

Leonard P. Matlovich

(6 Jul 1943 – 22 Jun 1988)

Matlovich, Leonard P. On Wednesday, June 22, 1988 in Los Angeles, Ca., son of Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Matlovich of Florida; brother of Margaret Wrobell. Friends may call at Christ Church, Washington Parish, 620 G St., SE, on Friday, July 1 from 7 to 9 p.m., where Mass will be offered on Saturday, July 2 at 9 a.m. Interment Congressional Cemetery. Memorial contributions may be made to an AIDS organization.

The Washington Post, June 24, 1988, p. C6

Leonard Matlovich, Gay Sergeant Discharged From Air Force, Dies



Matlovich. Leonard P. Matlovich, 44, a former Air Force sergeant whose 1975 discharge after his avowed homosexuality became a major gay rights rallying point died June 22 at the home of a friend in Los Angeles. He had AIDs.

Mr. Matlovich, a 12-year Air Force veteran who was awarded a Bronze Star and Purple Heart for combat service in Vietnam fought the discharge in military and civilian courts for 5 years. The case drew nationwide attention as a symbol of the struggle to stop discrimination against gay men and lesbians.

In September 1975, Mr. Matlovich's picture appeared on the cover of Time Magazine in connection with an article entitled "The Gay Drive for Acceptance". The inscription under the photograph was "I am a homosexual."

Eventually he settled out of court with the Air Force for \$160,000 in exchange for an agreement to give up his battle for readmission.

In later years, Mr. Matlovich was active in a variety of gay and lesbian causes in Washington and on the West Coast and in several support organizations involved with AIDs.

He made his decision to test the military's ban on homosexuals near the end of the summer of 1974 after several hours of conversation and counseling with Franklin Kameny, a Washington-based gay rights activist. At the time Sgt. Matlovich had served 11 years in the Air Force, and he had received exemplary efficiency ratings in addition to his combat decorations. He was a technical sergeant and a human relations specialist at Langley Air Force Base.

The following March, Sgt. Matlovich sent a memorandum to his commanding officer at Langley declaring that, "After some years of uncertainty I have arrived at the conclusion that my sexual preferences are homosexual as opposed to heterosexual. I have also concluded that my sexual preferences will in no way interfere with my Air Force duties ..."

Sgt. Matlovich said at the time that his first homosexual experience had been in 1973 with a government civil servant whom he met in a gay bar in Pensacola, Fla. After that, he said, his sexual partners had included doctors, lawyers and two other airmen, but he said he had never been threatened with blackmail.

"My partners have all been persons about my age or slightly younger ... and have without exception been respectable average citizens," he said in a letter to Air Force investigators.

Historically the Air Force and other services had excluded homosexuals on the grounds that they would threaten "discipline, good order, morale and security ... wholesome and healthful environment."

On receiving Sgt. Matlovich's memorandum, his commanding officer initiated steps to get the sergeant out of the service. Sgt. Matlovich asked for a hearing before a five-member discharge panel

which recommended a general discharge. The recommendation was approved by Air Force Secretary John McLucas.

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He was wounded in Vietnam when he stepped on a Viet Cong land mine, and he won a Bronze Star for killing two soldiers during a Viet Cong attack on his post while he was on sentry duty.

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