

Hale guard went to cops over supremacist material

Chicago Tribune - April 15, 2004

Author: Matt O'Connor, Tribune staff reporter.

A federal informant who took an oath to white supremacist Matthew Hale as part of his undercover efforts testified Wednesday he agreed to help the FBI after a Hale follower tried to get him to pass out racist literature at a Chicago public school where he worked.

Taking the witness stand late in the day at Hale's murder-solicitation trial, Anthony Evola, the government's star witness, said Hale asked him to be his security chief at just their second meeting. Evola, a security guard by trade, said he had impressed Hale at their first meeting when he quickly defused possible trouble from a protester.

In the first of more than a dozen audiotapes to be played at the trial, Hale joked to Evola, who wore a hidden recorder, about follower Benjamin Smith's deadly 1999 shooting spree, laughing that Smith was a poor marksman whose "aim got better as he went along."

Smith killed two people, including former Northwestern University basketball coach Ricky Byrdson, and wounded nine others before taking his own life.

Hale, the "Pontifex Maximus" of the former World Church of the Creator, is on trial in federal court in Chicago on charges he solicited the murder of a federal judge here after she ordered the church to change its name, take down its Web site and remove its name from books and materials.

For much of the day Wednesday, Hale's lawyer, Thomas Anthony Durkin, grilled former church leader Jon Fox, who said Hale asked him in December 2002 to kill U.S. District Judge Joan Lefkowitz, attorneys and an Oregon minister involved in the legal dispute.

Fox admitted he felt betrayed by Hale and other church members for failing to help him and his family during a tumultuous time.

Hale's lawyers criticized Fox for not telling the FBI of the alleged murder solicitation until 10 months later. But Fox's daughter, Elizabeth, 14, testified Wednesday that shortly after Hale's arrest in January 2003, her father told her that Hale wanted the judge dead and the other church burned to the ground.

Much of the government's case may well rest on the undercover tape-recordings made by Evola, who said he receives federal disability pay for acute learning disabilities.

While working for the public schools, Evola said he formed an organization, School Intervention, designed to keep children safe.

In the summer of 1999, Evola said he met a World Church of the Creator member who asked him to pass out pamphlets containing racist materials at the school where he worked as a security guard. But instead, Evola said he eventually went to the Chicago police about the matter and was referred to a sergeant who was working with the FBI.

Evola said he agreed to cooperate with the FBI after giving it some thought because the racist material "was not safe for children to read."

In March 2000, Evola decided to join the World Church of the Creator in his undercover role after he first heard Hale give a public speech and met him at church headquarters in East Peoria.

A month later, when the two met for a second time, Hale asked Evola to head security for him after the previous person in that position betrayed Hale by cooperating against the church in a lawsuit brought by a victim of Smith's shooting spree, Evola testified.

Hale had been impressed at their first meeting when Evola warded off possible trouble by a protester wielding an object in a sock by telling him it was "not the time or place for it," Evola said.

Regularly reporting his activities to the FBI, Evola said he became active in the church, frequently traveling across the country with Hale and standing beside or behind him as Hale gave public speeches.

Hale was concerned about his public safety and "felt like he was being watched all the time," Evola said.

Hale, of course, was unaware it was his security chief who regularly wore a hidden recorder to tape their conversations.

At a ceremony performed by Hale, Evola took an oath to Hale as he was appointed head of the White Berets, the church's elite security force.

With all the work he was missing, Evola was paid \$52,000 for his time by the FBI and an additional \$20,000 to cover his expenses, he said.

In the first tape played for the jury, Hale spoke with pride of Benjamin Smith on June 16, 2000, as the first anniversary of his shooting spree neared.

Hale was proud the church hadn't caved to pressure to express remorse to victims' families, saying, "Hell with that!"

"I'm not sorry for the mud races," said Smith, using the church's description for minorities, the targets of Smith's wrath. "We're sorry for brother Smith and his family."

After laughing about Smith's aim, Hale then said, "And then finally by Byrdsong, he planted a few ones, you know in his back, and that was it for him."

Moments later, he said of Smith: "Ah, I miss him. He was a good man."

Noting that Smith's shooting spree may have been sparked by the Illinois State Bar decision to block Hale from being a lawyer, Hale said, "They don't like the way I stand by our fallen brother."

"If people are gonna fight for me and fight with me, I'm gonna stand with them," Hale said. "It's one for all and all for one here, you know."

Caption: PHOTOS 3

PHOTO: Matthew Hale 's parents, Evelyn Bowshier and Russell Hale, and one of the defendant's supporters (right) attend the white supremacist's murder solicitation trial Wednesday in Chicago. Tribune photo by Bonnie Trafelet. PHOTO: Matthew Hale (left) and Tony Evola, his security chief who later turned FBI informant. PHOTO:

Fox

Edition: Chicago Final

Section: Metro

Page: 1

Index Terms: MURDER ; COURT ; OFFICIAL ; ATTEMPT ; ARREST ; CULT
RIGHTS ; RECORDING ; QUOTE

Record Number: CTR0404150076

Copyright 2004, Chicago Tribune