

Hale tapes take center stage - Informant urged supremacist to OK hit on judge

Chicago Tribune - April 16, 2004

Author: Matt O'Connor, Tribune staff reporter.

Federal prosecutors put on the heart of their case Thursday against white supremacist Matthew Hale, playing nearly a dozen tapes in which a federal informant planted in his group tried to persuade Hale to do harm to a federal judge and three church members.

What was apparent from the tapes was the informant, Anthony Evola, repeatedly pressed Hale to approve violence, but Hale, usually cautious, carefully avoided discussing details for fear he was being monitored somehow by law enforcement.

To ensure privacy, the two sometimes took walks away from Hale's headquarters in his father's house in East Peoria.

What Hale didn't realize was that Evola, his security chief, was wearing a hidden recorder and secretly taping all their conversations.

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 U.S. District Judge Joan Lefkowitz after she ordered the church to change its name when it lost a trademark-infringement lawsuit.

On cross-examination by Hale's lawyer, Evola insisted that in one 2001 conversation he kept bringing up his offer to do violence to a former church member to make sure Hale didn't plan to have someone else carry out the crime.

"I wanted to make sure no one else would do it because I didn't want anyone hurt," said Evola, a security guard with learning disabilities who agreed to help the FBI after a follower of Hale tried to get him to pass out racist literature at a Chicago public school where he worked.

But Thomas Anthony Durkin, Hale's lawyer, asked if Hale had once come to Evola and asked him to kill someone.

"Not in those words," Evola said.

"Or any other words, correct?" Durkin asked.

"I don't remember," Evola said. "I just don't remember the details that good."

Evola had also offered to do violence against another church member who had a falling out with Hale because Hale suspected he had dug up gold bullion the two had buried in case the church lost the trademark-infringement suit, according to testimony Thursday.

In December 2002, in the midst of that losing legal battle, Hale, in an e-mail addressed to "Brother Tony," asked Evola to find the home addresses of Lefkowitz and three Chicago lawyers who represented the victorious Oregon church with a similar name.

"Any action of any kind against those seeking to destroy our religious liberties is entirely up to each and every Creator according to the dictates of his own conscience," Hale said in the e-mail.

The next day, on directions from the FBI, Evola showed up unannounced at Hale's office in East Peoria.

"Well, I got your e-mail about the Jew judge," Evola said in a tape played for the jury Thursday.

"Ah, when we get it," Evola said in reference to the judge's home address, "we gonna exterminate the rat?"

"Well, whatever you wanna do ... basically, it's, you know," Hale replied. "Ah, my position's always been that I, you know, I'm gonna fight within the law and but ah, that information's been ... provided. If you wish to, ah, do anything yourself, you can, you know?"

"OK," Evola said.

"So that makes it clear," Hale said.

"Consider it done," Evola replied.

"Good," Hale said.

On Dec. 9, Evola sent an e-mail written by the FBI that said he had contacted an "exterminator I know about the rat problem we talked about."

"This guy is good and does a good quiet job," the e-mail continued. "You have to know where rats hide and he thinks he located her. He is working to get rid of the female rat right now."

On Dec. 17, 2002, Evola returned to Hale's office unannounced, but Hale's tone had changed dramatically.

"The stuff you talked about last time, I just cannot talk about," Hale said. "I cannot talk about stuff like that, you know?"

After a few minutes, the two went for a walk outside to talk privately.

Evola quickly announced that the effort to exterminate the rat--a clear reference to Lefkow--"is in motion."

"Here's the thing, brother, here's the thing," Hale said. "I can't be a party to such a thing."

Moments later, Hale said, "Here's the thing, if what you're talking about is what I think you're talking about, there's a federal statute that makes it an imprisonable offense to know about a crime that's to be occurred without telling anybody, see?"

"Right, well, it's just me and you and I trust you," Evola said. "You trust me."

Evola then asked Hale if he had two "trusted brothers that could help out with this."

"I can't," Hale said. "I can't take any steps to further anything illegal, ever. It's just, you know, absolutely vital."

Moments after Evola asked Hale if he could help provide an alibi for him, Hale said, "The more you talk about this stuff, the more I could conceivably know and I don't want to know anything, you know? Remember Sgt. Schultz in 'Hogan's Heroes'?"

"I know nothing, nothing," said Hale, imitating the TV character.

Evola laughed.

"I'm not telling you to do anything, you know. Either way or whatever," Hale said. "I, I've always said that, you know, that since this happened, that whatever happens, whatever a person does is according to the dictates of their own conscience."

"I'm still speaking in generalities because, you know, who knows who's listening?" Hale said. "I just don't, I don't assume anything these days."

Similar exchanges had taken place almost two years earlier when Evola tried to persuade Hale to authorize violence against former church member Kenneth Dippold for testifying against the church in a lawsuit.

In one meeting in an undercover FBI apartment in Chicago, Hale, lying on the couch as a video camera captured the scene in December 2000, said that if "I could snap my fingers and the bastard would drop dead hideously right now, I'd do it in a heartbeat, you know."

"But unfortunately, it's not that easy," he said.

In a long meeting the next month, Evola repeatedly attempted to obtain Hale's approval to harm Dippold. "As head of security, I think I should deal with this problem," he said.

But Hale refused and the next day e-mailed Evola, saying that while he had been persuasive, "I must veto" any violence.

Edition: Chicago Final

Section: Metro

Page: 1

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

Record Number: CTR0404160021

Copyright 2004, Chicago Tribune