

Media investigations into leaked forum messages reveal neo-Nazi Atomwaffen recruiter is an active duty Navy sailor

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16 March 2020

In the latest example of state tolerance of right-wing fascistic elements within its ranks, a series of reports, starting in November by the US government-funded *Bellingcat* and more recently *Gizmodo*, reveal that a high level recruiter for the fascist neo-Nazi group Atomwaffen Division (AWD) whose members have been implicated in five murders within the last three years, is an active member of the US Navy.

David Cole Tarkington, now in his early 20s, was an active member and recruiter for the AWD fascist paramilitary group on the neo-Nazi forum Iron March between September 2013 and December 2016. Tarkington is currently an aviation machinist mate's apprentice with Strike Fighter Squadron VFA-41, headquartered out of Lenmoore, California. Records indicate that Tarkington enlisted in July 2019 and graduated from the Naval Air Technical Training Center based out of Pensacola, Florida, in December of last year.

Sifting through the data, *Bellingcat* revealed in a November YouTube video that eight members of the defunct forum are currently active members in the US military, including in the Marines, Army and Navy. The video did not identify any person by name, instead hinting that one of the active members "even tried to get members to join a neo-nazi paramilitary group on U.S. soil."

Gizmodo reporters Tom McKay and Dhruv Mehrotra were able to link David Tarkington's forum username "The Yank" to his Skype handle, which included the same email as the one registered on Iron March as well as Tarkington's name and a photo that "bore close resemblance to those on Tarkington's other accounts on Facebook and Instagram."

Operating for six years, the Iron March forum was an online haven for fascists to recruit, plan and coordinate terrorist attacks. Founded by a Russian nationalist who goes by the *nom de guerre* "Alexander Slavros," the forum steadily gained in popularity throughout the world as members of the Nordic Resistance Movement, National Democratic Party of Germany and the Greek party Golden Dawn actively recruited disaffected and alienated youth on the website.

After Commander Ron Flanders, spokesperson for Naval Air Forces Pacific Fleet, was informed that one of their sailors was a lead recruiter for the Atomwaffen Division, Flanders told *Gizmodo* that it would not be "appropriate for me to comment on an ongoing investigation," but that the Naval Criminal Investigative

Service (NCIS) was "looking into the matter."

The internet message board Iron March was abruptly shut down in November 2017. During his time on the board, Tarkington sent over 200 private messages and authored nearly 400 posts under the avatar of "The Yank."

While Tarkington last logged into the forums on May 10, 2017, it is unclear if he continues to recruit for or is an active member of AWD. Through cross-checking emails and usernames across social media platforms, *Bellingcat* uncovered several photos of a masked Tarkington on social media giving a fascist salute while surrounded by Nazi iconography as well as in front of Jewish cemetery.

In a June 28, 2016, post on the board a user known as "Growth of the Soil" inquired, "If there are any interested atomwaffen from the area [Detroit] I can forward a bunch of info on them. I did a lot of digging myself." Brandon Russell, co-founder of AWD replied, "Awesome. Tell him to message 'the yank' on here. He is the one processing new members."

Russell, who is currently in federal prison after being found guilty on federal explosive charges, went on to enlist in the Florida National Guard. This has been part of a deliberate strategy by the fascist organization, as former member Devon Arthurs attested to in November 2018 *ProPublica* article: "These people join the military specially to get training. To get access to equipment."

In subsequent chats Russell revealed that he would "be in basic training for a few months," but that things were "going great with the AW. We run shit like a fascist mafia." Russell bragged on the forum under a post titled "military" that he was "100% open about everything with the friends I (sp) made at training. They know about it all."

In a separate forum post on the board by a supposed female member of the US military, "Pro Patria Mori" boasts that she's met "quite a few rightists ... lots of neo-Nazis, others just nationalists." Mori also noted the ubiquitousness of far-right iconography on a typical US base.

"On most bases you can see the occasional right-wing symbol. Sun wheel there, 88 here, Mussolini's face over there, a Templar cross tattoo. The symbols of SS units are especially common, even on things as public as cars, flags and helmets ... When my company commander mentions that 'this country needs a beer hall putsch and some brownshirts,' I know this is something he would not say

in front of his superiors, even if his superiors have said similar things.”

Through leaked chat logs, Tarkington is shown to have recruited at least 10 people into the apocalyptic white supremacist Hitler cult, including the recently arrested Atomwaffen leader John Cameron Denton, 26, of Montgomery, Texas.

