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Court order returns gay sailor to work

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MOFFETT NAVAL AIR STATION, Calif. — Keith Meinhold, kicked out of the Navy after revealing he was homosexual, reclaimed his job as a sonar instructor Thursday under court order.

"This is the day I've looked forward to," Meinhold said as he walked onto the military base with his uniform in a paper bag.

"I'll be proud and honored to wear the uniform of my country again."

The 30-year-old petty officer's reinstatement wasn't the first time the military has been forced to take back an openly homosexual soldier.

However, after a judge renewed a reinstatement order this week for Meinhold, President-elect Clinton announced plans to end the military's half-century ban on homosexuals.

"Part of the reason this case is so important is because of the attention it has generated, and because of the political climate in which it has arisen," said Benjamin Schatz, a lawyer for

Military debates homosexual rights

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

On the intellectual level, people in the military say they understand the argument that homosexuals have the right to serve their country. On the gut-level, many have doubts and anxieties.

From the rank-and-file to Pentagon brass, opponents say homosexuality isn't compatible with military life. An open policy would

be divisive, a morale-buster, a likely source of conflict and turmoil, they contend.

Homosexuals have always been in the military. But it's been a quiet reality, an orientation that could be hidden or overlooked — unlike a person's color or sex. If trouble cropped up, a soldier or sailor could be moved on or out.

Not Keith Meinhold. When the military

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the American Association of Physicians for Human Rights, a San Francisco-based homosexual-rights group.

Meinhold was honorably discharged in August after going on national television and saying he was homosexual. He said Thursday many of his former superiors and co-workers at Moffett knew for several years he was ho-

mosexual.

"I have had wonderful support from people from all walks of life — this has been very empowering," said Moffett, from Palo Alto.

The Pentagon said homosexuality undermines discipline and morale. The ban has led to dismissal of an average 1,500 military personnel a year.

Judges offer plan to treat drug-users

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

HOUSTON — Two Harris County judges are hoping to implement a Florida program under which some small-time crack cocaine users get charges against them dropped if they agree to get treatment and counseling before being assigned to intensive probation.

At the end of one or two years, the case would be dismissed and the former crack user hopefully can stay out of further trouble.

But judges Miron Love and Ted Poe say the small-time offenders would be warned from the outset that if they mess up at any point along the way, they'll return to court for prosecution on whatever case it was that got them into trouble.

Finding places to house several thousand drug defendants a year may turn out to be costly. But Love said the benefits of diverting cases out of the criminal justice system will go beyond decreasing the load on the 22 courts.

Attorney sues businesses in Austin, fights for disabled

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

AUSTIN — A man who uses a wheelchair has sued five Austin businesses alleging that people with physical disabilities are being denied access to doorways, restrooms, pay telephones or parking spaces.

The lawsuits, which allege violations of the Americans with Disabilities Act, were filed by Chuck Weir, an assistant city attorney in San Antonio.

Weir, who was paralyzed in a diving accident in 1982, said he filed the lawsuits last week in state district court in Travis County in an effort to force the businesses to renovate.

The federal disability law required businesses with more than 26 employees to make their services accessible to people with disabilities by Jan. 26, 1992.

Businesses with 10 or fewer employees must become accessible by Jan. 26, 1993.

"The ADA is a major civil rights act intended to open the doors that have been closed to disabled persons in the past," said Ginny Agnew of Austin, Weir's lawyer. "The doors need to be opened literally and figuratively to persons with disabilities, and that's the goal of these lawsuits."

The lawsuits name Blockbuster Video, Luby's Cafeteria, an Eckerd drugstore, a Coco's restaurant and Miller Blueprint Co.

Officials at Luby's, Blockbuster Videos and Coco's restaurants said they had not seen the lawsuits and declined to comment, the Austin American-Statesman reported Thursday.

Bob Miller Jr., manager of Miller Blueprint office supply and graphics store, said his store has just finished renovation plans.

He said the store missed the January deadline because "we've been trying to gather information on how to do it properly and get it done kind of all at once."

Gene Ormond, public relations director for the Jack Eckerd Corp. in Clearwater, Fla., said the company has "done a complete study of our 1,700 locations in 13 states to see which locations comply with the ADA guidelines."

Agnew and Weir said they have no plans to pursue legal steps if the five companies agree to make necessary modifications and present a reasonable work schedule.

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