

Klan 'Naturalization' a Long, Scary Wait

By JERRY THOMPSON

Jim Hulslander and I, a couple of Klan "recruits," waited in the long corridor outside the Malaga Room of the Howard Johnson's Motel in Birmingham's Hoover suburb to take the KKK oath.

Behind the closed door of the room, Don Black, Alabama Dragon of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, his wife and three Klan members were preparing for the "naturalization" ceremony at which we would take the oath.

HULSLANDER HAD been a talkative fellow on all aspects of Klan activity when I had first met him two nights earlier. Now he was silent. He seemed nervous. So was I.

I had reason to be. I was a reporter for *The Tennessean*, who would spend a year inside the Klan, investigating its activities and evaluating its potential for violence and terror.

We waited... and waited.

Suddenly, the door of the room opened and a Klan member I knew only as "Randy" beckoned us to enter. As soon as we walked into the room, I knew something was wrong.

Black was standing at one end of the room, his arms folded in front of him.

"WE ARE HAVING trouble securing this room," he said. "There are three niggers outside trying to look in the windows. We can't get the room secure, so we'll have to put off the meeting."

I glanced around the room. Ben Walker, a member of Black's security team, had taken off his flowing robe and was seated at the rear of the room, his pistol in his belt.

Roger Patmon, the only other Klansman present for the meeting, walked toward an entrance to the room that opened to a walkway outdoors. As he did I observed the face of a young black man at the window.

Patmon jerked open the door and confronted a youthful motel employee with an armful of white sheets. I'm sure he had no idea of the irony of what he was carrying.

"What do you want?" demanded Patmon.

"Nothing," the young man replied and walked away.

I HAD NO idea whether the presence of this motel employee had anything to do with putting off the initiation ceremony.

Naturally, I wondered if Don Black suspected that I was not what I was pretending to be — a retired Army sergeant named J. W. Thompson.

Was it possible that he suspected that I was a reporter? Or that he even might have thought I was a police officer?

Later, he would confide in me that he was actually suspicious of Jim Hulslander.

Hulslander's father was a police officer in Birmingham. That made him suspect in Black's eyes.

I had come to the meeting that night somewhat frustrated. Black had taken my initiation fee and dues. He had involved me in a series of Klan actions, including a den meeting in Muscle Shoals, Ala., at which I met my Imperial Wizard, David Duke. But he had not been able to set up a naturalization meeting.

I worried that Black, who seemed suspicious by nature, didn't trust me.

He would plan a meeting, tell me to be there, then cancel it.

He set one for Thanksgiving night, 1979, for the den in Brompton, a Birmingham suburb. I slipped home from Birmingham to Nashville on Thanksgiving eve, had a too hurried Thanksgiving dinner with my family that Thursday, then rushed back to Brompton for the naturalization ceremony.

BLACK STOOD me up. Later, he sincerely apologized.

At first I thought I was undergoing a hazing, while Black checked on the background story I had created about my childhood in Alabama, my movements about the country with my invented parents, and then my Army career.

My story was solid enough to pass a cursory screening, and obscure enough to make it impossible to refute. I had spent weeks creating it and committing it to memory.

Finally, I concluded that Black was not hazing me. He was Grand Dragon of a skeleton organization in the Birmingham area. He had few actual members there.

That was obvious when, in addition to himself and his wife, he produced only three members to induct two new recruits that night at the motel.

Don Black told me that my fellow recruit, Hulslander, had paid \$50 to rent the room that night. I gave Black's wife, Dariene, \$5 as my contribution toward that room rent.

WHEN I ARRIVED that night and walked into the Malaga Room, I was surprised that only seven of us had gathered in a room set up for 50.

"You can see we need more people active in Birmingham," Dariene told me. "Here's the five who always show up, no matter what is going on."

We spent a few minutes in idle chit-chat before Black told his security man, Ben Walker, to "robe up" and asked Hulslander and me to excuse ourselves briefly.

That was when the two of us started our wait in the corridor.

Now, because of the so-called "security breach" we couldn't have the oath-taking that night. But we did have a business meeting.

Black presided, and we talked about a mass rally and march in downtown Birmingham to show Klan support for a white police officer, George Sands, who had shot and killed a black woman.

