

Inside a neo-Nazi group attempting to gain a foothold in Winnipeg and across the country

 winnipegfreepress.com/local/homegrown-hate-547510902.html

By: Ryan Thorpe | Posted: 08/16/2019 7:00 PM | Comments: 162 | Last Modified: 08/21/2019 8:20 PM | Updates

WFP Exclusive

He stands about 5-10, with hair that's shaggy on top and clipped close at the sides. He pulls at his bushy beard when he's deep in thought. His arms are often crossed when he talks.

If you walked past him on the sidewalk, you wouldn't look twice.

Racial and homophobic epithets pepper his speech. He hates people who aren't like him. He hates Jews and rants about conspiracies against white men. He quotes neo-Nazis such as Tom Metzger, James Mason and George Lincoln Rockwell.

He claims to be a member of the Canadian Armed Forces and said he was trained as a combat engineer. That training makes him highly coveted by the global fascist organization of which he's a member. He wants to pass on those skills to other neo-Nazis.

On a warm weekday evening in August at Winnipeg's Whittier Park, he points to a nearby rail line and talks about the possibility of derailing a train. "Even if you didn't want to make that go boom," he mutters, before explaining how someone could sabotage the tracks.

He wants to recruit young white men for a race war. He thinks one is coming and can't wait for it to get here. His group idolizes serial killers and mass shooters, referring to the likes of Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh and Charleston church shooter Dylann Roof as "the saints."

His name is Patrick and he plans to establish a white supremacist terror cell in Manitoba.

During the past month, the *Free Press* carried out an undercover investigation into a neo-Nazi group called The Base, which is conducting a recruitment drive in Winnipeg.

After posters emblazoned with fascistic imagery and bearing the phrase "Save your Race, Join The Base" started popping up around the city — first in St. James, then Osborne Village, on Portage Avenue and in the North End — the *Free Press* reached out to the group. A reporter posed as a white nationalist and expressed interest in joining.

The reporter passed through a multi-tiered vetting process that included email and encrypted messaging exchanges, a voice call with the group's founder in the U.S., and an in-person meeting with its local activist. Then he was invited to become a member.

The voice call, which lasted an hour long, was recorded. The in-person meeting was documented with extensive notes immediately after the fact. At no point did the reporter participate in putting up any of the propaganda posters in the city.

The investigation was undertaken to gain insight into the size and scope of a fledgling neo-Nazi paramilitary group in Canada.

When torches lit the dark of night in Charlottesville, Va., two years ago this week, many observers of the extreme right felt as if something had shifted.

While the far-right movement has ebbed and flowed, Charlottesville marked a co-ordinated attempt by white supremacists to reassert themselves into the public domain, crawling out from the dark corners of the Internet they'd been relegated to.

The two-day "Unite the Right" rally on Aug. 11 and 12, 2017, was the largest far-right gathering in the U.S. in more than two decades.

The event turned deadly after a white nationalist protester deliberately drove a car into a group of anti-fascist activists, injuring 28 people and killing 32-year-old Heather Heyer.

Each subsequent massacre has marked another chapter in an unfolding narrative of white supremacist violence and terror. It is on the rise, spreading across the U.S., Canada and Europe.

From the shooting at the Walmart in El Paso, Texas, that killed 22 people earlier this month, to the Christchurch massacre streamed live on the Internet in March, to the synagogue shooting in Pittsburgh last year that killed 11, the increase of far-right extremist terror is a growing concern around the world.

But in the eyes of The Base — a secretive neo-Nazi group that conducts paramilitary "hate camp" training across North America — the organizers of the Unite the Right rally (which included prominent alt-right leader Richard Spencer) weren't nearly radical or extreme enough.



A screen capture from a video posted to the group's chatroom shows members conducting drills at a recent hate camp. The location is unknown.

The organization was founded in 2018 by a man who was known then by the pseudonym Norman Spear. Now he goes by Roman Wolf. He claims to be a veteran of the U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Arabic translation of The Base is "al-Qaida," although it's uncertain if that was intentional.

