



**Testimony of Lecia Brooks  
Southern Poverty Law Center**

**Before the  
Subcommittee on Military Personnel  
U.S. House Armed Services Committee**

**Alarming Incidents of White Supremacy in the Military—How to Stop It?**

**Feb. 11, 2020**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to the U.S. House Armed Services Subcommittee on Military Personnel on white supremacy in the military and how to stop it.

My name is Lecia Brooks. I am a member of the senior leadership team at the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC). We are a civil rights organization founded in 1971 and based in Montgomery, Alabama, with offices in five Southern states and Washington, D.C. For more than three decades, the SPLC has been monitoring, issuing reports about, and training law enforcement officials on far-right extremist activity in the United States. Each year since 1990, we have conducted a census of hate groups operating across America, a list that is used extensively by journalists, law enforcement agencies and scholars, among others.

I want to start by saying that, right now, the white supremacist movement in the United States is surging and presents a distinct and present danger to this country and its institutions, including the U.S. Armed Forces. Recent investigations have revealed dozens of veterans and active-duty servicemembers who are affiliated with white supremacist activity.

This is far from a new problem. In fact, the Southern Poverty Law Center has been documenting white supremacist infiltration of the military and urging officials to take substantial and systematic action since 1986. It is now clear that, despite some adjustments in policies related to recruitment and conduct within the U.S. Armed Forces, white supremacist activity continues to persist in the military. Because servicemembers often possess unique training and capabilities, those who are indoctrinated into white supremacist ideology may represent a significant threat to national security and the safety of our communities.

It is also clear that this issue has not been taken as seriously as the situation warrants at the highest levels of our government. In December, for example, it was reported that the National Defense Authorization Act was altered in the U.S. Senate to remove mention of “white nationalists” in the screening process for military enlistees. Under this change, the Department of Defense is instructed only to screen for “extremist and gang-related activity.”<sup>1</sup> The omission is significant when we consider the current political and social landscape—where officials with clear sympathies for white nationalist ideology are allowed to serve in the White House, hate groups have reached historic numbers, and mass killings are taking place at the hands of white supremacists.

As we have been doing for more than 30 years, we urge the Congress and the Department of Defense to develop and enforce clear policies that will establish a true zero tolerance standard for white supremacist activity within all branches of the U.S. Armed Forces. For its part, Congress must exercise a strong and continuing oversight role to ensure that our military is not infiltrated by white supremacists who want to obtain specialized weapons training that they can use to threaten the safety of our nation in furtherance of an agenda of hate.

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Mathias, “Phrase ‘White Nationalist’ Cut From Measure to Screen Military Enlistees,” December 19, 2019. [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/senate-removes-white-nationalists-from-military-bill-aimed-at-screening-for-extremists\\_n\\_5dfab39be4b0eb2264d3a18d](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/senate-removes-white-nationalists-from-military-bill-aimed-at-screening-for-extremists_n_5dfab39be4b0eb2264d3a18d)

## Assessing the Current Threat of White Supremacist Terror

In recent years, we have witnessed devastating violence carried out by individuals radicalized by white supremacist propaganda. This propaganda, found primarily online, is intended to recruit young people into an extremist worldview that portrays white people as being systematically replaced by nonwhite migrants—and people of color more broadly—and that demands urgent, radical, and violent action. This antidemocratic movement puts a premium on the type of training afforded by the U.S. Armed Forces. It is thus no surprise that hateful groups and individuals encourage their followers to join a branch of the military and that they target existing servicemembers for recruitment.

In 2018, the Southern Poverty Law Center documented the largest number of active hate groups – 1,020 — since it began its annual census of these groups in 1990. Most alarming, the number of white nationalist groups rose by nearly 50%. These disturbing trends are driven by three major factors: rising anxiety over rapid demographic change in the United States; toxic political rhetoric that singles out and demonizes specific communities based on their immutable characteristics; and the unchecked proliferation of hateful propaganda and extremist misinformation on social media and the broader internet. All of these factors affect our servicemembers, just as they do the broader population in the United States.