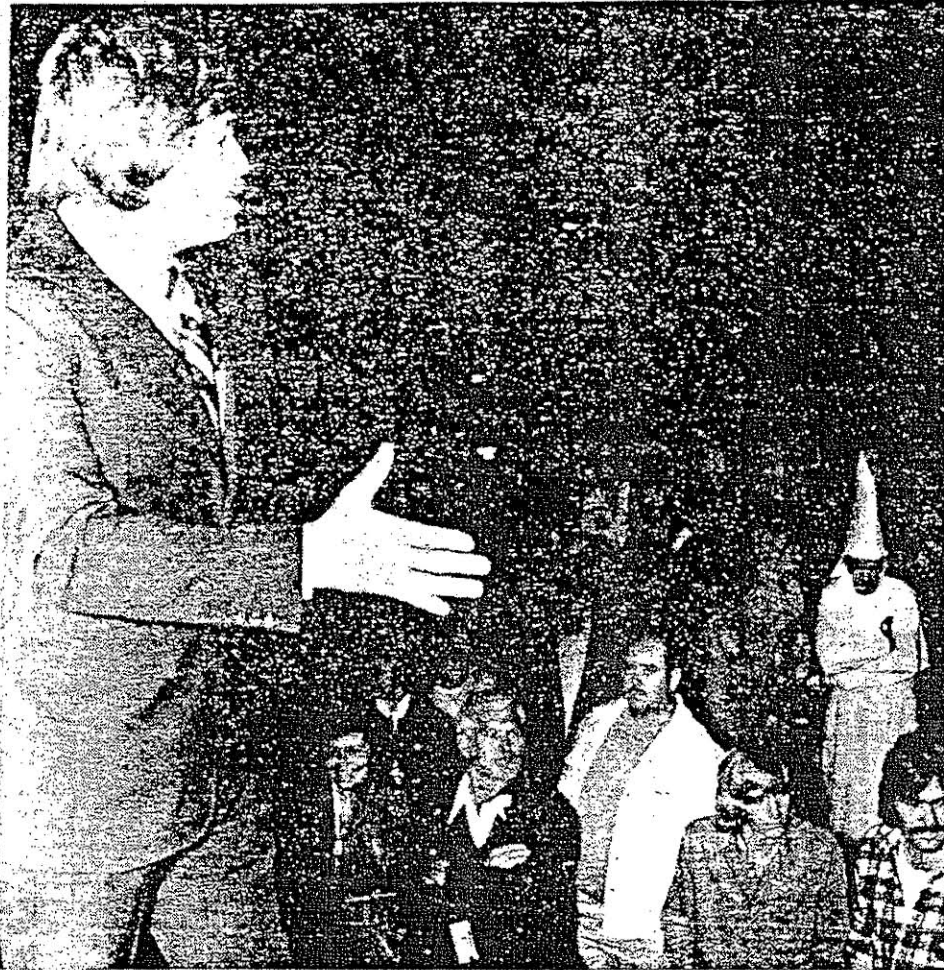
She, according to the authorities, had been riding in a "get-away" car from a shootout when she was slain.

THAT TRAGEDY had caused



Security or Infiltration Fear? The Question Lingers

An artist's dramatization depicts *Tennessean* reporter Jerry Thompson, left, and another Ku Klux Klan recruit, Jim Hulslander of the Birmingham area, as they are met by a robed Klansman at the door of the Malaga Room of the Howard Johnson's Motel near Birmingham. The two "recruits" had gone to the motel to take the KKK oath from Don Black, then Alabama Grand Dragon of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.



—Staff photo by Nancy Wamecke

Then Grand Wizard Under Watchful Eye

David Duke, the former Grand Wizard of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, speaks at a Klan rally at Lexington, Ala. Wearing a light jack-

et, Tennessean reporter Jerry Thompson stands in the audience near a robed Klansman.

rioting in Birmingham's black neighborhood.

Birmingham's black Mayor, Dr. Richard Arrington, had said he did not want Sands reinstated on the force.

The Fraternal Order of Police had contested the mayor on that. Now the Klan, through Black, was threatening press statements to come to the "aid" of the FOP and patrolman Sands.

