National Alliance: A Backgrounder

The National Alliance (NA) is a neo-Nazi organization with headquarters on privately-owned land in Mill Point, West Virginia. From the mid-1970s until the 2002 death of the group's founder, William Pierce, the NA was the most formidable white supremacist presence in the United States. It was also the largest neo-Nazi group in the country.

Under the leadership of Erich Gliebe, who took over the organization after Pierce's death, the NA has gone into a steep decline in terms of membership numbers and activity. In September 2013, Gliebe sent a letter to current members of the NA stating that the NA would end its membership program and now be supporter-based. Gliebe claimed that this decision came after consulting with the organization's board of directors and key members and supporters.

In his letter, Gliebe asserted that the NA would be better off without members because it would not “be such an easy target for hostile elements.” Apparently believing that the group's tactics were no longer working, in late 2012, Gliebe began proposing that the NA change its approach to outreach. He argued that the people the NA wanted to reach would not be responsive because the group's “enemies” had stigmatized the NA as neo-Nazi and a hate group. In reality, Gliebe has been largely unsuccessful in attracting members to the group due to his lack of leadership and charisma, as well as his seeming poor judgment and apparent financial mismanagement.
Strife under Gliebe’s leadership

Gliebe has faced a lot of dissension within the NA. In October 2012, Jim Ring, leader of the most active NA unit, based in Sacramento, California, resigned from the group. According to Ring, a number of other NA members resigned after him because of their dissatisfaction with Gliebe’s leadership. In an online message on his website, Ring urged NA board members to consider him as a replacement for Gliebe.

In a September 2013 interview with *American Free Press*, a conspiracy-oriented anti-Semitic newspaper, Ring blamed Gliebe for the demise of the group. He called Gliebe dishonest and incompetent. Ring also alleged that Gliebe was personally profiting from the sale of Pierce’s gun collection and timber on the NA property. Gliebe recently put the NA property up for sale.

During Gliebe’s tenure, the NA purged and lost several key members and leaders due to infighting and distrust of Gliebe’s leadership. Shortly after assuming control, Gliebe ousted former deputy membership coordinator and rival Billy Roper from the National Alliance. In addition to Roper, Gliebe came into conflict with other members of the board of directors that Pierce had established. They accused Gliebe of financial mismanagement, unresponsiveness to members and their concerns, and demonstrating a lack of basic leadership skills. The board members resigned, leaving Gliebe as the only remaining leader. A struggle ensued between Gliebe loyalists and the former board members over control of the group’s reputation and assets.

Dissatisfaction with Gliebe continued, and in April 2005, a core group of activists planned to break away from National Alliance and form their own organization with a similar mission and ideology. Gliebe and Walker expelled the group from the National Alliance before they could announce their departure.

Led by Kevin Alfred Strom, a National Alliance activist based in Virginia, the splintered group formed the now-defunct National Vanguard. At that point, Gliebe handed over the chairmanship to Shaun Walker, (then chief operations officer)
because the membership was so unsatisfied with Gliebe. But the two continued to operate the group jointly, with Gliebe assuming the title of CEO of the NA’s now-defunct music company, Resistance Records. Gliebe and Walker continued to run the National Alliance together until Shaun Walker’s arrest in June 2006 for assaulting a Hispanic man. Gliebe subsequently resumed chairmanship of the group.


The Nationalist Coalition, another offshoot of the NA, formed in 2006 but appears to be inactive. It still, however, maintains a website.

**Activities of the NA**

Under Gliebe’s leadership, the NA has ceased many of its operations, including the white power music company Resistance Records and the publication of its *National Vanguard* magazine. The group has continued to publish its newsletter, the *National Alliance Bulletin*.

Before its move to a supporter-based organization, the National Alliance remained active around the country. Members of the group distributed NA literature in various locations around the U.S., particularly at gun shows. The NA also set up tables at ethnic festivals where they tried to attract members.

