

Collection title: Colonel Margarethe Cammermeyer Collection

Collection ID: CAMM

Size: 13.76 linear feet

Date: 1985-2016

Abstract:

Margarethe (Grethe) Cammermeyer was born in 1942 in Oslo, Norway. Her career as a nurse in the military included distinguished service in Vietnam, work for the Veterans Administration, and a position as Chief Nurse of the Washington National Guard. As a result of her statement in an interview for top security clearance that she was a lesbian, she was separated from the military in 1992. She successfully challenged her discharge and the military's regulations that mandated that lesbians and gay men be separated from the service. This experience, documented in her memoir, *Serving in Silence*, inspired her to become involved in LGBT activism and politics. The Margarethe Cammermeyer papers contain her personal, professional, and activist materials including correspondence, legal documents, photographs, videotapes, ephemera and other materials. The majority of the material relates to her successful challenge in the courts of both her discharge and the military's regulations that mandated that lesbians and gay men be separated from the service between 1992 and 1997.¹

Accession information:

These materials were donated in 2020.

Provenance:

These are additional boxes to be added to the Colonel Margarethe Cammermeyer Collection that has already been processed and transferred to UCLA.

Restrictions:

The collection is open to researchers. There are no restrictions on the collection.

Copyright:

Property rights to the physical objects belong to the June L. Mazer Lesbian Archives. All other rights, including copyright, are retained by the creators and their heirs. It is the responsibility of the researcher to determine who holds the copyright and pursue the copyright owner or heir for permission to publish where the June L. Mazer Lesbian Archives do not hold the copyright.

Biographical sketch:

¹ Finding aid biography, Margarethe Cammermeyer Papers (Collection 2186). UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.
<https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/c8sb47qx/>

“Margarethe Cammermeyer was born on March 24, 1942 in Oslo, Norway. Her family immigrated to the United States in 1951, settling near Washington, D.C. She became an American citizen in 1960. From 1959 to 1963 she attended the University of Maryland, College Park, earning a Bachelor’s of Science in Nursing. In 1961, while at the University of Maryland, she joined the Army Student Nurse Program. Upon graduation in 1963, she reported for active duty, serving in the United States Army Nursing Corps at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, Martin Army Hospital at Ft. Benning, Georgia, and a 2-year tour in Nuremberg, Germany. In Germany she married fellow soldier, Harvey Hawken, in 1965. At her request in 1967, she was sent to the 24th Evacuation Hospital at Long Binh, Vietnam where she served for 14 months as head nurse of a medical unit and of the neurosurgical intensive care unit. She was awarded a Bronze Star. She was forced to leave the military in 1968 when she became pregnant with the first of her four sons, as women were not permitted to have dependents.

After returning from Vietnam, she settled in Seattle, Washington with her family. She continued her work as a nurse and in 1971 began working at the Veterans’ Administration Hospital. She continued working in VA Medical Centers, including those in Seattle, San Francisco, and American Lake, until her retirement in 1996. She was honored as the Veterans’ Administration Nurse of the Year in 1985. She supplemented her appointment at the VA with part-time work as a lecturer and consultant. She also continued her studies, graduating from the University of Washington with Masters of Arts in Nursing in 1976 and a Ph.D. in Nursing Science in 1991. She divorced in 1980.

