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New York

The Deadly Friendship

George Lincoln Rockwell and John Patler

by Dotson Rader

I met George Lincoln Rockwell for the first time in 1964, and I was to know him until his death.

To obtain the unlisted telephone number of Nazi Party Headquarters in Arlington I had called the FBI and told them I was a stringer for *The Chicago Tribune*. They gave me the number; also advice, which I ignored. I phoned the party headquarters and identified myself. The Nazi on the other end invited me to Arlington, after I had assured him I was neither a Jew nor a communist.

At that time the party was established in a small, frame house on a back street in a poor section of Arlington. It has since been padlocked by the Internal Revenue Service. Above the door was written, in large red letters: NO TRESPASSING. DOGS AND JEWS WILL BE SHOT. I noticed heavy steel screens on all the windows. At the back was a door leading to a small printing room for the Nazi "propaganda ministry." Immediately opposite the entrance to the main room was a table covered with red bunting behind which hung a Nazi flag. On the table was a brass cross desecrated by a swastika attached to its center. To each side of the cross stood a red vigil light. Nazi weddings were performed here. I had a sudden feeling of displacement, similar to the feeling I had had when visiting a state mental asylum in the Middle West.

As I entered the room, a thin, wiry man wearing a Nazi arm band asked me what the hell I wanted. I told him I had a scheduled interview with Mr. Rockwell. "Commander Rockwell," he said. He gave me several copies of *Storm Trooper*, the party organ, and told me to sit down and read them. The only item I clearly remember was a picture of a handsome young man, dressed in an American Nazi uniform, smiling proudly at a baby in his arms. The caption said that he had named his child Horst Wessel after the first German Nazi "martyr." The father cradling his son in his arms was John Patler, who was later to be arrested on the charge of murdering Rockwell and who is now undergoing psychiatric examination.

George Lincoln Rockwell came into the room. He

wore no Nazi insignia. He was tall, darkly handsome, with intense, deeply set eyes. He seemed tired and preoccupied and not a little disappointed upon noticing my youth. He rather sarcastically asked if I were the "reporter from Chicago." He shook his head incredulously and directed me to a chair near the front window. He pulled up a chair for himself. We talked.

He was inordinately self-confident, almost smug, and had an obvious pride in his physical condition, claiming, as he often did, that there was not a man alive who could beat him in a fair fight. Except when he touched on Jews or Negroes or such fantasies as mongrelization and international conspiracies, he could be reasonably coherent. His language was as violent as his dreams. He would babble on about the desire of Jews and Negroes to violate "Aryan womanhood." He took pleasure in describing explicitly the manner of the intended sexual attack, giving his prophecy the intense vividness of a personal sexual fantasy. He enjoyed telling tales of the sexual endowment of non-Aryans, speaking in gross exaggeration and, I think, a bit in envy.

Two years later in New York he would talk to me about his past and his marriages, but on that first day in Arlington, he spoke mainly of his destiny, spinning out his mad hope of a coming Armageddon where the West and East would clash in history's last battle, producing victory for white Christian civilization. And after would come the racial cleansing, the golden peace, the snow white kingdom.

I remember his sympathy for the Kennedy family, his hatred of Oswald, his firm belief that he too would be cut down by a Marxist sniper's gun. He was obsessed by his own dying, by the conviction of an inescapable martyrdom.

When we finished talking Rockwell took me on a tour of the building, pointing out various World War II mementos; he bragged about his naval record and his recent heroism in the face of Zionist attacks. He introduced me to several party members, among them John Patler.

With one exception, I did not see Rockwell again until February 1966, when, as chairman of Humanitas, a student committee at Columbia University that ar-

MR. RADER, who graduated last year from Columbia University, is at work on a novel.

ranged speakers, films and other events for the student body, I found myself in charge of Rockwell's visit to Columbia, scheduled for the evening of February 9 in McMillin Theatre. (We had brought Gus Hall, head of the Communist Party in the USA earlier in the year.)