The group also has gained media attention by exploiting issues in towns. In August 2012, the Cincinnati unit of the NA held a protest in North College Hill, a suburb of Cincinnati to protest the assault of a white man by six black teenagers. Authorities said that the assault was not a hate crime. In June 2012, NA members
in Kentucky held a public discussion about Third World immigration in northern Kentucky, which attracted counter-demonstrators.

The group’s last major event was a Holocaust denial conference which the NA hosted at its compound in West Virginia in May 2007. Speakers included Arthur Butz, an anti-Semitic professor of electrical engineering at Northwestern University; Willis Carto, an anti-Semitic propagandist who publishes the virulently anti-Semitic and white supremacist newspaper, *American Free Press*; Edward Fields, a long-time neo-Nazi activist; Mark Franklin, an anti-Semitic documentary filmmaker; Paul Fromm, a Canadian white supremacist; Michele Renouf, a British Holocaust denier and socialite and Ingrid Rimland-Zundel, a U.S.-based pioneer of Holocaust denial on the Internet. Rimland-Zundel is married to Ernst Zundel, who was deported in 2005 from Canada to his native Germany where he was convicted in 2007 on 14 counts of inciting racial hatred and defaming the memory of the dead.

**Criminal Activity**

The NA has long been associated with violent activity. A number of members of the group have committed violent crimes.

In March 2011, authorities arrested Kevin William Harpham for allegedly placing a deadly explosive device along an MLK Day parade route in Spokane, Washington. Authorities disarmed the device before it was able to explode. Harpham was a member of the National Alliance as recently as 2004. He was charged with the attempted use of a weapon of mass destruction, possession of an unregistered destructive device, and using a firearm to commit a hate crime. In December 2011, after pleading guilty to these charges, Harpham received a 32-year prison sentence.

In 2007, a federal judge sentenced three NA members, Travis D. Massey, the former leader of the National Alliance’s Salt Lake City, Utah unit; Shaun Walker, former NA chairman, and Eric Egbert, a Utah unit member, for the racially motivated
beating of a Mexican-American bartender at a bar in Salt Lake City in 2002. The men yelled racial slurs and pulled the victim outside, where they physically assaulted him. All three were convicted of conspiracy to interfere with civil rights and interference with a federally protected activity as part of a plan to intimidate non-whites in Salt Lake City. Massey, Walker and Egbert were sentenced to 57, 87, and 42 months, respectively.

In June 2001, another NA member, Eric Hanson, was killed in a shootout after resisting the Illinois State Police’s attempt to arrest him on weapons charges. Hanson, who in 1999 had been convicted for physically threatening an interracial couple and for possessing illegal weapons in two separate cases, seriously wounded one of the officers who tried to arrest him.

On April 23, 1997, Todd Vanbiber, an NA member from Winter Park, Florida, injured himself while trying to assemble a pipe bomb at a rented storage unit. In a search of Vanbiber’s storage unit, law enforcement officials found explosive devices, several weapons, ammunition, bomb-making manuals, Nazi memorabilia and NA materials. Vanbiber told authorities that on the night he was injured, he was putting final touches on 14 bombs that he and other accomplices, including Tampa NA member Brian Pickett, intended to plant on major highways in the Orlando area. The bombs were meant to create chaos and confusion while Vanbiber and his cohorts robbed two nearby banks. Though the gang’s alleged plot failed, Vanbiber and Pickett had successfully robbed two banks in Tampa and one in Danbury, Connecticut, the year before.

**Background**

The National Alliance has its roots in the Youth for Wallace campaign, established by Willis Carto (publisher of the anti-Semitic publications, *American Free Press* and *The Barnes Review*), in support of the 1968 presidential bid of Alabama Governor George Wallace. After Wallace’s defeat, Carto renamed his organization the National Youth Alliance and attempted to recruit college students to his increasingly radical cause. In 1970, William Pierce, who had been an associate of
George Lincoln Rockwell and the American Nazi Party (ANP), left the National Socialist White People's Party, the successor to the ANP, to join the National Youth Alliance. In addition to Pierce, the National Youth Alliance attracted several former ANP activists, and they ultimately led the organization away from Carto's influence.