The military played an important role in her life. In 1972 when the regulation prohibiting women from serving with dependents was lifted, she joined the Army Reserves, achieving the rank of Colonel in 1987. In 1988, she accepted the position of Chief Nurse of the Washington State National Guard. That same year she began a relationship with Diane Divelbess. In 1989, during an interview for top-secret clearance she told the interviewer, "I am a lesbian." As a result, she was separated from the military on June 1, 1992. On the same day, Lambda Legal and the Northwest Women’s Law Center filed suit on her behalf in Federal District Court in Seattle, challenging Cammermeyer’s discharge and the military’s regulations that mandated that lesbians and gay men be separated from the service. In June 1994, U.S. District Court Judge Thomas Zilly held that the ban on gays in the military violated the equal protection and due process guarantees of the U.S. Constitution and ordered the Army to reinstate Cammermeyer. She was reinstated in the Washington National Guard and resumed her position as Chief Nurse. The government did not appeal Cammermeyer’s right to be reinstated, but in its appeal asked the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals to strike the judge’s ruling from the books. The ruling took issue with the older ban as well as new the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy which was enacted in 1993. In October 1996, the Court of Appeals dismissed the government’s appeal as moot and denied the government’s request to vacate the district court’s ruling, sending the case back to the district court. In 1997 the district court denied the government’s motion to vacate, maintaining the value of the victory as precedent. In March 1997, Cammermeyer retired with full military privileges. She returned to health care work in 2006, opening an Adult Family Home to provide skilled care to the elderly. Since 2008, she has served as the Hospital Commissioner for Whidbey General Hospital.

Cammermeyer's experiences with the military's antigay policies inspired her to become involved in LGBT activism and politics. In 1994, she published a memoir, *Serving in Silence*; it was adapted into an Emmy winning television movie in 1995. Her first involvement in politics was in 1998 when she ran as a Democratic candidate for the United States Congress in Washington. Though she did not win the congressional seat, she continues to be involved in local politics, serving as the Chairperson of her local Democratic party. Between 1999 and 2001 she hosted the *Grethe Cammermeyer Show*, a daily internet talk show, on GAYBC Radio Network. She serves on the Military Advisory Council for the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network and the Defense Advisory Council of Women in the Services. Cammermeyer and her wife, artist Diane Dievelbess, have been involved in activism around a number of LGBT causes, including marriage equality. In 2012, after same-sex marriage was legalized in Washington, Cammermeyer and Divelbess became the first same-sex couple to get a marriage license in Island County."²

Scope and contents:

The Colonel Marjorie Cammermeyer Collection is comprised of biographical and career ephemera, award plaques, certificates, and letters of recognition, VHS tapes documenting her career and TV appearances, books written by Cammermeyer and referencing her work, LGBT subject files, and newspaper and magazine clippings.

Processing notes:

Margarethe Cammermeyer's materials have been processed in two parts. The first collection of materials was processed in 2014 and is located in UCLA's Special Collections as part of their relationship with the Mazer. [Read the UCLA Special Collections' finding aid for the Margarethe Cammermeyer Papers.](#)

The second collection was processed in 2021 by Casey Winkleman under a California State Grant awarded to the Mazer in 2020. It is currently located at the Mazer. This finding aid is a guide to this second part of Margarethe Cammermeyer's collection.

Arrangement:

Series I: Biographical and career history

Series II: Awards and recognition

Series III: Subject files

Series IV: Books and media

Series V: Ephemera

² Finding aid biography, Margarethe Cammermeyer Papers (Collection 2186). UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles. <https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/c8sb47qx/>

Box level content list:

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Box 1

Series I: Biographical and career history

Series II: Awards and recognition

Series III: Subject files

Scope and content: Biographical information; awards; correspondences; military pay vouchers.

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Box 1, Folder 1	Biographical information on Col. Cammermeyer
Box 1, Folder 2	Certificates of Appreciation
Box 1, Folder 3	LGBT discrimination during WWII
Box 1, Folder 4	50th Anniversary University of Maryland Nursing School
Box 1, Folder 5	Correspondences, film and television, 1993-1995
Box 1, Folder 6	Congratulatory letter to Cammermeyer from Ronald Reagan, 1985-10-28
Box 1, Folder 7	History of Sodomy Laws
Box 1, Folder 8	LGBT people in the military - Don't Ask Don't Tell; interview
Box 1, Folder 9	Military pay vouchers
Box 1, Folder 10	Military pay vouchers
Box 1, Folder 11	National Portrait Gallery - Press Cuttings - Gay Icons, 2009-07-92 - 2009-10-19

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Box 2

Series IV: Books and media

Scope and content: Books by Colonel Cammermeyer; speaking engagements and event documentation.

