

Title: The GIs of Gay Liberation: Vernon Berg and Leonard Matlovich vs. the U.S. Military

Speaker: Dr. Heather Haley

Date: 12 October 2022

Time: 1200-1315

Where: Hybrid event, C-138 & via Zoom

POC: Evan Wilson, D.Phil.

Zoom Link:

<https://usnwc.zoom.us/j/82367898520?pwd=bEp3WWdsS2cxTHI0MVB5OE5GOWc1UT09>

Meeting ID: 823 6789 8520

Passcode: 653033

This event is part of the HHC Seminar and Speaker Series

SYNOPSIS:

The idea of gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals as security risks susceptible to blackmail continued to be the most prevalent justification for their removal from federal employment and military service throughout the Cold War. The situation of Ensign Vernon “Copy” Berg, however, is inconsistent with this long-standing pattern. Following a five-month-long investigation into his life history and bisexual inclinations, which culminated in a personal interrogation by agents of the Naval Investigative Service, Berg received a temporary promotion and maintained his Top Secret security clearance for the remainder of his assignment aboard USS Little Rock. His continued access to sensitive material after his admission of bisexual behavior defied the accepted Cold War notion that gay, lesbian, and bisexual servicemembers were inherently criminal and, therefore, susceptible to foreign coercion and espionage. In “Queer in the Cold War,” Dr. Haley identifies three additional members of the gay male and bisexual communities—Dr. Franklin Kameny, Harvey Milk, and Tech. Sgt. Leonard Matlovich—as prominent active duty and dishonorably discharged servicemen as integral members of the fight for Gay Liberation in the 1970s. While Berg did not openly associate his fight to serve as an openly bisexual officer with the fight for Gay Liberation, his use of the media to garner public support warrants his placement among contemporary liberationists.

BIO:

Dr. Heather Haley defended her dissertation almost one year ago, in October 2021. After completing minor revisions, Auburn University conferred her doctorate in History two months later. While at Auburn, she minored in Women’s and Gender Studies and also received a certification in Public History. Her dissertation research, of which today’s presentation is a part, centers on lesbian, gay, and bisexual service members as they navigated the Cold War military. This research was generously funded by the Adams Center for Military History and Strategic Analysis at the Virginia Military Institute, the ABC-Clio Research Grant from the Society for Military History, the James C. Bradford Dissertation Research Fellowship from the North American Society for Oceanic History, and the Edward S. Miller Research Fellowship in Naval History here at the Naval War College.