"If the nigger mayor doesn't put Sands back to work, we'll march on Saturday," said Black.

Hulslander asked, "What about carrying weapons with us when we march? Won't there be trouble with the niggers when we demonstrate?"

"I'm not saying there won't be a confrontation," Black responded. "But we'll have our security there. And we'll get the police tactical squad to provide security."

I WONDERED whether he knew somebody on the police tactical squad, although a spokesman for the Birmingham Police Department said yesterday that all peaceful demonstrators — be they from the Klan or the Southern Christian Leadership Conference — are protected from harassment on the city streets by the police tactical squad.

Now Black told Hulslander and me:

"For those of you who haven't been with us before, we don't try to start trouble when we go out on a

march. People heckle us. They call us names. But we just keep marching. We never respond to the heckling.

"Of course," he said, "if they start trouble, we will protect ourselves. We will be carrying placards and the staffs can be used as clubs if anybody starts anything with us."

The meeting broke up with a round of friendly goodbyes. Black told me:

"Don't worry, J. W., at the next meeting we will definitely naturalize you."

I worried — until I talked to him shortly afterward by phone — that the Grand Dragon was misleading me because he didn't believe my story. But the next time I talked to him, he leveled with me. It was not me he suspected. It was Jim Hulslander.

"WE COULD have secured the room that night," Black said.

"It wasn't that. While you all were waiting outside, we (the five bona fide Klansmen left in the room) decided that we had serious doubts about Hulslander.

"He knew too many people he shouldn't have known. He was talking to too many people and spending too much money. I found out his father once worked for the Birmingham Police Department and that he had done some undercover work for the police before going to California.

He was just too eager, too cooperative and too knowledgeable, so we thought we had better wait him out. I hear now that he may have gone over to Wilkinson so we'll just let Wilkinson have him.

"Now that he's gone over, we'll get your naturalization over with. We'll get you naturalized right away. If we can't do it when they have the naturalization at the Brookside den, I'll have you over to my apartment, and we'll do it there."

Thinking back, I realized that my undercover role had never been suspect to Black, for, in fact, I had been a Klansman once I had paid my dues. I had been involved in many Klan activities even though I had not taken the formal oath.

SO FAR, I had attended a Klan rally in Lexington, Ala. I had heard David Duke, who headed the Knights faction and given it much publicity with his smooth tongue, speak at a den meeting in Muscle Shoals, Ala. I had helped disrupt a public meeting, and I had marched in Birmingham.

Indeed, I was a Klansman. In Duke, I had actually met and talked to the top man, the Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan.

I had seen another side of David Duke — a side never seen publicly, but from all appearances, a side fairly common inside the Klan.

Duke, in his speech to the den, freely used the word "nigger," referring once to a "mentally retarded little nigger bastard" when talking about the black birth rate and how it was outdistancing the birth rate of the white population.

Duke, like Black and Wilkinson, did not use the word "nigger" in public, but used it constantly in Klan and private meetings.

DUKE "explained" how the Jews were financing the blacks and "explained" why Jesus was not a Jew. He was warm and friendly as he answered questions that ranged from the local den organizations to national political issues.

Although some members there wanted to pay a visit to a home nearby in which some black women, who allegedly entertained numerous white visitors each day, lived, Duke went back to his public side and stressed the detrimental effect of a violent approach to such a problem.

"You can't do yourself, your family or our movement any good whatsoever if you are in jail," Duke said.

"I can assure you that a couple of nigger prostitutes catering to white men is appalling to me, too, but our problem reaches far beyond individual cases such as this.

"We must stick together politically and get at the causes of our problems, like the politicians who are stripping white people of their rights and shoving the niggers down our throats and the Jews who are financing all these well-organized nigger groups rather than try to provide a solution to individual incidents such as this."

WHEN ONE member vowed to pay a visit to the house anyway "just as soon as I find out where it is," another member suggested that he not go in a Klan robe but in a "ski mask."

I felt good that Don Black had vouched for me at the door of this den meeting and personally escorted me inside. Once inside, everyone there knew I was a Klansman.

