

# ALLEN SCHINDLER JR. SLAIN US NAVY SAILOR

b. December 13, 1969

d. October 27, 1992

**His murder brought national attention to gay people in the military.**

*“If you can’t be yourself, then who are you?”*

Allen Schindler Jr. was a United States Navy sailor. His brutal murder in 1992 brought national attention to gay bashing and the right of gay people to serve in the military.

Schindler was born in Chicago Heights, Illinois. His mother worked multiple jobs to support him and his sisters, while his aunt acted as their primary caregiver.

At age 18, Schindler joined the Navy and became a radioman on the aircraft carrier USS Midway. He described this period as among the happiest of his life. When the Navy decommissioned the ship less than a year later, Schindler was reassigned to the USS Belleau Wood. Though he had previously spoken safely, if discreetly, about his sexuality, he now faced unrelenting harassment from his new shipmates. They shouted homophobic slurs, physically assaulted him, and glued his locker shut. The military consistently ignored Schindler’s complaints about the abuse.

Frustrated by his treatment, Schindler eventually rebelled. In September 1992, he transmitted the message “2-Q-T-2-B-S-T-R-8” (too cute to be straight), which reached most of the Pacific fleet. He was immediately charged with broadcasting an unauthorized statement. In the ensuing meeting with his captain, Schindler came out and was told he would be discharged. In the aftermath, he wrote in his journal, “If you can’t be yourself, then who are you?”

As he awaited discharge, Schindler grew afraid for his safety. During his last visit home, he gave his prized childhood toys to a nephew and spent extra time in the airport saying goodbye to his mother. In Japan during his final shore leave, two fellow shipmen followed Schindler into a restroom at night. They beat him to death, crushing his face and neck and rendering him virtually unrecognizable.

Schindler’s killing spotlighted the issue of gay bashing and sparked renewed debate around the official ban on gay people serving in the military. The Navy’s attempt to conceal the details of her son’s murder forced Schindler’s mother to confront her own misunderstandings and biases. With gay rights organizations by her side, she fought for justice and became an activist.

Schindler’s killers were convicted, and in 1993 one received a life sentence. The same year, President Bill Clinton signed the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (DADT) policy into law. The bill allowed gays and lesbians to serve in the military if they kept their sexual orientation secret. Though discriminatory, DADT provided a step forward. In 2010, President Barack Obama repealed the bill, thus allowing gay, lesbian, and bisexual Americans to serve openly in the armed forces.



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