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**FAITH UNDER FIRE**

## Chaplain faces punishment for gospel message Navy officer already subject to court-martial for 'praying in Jesus name'

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By Art Moore

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The Navy chaplain who went without food for 18 days to protest the service's prayer policy has submitted a whistleblower complaint to Sen. Hillary Clinton and other lawmakers, charging top naval officials with violating the Constitution by affirming the actions of officers who barred him from praying "in Jesus name" and quoting certain Bible passages during an optional worship service.

Lt. Gordon James Klingenschmitt's complaint to Congress was issued Monday after an admiral and top Navy lawyer capped an 18-month investigation by ruling the chaplain's superior officer, Capt. James R. Carr, had grounds for punishing him.

Military Judge Anita K. Baker, designated by Secretary of the Navy Donald C. Winter, endorsed a decision by Rear Adm. F.R. Ruehe, commander of the Navy's Mid-Atlantic region, to dismiss Klingenschmitt's original complaint as being "without merit."

Ruehe, meanwhile is convening a special court-martial against Klingenschmitt for the chaplain's participation in a March 30 event with former Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore in front of the White House. The special court-martial, considered a misdemeanor court, will take place in August or September. The maximum punishment is a reprimand and a fine of up to



Lt. Gordon James Klingenschmitt

two-thirds of his annual salary, but Klingenschmitt believes the trial will lead to a review board that could dismiss him from the Navy.

Klingenschmitt, a minister in the Evangelical Episcopal Church – which split from the liberal mainline denomination in the 1990s – says he is being punished by his superiors for praying in Jesus name, in uniform, at the event.

Now, based on Ruehe's ruling, the chaplain says the complaint against him also includes preaching the gospel at an optional service – a memorial for a sailor.

Klingenschmitt said his line-by-line explanation of Romans chapter 8 during the memorial service was the same message given to the sailor before he died from a motorcycle accident.

The sailor responded, the chaplain said, by "dedicating his life to Jesus Christ."

But after the sermon at the service, which "included references to Jesus Christ as the way of salvation," Klingenschmitt said he received complaints from Carr and others, who claimed they were offended by the "exclusive" message.

Klingenschmitt argues the Romans 8 text was approved by the command and attendance at the service was voluntary.

"I was preaching at a memorial service, honoring the Christian faith of the deceased sailor, saying he's in heaven today because of his faith in Jesus Christ," Klingenschmitt said.

The chaplain says the Navy's objection to his preaching contradicts its public statements.

"This proves that for six months senior naval officials have been lying to the public, claiming chaplains are free during optional worship to preach what their denominations preach," Klingenschmitt told WND.

A spokesman for the admiral, Lt. Com. Robert Mehal, did not respond to WND's request for comment.

Klingenschmitt contends the U.S. Code gave him the right to conduct the service according to the manner and forms of the church of which he is a member.

In the ruling, Ruehe argued:

"In all the material Lieutenant Klingenschmitt has submitted as part of this complaint ... he has not submitted any document that establishes he was required

by his church to preach, on that occasion, the particular message he did. Presumably, if his bishop requires him to preach all the Gospels, and he's not required to deliver that particular message on that particular occasion, he was free to choose to deliver a message at the memorial service that, while being true to his own beliefs, could also have commanded the assent of the vast majority of his audience. Nevertheless, Lieutenant Klingenschmitt chose to deliver a message he knew to be, by his own description, "exclusive."

Klingenschmitt says this is proof Ruehe affirmed Carr for punishing him because of certain Bible verses he quoted during a voluntary service.

The chaplain also points out he, in fact, submitted to Ruehe a letter from his church expressing its "grave concern" regarding Carr's "well-documented improprieties" toward "one of our priests."

"Our agreement with the Navy, and our understanding of the Navy's agreement with us, is that when we endorse our priest to serve in the military that they will be permitted to conduct public worship according to the manner and forms of the Evangelical Episcopal Church, and provide for the free exercise of religion for service members of diverse religious traditions," wrote Emily A. Grider, the Colorado Springs-based church's registrar.