The group is heavily influenced by the views of an obscure neo-Nazi named James Mason, who pioneered a bizarre blend of the worldviews of Adolf Hitler and Charles Manson. Mason's selected writings serve as a manual for the organization.

They also take inspiration from the Atomwaffen Division, fellow travellers in the neo-Nazi scene whose members have been implicated in five killings and several hate crimes in the U.S. The group has been accused of planning to attack public water systems and blow up nuclear power plants.

While the two organizations are separate entities, experts on extremists say they can largely be seen as part of the same phenomenon.

The new generation of neo-Nazis rejects much of the old extremist right. They don't believe in centralized organizations. They want to foment "leaderless resistance." They're not content to be "keyboard warriors" and they don't care about optics.

The Base's membership, which is primarily located in the U.S. but includes Canadians and Europeans, appears to be gearing up for the ethnic cleansing they want to perpetrate when the "race war" comes.

They want terror attacks that destabilize "the system" and hasten its demise. This is exemplified by their promotion of "accelerationism," the idea that extremists should seek to make society unliveable in order to drive radical social change.

During its current phase of development, The Base is trying to establish "two- to three-man cells" in as many regions in North America, Europe, Australia and South Africa as possible.

"We are not shy about our ultimate motivations... We're looking for guys who will come into it with their eyes wide open and are willing to accept that risk because they feel the mission is important enough," Wolf said during the vetting process.

"Most of our members are National Socialists and/or fascists, although we also have some run-of-the-mill white nationalists... We have a strong revolutionary and militant current running through The Base.

"Most of our members are pretty hard core in that sense. You're going to be stepping into probably the most extreme group of pro-white people that you can probably come across."

"If we remain unaware, then we're really doing ourselves a disservice... Uncovering these groups is really important and then I think the next step is more the deconstructing of their message, of their narrative, because so many of their claims are entirely baseless." - Barbara Perry, director of the Centre on Hate, Bias and Extremism

In encrypted chats, Wolf has said members should focus on non-attributable actions that send messages and help to destabilize the system. He has instructed members to be less concerned about what is legal and more concerned about what they can feasibly get away with.

Evan Balgord, executive director of the Canadian Anti-Hate Network, said The Base and Atomwaffen Division — both of which have a foothold in Canada and push their members to join the military — represent the most violent, extreme fringes of the far right.

"They're the most concerning brand of neo-Nazism that we have here right now. They want to use terrorist attacks to carry out their goals. They consider the alt-right not pure enough, it isn't violence-promoting enough for them," Balgord said from Toronto.

"They're the most extreme of the extreme."

The Base is a highly secretive organization. While members rely on encrypted messages to communicate with one another, they recognize it doesn't matter how secure these lines of communication are if they can't be certain who they're talking to.

As a result, they've begun to prioritize face-to-face meetups, which is why the *Free Press* was unable to gain access to the group until after it met the Winnipeg member in person.

Since being invited to join roughly two weeks ago, the *Free Press* has monitored and documented the group's main chatroom on the encrypted messaging app Wire. The messages paint a chilling picture of a terror group in its infancy.

During that time, members have posted photos and videos of hate camps and real-life meetups from across North America.

Roman Wolf is the current pseudonym for the group's founder.

One video shows a member decked out in military fatigues engaging in target practice at an undisclosed location in a forest. Other photos show members posing, holding guns or white supremacist memorabilia, and giving neo-Nazi salutes.

Members show off their weaponry, have discussed how to purchase firearms "under the table" and exchange resources on military tactics. The group is in the process of developing a training manual.

Anti-Semitic, racist, misogynistic and homophobic comments are common, and some members have spoken approvingly of rape. They talk about murdering racial minorities and journalists, and share signs and news articles they believe point to the impending race war.

"I feel like were (sic) crossing a Rubicon here soon. The calls for civil war are totally mainstream now. Even the civnat (sic) talking heads are calling for uprising and acknowledging that race war is about to break out. The political climate has shifted," one member posted.

"Something is changing for sure even if it doesn't pop off imidiatly (sic) they are pushing very hard for legal ways to fight us. Either way I'm getting ready for the worst," another member responded.



