

## **Navy officials tried to fire chaplain prior to charges**

By Rowan Scarborough

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Internal e-mails indicate that the Navy was moving to fire an outspoken chaplain even before he was charged with disobeying an order.

Lt. Gordon J. Klingenschmitt, whose court-martial is scheduled to begin today in Norfolk, yesterday said the e-mails given to his defense team prove that the Navy was plotting to fire him after he had complained publicly about a commander censoring his sermons.

"They were firing me not because I wore my uniform in front of the White House," said Lt. Klingenschmitt, who, despite being ordered not to, participated in a protest of a Navy policy limiting chaplains to "nonsectarian" expressions outside worship services.

"They were firing me eight days before that, because I was a whistleblower to Congress. I was not only punished for quoting the Bible in the chapel, I was punished for exposing that to Congress and the newspapers. It's reprisal, and I'm asking Congress to investigate."

A week before the event, in a March 22 e-mail, Vice Adm. John Harvey, the Navy's top personnel officer, sent an e-mail to Adm. Michael Mullen, the chief of naval operations. In it, Adm. Harvey endorsed a recommendation from Lt. Klingenschmitt's command at the Norfolk Naval Station that the chaplain be "involuntarily" released -- in other words, fired.

"Today, I positively endorsed and forwarded ... the request from [Naval Station, Norfolk, to] involuntarily release chaplain Klingenschmitt from active duty due to lack of career potential," Adm. Harvey wrote to Adm. Mullen.

"This officer is the individual who conducted a hunger strike in front of the

White House several months ago and has engaged in other actions concerning [Department of Defense] and Navy religious ministry policies. Klingenschmitt's [commanding officer] has documented a compelling case that this officer has little career potential."

Lt. Karl Lettow, a Navy spokesman at the Pentagon, said the recommendation to fire the chaplain was never acted on by Navy civilian leaders. He said the Navy does not typically comment on correspondence between senior officers.

The Navy charged the chaplain after his March 30 public appearance with former Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore, who led the protest. He will appear at a special court-martial, facing a jury of three to five officers.

Part of his defense is a Jan. 6 memo from his commanding officer on his request to wear his uniform during public worship. The commander cited Navy regulations that permit the wearing of uniforms when "attending or participating in a bona fide religious service or observance."

Lt. Klingenschmitt said he considers the Moore press conference as an "observance" because he was there to pray.

Lt. Klingenschmitt, a member of a small breakaway evangelical Episcopal denomination, began butting heads with his superiors after he delivered a memorial sermon aboard the cruiser USS Anzio in 2004. He says he was abiding by his faith when he preached the Gospels, including John's admonition that eternal life goes only to those who believe in the son of God.

The ship's captain did not think the sermon was inclusive and counseled Lt. Klingenschmitt, who deemed the move harassment and censorship.

"They want to take a black Magic Marker to my Bible and tell me I can't read the Scripture in the chapel," he said this summer. But a Navy investigation found his complaint "without merit."