received favorable performance evaluations throughout his career. His unit mates first suspected that he is gay in 2004 when he refused to sleep with female prostitutes, a practice that was widespread at his base. Rocha did not report the abuse, which continued until 2006, because he feared retaliation as well as discharge under "don't ask, don't tell." According to Aaron Belkin, Director of the Palm Center, "it is very hard for an organization to get rid of abuse as long as discrimination remains official policy."

After a colleague complained, the Navy launched an investigation, which concluded in 2007. Official documents from the investigation were obtained recently via the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) by one of Rocha's unit mates.

While Rocha was singled out and forced to endure the longest period of abuse, others were victimized as well. An official military summary of the investigation lists 93 incidents and types of abuse including throwing hard rubber balls at the groin, allowing a dog to attack a sex worker, and handcuffing two female sailors to a bed and forcing them to simulate lesbian sex while being videotaped.

Since the launch of the investigation, the Navy has promoted Chief Michael Toussaint to the rank of Senior Chief. Toussaint was the petty officer in charge of Rocha's unit, and perpetrated or presided over most of the abuse.

After acknowledging to his superiors that he is gay, he was discharged under "don't ask, don't tell."



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The Palm Center is a research institute at the University of California, Santa Barbara. The Center uses rigorous social science to inform public discussions of controversial social issues, enabling policy outcomes to be informed more by evidence than by emotion. Its data-driven approach is premised on the notion that the public makes wise choices on social issues when high-quality information is available. For more information, visit www.palmcenter.ucsb.edu.