



Stetson Kennedy after being released by Capitol police following his unsuccessful attempt in 1946 to interest the House Un-American Activities Committee in his evidence against the Ku Klux Klan. Photo courtesy AP/Wide World.

THE KLAN UNMASKED

Stetson Kennedy

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To
all those who ever have or ever will stand up to and
struggle against the
Ku Klux Klan
and the bigotry for which it stands;
and also to
all those who shared with me the risk, anxiety,
deprivation, and work which went into this
investigation and book.

"How about 'Death to Traitors!'" the Dragon suggested. "That's all I can think of."

As soon as the meeting was over I put in a call to Superman's authors in New York. I gave them the new password, and urged them to work in the Klan's final oath.

"That's coming up!" they assured me. "We're really going to turn on the heat next week!"

When Headquarters Klan was again called to order the following Monday night, attendance was at rock bottom, and there were no new applications for membership. The Dragon looked sick.

"I know," he said before anyone could begin to berate him, "we need a new password. It's 'Damn Superman!' I'll bet they won't put that on the air!"

"Very funny," the Klansman sitting next to me said sourly. "Here we are a secret organization without a secret left, and all the Dragon does is crack jokes!"

Superman pursued his month-long chase of the Dragon, lambasting the Kluxers for the cowards, bums and bullies that they are. In the end Superman cornered the Dragon, knocked him out, and brought the whole gang to justice.

From inside and outside the Klan I could see that a real victory had been won. Never again would the hooded hoodlums be able to face the American public with their old air of self-importance. Equally important, I knew that the millions of kids who had listened to Superman were not likely to grow up to be Klansmen.

CHAPTER SIX

I WORK MY WAY INTO
THE FLOG SQUAD

I WAS having a beer in the bar where I first made contact with the Klan when Slim walked in, and without any greeting slipped a small card into my hand and walked out again. I looked at it. Crudely hand-lettered in black ink, it said:

Are You Ready To Meet—
DEATH?
Wednesday Night at 8
in Klavern No. 1
Be There!

At the bottom of the card there was a crude skull, with two curved cavalry swords as crossbones. It was signed "Brothers of the Sword."

I've been discovered, and this is the Klan's way of inviting me to my own funeral, I thought. There would be a mock trial in the Inner Den, followed by a mock burial symbolizing my banishment as a citizen of the Invisible Empire—and then perhaps the "Death, death, at the hands of a Brother" which I was sworn to accept if I betrayed the Klan's secrets!

Or could this be the Klan's way of inviting me to join its Klavalier flog squad, which I had been trying to penetrate for so long?

There was only one way to find out. I would be expected to keep the appointment—and ask no questions in the meantime. The more I thought about the two possible prospects, the more I was convinced that the odds were no better than fifty-fifty. If this were indeed the opening of the door to the flog squad, it was the long-awaited goal of my

Klan probe. I felt that at last I had reached the front line, and the hour of attack had come. I was determined to press forward. . . .

It was about five minutes before eight o'clock when I arrived at Klavern No. 1 on Wednesday night. A single light was burning in the entrance, but there was no one in sight. An ominous quiet prevailed as I walked up to the door of the Klavern. Taking a deep breath, I scratched the Klan's sign of the cross on the door with my fingernail.

An eye glared at me through the peephole wicket, and the Klarogo inside said, "Save—"

"—America," I replied, completing the current Klan password.

"Pass, Klansman," the Klarogo said, throwing open the door.

Accustomed as I was to Klan spectacles by that time, I was nevertheless taken aback by what I saw inside. The red neon cross was glowing behind the altar of the Grand Dragon, and about thirty-five men were seated about, robed in the deathly black of the Klavaliier Klub. The effect was so foreboding I must have taken a step backward.

"Advance, Klansman!" the figure seated at the station of the Grand Dragon ordered. I recognized the huge bulk and grating voice as belonging to Cliff Carter, the Night Hawk of the Klan. I walked slowly towards him, and stood at attention with arms folded across my chest, Klan-style, in front of the altar. The altar, I noticed, was draped as usual with the Confederate flag, with a cavalry sword lying diagonally across it and a ceremonial bowl in the centre. But the customary Bible was lacking, and the bowl, ordinarily filled with water, was empty. . . .

Very soon now I would know whether I was coming or going.

"Klansman Perkins," Carter began to intone in his best ritual manner, "for some time you have been under investigation—"

I braced myself for his next words.

"—to find out whether you are worthy of the highest honour and trust that can be bestowed by the Klan—"

elevation to the Order of the Knights of the Great Forest, otherwise known as the Klavaliier Klub. . . ."

My breathing returned to normal. I felt like a tight-rope walker who had just made a safe crossing.

"The *Kloran* of the Klan," Carter continued, "defines a Klavaliier as the soldier of the Klan. We take our name from the cavalier—a courtly, polite, cultured and very courageous and skilful soldier of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. . . . Do you think you can measure up to this description?"

