

'I spied on

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Staff Writer

URBANA — One day last spring, the phone rang in the Scott Hall dormitory room of Robert Harris, a senior engineering student at the University of Illinois.

Harris was stunned when he answered the phone.

The FBI was calling — Agent Ronald Kloepper of Urbana. He wanted to see Harris about doing some undercover work on the sprawling campus here.

Harris was as much flattered as stunned, however. The shy, 6-foot honors student had

always been something of a police buff. He eagerly accepted the FBI assignment.

Thus began a remarkable year of intrigue and adventure for Bob Harris as a campus informer for the FBI. He led a secret life that not even his best friends or parents knew about.

campus radicals'

Exclusive

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DURING THE YEAR he joined and spied on a gun-toting neo-Nazi clique and he infiltrated the campus chapter

of the radical Students for a Democratic Society.

It was an incredible "journey" for the lanky farmboy from Downstate Bardolph—an odyssey through the political extremes of a polarizing America as reflected at a large public university.

He saw firsthand — and sometimes felt — the political

passions that occasionally explode into the news. He went target-shooting and night-riding with a white racist. He loaned his car to — and developed a kind of admiration for — visiting members of the Illinois Black Panther Party.

It was a year that could have been torn from the pages of a

cheap fiction thriller. And it deeply changed Bob Harris' life.

HARRIS, BY ALMOST anyone's standards, was a middle-of-the-roader when he began his undercover work. He was a campus conservative

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who avoided political activism of any sort.

His parents were Nixon supporters, but Harris said that farming came before politics in his home. He was valedictorian of Macomb High School, the kid who worked the lights for the senior play.

As president of his UI dormitory, he was the straight-talking "student leader" who represents the "silent majority" of America's campuses.

As president of Scott Hall, he found the university responsive to his suggestions. He had his doubts about Vietnam, but had no real quarrel with the military. He was planning to apply for a spot in Air Force Officer's Training School.

BUT ONE YEAR has changed Bob Harris. He has quit his FBI assignment, befriended a number of student leftists and joined the fringes of the Radical "movement" that he had spied on since October.

He is skeptical — but not totally pessimistic — about the university's ability to respond to the needs of its students, particularly black students. And while he won't burn his draft card, he says he will probably go to jail, if necessary, to avoid the draft and the war.

Harris, 21, unveiled his secret life in extensive interviews with The Daily News. He disclosed how he:
Sang "Happy Birthday" to Adolf Hitler in a bizarre celebration staged by the neo-Nazi group in a campus coliseum.

● Accompanied the neo-Nazis

on a night-riding mischief spree last spring when they stinkbombed "The Red Herding," a coffeehouse hangout for student radicals.

● Helped police trap a lethally armed university employee and self-styled Nazi outside a laboratory where a leftist student was working alone.

● Was asked by the FBI to supply information on the political plans and activities of SDS, on its financial affairs and even on the social lives and the sex habits of its "leaders."

● Filed information to the FBI that helped thwart a possible white student sit-in and possibly led to the arrests last February of visiting Black Panthers on the campus.

● Frequented the same coliseum that was stinkbombed by the neo-Nazis less than a year later as an SDS regular and volunteer helper on the campus underground newspaper.

● Supplied SDS leaders with building plans of the university computer labs for possible use in a skin that never materialized.

● Was asked to identify SDS members for the FBI, using photographs supplied by the university's security department.

● Was paid \$76 for expenses for his spy services by the FBI and was offered \$100 a month to continue once he announced his plans to retire.

ALL THIS WOULD have seemed incredible in March, 1968.
At that time, Harris was putting the finishing touches on

his plans to run for president of the Illini Men's Residence Hall Assn. Already president of 3,300-student Scott Hall, Harris was considered a shoo-in for the post. A victory would have capped a successful collegiate career.

His grades were slipping, but he was still an honor student in electrical engineering, maintaining a B average.

HIS LIFE CHANGED abruptly March 10, 1968, when P. Michael Young pulled out his gun.

Young, a neo-Nazi with ties to the Ku Klux Klan and the Minutemen, worked with Harris on the midnight shift in the university's computer laboratory.

That night in the lab, Young showed Harris his gun, a semi-automatic, 10-shot, .38-caliber Beretta, serial number A26544.

Young boasted that the gun was part of an arsenal of heavy firearms kept by him and his Nazi friends. He said the arsenal — which included a World War II machinegun — was for protection against what he called the "Negro Jewish Communist conspiracy."

Harris, whose roommate next year was to be a Negro, says that bigotry "makes me sick to my stomach."

"That gun gave me a real jolt," said Harris. "But I tried not to show it. I wanted to learn more about him. I didn't know if he was bragging or what."

A FEW DAYS later, Harris notified university and Urbana police. They told him that Young probably wasn't dangerous, but suggested that he keep an eye on him and tell

them of any suspicious activities.
He soon was devoting all of his spare time — up to 20 hours a week — to infiltrating Young's group. He began a diary on Young and planned to write an expose of the Nazis for the Daily Illini, the student newspaper.

Shortly thereafter, Bob Harris got that phone call from the FBI. The government, he learned, had a job for Bob to do.
Saturday: Bob Harris and the "Nazis."