They idolize and celebrate mass killers and terrorists, posting stylized photos of people such as McVeigh and Roof and Anders Behring Breivik, the man who slaughtered 77 people in Norway in 2011.

On Tuesday evening, one member posted photos of a handwritten letter received in the mail from Christchurch shooter Brenton Tarrant, who is imprisoned and awaiting trial for allegedly killing 51 people at two New Zealand mosques in March.

"Letter from Saint Tarrant," the member wrote.

When it comes to extremist violence, members of The Base explicitly call for high body counts.

"If you do it, do it (expletive) right, high casualties or go home... Breivik, Tarrant and McVeigh are the gold standard. If you can't keep up, don't bother," posted one member.

Barbara Perry, director of the Centre on Hate, Bias and Extremism, said organizations such as The Base and Atomwaffen Division represent the tip of the iceberg.

In 2015, she conducted a study into far-right hate groups in Canada, estimating there were roughly 100 active organizations at that time. She's working on updating her research and early signs indicate there are more than 300 active groups in the country.

That means in the past four years the number of hate groups in Canada has tripled. This comes at the same time that police-reported hate crime has spiked. Statistics Canada data indicate hate crimes rose by 47 per cent in 2017, which came on the heels of a steady increase in the preceding years.

"We know some of these groups are already engaging in paramilitary training in the woods for that inevitable race war as they see it... It's absolutely terrifying, especially in these small cells, because they're so small and can be difficult to identify," Perry said from Oshawa, Ont.

"It's terrifying to combine that strategy, that end game if you will, with that propensity for extreme violence. Those are the kinds of cells you really have to worry about, in terms of their own activities and the influence they have in the broader movement."

The *Free Press* is unable to say how many members The Base has in Canada. In addition to the Winnipeg member, there has been a recruitment drive in Saskatchewan, and there's believed to be a cell of an unknown size on the East Coast.

Earlier this year, anti-fascist activists from the U.S. revealed the identity of an alleged member from Montreal named Nathan Gurette.

The organization purposely keeps regional activities and the total number of its militants from its wider membership. If there's a leak or security breach in one region, it doesn't expose the activities of the entire group.

The Base's main chatroom has roughly 45 members, although it's likely there are other members who don't participate. There are also regional chatrooms the *Free Press* was unable to gain access to.

That's in addition to the membership of Atomwaffen Division, which boasts between 50 to 100 members, U.S. media outlets have reported. The two groups have the same stated goals, embrace the same tactics and support and encourage each other.

CANADIAN NETWORK FOR RESEARCH ON TERRORISM, SECURITY AND SOCIETY

Evan Balgord of the Canadian Anti-hate Network, says the group is highly violent.

Atomwaffen militants have been known to operate in B.C. and Ontario. The Canadian military has confirmed Atomwaffen members have been found in its ranks.

While those membership figures may sound low, Perry said the potential damage a group such as The Base can do should not be underestimated.



"As we've seen, it only takes one. We've seen so many lone actors in recent years. While small numbers are encouraging, it's still 60, 100 members. If you look at any one part of the movement, it's like, 'Ah, it's just 50 here, 100 there,' but the thing is, it's accumulative," Perry said.

"It's unlike anything we've seen in the Canadian context. It's getting worse."

Balgord echoes that sentiment.

The *Free Press* has learned the Winnipeg member of The Base had crossed the U.S. border to attend hate camps with his American comrades. However, after he was turned away at the border by customs officials on one of these trips, the group now considers it too risky.

The terms

Neo-Nazism: A militant and racist political movement that grew in the aftermath of the Second World War. Its adherents often refer to themselves as "National Socialists" and seek to revive and implement Nazi ideology.

White supremacism: The racist belief that white people are superior to other races and should have dominion and power over them.

White nationalism: A political movement that promotes the white race and a national white identity. Most proponents, if not all, are white supremacists who seek to create a white ethno-state.

Instead, the organization is pushing to establish hate camps in Canada and to begin ramping up its operations here.

