

Republican House candidate took part in pro-Nazi group

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A Republican Party candidate for the House of Representatives participated for years in a group which staged re-enactments of Nazi military operations in World War II, where he dressed in a Waffen-SS uniform. Photographs of the reenactments, clearly identifying Rich Iott, were posted on the web site of the *Atlantic* magazine.

Iott is the Republican candidate for Congress in the Ninth District of Ohio, including Toledo and its environs, running against long-time incumbent Democrat Marcy Kaptur. A multimillionaire, he sold his Food Town supermarket chain to Spartan Stores in 2000, and the resulting closures and consolidation left many workers without jobs and many Toledo neighborhoods without a local grocery.

Aligned with the ultra-right Tea Party elements that have become dominant in the Republican Party in many parts of the country, Iott has poured his own money into the campaign, becoming one of only nine Republican challengers to out-raise an incumbent Democrat.

He won designation by the Republican National Committee as a “Young Gun,” a favored status meaning that he was regarded as a promising challenger, and entitling him to financial assistance from the National Republican Campaign Committee.

According to the *Atlantic*, Iott confirmed he had been involved with the Nazi reenactment group from approximately 2003 to 2007. He claimed he joined as a “father-son bonding thing” and quit the organization several years ago after his son lost interest.

While claiming he was not a political supporter of Nazism, Iott admitted a strong interest in German military conquests in World War II. “I’ve always been fascinated by the fact that here was a relatively small country that from a strictly military point of view accomplished incredible things,” he told the magazine. “I mean, they took over most of Europe and Russia, and it really took the combined effort of the free world to defeat them.

From a purely historical military point of view, that’s incredible.”

In the wake of the *Atlantic* report, Iott sought to continue his campaign and defend his activities, claiming he was the victim of “false character attacks” identifying him as a Nazi. He claimed that he had a long-time interest in military reenactments, and compared wearing a Nazi uniform to being a British Redcoat or a Confederate soldier in reenactments of the American Revolution and the Civil War.

This bit of sophistry cannot conceal what is clearly an affinity for those who carried out some of the worst atrocities of Hitler’s genocide. Iott joined the Nazi reenactment group in 2002, taking the rank of “SS-Kandidat” according to its web site, and was listed on its membership rolls under the pseudonym of “Reinhard Pferdman” until 2008.

The group took its name “Wiking” from the nickname of the 5th SS Panzer Division. Iott said that the group chose the Wiking division because it fought against the Soviet Union, not Britain and the United States. The division also participated in the 1939 invasion of Poland, and footage of Nazi soldiers marching in triumph through Warsaw appears on the Wiking web site.

The group’s web site makes only a formal disclaimer of sympathy for Nazism and emphasizes that the SS division fought “Bolshevist Communism,” while declaring, “Nazi Germany had no problem in recruiting the multitudes of volunteers willing to lay down their lives to ensure a ‘New and Free Europe’, free of the threat of Communism. National Socialism was seen by many in Holland, Denmark, Norway, Finland, and other eastern European and Balkan countries as the protector of personal freedom and their very way of life...”

National Republican Party officials were quick to criticize Iott’s activities once they had been brought to light publicly. The Republican National Committee

quickly took down all references to Iott from its web site. House Republican Whip Eric Cantor, who is Jewish, declared he “would absolutely repudiate” the candidate’s behavior.

It is not clear, however, whether the Republican Party will actually repudiate the candidate. Iott continued to defend himself Monday in interviews with the Associated Press and CNN, and was scheduled to represent the Republican Party in a debate with Congresswoman Kaptur on Monday night.

In his comments, Iott denounced Cantor by name, saying, “These types of attacks are part of the reason why good people don’t bother to get involved in running for office. They’re also why too many people have such a negative view of politicians.”

Several Toledo-area Republican politicians defended Iott. Tom Waniewski, a Republican candidate for several offices, declared, “Rich is a good guy, how can anyone who is so capitalism driven, so American driven have an ounce of Nazism in him?”

Toledo City Councilman Rob Ludeman said, “I think everybody does some things they regret—this for Rich might be one. It’s not something I would have done. I’m not going to abandon a candidate for one thing he did in life that I’m sure he regrets.”

Jon Stainbrook, chairman of the Republican Party in Lucas County, which includes Toledo issued a statement reiterating that Iott would remain his party’s candidate. He declared, “This is nothing more than a political attack against a candidate that has run a strong campaign against a 28-year incumbent who has neglected her constituents. This is a perfect example of dirty mudslinging politics—when people take something and spin it into more than what it is.”

Iott’s long association with admirers of the Nazis is not an aberration, but only the latest demonstration of the ultra-right politics of the “Tea Party” advocates who have come to prominence in the Republican Party in the past few months.



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