

Inside Politics

By Greg Pierce
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Booted from Navy

Navy Chaplain Gordon James Klingenschmitt was dismissed from the Navy this week, after waging a lengthy and at times bitter battle to overturn what he insisted was unfair restriction on prayer in the military.

Lt. Klingenschmitt, who has long insisted he was punished for praying in Jesus' name, was discharged for defying the military's prayer policy. He challenged that decision, but earlier this week the D.C. Court of Appeals ruled against him, he said, and the Navy ordered him to leave by yesterday.

"It's now official and final; today I was booted from the Navy," he wrote in an e-mail. "This morning I signed the [form] ending my 16-year military career."

His battle began when fellow sailors complained about a service he held for a deceased Navy officer. During the service, he said, he told listeners that Jesus is the way to heaven and for that his supervisor punished him.

Lt. Klingenschmitt eventually was stripped of his chaplain certification after being reprimanded for appearing in uniform at a press conference outside the White House last year and offering a prayer in Jesus' name. He said he was protesting an unfair policy that banned chaplains from offering public sectarian prayer in uniform outside of an official military chapel or service. After a court-martial last year, he led a successful effort to have the ban overturned.

For now, Mr. Klingenschmitt said, he will focus on speaking engagements. That didn't get off to the best start though: He was supposed to offer a prayer at the Conservative Political Action Conference this week, but said he was "disinvited."