Denton, otherwise known as “Rape” on the forum, was charged by the Department of Justice for multiple “swatting” events in which he called emergency services under the guise of imminent danger, causing dispatchers to send heavily armed police or a SWAT team to harass the victims at their residence. Those targeted by Denton’s harassment included journalists and a cabinet official believed to have been former Trump administration Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen.

In an August 2016 private message with the subject line “Atomwaffen,” Tarkington reached out to Denton, “Heil, i’m in charge of recruitment here on Ironmarch and was informed that you’re interested in joining up with AW. Get back to me with your Skype name if you want to speak further, and we’ll set up a date and time for me to screen you.”

In his appeals to potential recruits or “initiates,” Tarkington would claim to represent the “Atomwaffen Division, an American NS [National Socialist] organization dedicated to real world activism.” He then would link to some of the groups “accomplishments” which included hyperlinks to articles posted on the neo-Nazi internet publication *Daily Stormer*.

The forum data which exposed Tarkington along with dozens of other neo-Nazis was uploaded by an anonymous source, identified only as “antifa-data” to the Internet Archive on November 6, 2019. The data included all of the content pertaining to Iron March’s underlying database which enabled savvy users to search through the over 1,600 members on the forum. The information included IP and email addresses as well as real names in some cases. Through IP searches, *Bellingcat* was able to establish that several users logged onto the forums while on or near US military bases.

While the upload allowed the public and journalists to sift through the website user information, the US intelligence apparatus, if they were looking, would have easily been able to identify the social media links and metadata before the site was shut down years ago. Additionally, as part of recruitment into the US military, potential enlistees are supposedly screened and a background check is performed.

However, being a member of a group that espouses neo-Nazi or white supremacist ideology is not necessarily a barrier to enlistment or continued service, as defense officials from the Navy, Army and Air Force testified in a House subcommittee hearing this past February. In the hearing, reported on at the time by the *Military Times*, defense officials sought to cover up, instead of reveal, the extent of the problem.

Robert Grabosky, deputy director of law enforcement at the Air Force Office of Special Investigations, stated that membership in a white supremacist group “is not prohibited,” but “active participation” in the group could lead to an administrative discharge at a commander’s discretion. How one could be a “member” of a white supremacist organization, but not a “participant,” Grabosky failed to elaborate.

In a June 2019 International Centre for Counter-Terrorism report titled *Siege: The Atomwaffen Division and Rising Far-Right Terrorism in the United States*, author Jacob Ware cited several recent studies that point to the danger groups such as AWD pose to the general population with their increasingly violent and military-enhanced tactics.

According to the report, the US has seen a staggering 1,450 percent increase in far-right terrorist attacks between 2007 and 2017; this includes the notorious 2015 Mother Emanuel AME Church massacre, in which Dylan Roof executed nine worshippers at the Charleston, South Carolina church, and the August 2012 mass shooting at a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin.

The report noted that there was a “600 percent rise in the number of followers of white nationalist Twitter accounts between 2012 and 2016.” During that four-year stretch the “United States suffered an average of 11 right-wing attacks per year.” However, following the election of Donald Trump the number of right-wing attacks skyrocketed to 31 in 2017.

Research cited in the report conducted by the Anti-Defamation League found that “70 percent of all extremism-related killings between 2008 and 2017 were perpetrated by adherents to far-right causes.”

Tarkington is only the latest to be exposed, but as previous reports have indicated, at least seven additional AWD members, of which there are an estimated 60-80 in total, have either been trained by or are currently serving in the US military. This includes AWD member Vasillios Pistoris who, in a rare exception, was ejected from the Marines, while Army private Corwyn Storm Carver remains under military investigation for his membership in the group.

The ruling class can feel the tide shifting beneath their feet and through Trump’s demagoguery, they are continuing to recruit and pander to far-right elements. In a poll of 1,630 active-duty soldiers conducted last month by the *Military Times*, “36 percent of troops who responded have seen evidence of white supremacist and racist ideologies in the military,” a staggering 11 percent increase from 2017.

While the US military has always served as a safe space for the far-right, the embrace of Nazi iconography and members into the armed forces is a severe warning to the working class of the world. In order to prosecute the next global war between “Great Powers” the US ruling class is nurturing a fascist base of support that will be mobilized in an effort to suppress any working class opposition.



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