

Behind a Book That Inspired McVeigh

By JO THOMAS | New York Times | June 9th, 2001

The man who prosecutors said helped inspire Timothy J. McVeigh to commit the worst act of terrorism in American history lives and works on a southeastern West Virginia farm, the base for his neo-Nazi organization.

It has been 23 years since the man, William Pierce, using the pseudonym Andrew Macdonald, wrote "The Turner Diaries," a novel that described the bombing of the F.B.I. headquarters with a homemade truck bomb. The book became a classic among white supremacists and antigovernment groups. Excerpts from the novel were found in Mr. McVeigh's getaway car.

Now 67, Dr. Pierce runs National Alliance, his neo-Nazi publishing and music company, from a dusty metal building on his 395 acres near Mill Point, W.Va.

In an interview several weeks before Mr. McVeigh's scheduled execution, Dr. Pierce praised Mr. McVeigh as "a man of principle" who was "willing to accept the consequences" for what he did.

But, Dr. Pierce said, "I wouldn't have chosen to do what he did."

Dr. Pierce, who has a Ph.D. in physics, said that although some of his members became frightened and quit after the Oklahoma bombing, new ones joined. "Probably, on the whole, it was helpful," he said.

Since 1998, when the Anti-Defamation League called the National Alliance "the single most dangerous organized hate group in America," its membership has doubled, to 2,000, said Mark Potok, a spokesman for the Southern Poverty Law Center.

But over all, Mr. Potok's organization and other experts have found that the antigovernment paramilitary groups that were catapulted to the public spotlight by the Oklahoma City bombing are fragmented and dwindling in membership. A survey by the law center last month found that the number of what it called "patriot" organizations, including paramilitary groups, declined for the fourth straight year.

The number of such groups peaked at 858 in 1996, the year after the bombing, but fell to 194 by 2000, the survey found. And authorities who track these and other antigovernment organizations found few indications of any widespread sympathy for Mr. McVeigh.

Photo: Dr. William Pierce, the author of "The Turner Diaries." (Brian Ferguson/The New York Times)