"I do!" I said as fervently as I could.

"As the Military Department of the Invisible Empire, we Klavaliiers also serve as the secret police of the KKK and are entrusted with carrying out all 'direct-line' activity. Do you understand what I mean?"

"Absolutely!"

"In various Realms of the Invisible Empire the Klavaliiers go by various names—in Detroit, the Black Legion; in New Jersey, the Legion of Death. We are a militant army, serving our country in peacetime as the U.S. Army does in wartime! Our country was founded as a white Protestant nation, and we intend to maintain it as such! Any attempt to influence its affairs by inferior racial minorities or persons owing allegiance to foreign prelates or potentates will not be tolerated!"

Carter pounded on the altar with such force that the ceremonial bowl leapt into the air and almost fell on the floor. In the light of the red neon cross his eyes seemed to flash fire through the slits in his black mask.

"All hyphenated groups—whether they be Negro-Americans, Jewish - Americans, Catholic - Americans, Italian-Americans or what-have-you—must become American-Americans, or leave the country! The Ku Klux Klan is an American-American organization. As the Army of the Klan we Klavaliiers are dedicated to saving America for Americans! Do you subscribe wholeheartedly to these principles?"

"I do!" I said.

"To be a Klavaliier, you must be able and willing to respond to a call to duty at any hour of the day or night,

dropping instantly whatever else you may be doing. The only excuse tolerated for not mobilizing in response to a Fiery Summons is for you to be bedridden by severe illness! Do you still wish to join our ranks? Consider well, and if you are fainthearted, retire now before it is too late!"

"I wish to proceed . . ." I replied grimly.

There was a silence, which was broken by the sound of someone scratching the sign of the cross outside the door. The Klarogo sprang to the wicket. The countersign was exchanged, and an unrobed man entered excitedly, holding a small white envelope in his hand. He stood just inside the door, and gave the extended-arm sign of greeting.

"Advance, Klansman, and state your business!" Carter said, returning the salute as a sign of recognition.

The man walked forward and handed Carter the envelope. Carter opened it deliberately, then read slowly:

At least twenty good men needed at once to come to the aid of their brethren in Klavern 066! There is important work to be tended to, putting down armed rioting by Negroes!

"I call for volunteers!" Carter cried.

There was a chorus as every Klavalier present raised his hand.

Suddenly I realized that Carter was glaring at me.

"What about you?" he roared. "Are you afraid of being hurt or killed? What are you anyway—a coward?"

"Throw the yellow bastard out of the window!" a Klavalier called out, and the others echoed approval. I decided the time had come to do some fast talking.

"Your Excellency and Brothers," I said as loudly as I could, "I did not understand that I was already privileged to take part in your activities. Had I known that, I assure you I would have been among the first to volunteer!"

This quieted them, and after a moment Carter said:

"Spoken like a true Klansman! You are to be congratulated upon passing your first test. There's not really any emergency at Klavern 066—this is only one of the ways we have of testing whether or not a candidate is worthy. . . ."

The plain-clothed brother, having done his job, slipped on his black robe and hood and took a seat with the rest.

"As a Klansman you are already sworn to secrecy," Carter went on. "As a Klavalier you must be doubly sworn! Our operations are such that we must keep them secret not only from the prying eyes of the public but even from our own Brothers in the Klan. In the event that something should go wrong, it is the duty of the Klavalier to accept whatever fine, imprisonment or other punishment may be meted out to him, without revealing his identity as a Klansman. The good name of the Klan must be shielded at all costs! You know the penalty for betraying the secrets of the Klan—'Death, death, at the hands of a Brother.' To become a Klavalier you must seal that oath with your own blood! Do you still wish to proceed?"

"I do . . ." I replied, trying to tell myself I was lucky not to be having my throat cut!

"Advance, then, and take your position before the altar!" I stepped closer to the table.

"This is the Confederate flag for which the South fought," Carter intoned. "Red, symbolizing the blood shed for the South; white, for the purity of its womanhood; and blue for God's blue canopy that covers us. . . . The blood oath you are about to take is the same as that taken by our illustrious forbears, the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan of old. Extend your left hand!"

Reaching under his robe, Carter brought forth a large jack-knife. He pressed a button on the handle, and a long blade leapt out. Grasping my hand, Carter made a quick slash at my wrist. I was hoping he knew what he was doing, and that the result would not be fatal. A veteran no doubt of many such blood-lettings, he inflicted a gash which missed the principal veins and arteries, but produced a steady flow of blood. Holding my hand over the bowl, Carter let it drip in silence for a minute. Finally he released me and said, "Bind up your wrist!"

When I had tied it in my handkerchief, Carter ordered:

"Klansman, you will now give the Sign of Consecration!"