"If they're talking about putting together Canadian training camps, that's concerning, especially since they might have military members in their ranks," Balgord said.

"It fits a broader narrative, a template, of neo-Nazi groups that are specifically trying to take something from the armed forces and use it."

Research shows the presence of far-right extremists and members of hate groups in the ranks of the Canadian Armed Forces is a problem.

In November 2018, a military report noted that during a four-and-a-half year period beginning in 2013, 53 members of the military were identified as belonging to a hate group or partaking in racist or discriminatory actions or statements.

Of the 53 members, 16 held official rank in a hate group, including militants from Atomwaffen Division, the Proud Boys, the Soldiers of Odin and the Three Percenters, among others.

When the *Free Press*, posing as a white nationalist and a new recruit, met with the Winnipeg member of The Base, the man dropped his online pseudonyms.

Online, he goes by the names Dave Arctorum and "coincidence detector" (a reference to a Google Chrome extension used by anti-Semites to identify Jewish-sounding names in news articles).

He said his real first name was Patrick and that he was 26 years old. He said he grew up in the countryside and at some point lived in Winnipeg, but now resides in Beausejour. He later said his father owned land near Lundar.

Walking on the trails of Whittier Park, he joked about how his U.S. comrades said his voice sounded the same as Jordan Peterson's, the University of Toronto psychologist who's become a famous intellectual.

He's physically fit and often carries a backpack filled with propaganda flyers and a roll of tape so he can put them up around the city. Recently, he's begun putting up flyers that attempt to intimidate and threaten local anti-fascist activists.

He claimed to have joined the military out of high school, training as a combat engineer, but indicated he plans to leave the military soon because he feels he can no longer "serve the ZOG."

ZOG is an acronym used by neo-Nazis to refer to the conspiracy theory that a Jewish cabal secretly controls the governments of major western countries. ZOG stands for "Zionist Occupied Government."



A member of The Base posts photos of weaponry in the group's chatroom.

During his years in the military, he said he tried to turn other soldiers onto neo-Nazism and felt he had made progress with two individuals.

Patrick also revealed that in addition to his social-media accounts, which promote his political views, he set up multiple other accounts to spread misinformation among local anti-fascist activists.

At one point in the conversation, which lasted roughly an hour-and-a-half, he said in a well-ordered society such activists would be dragged out of their homes and "strung up." He also discussed plans to find the addresses and phone numbers of these people and post them publicly.

On two of his social media accounts, he actively spreads white nationalist, white supremacist and neo-Nazi views.

"At this point it is the system that is fomenting armed (white nationalist) revolution, not us. We tried the peaceful route. The system closed it off at every turn. Now the system shall reap what it has sown. I'll leave it at that," he wrote.

In another post, he wrote: "After the collapse, social media will be a wonderful record for figuring out what surviving whites will get the rope in the new state."

Both in person and while exchanging encrypted messages, Patrick encouraged the reporter to get a gun licence. He also said he could provide a firearm to the reporter for paramilitary training.

He has mentioned owning multiple long guns and a handgun. This week, he said a new member might join the Manitoba cell in the near future, indicating someone else has likely begun the vetting process.

The *Free Press* later found a dormant social-media account for an individual it believes may be the member of The Base. A number of biographical details, including his age and first name, lined up with what he had revealed in person.

The photo also appeared to match, although the *Free Press* was unable to determine with complete accuracy if the two people are one in the same. In person, the man had a large beard, but the individual in the photo was clean-shaven, making identification more difficult.

How to get out

Christian Picciolini is a former violent extremist who has spent the last two decades trying to make amends for the movement he helped create. In the U.S. in the 1980s and 1990s, he was a leader in a far-right hate group.

Since leaving the movement, he's helped reform hundreds of extremists and has guided their departure from such organizations. He is an award-winning television producer, public speaker, author and peace advocate.

If you are an extremist or a member of a hate group, Christian Picciolini can help you. He can be reached at christian@freeradicals.org

The *Free Press* sent the man's full name (taken from the dormant social-media account) to the Canadian Armed Forces to see if he was a member. The military had no record of anyone serving under that name past or present.

