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Klanswoman's 2 Lives: Teacher and Terrorist

By Jack Nelson
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MERIDIAN, Miss., July 7—Pretty Kathy Ainsworth, a softspoken teacher with an excellent record, turned out to be a terrorist in a story that rivals that of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

Since her death in a gun battle with police here last Sunday in a bombing attempt, the FBI has linked her to Ku Klux Klan records and files on violence



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KATHY AINSWORTH
... devout terrorist

and bomb-making. Many of her friends in Miami and Jackson, Miss., find it impossible to believe she is the same person who was revered as a cheerful churchgoer, who loved children and was worshipped by them.

The documents were found by Mrs. Ainsworth's husband, Ralph, in a desk at their home in Jackson and turned over to the FBI. Neither Ainsworth nor any of his relatives shared his wife's fanatical beliefs.

Mrs. Ainsworth, 28, and Thomas Albert Tarrants III, 21, were shot by Meridian police in a wild exchange of gunfire when officers caught them as they allegedly were trying to dynamite the home of a Jewish businessman here. Tarrants, who emptied a submachine gun in the battle, critically injuring a policeman and a bystander, was seriously wounded and is at a hospital under heavy police guard.

They were a strange pair—Kathy, adored by her students and their parents, who

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had no idea of her role as a terrorist, and Tarrants, a tough-talking hoodlum who exhibited hatred for Jews and Negroes and a fondness for firearms even at age 13.

No one who knew Tarrants was surprised at his Ku Klux Klan activities, but all who knew Kathy, except for her associates in the Klan and perhaps a few other fanatical friends, were shocked to learn of her double role. Friends in Jackson, where she attended college and taught a fifth-grade class, found it incredible that she could be involved in any kind of hate action.

"It was a Jekyll and Hyde case," says her father-in-law, Richard Ainsworth, a Meridenhall car dealer and retired Army colonel. "Kathy was the sweetest person you would ever meet anywhere, but she just got brainwashed by her mother and other people. Her mother is anti-Negro and anti-Semitic—just the worst you ever saw."

The mother, Mrs. Margaret Capron Beckler, of Miami, a native of Hungary, is an outspoken anti-Semite who has told acquaintances her daughter died fighting for what she believed in. "She was just as satisfied at the manner in which

Kathy died as if she had died in the middle of church," Ainsworth said.

Kathy had friends who ranged from Adon Taft, the highly respected religion editor of the Miami Herald, to Sam H. Bowers, a Klan leader who had been convicted on a Federal civil rights conspiracy charge in connection with the 1964 lynching of three civil rights workers in Neshoba County, Miss.

Police sources and numerous acquaintances of both Kathy and Tarrants have reported that older fanatics had influenced the pair with propaganda and hate material from organizations in Arizona, California, New Jersey and other States.

Kathy's husband, manager of two Jackson health clubs, would say only, "She was an angel, that's all I can say." But it was learned that while he knew of her Klan connections, he did not know she was so deeply involved, and he frequently urged her to quit the Klan.

Ainsworth's father said that the day before the violence, his son quarreled with her about attending racist meetings. Ralph, a military police sergeant in the National Guard, was in summer encampment at Camp Shelby near Hattiesburg when he heard a radio newscast reporting that his wife had been killed.

Tarrants had been identified as a prime suspect in at least a dozen bombings, burnings and shootings that have occurred in the Meridian and Jackson areas in the last year. But until the violence here police knew little about Kathy's activities, only that she was a member of the Klan and of a Klan front, the Americans for the Preservation of the White Race (APWR).

Found in Kathy's desk at the Ainsworth home were several Manila folders bearing subject labels, including Klan, APWR, Bombings, Segregation, Conspiracy, Integration Versus Segregation, Cuba and Civil Rights.

The files contained a thick manual used by the militant and heavily armed Minutemen. It contains numerous hate messages against Negroes and Jews, along with voluminous in-

structions for bomb-making and use of firearms.

Kathy and Tarrants carried out their Klan roles in the name of "Christianity" just like all Klan members do. While there is little to indicate Tarrants ever has been religious, Kathy was a

devout churchgoer. She taught Sunday school and sang in the choir at Coral Baptist Church in Miami before she left for Jackson to attend Mississippi College, a conservative Baptist institution.

She was born in Chicago but reared in Miami, where her mother did domestic work and other menial jobs.