White supremacist organizations appear to have enjoyed a measure of success in their ambitions of reaching members of the U.S. Armed Forces. According to a 2019 poll conducted by *The Military Times*, 36% of active-duty servicemembers who were surveyed reported seeing signs of white nationalism or racist ideology in the U.S. Armed Forces—a significant rise from the year before, when 22% reported witnessing these extremist views.<sup>2</sup> In the same survey, more than half of servicemembers of color reported experiencing incidents of racism or racist ideology, up from 42% in 2017.<sup>3</sup>

During this same period, the SPLC has documented an alarming, upward trend in white supremacist violence. Recent attacks in El Paso, Texas, Poway, California, and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, are stark reminders of the threat posed by white supremacist ideology and those it motivates to act. Each of these attacks was inspired by white supremacist ideas, particularly animosity toward nonwhite migrants. The perpetrators in El Paso, Poway and Pittsburgh each were demonstrably influenced by the propaganda of white supremacist organizations and their leaders.

A number of additional plots by white supremacists have been thwarted. The arrest of Lt. Christopher Paul Hassan, a 49-year-old serving in the Coast Guard, provides a recent example of the threat posed by those radicalized by white supremacist materials who are currently active in

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<sup>2</sup> Leo Shane III, “Signs of White Supremacy, Extremism Up Again in Poll of Active Duty Troops,” February 6 2020. <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2020/02/06/signs-of-white-supremacy-extremism-up-again-in-poll-of-active-duty-troops/>

<sup>3</sup> Leo Shane III, “One in Four Troops Sees White Nationalism in the Ranks.” October 23, 2017. <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2017/10/23/military-times-poll-one-in-four-troops-sees-white-nationalism-in-the-ranks/>

the U.S. Armed Force.<sup>4</sup> Lt. Hassan, who had also spent time in the Marine Corps and the Army National Guard, pleaded guilty to federal gun and drug charges—including unlawful possession of unregistered silencers; unlawful possession of firearm silencers unidentified by a serial number; possession of a firearm by an addict and unlawful user of a controlled substance; and possession of a controlled substance—in October 2019.<sup>5</sup> He was sentenced to more than 13 years in prison in February 2020.<sup>6</sup> Lt. Hassan identified as a white nationalist and advocated for “focused violence” against journalists, Democratic politicians, professors, U.S. Supreme Court justices and “leftists” in order to establish a white ethnostate. He had been engaged with white supremacist ideologies before he joined the military in the 1980s.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) last year recognized the increased threat posed by white supremacist terrorism in the United States. In a September 19, 2019, document (*Department of Homeland Security Strategic Framework for Targeting Terrorism and Targeted Violence*)—published roughly two months after a man in Texas killed 22 people in El Paso to stop the “cultural and ethnic replacement” of white people the United States—the DHS acknowledges that “[w]hite supremacist violent extremism, one type of racially- and ethnically-motivated violent extremism, is one of the most potent forces driving domestic terrorism. Lone attackers, as opposed to cells or organizations, generally perpetrate these kinds of attacks. But they are also part of a broader movement.”<sup>7</sup> The report concludes that domestic terrorism poses as large a threat to the United States as terrorism from overseas. This was a major course correction for the department. For years, the DHS downplayed the dangers posed by violent white supremacists, despite the warnings of its analysts. A 2009 report warned that the economic downturn and election of the nation’s first African-American president might provide fuel for rightwing extremists and that, amid the war on terror, rightwing extremists might “attempt to recruit and radicalize returning veterans in order to boost their violent capabilities.”<sup>8</sup> Despite the report’s accuracy and prescient warnings, then-Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano retracted it under pressure from conservatives who claimed, falsely, that it portrayed them as a security threat.<sup>9</sup>

According to its own statements, the FBI has also prioritized white supremacist violence. Last July, FBI Director Christopher Wray noted at a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing that

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<sup>4</sup> Dave Philipps, “Coast Guard Officer Plotted to Kill Democrats and Journalists, Prosecutors Say,” February 20, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/20/us/christopher-hasson-coast-guard.html>

<sup>5</sup> Christine Hauser, “Coast Guard Officer Called a ‘Domestic Terrorist’ Pleads Guilty to Gun and Drug Charges,” October 3, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/03/us/christopher-hasson-coast-guard-white-supremacist.html>

<sup>6</sup> Michael Levenson, “Former Coast Guard Officer Accused of Plotting Terrorism is Sentenced to 13 Years,” January 31, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/31/us/christopher-hasson-coast-guard-terrorism.html>

<sup>7</sup> “Department of Homeland Security Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence, September 19, 2019. Prepared by the Department of Homeland Security.

