

Ex-sailor says lawsuits forcing new gay policy

By PETER HAYS
The Daily News

A gay ex-sailor in Canada's navy says the federal government is being forced into dropping its discriminatory policy against homosexuals in the military.

"This doesn't come as any major surprise, because with all the pending court cases, the (Canadian Armed Forces) didn't have a hope in hell of winning," Wilson Hodder said yesterday.

There were widespread media reports yesterday saying the government was about to announce a new policy lifting restrictions against homosexuals in the Armed Forces.

But Associate Defence Minister Mary Collins said yesterday no final decision had been made on a policy change.

The forces' policy against "knowingly" hiring or promoting gay and lesbian soldiers is being challenged in five Federal Court lawsuits launched by former soldiers.

Hodder, 42 joined the navy in 1969, serving as bosun on the supply ship HMCS Protecteur and later as a staff member at CFB Stadacona in Halifax.

'Relaxed' era

When he left the navy in 1979 — for reasons unrelated to his sexual orientation — he held the rank of master corporal. Hodder is now chairman of the Nova Scotia Persons With Aids Coalition.

Being a known homosexual didn't impede his military career in the relatively "relaxed"

1970s, Hodder said, adding that attitudes have since become less forgiving.

But for anyone, dealing with being a homosexual in the Canadian military is a personal battle. "It wasn't a problem for me, (but) I'm probably extremely tough," he said.

"I guess it's a major problem for people coming to terms and not accepting the emotional thing — I was quite happy with who I was, and still am, and . . . if (other people) have a problem with that, it's their problem."

In fact, Hodder said there is a certain historical acceptance of gay men in the navy — it just took the administration a little longer to catch up with reality.

"I know people in the Armed Forces who are gay, from private to admiral, and everything

in between. I think it's a matter of the military finally realizing they can't buck nature."

Fear of reprisal

It will take much longer, Hodder added, for some soldiers to come to terms with homosexuality. And fear of reprisal will likely prevent many gay and lesbian troops from revealing their sexual orientation.

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