At this time, it is unclear if the Winnipeg member of The Base is lying about being in the military, if the social media account in question was set up under a pseudonym, or if the *Free Press* has not yet discovered his correct legal name.

A military spokesman told the *Free Press* he could not comment on specific investigations into members, but that "in any instance where information indicates discriminatory behaviour by a CAF member action is taken."

It is not known if The Base or its recruitment drive in Canada is being investigated.

When reached for comment, Winnipeg Police Service spokesman Const. Rob Carver responded with a short written statement, saying: "I can confirm that WPS is aware of the flyers and monitoring the situation."

Meanwhile, the RCMP said it does not investigate movements or ideologies, instead it tracks criminal activity. A spokeswoman said the agency only confirms the existence of an investigation if it leads to criminal charges being laid.

John Townsend, head of media relations for the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, said the agency has put additional resources into tracking and investigating far-right extremists in recent years.

In its most recent public report, CSIS director David Vigneault said the agency has become "increasingly preoccupied by the violent threat posed" by far-right extremists.

While Canada has not seen the same level of bloodshed as in the U.S., it has not been immune to flare-ups of far-right violence. That includes the 2014 shooting in Moncton, N.B., in which three Mounties were slain; the 2017 shooting at a Quebec City mosque in which six people were killed and 19 were injured; and the 2018 van attack in Toronto, where 10 people were killed and 16 were injured.



VINCENT YU / THE ASSOCIATED PRESS FILES

Members of The Base consider Brenton Tarrant a 'saint.' Tarrant is accused of killing 51 people at two New Zealand mosques earlier this year.

More recently, accused killer Bryer Schmegelsky, who alongside accomplice Kam McLeod, led the RCMP on a manhunt from B.C. to Manitoba, was reported to have owned a swastika armband and Hitler Youth knife.

Leaked plans for a hate-camp gathering in Washington state foreshadows what's on the horizon in Canada.

Spokane police recently confirmed they're investigating rumours members of The Base plan to travel through the city this month. Wolf is believed to have recently purchased property in the Pacific Northwest.

"Basically, we have two kinds of training events. We have more localized ones which are kind of ad hoc... and we also have national meetups. Those are on private property, typically. That allows us to have larger numbers with more security and privacy," Wolf said.

"It also allows us to do more extensive kinds of training without having to worry about park rangers or somebody stumbling upon us and disrupting what we're doing."

Balgord said he isn't surprised Canada is proving fertile ground for groups such as The Base and Atomwaffen Division. Prior to the shutting down of the online fascist forum Iron March in late 2017, he said 70 per cent of the foot traffic on the site involved Canadians.

"Canada recently took the step of naming Blood and Honour and Combat 18 as official terrorist organizations. Atomwaffen and The Base should be listed as terrorist organizations as well," Balgord said.

"It's a death cult. That's probably the best way to put this. They worship mass killers and Hitler and the apocalypse. It's a neo-Nazi death cult that believes in using terrorism to achieve their aims. The implicit call within their talk of 'accelerationism' is terror attacks."

Perry said she worries about what's on the horizon for the extremist right in Canada and fears these groups may seize upon the upcoming federal election to advance their aims and increase political polarization.

Her outlook is pessimistic, at least in the short term: things are likely to get worse before they get better.

She believes reporters, activists and academics can do important work to expose such groups and reveal what their members may be planning.

"If we remain unaware, then we're really doing ourselves a disservice... Uncovering these groups is really important and then I think the next step is more the deconstructing of their message, of their narrative, because so many of their claims are entirely baseless," Perry said.

Research indicates some of these men are not beyond reform. Perry said she and her colleagues have interviewed people who have left the movement to better understand what drove them into it and what precipitated their break.

For many, the ability to step back from the ledge and radically reorient their lives depends on whether they crossed the line from online extremist activity to committing violence.

What's perhaps most worrisome, at least for Winnipeggers, is that Patrick seemed determined to do the latter.

"What good are ideals if they're only exercised on paper?" he asked.

The question was rhetorical.

His mind was already made up.