[https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/19\\_0920\\_plcy\\_strategic-framework-countering-terrorism-targeted-violence.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/19_0920_plcy_strategic-framework-countering-terrorism-targeted-violence.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> “Rightwing Extremism: Current Economic and Political Climate Fueling Resurgence in Radicalization and Recruitment,” April 7, 2009. Prepared by the Extremism and Radicalization Branch, Homeland Environment Threat Analysis Division of the Department of Homeland Security.

[https://web.archive.org/web/20110927124641/http://rogerhedgecock.com/resources/HSA\\_RightwingExtremism\\_Report\\_april2009.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20110927124641/http://rogerhedgecock.com/resources/HSA_RightwingExtremism_Report_april2009.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Eric Marropodi, “Napolitano Apologizes to Veterans over ‘Extremist’ Flap,” April 24, 2009. <https://www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/04/24/napolitano.am.legion/>

domestic terrorism arrests were roughly on par with the number made in relation to international terrorism cases. He told the committee that the FBI had already been involved in roughly 100 domestic terrorism cases and that most involved some form of white supremacy. Just last week, Wray told the House Judiciary Committee that the FBI has elevated racially motivated violent extremism to a “national threat priority.” “Not only is the terror threat diverse, it’s unrelenting,” he said.<sup>10</sup>

The spike in arrests of potential mass shooters made in the aftermath of the El Paso attack also illustrates the seriousness of the white supremacist threat. A survey conducted by HuffPost found that, in the four weeks following the August 2019 attack, more than 40 people were arrested for plotting mass killings. Roughly a dozen of those cases involved some form of rightwing ideology.<sup>11</sup>

It is critical that branches of the U.S. Armed Services treat the growing threat of white supremacy with the same seriousness as their colleagues in federal law enforcement.

### **Dozens of Former and Active-Duty Military Personnel Active in Violent White Supremacist Groups**

The participation of active-duty personnel and veterans in white supremacist activity has long posed a serious threat to the public and other military personnel. Indeed, the Southern Poverty Law Center first began actively lobbying the Department of Defense to prohibit all military personnel from being members of, or participating in, the activities of white supremacist groups in 1986. While steps have since been taken to prevent racist extremists from entering the U.S. Armed Forces, numerous recent examples of violent white supremacists with current or former involvement in the military shows those responses have been inadequate.

Over the last two years, we have identified dozens of former and active-duty military personnel among the membership of some of the country’s most dangerous white supremacist groups. Those groups include the Atomwaffen Division, a neo-Nazi group whose members have allegedly been responsible for five murders since mid-2017. One of the people killed was a gay, Jewish college student named Blaze Bernstein who was stabbed more than 20 times.

Brandon Russell, who launched Atomwaffen in 2015 from an online forum called Iron March, served in the Florida Army National Guard. After his roommate Devon Arthurs killed the pair’s two other roommates—who were also members of Atomwaffen—police found a stash of explosive materials and homemade fuses. Inside a cooler labeled with Brandon’s name, they found hexamethylene triperoxide diamine, or HMTD, a homemade explosive used in past terror attacks, including the London bombing in 2005. A framed photo of Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh was found in Russell’s bedroom. Police released Russell after questioning,

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<sup>10</sup> Tess Owens, “The FBI Just Put White Nationalists and Neo-Nazis on the Same Threat Level as ISIS,” February 6, 2020. [https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/3a8awn/the-fbi-just-put-white-nationalists-and-neo-nazis-on-the-same-threat-level-as-isis](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/3a8awn/the-fbi-just-put-white-nationalists-and-neo-nazis-on-the-same-threat-level-as-isis)

<sup>11</sup> Christopher Mathias and Ryan J. Reilly, “Over 40 People Have Been Arrested As Potential Mass Shooters Since El Paso,” August 31, 2019. [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/mass-shooting-plot-arrests-el-paso\\_n\\_5d66d1eae4b063c341f9f2da](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/mass-shooting-plot-arrests-el-paso_n_5d66d1eae4b063c341f9f2da)

but only hours later he was arrested by Florida sheriff's deputies who found an AR-style assault rifle and more than 1,000 rounds of ammunition in his car. He also possessed flyers that read "Don't prepare for exams, prepare for race war."<sup>12</sup>

