

Army gives up battle to collect from ousted homosexual officer

By Hugh Aynesworth
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DALLAS — A 32-year-old homosexual man, badgered for eight years to pay back money the Army says it spent to educate him at West Point, may finally be free of the \$176,000 obligation.

Clayce Rodamer said that the Army's oral agreement to end the quest to make him pay — given hurriedly just hours before his story was highlighted on ABC News' "Nightline" on Tuesday — was a relief, but he said he now hoped to lend support to help others similarly affected.

And he said repairing the damage to his shattered credit is going to take some time.

Mr. Rodamer, a second lieutenant stationed at Fort Bliss, Texas, was told he must leave the military immediately when in 1988 he told superiors that he was homosexual. He determined his sexual orientation two years after graduating from the U.S. Military Academy in West Point, N.Y., he said.

He claimed he had had no homosexual contact that was military-related. He showed several documents that indicated he had scored superior ratings during his

brief career.

Mr. Rodamer expressed a still-present love for the Army in a conversation yesterday with The Washington Times.

"I didn't want to leave," he said, "but the code of honor at West Point taught me to be truthful no matter what the cost. I left only when they said they no longer wanted me. I broke no contract with the Army. They broke it with me."

Mr. Rodamer's attorney, David Przeracki of Dallas, said that because of statutes of limitation, unless Mr. Rodamer receives assurances that the debt will be canceled and promises to help repair his credit record, he will file a civil lawsuit later this week.

He said Mr. Rodamer has been turned down for credit to buy a house and told that the massive Army lien — \$76,000 for training and about \$100,000 in penalties and interest — was the only blot on an otherwise pristine credit record.

Mr. Rodamer said that he hoped to help others "caught in the same situation," and that he had been helped immensely by the Washington-based Servicemembers Legal Defense Network.

Through most of the decade in which the Army tried to collect \$2,700 per month, Mr. Rodamer said he was not earning that much take-home pay. He has been a pricing executive with a Dallas-area computer-supply firm for several years.

"I never did get to talk to anyone on the phone or meet with anyone in person," he said.

"I just hope that now, for myself and the handful of people they said they are considering, that this really does take care of it," he said.

Mr. Przeracki said he had talked to Pentagon officials yesterday, but the letter sent to Department of Defense lawyers had not yet been received.

"It wasn't just a coincidence that three hours before air time the Army was trying to get a memo written," said Mr. Przeracki's partner, Tom Mills, adding: "This seems to be one of those issues where they need to be pushed a little bit."

Mr. Rodamer said the administration-backed "don't ask, don't tell" program should be abolished, "because it's not 'don't ask, don't tell,' it's 'don't ask, don't tell the truth.' They're setting people up not to tell the truth."