

The Jewish Week

SERVING THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF GREATER NEW YORK

(06/03/2005)

Navy Probing Chaplain's Bias Charges

Lieutenant says his advocacy for observant Jewish soldier played a part in his reassignment.

Stewart Ain - Staff Writer

An Orthodox Jewish sailor lost 17 pounds while at sea for six weeks because the Navy refused to provide him with enough kosher food, and he was forced to pay shipmates \$100 to work his shift on Friday nights and Saturdays so he could observe the Sabbath, according to the chaplain aboard the sailor's ship.

Lt. Gordon James Klingenschmitt said in a phone interview that partly because of his advocacy for the sailor, his commanding officer gave him a negative recommendation and that his contract as a Naval chaplain might not be renewed after three years of service.

Klingenschmitt, 36, has been transferred ashore after serving as the head chaplain aboard the cruiser USS Anzio based in Norfolk, Va. He said a Navy review board would determine whether his military career was over.

A priest in the Evangelical Episcopal Church, Klingenschmitt transferred to the Navy and accepted a demotion from major to lieutenant after 11 years as an Air Force officer in order to become a military chaplain.

"I think my calling to God is higher than my pay or my rank," he explained.

Klingenschmitt said the Jewish sailor, a Californian, has decided against speaking publicly about his treatment and The Jewish Week has decided not to name him. But Lt. Cmdr. Charles Owens, a spokesman for Naval Surface Forces Atlantic, said the Navy Inspector General's office in the Pentagon launched an investigation last week into Klingenschmitt's allegations, including those dealing with the sailor.

"We don't discuss anything while it is under discussion," Owens said in a phone interview. "The Navy will investigate each one [of the allegations] on its own merit and it could take a day or a month [to complete]. ... The investigation will be thorough, impartial and just."

Klingenschmitt said that before the Anzio departed for a six-week mission in November, enough kosher meals were placed on board to provide the Jewish sailor with only one kosher meal per day for four weeks, despite his entreaties otherwise.

As a result, the chaplain said, the sailor's diet consisted of those meals, as well as kosher cereal, peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, and fresh fruit.

"When he started on the cruise he was 147 pounds and when it ended, he was 130 pounds," Klingenschmitt said. "His face was thin and his clothes didn't fit him right. His cheekbones were sticking out. He looked a little bit like a skeleton."

Klingenschmitt said also that he pointed out Navy regulations requiring that accommodations be made for Sabbath observers, but he said the sailor's supervisors ignored them and assigned the Jewish sailor to work on the Sabbath once a month.

"He had to pay his shipmates \$100 a day" to take his work assignment, Klingenschmitt said. "They all took the money [and worked the shift]," he said, "except for one time when he paid a guy \$100 and the guy failed to show up."

The Jewish sailor was brought before a disciplinary review board, and after that "the executive officer ordered that his schedule be accommodated."

Rabbi Jacob Goldstein, a Chabad rabbi in New York, said he spoke with the Jewish sailor recently and that he corroborated Klingenschmitt's story.

"He said he walks nearly four miles to Chabad [in Norfolk] to attend services when he is ashore," Rabbi Goldstein said. "I also had a lengthy conversation with the local Chabad rabbi in Norfolk who confirmed [the sailor's] Jewish background and attendance at services."

The Jewish sailor has become more observant in the past two years, Klingenschmitt said. According to the chaplain, the sailor was turned down recently in his request for an early discharge from the Navy because of its difficulty accommodating his religious needs.

Klingenschmitt noted that the sailor has completed three of his four years of service. n

Here is a list of other articles in this section

- [Air Force Fight Moves To Hill](#)

L.I. congressman accuses colleagues of 'jarring insensitivity' to charges of religious intolerance at academy.