According to Arthurs, Russell joined the National Guard in order to receive the kind of skills he would need to prepare for that potential race war. "He joined specifically for the knowledge and the training, and he wants to use that training against the government," Arthurs said during a police interrogation. He also told them that Russell had acquired guns and trained other Atomwaffen members in their use.<sup>13</sup>

Atomwaffen Division specifically targets members of the Armed Services, and its members are encouraged to enlist in the military to acquire specialized training. "The US military gives great training ... you learn how to fight, and survive," Joshua Beckett, an Atomwaffen member who formerly served as an Army combat engineer, told other members in the group's online chat.<sup>14</sup>

While Beckett appears to have left the military when he joined Atomwaffen, other members were still active in the Armed Forces while they were involved in the neo-Nazi group. Vasilios Pistoris was a Marine lance corporal when he became a member of the group's North Carolina cell. The search history of Pistoris's computer was highly disturbing; it included searches for information about the Norwegian terrorist Anders Breivik (who killed 77 people in 2011), the specific firearms equipment Breivik used in his attack, and manuals for building explosives and rifles.<sup>15</sup>

"Soldiers, criminals and workers make the best Nazis just a fact," Corwyn Storm Carver, then an active-duty member of the U.S. Army stationed at Fort Bliss in El Paso, wrote in a chat with other Atomwaffen members in 2018. Carver also praised the actions of white supremacist terrorist Dylann Roof, who killed nine black worshipers in a Charleston, South Carolina, church in 2015, but added, "Shooting up a geriatrics in a church is a soft target."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> A.C. Thompson, "An Atomwaffen Member Sketched a Map to Take the Neo-Nazis Down. What Path Officials Took is a Mystery," November 20, 2018. <https://www.propublica.org/article/an-atomwaffen-member-sketched-a-map-to-take-the-neo-nazis-down-what-path-officials-took-is-a-mystery>; Associated Press, "Florida Neo-Nazi Leader Gets 5 Years for Having Explosive Material," January 9, 2018. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/florida-neo-nazi-leader-gets-5-years-having-explosive-material-n836246>

<sup>13</sup> A.C. Thompson, "An Atomwaffen Member Sketched a Map to Take the Neo-Nazis Down. What Path Officials Took is a Mystery," November 20, 2018. <https://www.propublica.org/article/an-atomwaffen-member-sketched-a-map-to-take-the-neo-nazis-down-what-path-officials-took-is-a-mystery>

<sup>14</sup> A.C. Thompson, Ali Winston, and Jake Hanrahan, "Ranks of Notorious Hate Group Include Active-Duty Military," May 3, 2018. <https://www.propublica.org/article/atomwaffen-division-hate-group-active-duty-military>

<sup>15</sup> Shawn Snow, "The neo-Nazi boot: Inside one Marine's descent into extremism," September 4, 2019. <https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/your-marine-corps/2019/09/04/the-neo-nazi-boot-inside-one-marines-descent-into-extremism/>

<sup>16</sup> Christopher Mathias, "Exclusive: Army Investigating Soldier's Alleged Leadership In Neo-Nazi Terror Group," May 3, 2019. [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/atomwaffen-division-army-soldier-investigation-corwyn-storm-carver\\_n\\_5ccb5350e4b0e4d7572fde38](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/atomwaffen-division-army-soldier-investigation-corwyn-storm-carver_n_5ccb5350e4b0e4d7572fde38)

Altogether, investigators have found seven members of Atomwaffen who have served in the military—a significant number considering the group has likely ever had, at most, about 100 members at a time.<sup>17</sup> Because of their sophisticated weapons and explosives training, those members significantly increase the group’s potential to carry out deadly attacks.

