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Navy chaplain found guilty of disobeying order

By KATE WILTROUT, The Virginian-Pilot
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NORFOLK - Gordon Klingenschmitt didn't just switch careers four years ago when he left his job as an Air Force intelligence officer to become a Navy chaplain.



Lt. Gordon Klingenschmitt

He also took a demotion so he could follow his calling, his wife testified, trading his rank as an Air Force major for the lower position of Navy lieutenant.

Klingenschmitt was convicted Wednesday, the second day of a Navy special court-martial, for disobeying an order not to wear his uniform for media appearances. Lt. Tiffany Hansen, Klingenschmitt's military attorney, asked the jury to consider the chaplain's accomplishments and his vocation before sentencing him.

The chaplain faces a maximum punishment of a reprimand, restriction to base for two months, and fines or forfeiture of pay not to exceed \$41,916 - two-thirds of his annual salary.

Klingenschmitt declined to settle the charge administratively, choosing the court-martial instead. The jury, which took an hour and 20 minutes to find him guilty, is expected to decide Klingenschmitt's sentence today.

"A conviction is enough," Hansen told the jury. "There was no financial gain as a result of him doing what he did" March 30.

That day, Klingenschmitt appeared in uniform at a news conference in front of the White House to protest Navy regulations requiring chaplains to offer nondenominational prayers except during religious services.

His civilian attorney argued that the chaplain only said prayers and read Scripture at the event and waited until he was out of uniform to answer reporters' questions.

Prosecutors contended that Klingenschmitt was promoting a personal cause and his presence in uniform at the news conference was enough to

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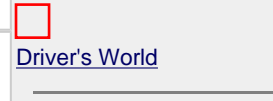
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Background: Trial begins for Navy chaplain accused of disobedience

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convict him.

Hansen mentioned her client's 11-year Air Force career, the mission work he did for a year during college, and the community service projects he organized while assigned to the Anzio, a Norfolk-based cruiser.

She highlighted the testimony of his character witnesses during the sentencing phase: a former Anzio sailor who said Klingenschmitt helped him overcome depression, a retired Air Force colonel who described him as "extremely dedicated" in his work at the North American Aerospace Defense Command, and Mary Klingenschmitt, who described her husband as "passionate and dedicated."

"Chaplain Klingenschmitt is a military man who has a passion for Jesus Christ," Hansen told the jury of five male officers.

Character witnesses testifying for the prosecution painted a different picture of Klingenschmitt, a priest in the Evangelical Episcopal Church.

Capt. Loyd Pyle, the commanding officer of Norfolk Naval Station, said in court that Klingenschmitt's performance as a chaplain is generally overshadowed "by his lack of military bearing and his disdain for military authority."

Pyle sent Klingenschmitt a written order in December directing him "not to wear your uniform for this or for any other media appearance without my express prior permission."

Capt. Norman Holcomb, the head chaplain at the naval base, testified that the junior chaplain did "an adequate job" as a counselor and in providing prayers at military ceremonies.

Yet Holcomb said he found the chaplain "to be untruthful, unethical, insubordinate, contemptuous of authority... and a totally frustrating independent operator."

Klingenschmitt was unbowed.

"I will not be broken," he said Wednesday night at a news conference in downtown Norfolk. "I have not yet begun to fight."

Wearing a clerical collar but not his Navy uniform, Klingenschmitt said he would appeal his case to the U.S. Supreme Court if necessary.

He also called on President Bush to take action.

"When I said a prayer in front of the White House, it was a bona fide religious observance," he said. "If this is my crime, then I am guilty of praying in Jesus' name."

Commenting on why his attorneys called no witnesses in his defense Wednesday, Klingenschmitt said he reached that decision after hearing God's voice three times the previous evening.

"In the trial of Jesus Christ, he never opened his mouth in his own defense," the chaplain said.

Staff writer Steve Stone contributed to this report.



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Serving almighty God, Not the US Navy (hide comment)

Hopefully all military chaplains are serving Almighty God, and not any particular branch of service. As for using the name of Jesus, read the book ! St John 14:6 in particular. Jesus said, "I am the way the truth, and the life; no man cometh to the Father, but by me." Bush needs to kick some butts over at the Pentagon. Shame on these stuffed shirts !!!

- *richard Williams - Martinsville*

He knew better! (hide comment)

I was an enlisted man in the Navy and I'm tired of so call "Gentlemen" or Officers messing up and going before the press hoping for public acclaim. Well Mr. K. you knew the rules and you broke them...quiet crying like a little girl who just spilled catsup on her white dress. Act like a man a take your sentence for premeditated actions. Your a big boy Sir...act like a man and quiet embarrassing yourself and the Navy.

