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Ku Klux Klan burns 'flag of Communism'

GAMBER, Md. (AP)—Amid the strains of "The Old Rugged Cross," and epithets decrying desegregation, school busing and socialism, the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan burned "the flag of communism" atop a cold and soggy hilltop near here Sunday.

The cross "lighting," as a Klan spokesman referred to it, in this rural town in Carroll County about 25 miles from Baltimore attracted only 40 people, but the rally was no less stirring for the

hooded members of the 107-year-old fraternity.

As the flames licked up around the top of the 100-foot cross, Tony La Ricci, the Grand Dragon of the Maryland Knights of the KKK said, "There it is, folks, the most beautiful sight in the world—a flaming cross."

The rhetoric throughout the raw and drizzly afternoon was larded with slurs against blacks and Jews and appeals to patriotism and Christianity.

The ceremonies began with the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag and those "who do not wish to participate in this" were invited by La Ricci to leave.

Later, mimeographed flags of "communism" were passed out for ritual burning at the close, and again those who did not participate were also invited to leave.

No one left.

Bedecked in the dragon-green robes of his office, La Ricci said the news media had portrayed the Klan as a "terrorist organization." "We're not terrorists," he said. "We're not violent, although we can be violent in defense of our rights and our country."

La Ricci said on the 1920's and 1930's, when national Klan membership was at its height, the organization "played a great role in shaping the country."

"The time has come for the Klan to play a great role again in shaping the country," he said.

The rally was held on a hill overlooking well-kept dairy farms. Klanswomen sold coffee and other refreshments from a small table under a tarpaulin, and children, some of them in Klan robes, handed out literature and membership cards.

The Klan supplied its own security guards. Eight men wore green army fatigues, KKK shoulder patches, helmets with "KKK" across the front, paratrooper boots, and shiny black belts from which long billy clubs dangled.

Before helping to light the big cross, the security men lit a three foot cross for the burning of the "communist flags." "Everytime you burn one, think of it as 10,000 Communists," yelled one man.

For all the speeches, a widow from Glen Burnie who said she had three school-age daughters told a reporter: "It's not that I'm against the colored, I just don't like the way the country's going."