Despite the Defense Department’s insistence that it is taking all the necessary actions to prevent extremists from operating within the ranks, Russell’s case demonstrates that military officials at times are ignoring—either willfully or through neglect—clear signs of extremist activist among servicemembers. Indeed, in an investigation launched after Russell’s arrest, the Florida National Guard found that Russell had an Atomwaffen Division tattoo but that it apparently failed to prompt any action on the part of the Guard. The investigation, acquired by ProPublica, also found that Russell had expressed “hatred for homosexuality and ‘faggots’” and “seemed very anxious to receive body armor, and keep his military issued gear.” Nevertheless, investigators concluded that the Guard had not neglected its duties by allowing Russell to continue to serve.

Russell has since been sentenced to five years in prison on charges related to the explosive materials found in the apartment he shared with Arthurs and other Atomwaffen members.<sup>18</sup> From prison, he has attempted to send instructions for building explosives to another member of the neo-Nazi group.<sup>19</sup>

Atomwaffen Division is one of a growing number of groups that embrace violence as a tool that will ultimately help them foment a race war. They are one of many groups that believe society should be pushed to collapse, providing them the opportunity to build an all-white, non-Jewish ethnostate. Like Atomwaffen Division, they organize themselves into networks of clandestine cells, each charged with committing targeted acts of violence they believe will sow societal discord and ultimately attract more white people to their ranks. It is worth noting that not all white supremacist extremists who promote revolutionary violence belong to hate groups. In fact, the numbers radicalized through online extremist communities and propaganda likely far outnumber those who belong to formal groups.

We are especially concerned that terroristic, cell-style white supremacist groups that embrace paramilitarism, conduct tactical training camps for members, and continually encourage members to carry out attacks against both people and the nation’s infrastructure will attract veterans and active-duty servicemembers to their ranks. The recent arrests of two trained soldiers—one from the United States and one from Canada—who belong to a terroristic white supremacist group called the Base have only heightened our fears.

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<sup>17</sup> A.C. Thompson, “An Atomwaffen Member Sketched a Map to Take the Neo-Nazis Down. What Path Officials Took is a Mystery,” November 20, 2018. <https://www.propublica.org/article/an-atomwaffen-member-sketched-a-map-to-take-the-neo-nazis-down-what-path-officials-took-is-a-mystery>

<sup>18</sup> Associated Press, “Florida Neo-Nazi leader gets 5 years for having explosive material,” January 9, 2019. <https://apnews.com/6380120849a4470f9e569676718889c9>

<sup>19</sup> Janet Reitman, “How Did a Convicted Neo-Nazi Release Propaganda From Prison?” May 25, 2018. <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/how-did-a-convicted-neo-nazi-release-propaganda-from-prison-628437/>

Brian Mark Lemley Jr., who was previously a Cavalry scout in the U.S. Army, and Patrik Jordan Mathews, a combat engineer in the Canadian Army Reserve until last August, were both arrested in January on federal gun charges in Maryland. According to an FBI investigation, on an encrypted chat, members of the Base “discussed, among other things, creating a white ethno-state, committing acts of violence against minority communities (including African-Americans and Jewish Americans), the organization’s military-style training camps, and ways to make improvised explosive devices.” Lemley once wrote, “I day dream about killing so much that I frequently walk in the wro[n]t [sic] direction for extended periods of time at work.” Mathews told members they should be prepared to “Derail some fucking trains, kill some people, and poison some water supplies.” He continued, “If you want the white race to survive you’re going to have to do your fucking part.”<sup>20</sup>

One day after Lemley and Mathews were arrested along with another Base member, authorities arrested three other members of the group in Georgia for conspiring to murder a couple involved in antifascist activism.

In addition, in the Spring of 2019, 11 servicemembers associated with Identity Evropa, a white nationalist hate group, were identified and reported to be under investigation by military officials. Those servicemembers included a lance corporal in the Marines, a master sergeant in the Air Force, a specialist and a physician in the Army, National Guard members in Minnesota and Texas, and two Army ROTC cadets.<sup>21</sup> Their affiliation with white supremacy came to light only after online correspondence among Identity Evropa members was released, underscoring both the widespread presence of white supremacists and the inconsistent nature of efforts to detect and weed out extremists from the U.S. Armed Forces.

### **A Long History of Military Training for White Supremacist Leaders**

Rightwing extremists poisoning the ranks of the military, or extremists using their military training to further their racist and often-violent ambitions, is not a new problem. Historically, many of the white power movement’s most infamous leaders have served in the military.