Ruehe also responded to Klingenschmitt's complaint about another incident involving the content of prayer. Each evening the chaplain says a short prayer over the ship's PA system. Klingenschmitt said Carr censored his prayers, asked him to pray a "Jewish" prayer so as not to offend a Jewish sailor.

Ruehe argued Carr "legitimately sought to ensure evening prayer had the broadest possible appeal."

The Navy, the admiral said, "must be sensitive to the requirements of the Constitution's Establishment Clause which prohibits official government endorsement of sectarian religious beliefs."

Klingenschmitt said he wants Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld to overrule Navy Secretary Winter.

"I've asked for a congressional inquiry as to why the secretary of the Navy is now letting commanding officers punish chaplains for their optionally attended sermons," he said.

**Not about prayer?**

Navy officials have insisted over the past several months it was Klingenschmitt's attendance at

the event with Roy Moore – known for his ouster from the Alabama Supreme Court after refusing to remove a Ten Commandments monument – that violated policy, not any specific prayer.

In April, Terri Davis, public affairs officer at Norfolk, Va., where Klingenschmitt is stationed, pointed out the charge involves his allegedly disobeying a "regulation or an order."

"This stems from his appearance, in uniform, at a press conference," the spokeswoman said. "This has absolutely nothing to do with him praying. This has to do with his conduct as an officer and being there in uniform."

Davis pointed out Navy regulations prohibit an officer from appearing in uniform and expressing political or personal views. Klingenschmitt counters that he did not express a political view at the press conference but simply prayed.

The chaplain points to a Feb. 21 Navy policy that states: "Religious elements for a command function, absent extraordinary circumstances, should be non-sectarian in nature."

A command function is an official Navy event outside the traditional chapel or worship-service setting. By punishing Klingenschmitt, the chaplain contends, the Navy is stretching its "command function" requirement to every public event at which a chaplain wears his or her uniform.

Klingenschmitt believes the March 30 event qualified as one appropriate for wearing his uniform since the Navy Uniform Regulation "permits a member of the naval service to wear his or her uniform, without obtaining authorization in advance, incident to attending or participating in a bona fide religious service or observance."

In April, Capt. Lloyd Pyle presented the charge to Klingenschmitt. The chaplain had a choice of accepting a letter of reprimand or insisting on his rights to a court-martial. He has chosen the latter.

Pyle's letter said Klingenschmitt violated the Navy policy by "wrongfully wearing his uniform while attending and participating in a news conference in support of personal views on political and religious issues."

The event was meant to protest against the Navy policy requiring non-sectarian prayers in all but chapel settings.

[As WorldNetDaily reported](#), in January Klingenschmitt received a letter from his commanding officer recommending he not wear his uniform at an earlier White House event, but not prohibiting it.

"If, despite my recommendation, you choose to participate in this [White House] event in uniform, you should limit your participation, while in uniform, to the 'bona fide religious service or observance,'" stated the letter.

In January, then, the chaplain broke his 18-day hunger strike by praying at the White House in uniform, for which he received no discipline.

"They gave me prior, written permission to wear my uniform, so long as I only said prayers," Klingenschmitt explained. "And that's all I did."

Klingenschmitt said Navy personnel contacted the Washington Post Friday as a sort of pre-emptive PR move. The Post published a story about the charges against him Saturday.

The chaplain described the two White House events, saying, "On 7 January, I wore my uniform in front of the White House and I never got punished. But on 30 March, I wore my uniform in front of the White House and I got punished. At both events, all I did was say prayers."

"All I did was say prayers at a press conference," he said. "I did not make any political speeches. The Navy is characterizing the prayers themselves as political speech."

After the February Navy policy came out, Klingenschmitt filed a whistleblower complaint with Winter, which is part of the reason, he claims, the service is punishing him.

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