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Navy chaplain ends hunger strike after 18 days

Claims that service changed its policy are disputed

By **Leo Shane III, Stars and Stripes**

Mideast edition, Sunday, January 8, 2006

WASHINGTON — The Navy chaplain who had pledged a hunger strike until rules were changed to allow him “to pray publicly in Jesus’ name” broke his 18-day fast Saturday, calling his protest a victory for religious liberty.

Navy officials said they made no policy changes since the start of his fast, and disputed charges that he would have been dismissed if not for his public protest.

But Navy Chaplain (Lt.) Gordon Klingenschmitt said he was on the verge of losing his commission before he began the hunger strike and said he believes the Navy changed its policy to keep him in the service.

The chaplain had received poor reviews from his commander prior to the latest protest, which he believed were the precursor to his dismissal.

Along with that complaint, Klingenschmitt took issue with Defense Department rules mandating nonspecific language in public, nondenominational events, and an order from superior officers prohibiting him from wearing his uniform during television appearances related to his protest.

Klingenschmitt had asked for the president to sign an executive order overruling those restrictions, but said a Navy memo affirming his right to wear his uniform in certain public events and use Christian-specific



Leo Shane III / S&S
Navy Chaplain Lt. Gordon Klingenschmitt prepares to receive communion during a event outside the White House on Saturday. Klingenschmitt went on a hunger strike for 18 days to protest what he called limits on his religious freedoms, but broke his fast on Saturday.



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Navy Chaplain Lt. Gordon Klingenschmitt, left, prays with Katie Mahoney, center, and Air Force Reserve Chaplain Capt. Imogene Stewart.

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language during certain instances satisfied his protest goals.

"Today the Navy has reluctantly obeyed the law, to grant me the religious liberty I always should've had," he said during a prayer rally outside the White House on Saturday.

The memo sent to Klingenschmitt specifies that sailors cannot wear their uniforms for media appearances without prior approval from command, but are permitted to do so for any legitimate worship services.

Navy officials said it is not a change in policy, and Klingenschmitt was not given a blanket order not to wear his uniform in public.

Officials also said that Klingenschmitt all along has been an active-duty sailor in good standing, with no disciplinary action pending, and has not received any punishment for language used in public forums.

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