I knelt in front of the altar on my right knee, placed my right hand over my heart, and raised my left hand in outstretched salute. . . .

With great solemnity, Carter administered the blood oath of the Klavaliens:

"Klansman, do you solemnly swear by God and the Devil never to betray secrets entrusted to you as a Klavaliens of the Klan?"

"I swear."

"Do you swear to provide yourself with a good gun and plenty of ammunition, so as to be ready when the nigger starts trouble to give him plenty?"

"I do. . . ."

"Do you further swear to do all in your power to increase the white birth-rate?"

Despite the seriousness of the moment, I almost laughed. So the Klavaliens were a menace to white Southern womanhood as well as to everybody else!

"I do!" I blurted out with more gusto than I had thus far been able to muster.

Carter dipped his forefinger into the bowl of blood, and smeared the Klan's sign of the cross on my forehead. Taking up the sword, he tapped me alternately on each shoulder with the flat of the blade.

"Klansman, I dub you Knight of the Klavaliens! Live up to your oath! Be you ever ready to fight for your Honour, your Home, the Klan, and White Supremacy! Arise!"

"Congratulations!" Carter added as I stood up. He pulled off his hood and mask, and wiped the perspiration from his jowls. As he gave me the Klan handshake, he said, "Unmask, men, so Perkins can see who his new brothers are. After we've cooled off a bit, I'll explain to Perkins how we work."

I looked around the den. I had seen many of the faces before, in various Klaverns around Atlanta. There was Randal, Grand Kligrapp of the Georgia Realm, my old "buddy" Slim Pickett, and a tough little Kluxer named Ira Jett (who was eventually to save my life, for reasons of his own). I had found Kluxers to be an ugly lot, but this hand-picked gang of strong-arm Klansmen were the meanest I had ever seen under one roof. They were capable, I felt sure, of every conceivable form of violence. Frustration, cruelty and alcoholism showed in every face. I resolved to

take a look into a mirror at the first opportunity, to reassure myself that I did not look like a Klavaliens.

I took a seat among the ranks of the Klavaliens, and Carter resumed his station behind the altar.

"Perkins," he began, "the Klectoken fee for joining the Klavaliens is ten dollars. In addition to your regular Klan dues, we charge one dollar a month just to meet expenses. Every fifth Wednesday we get together for a steak dinner at Wingo's Café over in West End; the cost of that is one dollar fifty. We reserve a private dining-room there, and that's where we transact most of our business, unless something urgent comes up at a Klan meeting, in which case we meet here in the Inner Den right afterwards. You'll be expected to provide yourself with another robe immediately, and to dye it black."

I must have winced visibly at all these expenses.

"If it's action you crave, you'll get your money's worth, I promise you," Carter continued. "Now if you'll come forward I'll issue your membership Kard in the Klavaliens, and explain its secret symbolism."

I walked up to the altar, and he handed me a small wallet-size card, white, with various cabalistic-looking symbols hand-drawn on it in heavy black ink.

"The question mark," he said, "stands for secrecy, and the corkscrew for crookedness—"

There was an appreciative titter from the Klavaliens.

"What about the letters 'A.T.'?" I asked.

"They stand for Ass-Tearer," Carter replied, and the Klavaliens roared at their "joke." Such kid stuff, I thought to myself—if it weren't so deadly serious! "My title is Chief Ass-Tearer," Carter continued, "and I hold Klavaliens Kard No. 1. We are organized along military lines, and I serve as Chief of Staff to the Grand Dragon, who holds Klavaliens Kard No. 0. The line of authority is there—we don't make a move except on the Dragon's orders or O.K. But if trouble comes, I take the rap for the Dragon, to keep the Klan's name clear. That number in the corner of the Kard, seventy-three, is your identification. The Kard is your passport to all Klavaliens functions—guard it well!"

With that, I slipped the Kard into my wallet and resumed my seat.

"There are certain precautions we take in telephone conversations among ourselves about Klavaliier business. You must never address me by name on the phone—call me 'Clearwater.' My office is to be referred to only as 'Hole in the Wall.' For mobilization, we've set aside two principal points with code names—Five Points, which we call 'Chinatown,' and Buckhead, which we call 'Black Rock.' Think you can remember all that?"

"Clearwater, Hole-in-the-Wall, Chinatown, Black Rock . . ." I repeated.

"Good man! Now I'll tell you about one of the jobs we pulled lately, just to let you know how we work. You remember a complaint that came up in the Klavern a couple of weeks ago about a nigger who had a habit of jostling white ladies at the bus stop in front of Davison-Paxon's department store?"

"Sure," I replied. "The Dragon said he was turning it over to the Klavaliiers for handling."

"Well, we handled it all right! I'll bet that nigger won't never get within six feet of no white lady as long as he lives!"