On another occasion, I accompanied a group of Klansmen to a public meeting in the Birmingham City Council chambers in which the National Alliance Against Racist and Political Oppression planned to put the Klan "on trial."

More than a dozen of us entered the chambers just after the meeting got under way and took seats in the back of the room. Several members of Bill Wilkinson's Klan faction joined us also.

We heard one witness after another, both black and white, lambast the Klan for its past reputation of violence.

One black man, a real honest-to-goodness Army sergeant who is now head of the NAACP in Sylacauga, Ala., told of having his home shot into while his wife and children were at home.

SOME KLANSMEN clapped their hands.

I didn't, and Black, who was sitting beside me, didn't.

They clapped again when he told of how the police didn't come to investigate the shooting because someone else had had a television set stolen and everyone was busy with that investigation.

After about two hours of having the Klan depicted as a bunch of lawless, violent hoodlums, Black leaned over to me and said:

"We're leaving. As we leave we'll shout 'Smash Communist Treason.' Pass the word."

When the word had been passed to all, we rose all together.

Black started the chant at the top of his lungs. It surprised the hell out of me, and I jumped off the floor.

I'M SURE it surprised the rest of the people in the room, too.

By the time he'd started the chant the second time, I had joined it and shouted, too.

A Confederate flag was unfurled by some of those in our group, and the television cameras were taking it all in.

"That didn't come off as strong as I hoped it would," Black said outside the chambers.

Several of the Klansmen began leaving. I stayed with Black who was obviously waiting for some of the television people to approach him for an interview.

We walked over and looked out a window and discussed the possibility of asking for the use of the City

Council chambers to allow the Klan to refute some of the charges made against it. Finally, we were alone. Everyone else had left.

"THE WILKINSON people were clapping for all the wrong things," Black said.

"I can't understand those folks sometimes. All they are doing is making sure people never forget the Klan's violent reputation of the past. Violence and guns should be the last resort, not a way of life."

So I had felt I had earned Black's

trust in all those meetings and protests. I wanted the formal oath-taking ceremony to take place soon.

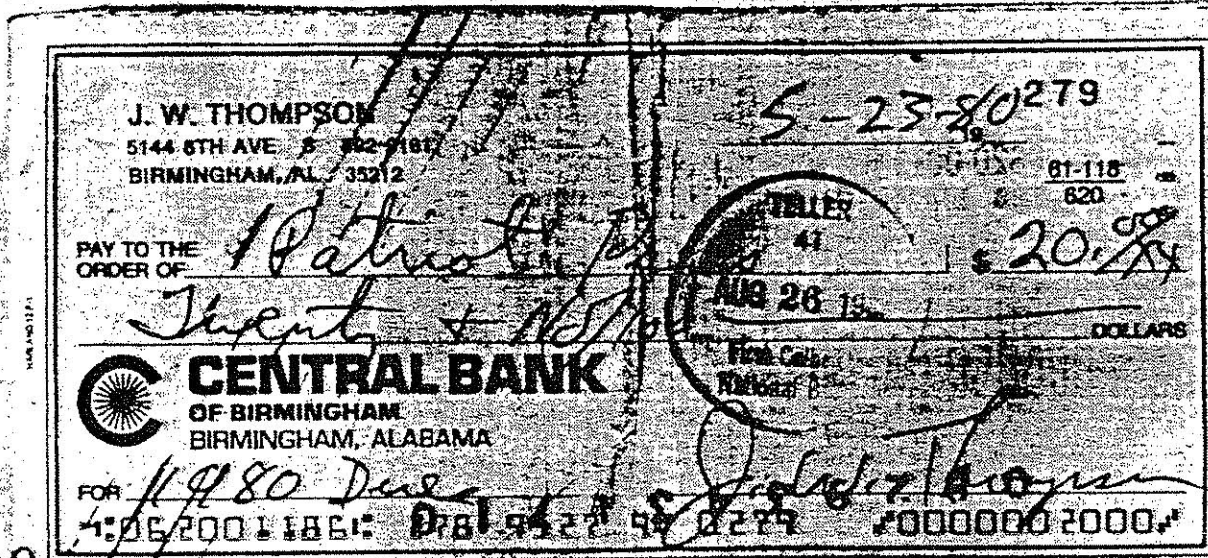
Hulslander was the "plant" in Black's eyes, so in a telephone conversation with Black, I put it to him:

"Why can't I get naturalized?"

