

FBI Agent Penetrated Into The Heart of Darkness

5.11 a.m. ET (9: 11 GMT) June 5, 1999

By Wendy Nakamura, Associated Press

WASHINGTON DC (AP) - For almost fourteen years, he lived in a world of hatred, bigotry, and violence.

He attended Klan rallies and meetings of buttoned-down intellectual racists in business suits in the most upmarket hotels. He met and hosted Holocaust deniers like German- Canadian Ernst Zundel and British author David Irving. He was there at cross-burnings and street marches, waving a picket sign or a Confederate battle flag and always shouting the loudest of any among his White supremacist cohorts. He drank beer with Skinhead gangs, swapped jokes with them about African-Americans, Hispanics, and Jews, and heard them plot hate crimes and racial assaults. He cruised the Internet, posting racist messages to computer bulletin boards and newsgroups, making contacts with neo-Nazis and nationalist extremists the world over. He infiltrated the inner councils of almost every top hate group in the United States and even in Europe. He even filed a libel suit against another White supremacist who claimed he was an FBI informant.

But he was.

Last month FBI Special Agent James R. Finchley, a decorated Vietnam veteran and "one of the best and bravest men ever to graduate out of Quantico" according to a former instructor at the world-famous FBI academy who knew him and trained him, came in from the cold at last, after successfully carrying out the longest-running deep-cover infiltration of any criminal or terrorist underworld in the history of American law enforcement.

Finchley's fourteen years in the White racist underground produced only a handful of actual prosecutions, but "that wasn't his primary mission," according to the former director of the FBI's Behavioral Science Unit at Quantico, Kenneth M. Lanning. "He was there to listen and learn, and the wealth of information he obtained for us is beyond price."

"It is not too much to say that we now know virtually everything there is to know about organized race hatred in this country. These guys [White supremacist activists and leaders] couldn't go to the can without us knowing about it," Lanning said.

FBI Director Louis Freeh was not available for comment, but U. S. Attorney General Janet Reno told a reporter, "We usually do not make any public statement on covert operations of this nature until all criminal cases associated with an investigation have been brought to a conclusion, but I will say that Special Agent Finchley displayed uncommon courage, resourcefulness, and initiative in a very complex and often dangerous situation."

Finchley's cover was so deep he is reported to have actually married one woman who was involved in a White supremacist group he wanted to penetrate. On that occasion he went to St. Petersburg, Russia to meet and bring to America a Russian woman who was to be the "mail order bride" of a nationally known White supremacist leader who was banned from entering the country because of his views.

Finchley was so taken with the woman that he persuaded her to marry him instead, allegedly in order to keep her out of the clutches of the racist leader. Soon afterwards he and his Russian wife amicably divorced and Agent Finchley arranged for her to get a green card and relocate to Florida.

Justice Department sources are close-mouthed about many of the details of Finchley's fourteen-year odyssey into the murky underworld of racism and hate. "There are still some loose ends to be tied up, and once this gets out there are going to be some very angry White supremacists out there," said a spokesman for the Department. The source refused to say whether Agent Finchley had been moved into the Witness Protection Program or what measures were being taken to prevent retaliation by Finchley's former comrades in the racist movement.

Possibly the most bizarre event of Finchley's long- running undercover operation was when he was accused of having been involved in the Oklahoma City bombing as "John Doe Number Two" by the editor of a racist newsletter who had long suspected Finchley of being a Federal agent. Finchley took an absolutely unprecedented step: he sued the editor for libel and obtained a 110,000 default judgment when the defendant didn't show up in court to try the case.

"I don't know if he's been successful in collecting any of the money the judge awarded him," said Lanning.