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NAVAL SENIOR CHIEF PUNISHED FOR ANTI-GAY ABUSE
Forced Retirement and Censure

SANTA BARBARA, CA, October 21, 2009 - The Navy is reprimanding and forcing the retirement of a chief petty officer who oversaw and perpetrated a string of abuses against a gay sailor and others in a military working dog unit in Bahrain, the Associated Press is reporting today. After an investigation begun by Youth Radio, as well as Congressional and media attention resulting from Palm Center's efforts to publicize the story, the Navy conducted a review of complaints that Chief Petty Officer Michael Toussaint had harassed and abused Petty Officer 3rd Class Joseph Rocha and others, in part because of their sexual orientation. The incidents included forced simulation of homosexual acts, being fed dog food, and being hog-tied to a chair and rolled into a dog kennel full of feces.

As a result of the investigation, the Secretary of the Navy is issuing a letter of censure faulting Toussaint's actions. "The Navy's actions in reviewing Joseph Rocha's case show how important accountability is in the chain of command," said Dr. Aaron Belkin, director of the Palm Center at University of California, Santa Barbara. "The suffering of Rocha and others was exacerbated by the 'don't ask, don't tell' policy since it hampers the ability of abuse victims to hold leaders and perpetrators accountable. The results undermine discipline and order in the entire unit, not just for gays and lesbians."

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The Palm Center is a think tank at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Since 1998, the Center has been a leader in commissioning and disseminating research in the areas of gender, sexuality, and the military. For more information visit www.palmcenter.ucsb.edu.