By 1974, the organization had split into separate factions, and Pierce's wing became known as the National Alliance. In the early years of the National Alliance, Pierce held weekly meetings near Washington, D.C., in an effort to attract people to the organization. At the same time, Pierce was formulating a philosophy that became the basis of what he called "Cosmotheism," a racist religion that stresses the superiority of the white race and the unity of the white race with nature.

In 1985, Pierce relocated the National Alliance from Arlington, Virginia, to a 346-acre farm in Mill Point, West Virginia, which he bought for $95,000 in cash; he called his new compound the Cosmotheist Community Church.

William Pierce became renown in far-right circles throughout the world as the author of *The Turner Diaries*, a novel written under the pseudonym Andrew Macdonald. The book calls for the violent overthrow of the federal government and the systematic killing of Jews and nonwhites in order to establish an "Aryan" society. Pierce's follow-up to the *Diaries*, called *Hunter*, has also become popular among white supremacists. It tells the story of a racist serial killer who tries to cleanse America of its "sickness" by murdering interracial couples, eventually "working his way up" to assassinating Jews.

*The Turner Diaries* has inspired several acts of violence. It is thought to be the inspiration behind Timothy McVeigh's bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City, which resulted in the deaths of 168 people. It is also considered the inspiration behind the crime spree in the early 1980s perpetrated by a white supremacist gang called The Order, led by Robert Mathews (the inner circle of...
resistance fighters in *The Turner Diaries* was named The Order. The Order's crimes included murders, robberies, counterfeiting and the bombing of a synagogue. Mathews, who was killed in a confrontation with federal officers, was a Pacific Northwest representative of the National Alliance, and other founders of this terrorist gang also traced their roots to the group.

Additionally, members of the Aryan Republican Army, a white supremacist gang, committed 22 bank robberies and bombings across the Midwest between 1992 and 1996 using tactics reminiscent of Mathews' group. *The Turner Diaries* was required reading for the group. *The Turner Diaries* and the activities of Mathews' group have also been cited as a role model for an alleged conspiracy by a group of white supremacists in East St. Louis, Illinois, who called themselves The New Order. In March 1998, federal authorities arrested three men in this group who allegedly planned to bomb the offices of the Anti-Defamation League in New York, the Southern Poverty Law Center in Montgomery, Alabama, and the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles. It has also been reported that *The Turner Diaries* was a great influence on David Copeland, a British neo-Nazi who set off bombs in ethnic neighborhoods and a gay bar in London, killing three people in April 2000.

National Alliance propaganda has inspired racist incidents throughout the United States. In the mid-1990s, the NA attempted to attract members among United States Army personnel at Fort Bragg in Fayetteville, North Carolina. A member of the elite 82nd Airborne Division, Robert Hunt, reportedly worked as an NA recruiter while stationed at Fort Bragg. In April 1995, according to the group, Hunt rented a billboard outside the base and used it to post an NA advertisement and local phone number. Several months later, in December 1995, a black couple was gunned down nearby in what prosecutors called a racially motivated killing. James Burmeister and Malcolm Wright, members of the 82nd Airborne, were convicted of the murders and sentenced to life in prison. Burmeister and Wright were active neo-Nazi skinheads and reportedly read National Alliance propaganda.
Another racial incident that can be linked to National Alliance propaganda occurred in April 1996, in Jackson, Mississippi. Police say Larry Wayne Shoemake piled a small arsenal of weapons into an abandoned restaurant in a predominantly black neighborhood and, from this hideout, began shooting wildly onto the street, killing one man and injuring seven others. Shoemake ultimately took his own life as well. In a police search of Shoemake's home, authorities found Nazi material as well as literature from the National Alliance. According to his ex-wife, Shoemake first encountered NA propaganda in the mid-1980s, when he borrowed *The Turner Diaries* from a friend, and he was not the same after reading Pierce's novel. "It was like an eye-opener to him," she said. Shoemake had also begun subscribing to Pierce's monthly publications.