"You can," he said.

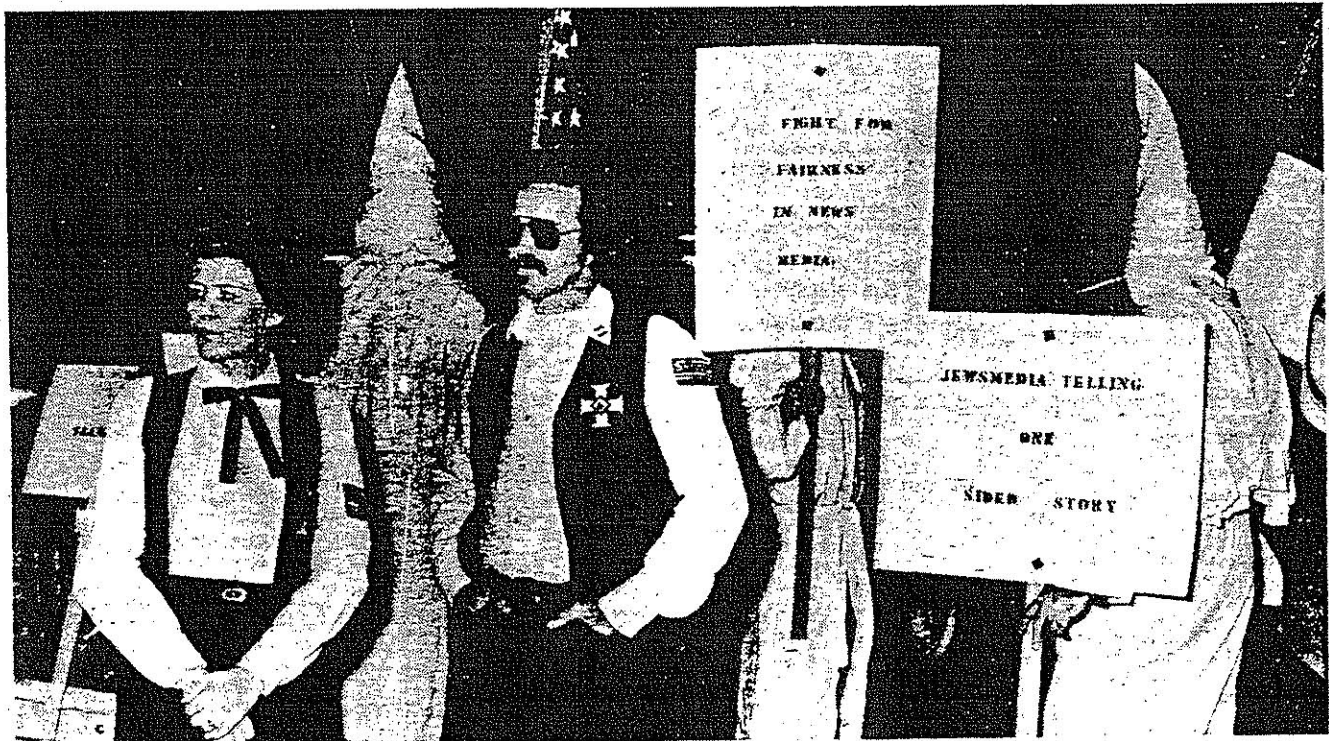
"If need be, I'll just have you over to my house, and we'll get you naturalized there. As Grand Dragon, I certainly have the discretionary power to do that."

Indeed he did.



Check Represents Dues for 1980

This \$20 check written by Tennessee reporter Jerry Thompson to the to Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, now headed by Don Black. Thompson Patriot Press, a Klan-bookstore in Metairie, La., covered his 1980 dues posed as J.W. Thompson during his undercover infiltration of the Klan.



Reporter Thompson, at right, turns away during a Klan demonstration when he is approached by members of the news media who he fears

may remember him as a fellow news man they have known in the past. The reporter spent more than a year in the Knights of the KKK.