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- Box 2, Folder 1 "Serving in Silence" books
- Box 2, Folder 2 Speaking engagements and event documentation
- Box 2, Folder 3 Miscellaneous

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Box 3

Series IV: Books and media

Scope and content: VHS tapes documentation of Colonel Cammermeyer's life, TV appearances, interviews, and awards ceremonies.

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- Box 3, Folder 1 VHS tapes - News footage and interviews, 1992-1997
- Box 3, Folder 2 VHS tapes - TV appearances and segments, 1994-1997
- Box 3, Folder 3 VHS tapes - television appearances and interviews
- Box 3, Folder 4 VHS tapes - awards ceremonies

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Box 4

Series IV: Books and media

Scope and content: Audiovisual material relating to Colonel Cammermeyer's life and work.

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- Box 4, Folder 1 VHS tapes - music festivals/specials and Cal Aderson, 1994-1996
- Box 4, Folder 2 VHS tapes - Fundraisers and Q patrol training
- Box 4, Folder 3 VHS tapes - "In the Life" and Real Life Boston
- Box 4, Folder 4 VHS tapes - Colonel Cammermeyer, 1994-1995

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Box 5

Series IV: Books and media

Scope and content: Audiovisual material relating to Colonel Cammermeyer's life and work.

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Box 5, Folder 1 VHS tapes - "Serving in Silence", 1998 and "A Tie to the Earth for Gay,
Lesbian, Bi, Youth

Box 5, Folder 2 VHS tapes - Keynote, retirement party, and "Freedom Speaks",
1995-1997

Box 5, Folder 3 VHS tapes - LGBT people in the military

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Box 6

Series IV: Books and media

Scope and content: Audiovisual material relating to Colonel Cammermeyer's life and work.

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Box 6, Folder 1 Heartland Men's Chorus and "Serving in Silence" DVD

Box 6, Folder 2 VHS - handwritten list of tapes

Box 6, Folder 3 VHS tapes - LGBT in the military

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Box 7

Series V: Ephemera

Scope and content: Ephemera relating to Colonel Cammermeyer's life and work.

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Box 7, Folder 1 Newspapers, Magazines, Clippings

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Box 8

Series IV: Books and media

Books relating to Colonel Cammermeyer's life and work.

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Box 8, Folder 1 Books referencing Colonel Cammermeyer

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Box 9

Series II: Awards and recognition

Series V: Ephemera

Scope and content: Awards, plaques, and photographs given to Colonel Cammermeyer for her work.

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Box 9, Folder 1 Awards, plaques, photographs

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Box 10

Series II: Awards and recognition

Scope and content: Oversized items.

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Box 10, Folder 1 Awards and plaques, photographs, articles and posters

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Box 11

Series II: Awards and recognition

Series V: Ephemera

Scope and content: Awards given to Colonel Cammermeyer for her work.

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Box 11, Folder 1 Award

Box 11, Folder 2 Mug

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Box 12

Series II: Awards and recognition

Scope and content: Physical award medal “American Veterans for Equal Rights” and associated documentation.

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Box 12, Folder 1 2016 Leonard P. Matlovich Distinguished Service Medal

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Box 13

Series II: Awards and recognition

Series V: Ephemera

Scope and content: Statues, and a bell (associated with Box 14 sculpture).

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Box 13, Folder 1 Statue documentation

Box 13, Folder 2 Statues and sculptures

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Box 14

Series II: Awards and recognition

Scope and content: Sculpture associated with Box 14 bell.

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Box 14, Folder 1 Sculpture

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Box 15

Series V: Ephemera

Scope and content: Campaign t-shirts and ephemera.

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Box 15, Folder 1 Campaign t-shirts and ephemera