If Kathy ever had any racist or anti-Semitic feelings as a girl in Miami, she kept them well hidden. Even her closest friends say they never suspected a thing until long after she had moved to Mississippi in 1960. One of them, Adon Taft, the religion editor, says, "She was an ideal girl from all we knew, the kind of girl we had long told our daughters we would like for them to grow up and be like."

Mrs. Capomacchia was something else. Acquaintances say she long has been anti-Semitic, although neither her husband nor her son shared her views.

A circus follies dancer as a young woman (her husband was a juggler), she was extremely close to Kathy. She had little formal education, but she was determined that her daughter would be well schooled. She worked hard as a domestic and as an electronics plant worker, put Kathy through high school, then sent money to her when she went to Mississippi College, where part of the tuition was covered by a scholarship.

Friends in Miami first began noticing Kathy's segregationist feelings a few years ago when she came back from Mississippi for visits, but no extremist leanings were evident until last summer shortly before she married Ralph Ainsworth. Even then there was nothing to indicate fanaticism.

By contrast, Tarrants, nicknamed "Tat" by his classmates, blossomed as

young an extremist. A former classmate in Mobile recalls that at age 13 Tarrants was engrossed in William L. Shirer's "The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich" and that he put a stinkbomb in a Jewish girl's school locker.

A former junior high classmate in Alabama recalls that Tarrants was obsessed with guns. "Not just squirrel guns like I'm interested in and every youngster is interested in, but tommy guns—just how far they would shoot and how many they would kill. He would talk about Communists invading the United

States and he would become very disturbed."

In 1963, when Mobile's Murphy High School was desegregated, Tarrants led a violent demonstration of 300 of the school's 2900 students. The students ran wild, racing around police lines, tearing down fences and yelling, "Two-four-six-eight, hell no, we won't integrate." Tarrants was one of 54 students arrested and charged with disorderly conduct.

Later police at Prichard, a small industrial city north of Mobile, seized a semi-automatic shotgun from young Tarrants after he became involved in an argument with a Negro service station operator. No charges were filed.

Tarrants came under the influence of extremists in Mobile and Mississippi. On June 11, 1964, at the age of 17, he was arrested in the company of Robert M. Smith, then 39, Mobile leader of the National States Rights Party, and charged with possessing an illegal weapon—a sawed-off shotgun. He was put on probation.

On Dec. 21, 1967, Tarrants and Klan wizard Sam Bowers, 43, were arrested in Collins, Miss. In a car which had been stolen in Memphis, Tarrants was charged with possessing a submachine gun found on the seat of the car, but he made bond and returned to Mobile.

Mississippi authorities were unable to extradite him for trial because the charge was a misdemeanor, but he later was indicted on

a charge of interstate transportation of a stolen auto and became a fugitive.

No Federal charge was brought on possession of the gun, although a submachine gun is an illegal weapon under Federal law. The FBI traced the weapon, a German-made M-3, and found it has been stolen in 1958 from a National Guard armory in Mobile. (The FBI has information that gun raids on a number of guard armories in the South have been the work of Klan groups.)

Kathy and Tarrants had been close associates long before the Meridian violence. Kathy's husband remembers that he had met the youth several months earlier while visiting with his wife in the Mobile home of Sidney Crockett Barnes, a housepainter known to police as an extreme anti-semitic.

Barnes, 63, and his wife had strong ties with both Kathy and Tarrants. The

couple moved to Mobile in 1964 from Miami, where they were close friends of Kathy's mother. Barnes told Ainsworth that Tarrants "is like a son to me." When the Ainsworths married, Barnes gave Kathy away.

After visiting Barnes last summer, shortly before her marriage, Kathy told a friend she had come to believe as Barnes did, that an internal Jewish Communist conspiracy threatened the Country. Kathy told a friend that at first she didn't believe it, but that she had digested much literature on the subject and was just as convinced of that as she was of the Christianity of the Ku Klux Klan.

A reporter telephoned Barnes' home in Mobile to try to interview him, but he refused, declaring, "don't you know these lines are tapped?"

Mrs. Capomacchia and Tarrants' father have been bitter about what happened at Meridian. "No one can tell me the truth about how my daughter died but her and she's dead," she told a reporter who telephoned her. She refused to say anything else, but Adon Taft of Miami said she told him, "Kathy stuck her neck out and if more people stuck their necks out this country wouldn't be in the mess it's in."