

Minutemen's Recruiting Stepped Up for 'Debacle'

By Harry Jones Jr.

Special to The Washington Post

NORBORNE, Mo. — While many ultraconservatives gnashed their teeth Nov. 4, the leader of the militant and secretive Minutemen organization that is headquartered here seems to have accepted the Goldwater debacle with a fatalistic sort of self-satisfaction.

As far as 41-year-old Robert Bolivar DePugh is concerned, the landslide defeat of Sen. Barry M. Goldwater simply proved the wisdom of Minutemen philosophy as DePugh has articulated it since founding the group four years ago. It is, and has been: "The time is past when the American people might have saved themselves by traditional political processes."

The first postelection issue of the Minutemen's monthly newsletter, "On Target," dated Nov. 4, proclaimed:

"The hopes of millions of Americans that the Communist tide could be stopped with ballots instead of bullets have turned to dust."

Recruiting Stepped Up

And so the Minutemen are now stepping up their recruiting efforts so that when their expected Communist takeover of the United States occurs—from within or without—the underground army of guerrilla fighters, infiltrators, saboteurs and assassins that DePugh says he has been organizing will be ready for its heroic, last-ditch fight for freedom.

To boost recruiting, this latest "On Target" offers a "special recruiting kit" to members, including 20 booklets titled "The Minutemen, America's Last Line of Defense," 200 leaflets, 10 application forms and a "new bulletin on successful recruiting techniques." The price: Just a dollar.

Minutemen, if they have been good members, will already have paid a \$5 membership fee, \$24 a year in monthly dues, \$5 a year for

the "On Target" subscription and \$2 for the Minutemen's handbook on guerrilla warfare tactics, including instructions on how to create a home-made bomb. High school and college students now are offered a cut-rate fee to join and are assessed dues of only \$1 a month. All members must buy their own weapons.

Just how seriously one should take DePugh and the Minutemen organization depends almost entirely on how thoroughly DePugh is to be believed. He is the only known leader of the group, and is one of its few known members. He is therefore its sole spokesman. And some of the things he has spoken are, indeed, hard to believe.

Rapid Growth Claimed

For three years he has placed the membership in the Minutemen at "more than 25,000." Last summer he was a little more specific, putting it between 25,000 and 46,000. Now he says membership grew rapidly during the election campaign and immediately after it.

But DePugh has never offered any real evidence that the Minutemen are anything more than essentially a paper organization with just enough followers over the country so

that they can occasionally snag a headline somewhere, usually because of their preoccupation with weapons of war.

DePugh shrugs off the responsibility of trying to prove that all he says of the Minutemen, their activities or their size is true. The first rule of security, he says, is deception. And security is essential to the effectiveness of the group after the Red takeover.

If there is a visible significance to the Minutemen, it is therefore more in the rhe-

toric of the organization than in its alleged size or scope of influence. For, repeatedly, a rhetoric of violence has been employed by DePugh and "On Target," and it is violence placed in the context of ultraright-wing anticommunism.

Perhaps the grizzliest example of this came in the March 15, 1963, issue of "On Target," which took out after 20 U.S. Representatives who had voted against increasing funds for the House Committee on Un-American Activities. Calling them "Judases" and "traitors," the newsletter warned them:

"Traitors beware! Even now the cross-hairs are on the back of your necks."

In essence, the vigilante doctrine of this strange group espouses the inevitability of violent action in the struggle between individualism and collectivism. At some unstated time in the future, after certain, vaguely explained conditions have come to exist in this country, it will be time for Minutemen and all other good Americans to strike back at the enemy.

The "enemy," this doctrine continues, is not just the foreign Communist invader, but also whoever the Minutemen have decided are American Communists, a list the organization claims to have been compiling for some time. How does DePugh conclude someone is a Communist?

"In our files," he said a few months ago, "we state just the facts. A person writes a certain article a certain way, or belongs to certain organizations, or signed a petition for a certain thing, such as abolishing the House Committee on Un-American Activities."

"When these begin to show

a consistent pattern of following the Communist line, you have to start considering them fellow travelers, and if it continues, you have to start considering them Communists."

DePugh acknowledges that by the very nature of the Minutemen — with no tight chain of command, little discipline, strict secretiveness even within the organization — few safeguards have been provided to prevent some mentally unstable follower from using Minutemen gospel as a "patriotic" justification for just about any act.

Heads Drug Firm

DePugh is now president of a small veterinary drug firm in Norborne, the Biolab Corp. He first tried to start it in 1954, but it failed. His second attempt, in 1959, was more successful, and it grew in size

until 1962, when, as he explains it, he started devoting too much time to Minutemen activities.

He served in the Army in World War II but did not see combat. He has attended two universities and a college, but earned no degree. He is married and the father of five children.

DePugh used to be a member of the John Birch Society and he talks of several long meetings he has had with Robert Welch, leader of the Birchers. But now the two groups have split.

The Birch Society bulletin for August this year explained that when "Mr. DePugh began steering the Minutemen into becoming an underground armed-guerrilla organization" the Society decided to drop him from membership.

DePugh's explanation of the split differs from Welch's. He maintains that Welch believed that DePugh was trying to take over the John Birch Society.

Probe Asked On Plans of 'Minutemen'

Associated Press

The House Committee on Un-American Activities was asked yesterday by a member of Congress to investigate the organization known as the Minutemen.

Rep. Charles S. Joelson (D-N.J.) said the Minutemen is a secret, armed organization that favors "forcing governmental policies by violent means."

"In my opinion, nothing can be more un-American" than that, Joelson said in a letter to Rep. Edwin E. Willis, (D-La.), chairman of the Committee.

Joelson said that, following the election of President Johnson, the head of the Minutemen, Robert Bolivar de Pugh, called on all conservatives "to join the Minutemen's secret underground army for training as America's last line of defense against communism."

Joelson said he joins Willis in "unremitting opposition to communism," but added:

"The time has now come to make it crystal clear that under the guise of anti-communism, no extreme right-wing Fascist group will be allowed to threaten the peace and tranquility of our beloved Nation."