Frazier Glenn Miller served for 20 years in the U.S. Army, including two tours of duty in Vietnam and 13 years as a Green Beret. Afterward, he founded the Carolina Knights of the Ku Klux Klan and, with the help of active-duty soldiers, began to amass illegal weapons and conduct military training. Miller, who also founded the White Patriot Party, had ties to The Order, the white supremacist terrorist organization whose members carried out armored car robberies and assassinated Denver radio show host Alan Berg. During a trial for criminal contempt in 1986, a witness testified that he had procured weapons and explosives for Miller, including 13 armor-piercing anti-tank rockets, from military personnel. Miller later served three

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<sup>20</sup> United States of America v. Brian Mark Lemley, Jr., Patrik Jordan Mathews, and William Garfield Bilbrough IV. <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/6664597-Motion-for-Detention-The-Base-Maryland.html>

<sup>21</sup> Christopher Mathias, “Exposed: Military Investigating 4 More Servicemen For Ties To White Nationalist Group,” April 27, 2019. [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/white-nationalists-military-identity-evropa\\_n\\_5cc1a87ee4b0764d31dd839c](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/white-nationalists-military-identity-evropa_n_5cc1a87ee4b0764d31dd839c)



years in prison for his involvement in a plot to kill SPLC founder Morris Dees. He and other Klansmen were flushed out of a mobile home in Missouri, where the FBI found C-4 explosives, hand grenades, automatic weapons and ammunition. In November 2015, Miller was sentenced to death on murder charges after he killed three people during an April 13, 2014, attack on Jewish facilities in Overland Park, Kansas.

Another well-known white supremacist, Louis Beam, who popularized the “leaderless resistance” model of white supremacist terrorism that is experiencing a revival in much of the movement, served as a helicopter gunner in the Army during the Vietnam War. Shortly after his return, he joined the United Klans of America and went on to become one of the most influential leaders in the white power movement during the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>22</sup> He maintained a close relationship with Richard Butler, the head of the Aryan Nations who was himself an Army veteran.<sup>23</sup> The Northwest Front, a white nationalist hate group that aims to build a white homeland in the Pacific Northwest, was founded by Army veteran Harold Covington.<sup>24</sup> Michael Tubbs, the leader of the Florida chapter of the neo-Confederate hate group League of the South, is a former Green Beret with expertise in demolitions. In 1990, Tubbs was arrested on charges related to a huge cache of weapons and explosives he had amassed, including 45 pounds of C-4 explosive, an anti-aircraft machine gun, and 25 pounds of TNT.<sup>25</sup> Authorities believed the arsenal was stolen from the military. A letter found by authorities suggested that Tubbs was planning to use the arsenal to outfit his group, Knights of the New Order, which was dedicated to “fostering the welfare of the white Aryan Race.”<sup>26</sup>

Many of these leaders have spoken candidly about the value U.S. military training adds to their racist organizations. Tom Metzger, an Army veteran who founded the neo-Nazi group White Aryan Resistance (WAR), told the author of a 2012 book that he estimated about “10 percent of the army and Marines ... are racist extremists of some variety.” “I would encourage them to join the military, if they have a scratch they can’t itch,” he said of his followers, “Then go in to bring some training back to the US and make the federal government aware of our existence.” Speaking with the same writer, neo-Nazi Billy Roper revealed that within his group, White Revolution, there were about a dozen members who served in the military. “Some of them have tattoos” of racist symbols, he said, “because anyone can walk in and get in the military now.” Two military members of his group were reprimanded for having swastika tattoos, he said.

