

The Sunday Capital

Annapolis paper

Navy demands 2384090 Capital A1 gay ex-officer repay tuition

By SCOTT HARPER
Staff Writer

Orlando Gotay, a 1987 Naval Academy graduate, thought things couldn't get worse when, as he claims, he was forced to quit the Navy last year for being homosexual.

But they have.

The Navy now is demanding Gotay pay \$22,949 in tuition because he resigned from the military before completing the five years of service academy graduates must perform.

But the Puerto Rico native who now lives in San Francisco said he will not pay the Navy a dime, because it was the Navy that pressured him to get out early.

The American Civil Liberties Union has agreed to represent Gotay in court if the Pentagon pushes the matter.

"First they force me out, end my career as a Naval officer, and then they tell me I have to pay them for doing this to me," Gotay said in a telephone interview.

"Their charges are senseless and have no foundation, and they're going to stop."

A Navy spokeswoman said this week the case is cut and dry. It all

centers on a contract each midshipman must sign: If, upon graduation, a person voluntarily resigns before finishing his service obligation, that person owes the government in part for his education in Annapolis.

Lt. Beci Brenton said the Navy has sent Gotay three letters asking him to begin repayment. Because he has not replied, the account has been turned over to the U.S. Justice Department for collection.

Amy Kessner, a spokeswoman for the Justice Department, could not be reached for comment.

Gotay and his lawyers see the matter as another example of the military's attempt to bar homosexuals by seeking reimbursement of scholarship money.

Most of these cases — in which gays are pushed out of the military and made to reimburse the government for tuition — have involved ROTC-trained officers. Disclosure of this policy has led to discrimination protests from students and faculty at several campuses, including Harvard.

Rarely, if ever, however, has an academy graduate been the source (See NAVY, Page A9)

In March, Gotay was given an honorable discharge. he said.

Because of this "voluntary resignation," the Navy ordered Gotay about a week after his discharge to begin paying back more than \$22,000 in tuition.

A political science major at the academy, Gotay now is looking for a job in which he can put his management skills and experience to use. He currently is working as a language teacher.

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MOUNTAIN VIEW, Calif. — If you think current events on the planet Earth are not think again. The brainy types at NASA's Ames Research Center believe early Earth, billions of years ago, may have been a hot spot.

"It may be as many as 10,000 people," Costello said.

Utility spokesman John Costello said power was lost about 7:15 a.m., but he was unsure how many customers were without electricity.

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 of such action, Gotay and his lawyers said. The Navy said Gotay's case is not the first of its kind.

Gotay, 26, was serving as a machinery officer aboard the *USS Belknap*, flagship of the 6th Fleet, when he learned in June 1989 that he was under investigation for homosexuality.

The inquiry did not prove any sexual misconduct, although Gotay admits now that he is gay. According to military policy, it is illegal to be gay and serve in the armed forces.

He said that during the investigation, no one ever asked him directly if he was homosexual.

A month later, Gotay said, he was charged with fraternization, or social contact, with enlisted personnel. His commanding officer dismissed the charges, however, and issued

him a mild reprimand. But the damage was done. Gotay said word spread like wildfire about his sexual preference, making life aboard the guided missile cruiser "a total nightmare."

"What I went through, the mental abuse and the psychological strain, was far worse than even plebe summer," Gotay said, referring to the strenuous training that academy inductees receive their first summer in Annapolis.

Then in November, Gotay got a letter from the Chief of Naval Operations informing him that administrative hearings on alleged misconduct were being prepared against him, and that he could either stand trial or resign. He resigned.

In March, Gotay was given an honorable discharge.

Because of this "voluntary resignation," the Navy ordered Gotay about a week after his discharge to begin paying back more than \$22,000 in tuition.

"That's when I decided this had gone too far," he said.

Since then Gotay has contacted the ACLU and news media across the country in hopes of "exposing how the Navy's policies are so blatantly wrong" in regard to homosexuality and scholarship reimbursement.

"They made it clear that they were determined to get me out of the Navy, one way or another, and then they tell me I resigned voluntarily and that I owe them all this money," he said. "Is that fair? Is that how you treat people?"

Gotay said he was not aware of his homosexuality until his final year in Annapolis. He was aware of the military policy toward homosexuals and kept his preferences to himself, he said.

A political science major at the academy, Gotay now is looking for a job in which he can put his management skills and experience to use. He currently is working as a language teacher.