"I Can't Chance Coming"

Columbia's administration at first went along with us reluctantly; but, as the day of his appearance neared, its support waned and I was called in for conferences in the vice president's office to see if there were some way for Humanitas and the university to back down without losing face. There was no way.

It was during the last week of January that I first heard of the alleged arrest warrant against Rockwell. It grew out of a complaint against him by a Jewish war veteran who charged that Rockwell wanted him cremated. I called Rockwell. He assured me it was false.

About one week before the meeting I began getting threatening phone calls. I had the phone number changed and the number unlisted.

John Patler arrived in New York on February 8 and came to my apartment to discuss the arrangements. Patler is small, dark haired, with large, mild brown eyes and a warm, boyish smile. He looked about 10 years younger than he actually was. He was soft-spoken and intelligent. I mentioned the threats I had received. He asked if I were a conservative. I replied no, quite the contrary. "Why then," he asked, "did you invite the commander to New York?" I gave the standard reply about defending every citizen's right to free speech. But having heard it all before he interrupted me to ask if I did not know that when the commander came to power it would be precisely people like me who would have to be lined against the wall. No, I said, I didn't know that, but, in any case, I was glad to be warned. I told him that if his party came within serious reach of power I expected I would risk my life to prevent it. I was dead serious, but he only looked skeptical and laughed.

We agreed that the fee (\$200) would be paid in advance before the meeting, that no pickets would be allowed in the auditorium and that a student would introduce the speaker.

The phone rang as Patler was about to leave. It was Rockwell calling from Arlington to cancel his appearance. He had been called by a "contact" in the New York Police Department who told him that the arrest warrant was, in fact, still in existence and, more importantly, that there was a determination to serve it. "The Jew vets," Rockwell said, "are out to get my ass. I can't chance coming."

I could not get him to change his mind. But Patler talked to him, telling him how much his message was needed in New York, how it would be an inspiration

to all the people who, in their hearts, believed in him. Finally he put it on a personal level and said that Rockwell owed it to him since he was willing to die to protect his commander. Rockwell gave in (having asked specifically that his ushers be blond - which Rockwell was not).

Patler confronted me with several more demands: that Rockwell have an attorney before his arrival in case of immediate arrest; that we get official confirmation of the warrant's existence and the intention to serve it; and, lastly, that we agree to an acceptable plan for getting Rockwell into McMillin Theatre without a confrontation with the police. "If he's to be arrested," Patler said, "let's have it on TV."

Patler left to check with the police and I called the officer in charge of Columbia's security and made several changes in the plans for spiriting Rockwell into McMillin through various tunnels without police discovery. I also informed him that Rockwell, rather than going to the Astor Hotel as planned, would come to my apartment. I asked him to keep that information confidential. I then telephoned 20 lawyers, at least. I could retain none of them. Only one bothered to explain his reluctance: he couldn't afford the publicity.

I saw Patler again that evening. The police denied knowledge of an arrest warrant and I received assurances from the office of the Jewish War Veterans that the warrant was no longer in existence.

With the day's planning finished, Patler talked for a while about his life and his relationship with Rockwell. Patler grew up in an Italian ghetto in New York, surrounded by Negroes, then Puerto Ricans. Through his late teens, until he joined the Marines, he considered himself a conservative. I got the impression that he did not take all of national socialism seriously. I don't know what made someone like Patler play aide to a second-rate fuehrer, but it seemed closely involved with the darkness and duplicity needed to hide the man from himself.

He always spoke in praise of Rockwell, hailing his physical courage and his adamant single-mindedness. He believed the commander would be elected President in 1972 and that he, Patler, would be his right-hand man in building the New Order. I think he loved Rockwell passionately, drawn to him by an irrational loyalty that caused him to leave his wife and children once his friend had convinced him that they were damaging his usefulness. He also changed his name at the commander's insistence.

He had given up much to follow his leader. His constant attack against homosexuals and his fear of their infiltration of the Nazi Party made me at once suspect the nature of his emotional dependency. This suspicion was reinforced by the transformation in him when he was with Rockwell and his claim, that evening and during the next day, that when the commander took