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FAITH UNDER FIRE

Uniformed Navy chaplain prays 'in Jesus' name' Act of faithfulness defines career as service ejects Christian

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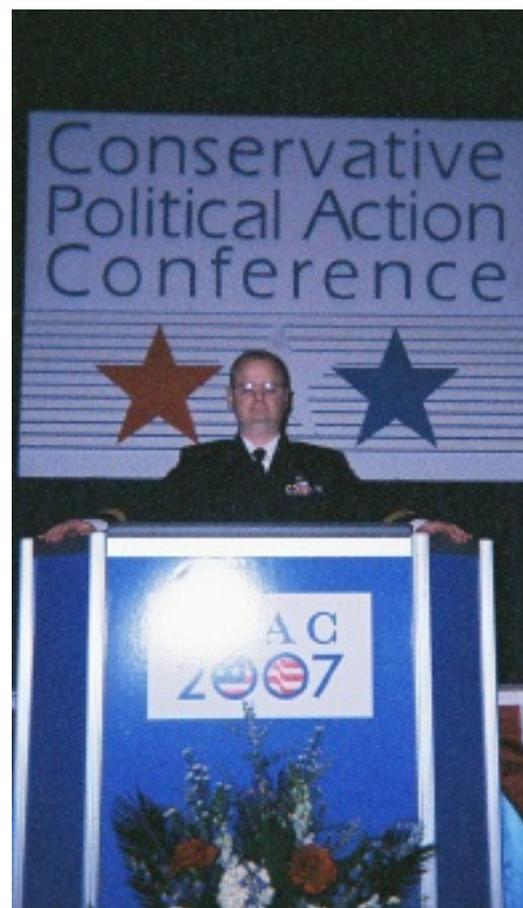
In front of witnesses and God, a man who fought the whole of the U.S. Navy over his constitutional right to pray "in Jesus' name" while in uniform has done just that, delivering a benediction at a meeting of the Conservative Political Action Conference in Washington a short time after Vice President Dick Cheney had left the room.

Former U.S. Navy Chaplain Gordon Klingenschmitt told WND it was an act to define the close – for now – of his 16-year military career.

He said he had been on the schedule of the CPAC event to deliver the invocation, but when an appeals court just days ago cleared the way for the Navy to dismiss him, his supervisor told him the Navy had contacted the conference and asked that he be "disinvited."

(Story continues below)

Multiple WND calls to CPAC asking for a comment were not returned.



Lt. Gordon James Klingenschmitt

"When the vice president was speaking I stood outside the room, and I waited until the event was over. ... Then after everybody left, I decided that my last act as a Navy chaplain should be to pray in my uniform in Jesus' name," he said.

"So I went and put on my uniform, since I was technically in the Navy until midnight, and at 11:30 p.m. I took the stage at the CPAC conference and I said the benediction to the banquet."

"I prayed in Jesus' name in front of an empty room," he told WND, with his wife and manager as witnesses.

He said those he met at the conference were cordial and gracious, in fact sympathetic. "I met several old friends who have helped me with my cause. Just about everybody in the room knew who I was, knew about my cause to pray in Jesus' name."



Lt. Gordon James Klingenschmitt

He had been ordered dismissed by midnight on Thursday, and moved out of military housing in order to prepare for that. But he said he will continue his personal battle, even though the overall victory already is his, since Congress has ordered the removal of the restrictions under which he was punished.

"I'm going to continue my lawsuit against the Navy as a civilian, but will fight to be reinstated," Klingenschmitt told WND. "I will continue to fight for all chaplains' rights to pray according to their conscience, but will do so outside of the Navy instead of inside."

Klingenschmitt said the battle was worth it, and he would do it all over again. "We did change national policy. We rescinded the policy that I was punished for," he said.

Klingenschmitt's removal from the military came just a day after the District of Columbia Court of Appeals concluded that Klingenschmitt hadn't met "the stringent standards required for an injunction pending appeal," so the administrative stay was being dissolved.

That stay had been obtained by a law firm representing him in his civil rights action against the Navy. He earlier had been scheduled to be removed from the Navy in January, but a lawsuit filed by [the Rutherford Institute](#) alleges he was within his rights to pray as he did.

"The Constitution is clear about the fact that the government is prohibited from establishing a religion," said John W. Whitehead, president of the Rutherford Institute. "Furthermore, the First Amendment to the United States Constitution guarantees that all citizens have a fundamental right to freely exercise their religious beliefs, and that includes military service people."

The civil rights complaint stems from a 1998 memo issued by the Navy Chief of Chaplains that

discouraged them from invoking the name of Jesus in their prayers. "This instruction was later embodied in an instruction from the secretary of the Navy, which provided that religious elements for a command function, absent extraordinary circumstances, should be non-sectarian in nature," the lawsuit said.

"Chaplain Klingenschmitt resisted these directives on the basis of a federal statute providing that chaplains may conduct public worship according to the manner and forms of the church of which he is a member," the firm said.

However, Klingenschmitt says that because he objected to the ban on the name of Jesus, the Department of the Navy gave him adverse fitness reports, reprimands and then brought him up on a court martial – in violation of his constitutional rights.

And that, the Rutherford Institute charges, is an attempt by the Navy to assemble a "civic religion."

"There's a unitarian system of religion that's aimed at Christians," Whitehead told WND. "It boils down to that. We're seeing it all across the country, with council prayers, kids wanting to mention Jesus. What's going on here is it's generally a move in our government and military to set up a civic religion."

In Klingenschmitt's disputed appearance, he prayed during an event held by former Alabama Supreme Court Chief Justice and WND columnist [Judge Roy Moore](#), who was removed from his office when he refused to follow a federal court order he considered unlawful: to remove a Ten Commandments monument from public property.

The Navy convicted him of failing to follow a lawful order because his superior didn't want him praying "in Jesus' name" and court-martialed him for that. But when Congress got word of his \$3,000 fine for his prayer, members ordered the Navy to remove the limitation and allow chaplains to pray as their "conscience dictates."

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