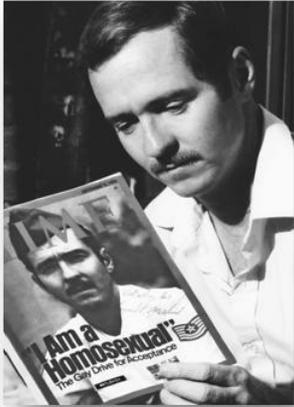


SGT. LEONARD MATLOVICH

Gay U.S. Military Activist
(1943-1988)



Leonard Matlovich followed in his father's footsteps and volunteered for service in the Air Force. He served three tours of duty in Vietnam where he received a Bronze Star for heroism under fire, and a Purple Heart for being seriously wounded in a land mine explosion. While teaching Air Force race relations courses, Matlovich came to realize that prejudice and discrimination against gays was similar to that against African Americans, and that he could not abide having to teach about equal opportunity when it did not apply to people like him. This revelation prompted him to reach out to gay rights pioneer Frank Kameny, who had been looking for a test case against the military's ban on homosexuals serving openly. With Kameny's support, Matlovich revealed his homosexuality in a carefully worded letter to his commanding officer on March 6, 1975. Despite his exemplary military record, a three-member military panel ruled Matlovich unfit for service and discharged him in October 1975. After a five-year legal battle, a U.S. District Court ordered his reinstatement but without ruling against the ban itself. Convinced they would find some other reason to discharge him if he reentered the service, Matlovich accepted the Air Force's offer of a financial settlement. Matlovich devoted the remainder of his life to championing the fight against anti-gay discrimination and confronting national indifference to the AIDS epidemic. The issue of gays serving openly in the military was brought to the forefront when Matlovich's challenge catapulted him into the role of a national hero for the cause two decades before "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" would become emblematic of the struggle for GLBT equality. Matlovich died from AIDS on June 22, 1988 and was buried with full military honors in the Congressional Cemetery in Washington, D.C. His headstone reads simply "A Gay Vietnam Veteran" and is inscribed with the words he made famous: "When I was in the military they gave me a medal for killing two men and a discharge for loving one."

Lesson Plan

Level 1: Contributions Approach

1. Activate prior experience: What do you know about Leonard Matlovich as a veteran and activist? Read the biographical information.
2. Group Discussion: In what way did Matlovich receive worldwide acclaim as a gay veteran?
3. View the following information at <http://www.leonardmatlovich.com/>

Level 2: Additive Approach

1. How had Matlovich added to his beliefs about freedom and his commitment to patriotism?
2. View other gay veterans in the Legacy Project website at <http://legacyprojectchicago.org/Military.html>
3. Discuss the way in which gay veterans overcome any challenge to be true to their country and to their identity.

Level 3: Transformational Approach

1. Examine the following photographs of Matlovich at <http://www.leonardmatlovich.com/gallery.html>
2. Read Matlovich's obituary at http://articles.latimes.com/1988-06-24/news/mn-5916_1_leonard-matlovich
3. Analyze the passages that Matlovich experienced to strengthen his passion for justice.

Level 4: Social Action Approach

1. What have you learned about how Matlovich won the battle but lost the war against the United States military's gay ban?
2. Examine the American Veterans for Equal Rights at <http://aver.us/aver/>
3. Delineate steps that you would take to advocate for more legal protection for gay and lesbian veterans.