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<sup>22</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, “Louis Beam.” <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/louis-beam>

<sup>23</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, “Richard Butler.” <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/richard-butler>

<sup>24</sup> Ryan Lenz, “Harold Covington, founder of white separatist group, dies at 64,” July 25, 2018. <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2018/07/25/harold-covington-founder-white-separatist-group-dies-64>

<sup>25</sup> Heidi Beirich, “League of the South to Protest ‘Southern Demographic Displacement,’” August 21, 2013. <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2013/08/21/league-south-protest-%E2%80%9Csouthern-demographic-displacement%E2%80%9D>

<sup>26</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, “Michael Ralph Tubbs.” <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/michael-ralph-tubbs>

But when they had them altered and made into Sonnenrads—a widely used symbol among neo-Nazis—both were allowed to reenter the military.<sup>27</sup>

### **The Department of Defense’s Inadequate Response to the Threat of White Supremacist Infiltration in the Military**

The SPLC has long advocated for the Department of Defense to take strong action to prevent individuals who harbor extremist ideologies, including white supremacy, from serving. In 1986, we urged then-Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger to investigate the participation of servicemembers involved with Frazier Glenn Miller’s KKK paramilitary activities and to issue a prohibition on active-duty personnel from membership or participation in any Klan group.<sup>28</sup> Secretary Weinberger did issue a directive instructing servicemembers that they “must reject participation in white supremacy, neo-Nazi and other such groups which espouse or attempt to create overt discrimination.” He told military personnel they were barred from “active participation” in these groups. However, as University of Chicago assistant professor Kathleen Belew explains in her book *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America*, “[T]he directive said nothing about other kinds of actions that undergirded white power activity—such as membership excluding ‘organizing or leading,’ distributing propaganda, or displaying white power symbols.” As a result, “Active-duty personnel continued both passive and active participation in the white power movement.”<sup>29</sup>

In 1994, six months before the Oklahoma City bombing by Gulf War veteran Timothy McVeigh, we wrote to Attorney General Janet Reno to warn of the growing threat of domestic terrorism. In the wake of Oklahoma City and the murder of a black couple by skinheads serving as active-duty paratroopers with the 82nd Airborne in 1995, the Defense Department tightened regulations on the participation of active-duty servicemembers in extremist activities.

But the increased scrutiny on white supremacist affiliation did not last. Facing recruitment shortages during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the military relaxed recruitment standards and largely turned a blind eye toward the extremist beliefs or affiliations of potential recruits.

In 2006, the SPLC released a report highlighted the continuing presence of white supremacists in the military and, once again, reached out to ask the Department of Defense to implement a zero tolerance policy on white supremacy.<sup>30</sup> Then-Undersecretary of Defense David

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<sup>27</sup> Matt Kennard, *Irregular Army: How the US Military Recruited Neo-Nazis, Gang Members, and Criminals to Fight the War on Terror* (London: Verso, 2015), 24-25.

<sup>28</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center. SPLC to Honorable Caspar Weinberger, Montgomery, AL, April 15, 1986. <http://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/legacy/images/dynamic/intel/weinberger.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> Kathleen Belew, *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 137.

<sup>30</sup> David Holthouse, “Several High Profile Racist Extremists Serve in the U.S. Military,” August 11, 2006. <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2006/several-high-profile-racist-extremists-serve-us-military>; Southern Poverty Law Center, *Letter to David S.C. Chu*, October 12, 2006. <http://www.splcenter.org/images/dynamic/main/rc101206.pdf>

S. C. Chu dismissed the SPLC's reporting as "inaccurate and misleadingly alarmist" and claimed, despite our documentation of extremists actively serving in the U.S. Armed Forces, that a zero-tolerance policy was already in place. Again in 2008 and 2009, the SPLC wrote letters to the Department of Defense urging an investigation, with little result.<sup>31</sup>

Clearly, the problem persists to this day.

We urge this Subcommittee and this Congress to exercise its oversight responsibilities and to use its powers to ensure that every branch of the military take the strongest action possible to prevent the infiltration of white supremacists and to weed out those who are already active. They represent a serious and ongoing threat not only to military order and the values that servicemembers are sworn to uphold but to the safety of every American.

Thank you.

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<sup>31</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center. SPLC to Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, Montgomery, AL, November 26, 2008. <https://www.splcenter.org/news/2008/12/02/letter-secretary-gates-extremists-continue-infiltrate-military>; Southern Poverty Law Center. SPLC to Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee, Senate Armed Services Committee, House Committee on Homeland Security, and House Armed Services Committee, Montgomery, AL, July 10, 2009. [http://www.splcenter.org/images/dynamic/main/SPLC\\_letter\\_extremists.pdf](http://www.splcenter.org/images/dynamic/main/SPLC_letter_extremists.pdf)