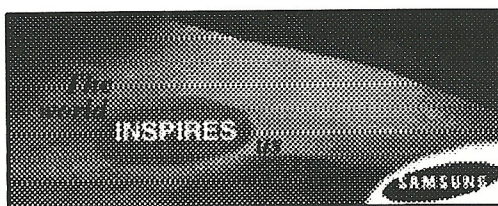




U.S. NEWS

STORY PAGE



- HOME
- U.S.
- WORLD
- WEATHER
- SPORTS
- SCI-TECH
- STYLE
- SHOWBIZ
- HEALTH
- EARTH

CNN
All Politics

CONTENTS
HELP
FEEDBACK

excite
Search the Web

Search **CNN** SEARCH

CHECK OUT THE NEW **PATHFINDER**

YOUR HOME ON THE NET

PATHFINDER

Jury acquits Air Force major in sodomy case

August 16, 1996
Web posted at: 5:10 a.m. EDT

SAN ANTONIO (AP) -- A military jury late Thursday acquitted an Air Force major of having lesbian sex after defense attorneys argued that her accuser was an untruthful predator bent on destroying a military career.



Meeks leaving a hearing at Lackland Air Force Base a few days prior to her acquittal (AP Photo)

Maj. Debra L. Meeks, 41, had been charged with sodomy for allegedly carrying on a homosexual relationship over a two-year period with civilian Pamela Dillard.

The five-man, two-woman jury deliberated for seven hours before acquitting Meeks of the sex charge as well as a charge of conduct unbecoming an officer, which was filed after Dillard said she had threatened her with a gun.

After their verdict, Meeks put her head in her hands and slumped in her chair. Then defense lawyer Michael Tigar put his arm around her, and she hugged him.

"This is a proud day for justice in the military," Tigar said. "Major Debra Meeks had the courage to refuse to accept an offer to plead guilty to something she did not do."

The military had offered her

“This is a proud day for justice in the military. Major Meeks had the courage to refuse to plead guilty to something she did not do.”

Michael Tigar
Defense lawyer

The military had offered her a plea bargain for which she could have pleaded guilty to an assault charge. Instead, she chose to fight, risking the loss of her pension and other benefits, as well as up to eight years in a military jail.

"We sent a message, and the message is that if charges of this kind are to be brought against a distinguished member of the military, those who bring them had better be prepared to back

them up," Tigar said.

With tears in her eyes as she emerged from the courthouse, Meeks said, "I'm just glad this nightmare is over. My dog is at home and I'd really like to go home to my dog."

Throughout the trial, she had refused to publicly state her sexual orientation. She continued to do that after the trial.

"I don't really want to comment on that. It's my personal, private life," she said.

Correspondence in question

Dillard, the prosecution's key witness in the court-martial, had testified that their relationship was intense, including oral sex, and that Meeks had sent her cards and letters about their affair.

“Those are not the letters that a friend would send to a friend. Those were passionate letters. Sodomy? You betcha.”

Maj. James Flannery
Prosecutor

"Those are not the letters that a friend would send to a friend. Those were passionate letters that one lover would send to another," said prosecutor Maj. James L. Flannery. "Sodomy? You betcha."

Tigar, however, questioned the authenticity of the correspondence and argued that written

words are not evidence that homosexual sex occurred. Tigar also argued that even if they believed Meeks is a homosexual but didn't believe she committed sodomy, then it would have to acquit her.

Under the "don't ask, don't tell" rule implemented in 1994, homosexuals are permitted to serve in the military as long as they don't have sex with service members and keep their sexual orientation and conduct private.

Sodomy, defined under military law, is "unnatural carnal copulation with another person of the same or opposite sex."

Dillard testified she and Meeks began having a sexual relationship in Virginia in 1992 and continued after Meeks transferred to Lackland Air Force Base in Texas. Dillard claims she eventually moved to San Antonio at the request of Meeks and was "her wife, essentially."

Defense lawyers contend Dillard moved to San Antonio because she wanted to establish residency to attend medical school in Texas.

Dillard testified the relationship began crumbling in 1994 and that another female Air Force officer become involved with Meeks.

Copyright 1996 Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, or redistributed.

Related stories:

- [Military judge upholds sodomy charge](#) - August 14, 1996
- [Major faces discharge for alleged same-sex affair](#) - August 12, 1996
- [Military still asking, telling, paper says](#) - February 27, 1996
- [Clinton moves to avert HIV discharges](#) - February 10, 1996

Related sites:

- [MIT ROTC Task Force](#) - formed to review the impact of the military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy and the ROTC that is on campus.
- [Gays in the Military](#) - collection of links to appropriate sites.
- [Lackland Air Force Base](#)