- *Calvin Mitchell - Norfolk*

Not the whole story (hide comment)

Unfortunately not all of you know the whole story about Mr. Klingenschmitt. I know first hand how pompous and egotistical he is. He was reprimanded on 2 occasions for belittling other people in "the name of god". At the wake of a deceased sailor he stood in front of the family and accused the sailor of being an alcoholic and a fornicator. Mr. Klingenschmitt does what he wants, when he wants and hides behind the chaplain name. The U.S. Navy and the Chaplains Corp is alot better off without him.

- *Ned W. - Virginia Beach*

He knew the rules (hide comment)

Every military person knows they're not allowed to wear the uniform at a political rally. The chaplain chose to disobey an order. He was justly found guilty. Perhaps his attorney should have called witnesses for the defense. But I guess I have a couple of questions for you folks who feel he's innocent. 1)Did he take an oath when he became a chaplain to follow the orders of those lawfully over him? 2)Did he volunteer for this service or was he drafter?

- *Glen W. - Chesapeake*

I see the connection (hide comment)

If Lt Klingenschmitt was out of uniform, there would be no story. That's the point. The flyers he handed out compared himself (and just about every soldier and sailor with a conscious, willing to stand up for what's right) to Rosa Parks. Does no one understand? Without having to say a word, he spoke volumes.. Of course he was aware he wasn't (technically) supposed to wear his uniform while engaged in a protest, but that's the whole point. The Rosa Parks comparison should have hit it on the head for people. The Lt is proud to serve his country. He's proud to wear the uniform. But he also has an obligation to his soul and his God. When something isn't right, strong people stand up for what they believe in. But you don't have that right in the military. Rosa Parks also broke the "law" by riding in the front, but she couldn't take her uniform off. She, too, was hauled to jail. And today she is an American icon. Lt Klingenschmitt, I see the connection.

- *Raliek M. - Norfolk*

Guilty! Yes! He deserves it! (hide comment)

GJK spins like a politician. He dissembles more than anyone I've ever seen in uniform. This is about doing simple military stuff, stuff that academy grads like GJK should know. Read his website material and you see that this was never about prayer, but the agenda of a man who doesn't work or play well with others, who has no regard for established regulations, and doesn't respect sailors. He had multiple chances to correct his behavior, still pray Jesus name, like many evangelical chaplains who care about their people do every day. Read the comments GJK posted from his crew and you see that he came into the Navy looking for a fight. If he loses his retirement that's too bad. I feel bad for his family but he did this to himself. And Roy Moore, need I say "more." He has no clue about serving in the military. His comments are irrelevant. Hopefully the ministers at the conference chip in for his civilian life and legal fees since they egged him on. They are as much to blame as him.

- *Steven D. - Virginia Beach*

"Whom shall I send" Isaiah 6:8 (hide comment)

Gordon J. Klingenschmitt answered God's call just as Isaiah did. He is a Navy "Chaplain" whether he's wearing a uniform or not. Our soldiers are still soldiers in or out of their uniforms. Many of our soldiers are in Iraq fighting for freedom. I'm sure they are proud to represent the USA in the attire that they wear. Chaplain Klingenschmitt is also fighting a battle, a spiritual battle. He also proudly wears his uniform. Isn't that what he signed up for?

- *Trina J. - Va Beach*

Military Chaplain (hide comment)

I have been a military Chaplain for 28 years. Never once was I told I could not pray in the Name of Jesus. This Chaplain was not accused of praying in Jesus name. He was accused of disobeying a lawful order. He was offered a Captains Mast, and probably would have received a career ending letter of reprimand. However, it would have come without fanfare and publicity. By not choosing the Captains Mast, he choose the courts martial. It was a sad case as 5 jurors were placed in a position to find someone guilty who was obviously guilty of what he was charged with. In the end, the Chaplain should have taken the CM and let it go with a career ending letter in his file. Either way, his career is over. The ministry of a Chaplain is the best thing I have ever done. I am an evangelical Chaplain and have never been told not to do anything...God has blessed my ministry! Jesus name has been lifted up!

- *brandon t. - canton*

As even Midshipmen, the lowest form of life there is known (hide comment)

You don't wear a uniform to a political rally under any circumstances. The Lieutenant knew that and blatantly disregarded what amounts to standing orders as well as specific orders not to wear his uniform. The outcome was the only possible outcome: guilty as charged. When you are in the military, you follow orders, period, unless it is an illegal order; "Don't wear your uniform to a political event," is not an illegal order. It is a fitting and proper order to avoid the appearance of military support of any particular political stance.

- Archie Whitehill - Norfolk

What a waste of time (hide comment)

What a waste of time. I've seen sailors sleeping on the job, and these people never get busted. What's more important?

- Mike R. - Virginia Beach

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