

Bernie Sanders, Ro Khanna defend endorsement of Maine Democrat Graham Platner after Nazi tattoo revealed

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In an extended interview Monday on *Pod Save America* with Tommy Vietor, Barack Obama's former National Security Spokesman, Graham Platner—the Bernie Sanders-backed Democratic Senate candidate from Maine—revealed that he had a Totenkopf (“Death’s Head”) tattoo on his chest, which he received nearly 20 years ago during his third deployment as an infantryman in the United States Marine Corps.

After stating “I am not a secret Nazi,” Platner offered the unconvincing claim that he was “very inebriated” when, as a young Marine on liberty in Split, Croatia, he and his comrades “chose a terrifying-looking skull and crossbones off the wall.” Revealing the normalization of fascist imagery within the US military Platner added, “skulls and crossbones are pretty standard military uh military thing.”

The *Totenkopf* symbol gained prominence among reactionary military units in the 18th century and was later adopted by the *Freikorps* during the suppression of the German Revolution of 1918–1919. It became infamous when embraced by the Nazis, particularly the SS, whose members wore the skull and crossbones on their field caps, collar tabs and flags flown over concentration camps and battlefields. The 3rd SS Panzer Division *Totenkopf*, which fought on both the Eastern and Western Fronts and committed numerous war crimes, took its name and insignia directly from the “death’s head.”

Since the end of World War II, neo-Nazis around the world, including groups like Atomwaffen, have continued to brandish the symbol to signify their hatred of Jewish people and loyalty to Hitler and fascism.

Platner claimed that neither he nor anyone else he interacted with since getting the tattoo in 2007 raised this history or confronted him over it. He tried to sanitize the matter by invoking his background checks in the military and US State Department: “In the nearly twenty years since, this hasn’t come up... I enlisted in the Army... passed a full background check to join the Ambassador to Afghanistan’s

security detail.”

That such iconography could circulate for years within the US military and diplomatic-security apparatus underscores what the *World Socialist Web Site* reported six years ago in “Neo-Nazi networks exposed across US military”: fascist and white-supremacist currents have been cultivated inside the armed forces.

Following the interview, Platner’s former political director, Genevieve McDonald, posted on her personal Facebook account, “Graham has an anti-Semitic tattoo on his chest. He’s not an idiot, he’s a military history buff.” McDonald added, “he should have had it covered up because he knows damn well what it means.”

Matthew Kassel, a reporter for *Jewish Insider*, wrote that a former acquaintance of Platner said he socialized with him in Washington, D.C., in 2012, while Platner was attending George Washington University. At the time, Platner worked as a bartender at the Tune Inn on Capitol Hill.

According to the former acquaintance, Platner would often take off his shirt while drinking late at night, revealing the large Nazi tattoo on his chest, which he allegedly referred to as “my *Totenkopf*.” The acquaintance said that at times Platner admitted he knew the symbol’s meaning when he got it, while on other occasions he claimed he only learned afterward that it was associated with the Nazis.

Despite apparently knowing since at least 2012 that he had Nazi imagery on his body, Platner did not seek to remove or cover up the tattoo until yesterday, October 22, 2025.

Platner is one of three Democrats running for Senate in the 2026 election. Earlier this month, Maine Governor Janet Mills, 77, the favorite of the party establishment, announced her candidacy, joining Platner and former congressional staffer Jordan Wood. Last week, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer endorsed Mills, calling her the “best candidate to retire Susan Collins,” the Republican senator.

Sanders and other pseudo-left elements are trying to sell Platner as a “progressive” and “working class” outsider. In

reality, like Dan Osborn, the Sanders-backed 2024 “independent” Nebraska Senate candidate, Platner is a right-wing soldier for imperialism whose adult life tracks the arc of Washington’s colonial wars.

As a young man, Platner joined the Marines out of high school because, he said, he “wanted to fight” and “that’s where the action is.”

Platner recalled to Vietor his first deployment to Iraq in the Al-Anbar province in January 2005. He said his Marine unit “operated” for 7 months east of Fallujah. Five months later, in 2006, Platner took part in the Battle of Ramadi. Recounting his role as a machine gun section leader, Platner told Vietor there was an “immense amount of violence that we were committing. The civilians in the city suffered immensely...

“We killed people,” he said, drawing a contrast between his Marine career and the current vice president, “I wasn’t JD Vance writing up a report...we were fighting the war.”

It was during his third deployment in 2007, by this time a man in his mid-twenties, that Platner decided to get the Nazi tattoo.

In 2009, Platner re-enlisted with the Maryland Army National Guard and deployed to Afghanistan the following year as a rifle team leader. In 2018, he took a mercenary position with Constellis, formerly Blackwater, and deployed to Afghanistan.

After serving US imperialism for 15 years, Platner, apparently, came to the revelation that US neo-colonial wars of aggression served the interests of war profiteers and military contractors. In 2018, Platner began his career as an oyster farmer in Maine before deciding to run for Senate earlier this year with the backing of Sanders.

It should be noted that Platner felt compelled to reveal his Nazi tattoo only after he received information that his Democratic opponents in the primary were planning to reveal it themselves. Last week, Platner sought to contain the fallout from Reddit posts surfaced by his opponents in which Platner described himself as a “communist” and “socialist.”

In an interview with CNN last Tuesday, Platner repudiated any association with left-wing politics. He said, “I’m not a communist. I’m not a socialist. I own a small business. I’m a Marine Corps veteran.”

What was meant as preemption only confirmed what his career already demonstrated.

Platner’s Nazi tattoo and record of killing for US imperialism has not prevented Sanders, the phony socialist from Vermont, from continuing to back him. On October 21, Sanders angrily defended the ex-Marine, saying “I personally think he is an excellent candidate and will support him, and I look forward to him becoming the next senator from Maine.”

Pressed about the Nazi tattoo, Sanders waved away the issue as the product of “the corrupt campaign-finance system,” adding, “We don’t have enough candidates in this country that will take on the powers that be and fight for the working class.”

This grotesque invocation of the “working class” to defend Platner exposes the political role of Sanders and the Democratic Socialists of America. Their task is not to fight fascism and inequality, but to channel mass social opposition to war and the financial oligarchy back into the Democratic Party.

In an interview with *Axios* Thursday, Sanders doubled down, saying he was not “overly impressed by a squad of media running around saying, ‘What do you think about the tattoo on Graham Platner’s chest.’”

In an interview on the YouTube show *Breaking Points* Thursday, California Representative Ro Khanna likewise reaffirmed his support, characterizing Platner as a “working class candidate,” while dismissing the revelations as “politics of personal destruction.” Both Khanna and Sanders support the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, a campaign waged in alliance with fascist units such as the Azov Battalion inside the Zelensky government. Their defense of Platner—a US veteran flaunting Nazi imagery—is fully consistent with their imperialist politics.

Joining this reactionary phalanx is the United Auto Workers bureaucracy, which formally endorsed Platner’s Senate campaign last week. In the press release, UAW President Shawn Fain proclaimed Platner has “chosen to stand with the working class.”

Fain’s praise for Platner’s supposed “stand with the working class” is a fraud. The UAW apparatus, which suppresses strikes and collaborates with management, is itself a key component of the nationalist structure that defends capitalist property relations and US imperialism.



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