

Klansman says no mistakes made

Twenty-six years later, Virgil Griffin has no regrets over actions in 1979

By Daniel Bayer
Production director

Virgil Griffin, the man who led the Klan/Nazi caravan to Greensboro on the night of November 3, 1979, is unrepentant about his actions on that day as he testified before the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission last week. "I don't think we made any mistakes," said Griffin, who was the Imperial Wizard of the North Carolina Ku Klux Klan in 1975 and a Klan member for 18 years. Griffin's demeanor was in marked contrast to the testimony of George Wallace, who was grand dragon of the Federated Knights of the Ku Klux Klan in 1979 and who spoke before the commission during the morning session.

In an atmosphere that resembled the questioning of the mobsters by the Congressional investigative committee, Griffin interspersed answers to questions from members of the committee with diatribes against communists and the committee itself. "I don't think this commission is going to solve anything," Griffin said in an opening statement. "I think it's a total waste of time. This thing would have rotted 20 years ago if it were for people like this com-



Daniel Bayer/Carolina Peacemaker

White roses and five empty seats at the hearing symbolized the five victims — Cesar Cauce, James Waller, Bill Sampson, Michael Nathan, and Sandi Smith — of the 1979 Morningside Massacre.

mittee bringing it up."

Griffin said that the Klan and Nazis came to Greensboro in 1979 in response to a "Death to the Klan" poster distributed by the Workers Viewpoint Organization, which shortly after the massacre became the Communist Workers Party.

"They said that we were hiding under rocks, that we were scum," said Griffin. "I'm not scum. I'm as good as any man who walks this earth... I don't

hide under a rock from nobody."

Griffin denied that there had been any cooperation between the Klan and the Nazis prior to the morning of November 3.

"When they found out I was coming one of them called me and asked me about coming up here to Greensboro, I told him we were going as a citizens group," said Griffin. "We weren't wearing robes, we weren't wearing uniforms. We were going over to where they were supposed to

speak and fly American flags across the street."

Griffin also denied driving the planned route of the anti-Klan march the night before the massacre.

"Somebody that morning (November 3) came in with a map, and we started over there, to where they were gathered. We said 'Let's go through and see how many's there,' before we go where we're supposed to go. We started through there and they

started beating the cars with clubs and all hell broke loose," said Griffin.

"Did you have any thoughts on how to prevent 'all hell' from breaking loose?" asked Commissioner Robert Peters, a retired corporate attorney.

"Well, I didn't think they'd start beating the cars, I thought we'd just drive through there and go on up to the place and do our thing with our flags," answered Griffin. Griffin told the commission that, "according to the court," the first shot was fired by a Klansman, "in the air."

"Did the Klan bring any guns to the rally?" asked Peters.

"Well, how the hell do you think they got them if they didn't?" said Griffin, accompanied by chuckles from the audience. He denied knowing that Klansmen were bringing guns and said that he told them not to bring them.

"If I'd known there was going to be violence, I wouldn't have been there, sir," said Griffin. "If I'd known what was going to happen ahead of time, that it was going to happen, we wouldn't have been there. But it happened, and we can't change it."

Griffin said the ultimate responsibility for the massacre lay with the organizers of the anti-Klan rally.

"If Paul Bermanzohn and Nelson Johnson hadn't put that poster out, it wouldn't have hap-

pened," said Griffin. "That's the only reason I came to Greensboro. If they hadn't put that poster out calling me scum, hiding under a rock, I'd have been in another town, rallying. That poster is the only reason I came to Greensboro, and it's the Communist Party's fault that it was put out."

Griffin then launched in an emotional attack on communism.

"I don't believe they have a right in this country period, and I think every time a Senator or Congressman walks by the Vietnam Wall, they ought to have their damn heads in shame for allowing the Communist Party to be in this country. Our boys went over there fighting communism, and came back here and got off the planes, and the CW was out there spitting on them and calling them baby killers cursing them, and if our Senate and Congress were worth damn they'd have turned the guns on them and cleaned it up here, and that's the way I feel about the Communist Party."

Griffin said that he was not opposed to non-communist affiliated unions. The WVO/CW was attempting to organize workers at area textile mills at the time of the massacre.

"I belonged to a union or time," said Griffin. "I tried to organize a union at J.P. Stever (textile mill)."