If you have any information regarding The Base's activities in Canada, or the identity of its Winnipeg member, please contact the Free Press at the email below.

ryan.thorpe@freepress.mb.ca

Twitter: @rk_thorpe

Ryan Thorpe

Reporter



Ryan Thorpe likes the pace of daily news, the feeling of a broadsheet in his hands and the stress of never-ending deadlines hanging over his head.

[Read full biography](#)

ABOVE THE FOLD

Ryan Thorpe:

Tom Brodbeck:



SNC-Lavalin's power and influence over Trudeau's government alarming

Niigaan Sinclair | Photography by Phil Hossack:



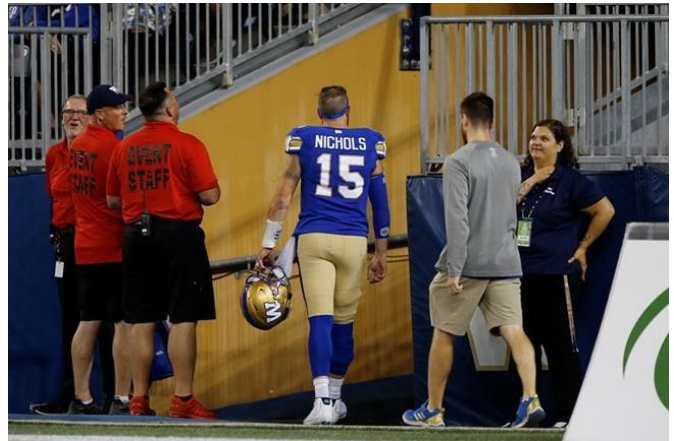
Gridiron link to North investment in future

Jeff Hamilton:



A big win, a major loss and a massive career milestone

Frances Koncan:



Public statue immortalizes infamous Bloody Saturday events

Doug Speirs:



The ultimate hotdog to go on sale and proceeds go to Riverview Health Centre

David Sanderson | Photography by Sasha Sefter:



Fort Garry Hotel porters also serve as goodwill ambassadors for the city



Editorial:

Liberals can't outrun SNC-Lavalin

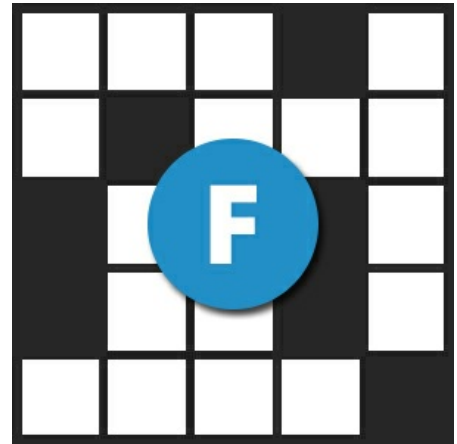


Editorial cartoon for Aug. 16, 2019

Adrian Powell:

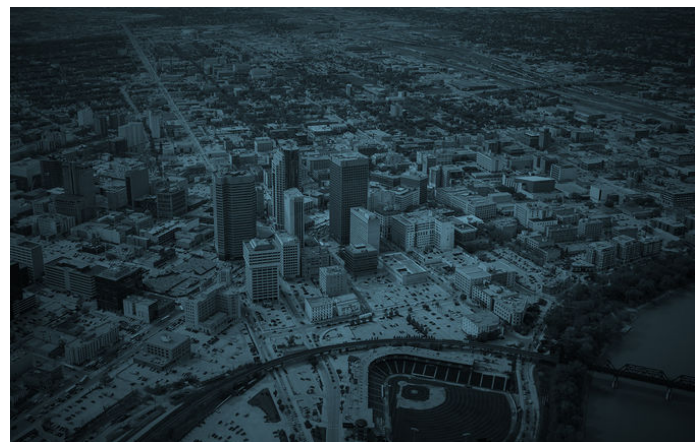


Crossword for Friday, Aug. 16



The Back Page

Next Article
Tom Brodbeck:



SNC-Lavalin's power and influence over Trudeau's government alarming