"Let me tell him how we did it, Chief," Randal broke in. "You've done talked yourself hoarse."

Carter nodded, and sat back while Randal related the sordid tale. . . .

"Our calendar has been so full it took us a while to get around to this case, Perkins, but when we did, we set it up like this. The nigger always showed up there at six o'clock rush in the evening. First, a couple of our boys staged a fake fist-fight down the street a ways, to attract everybody's attention. While that was going on, a bunch of us pulled up in a car to the bus stop, right beside the nigger. I was already there, standing in back of him, and when they opened the door I pressed a gun in his back and told him to get in. He got in without making any fuss and we drove on down Ivy Street to the Grand Theatre. You know where that is. It's been abandoned a long time, and there's a parking lot in back of it, real dark. After looking to make sure we weren't being followed, we turned in there and changed cars. The

idea is that if anybody had noticed the gun and given the cops a description of the car, we'd be in the clear."

"Every job pulled around town here calls for the same routine," Carter interjected.

"Soon as we had switched cars we drove out of town and over into Rockledge County," Randal went on.

"The idea there," Carter cut in again, "is to do our work among friends. We've got Rockledge County completely Kluxed—police, sheriff's office, prosecutor, judges, fire department, even the dog-catcher. If anything was to go wrong, we wouldn't have a thing to worry about so far as being prosecuted is concerned. That's why we take all our cases, if at all possible, into Rockledge County for handling. . . ."

"We'd already planned to meet another carload of our boys at a certain wooded hummock over the county line," Randal went on. "They were supposed to bring the whip with them—we've got one made out of a piece of sawmill belt nailed on to a sawed-off baseball bat handle—but they had a flat tyre and was late getting there. So we cut some pine branches off a tree and went to work on the nigger.

"He was the stubbornest one I ever beat on! No matter how hard we hit him, we couldn't make him holler. Said he hadn't never jostled no white ladies. Kept talkin' about how he had fought for democracy and all that stuff during the war, and hadn't ought to be treated that way. I told him that was probably what was wrong with him—rubbin' up against them French women and comin' home with all kinds of crazy notions about equality!"

While Randal chuckled at his own brand of humour, Carter again put in his oar:

"I sent 'em down to the creek to dip their switches in branchwater—makes 'em heavier, and you can do a better job!"

"The rest of the boys finally got there with the whip, and we all gave the nigger three licks apiece with it for good measure," Randal added.

"In the Klavaliier Klub," Carter said pointedly, "every man takes his turn with the whip on every job. That way, there's less chance of anybody ever doing any talking.

There's a certain knack to using that bullwhip. A time or two we killed men with it when we wasn't aimin' to. You'll catch on to it soon enough!"

"When we finished with this nigger we drove him back to nigger town and dumped him out," Randal finished, eager to get another word in. "Told him if he ever said one word to anybody about being beaten, he'd be a dead one!"

"That reminds me—" Carter said, looking around the room. "Slim, what'd you do with that whip?"

"Don't worry, Chief, it's perfectly safe. I threw it way up under my brother's house. I can fetch it anytime at a moment's notice."

"You should've brought it with you tonight! It's still early yet, and there's a little job I want taken care of—"

"Are we going to ride tonight, Chief? What's cooking?" the Klavaliars broke in.

"Hold your horses!" Carter shouted, not displeased by their blood-lust. "Slim, we'll let the whip go tonight, but next Wednesday when we get together at Wingo's you be damned sure you bring it with you! The Dragon has a rush call for us to take care of some damyankee nigger-lovin' union organizers who are causing trouble out in Chinquapin Mill Village. Our most important job is to run union carpetbaggers back across the Mason-Dixon Line where they come from!"

"I happen to know a couple of them union organizers, and they is Georgy boys, born and bred right around here," a Klavaliar sitting next to me ventured. "It ain't going to be easy to run them off nowhere. . . ."

"Are you takin' up for the nigger-lovin' sonsabitches?" Carter barked. "I don't care who they are! It ain't the old-time honest-to-god unions for white folks we're after, it's these new-fangled outfits that don't care who they take in! They're run by a bunch of no-good Catholics, Jews and foreigners up North, and don't know what's good for the South! The Dragon has a whole stack of requests from mill-owners all over the South begging us to send men to chase those babies away from their gates! All expenses paid, and plenty of drinkin' liquor for all hands!"

The Klavaliar who had dared question Carter's union-busting leaned over and whispered in my ear.

"You can bet your bottom dollar ole Cliff and Doc Green rakes in a heap more than expenses on these deals!" he said. "Them mill-owners pay plenty for our services. Green and Carter pocket it, and all we get for doin' the dirty work is a slug of rot-gut liquor!"

"Before we get going on such serious business, I want to clear our docket of all these little piddling cases," Carter resumed. "You can get along without the bullwhip tonight—cut yourselves some more switches, or do whatever you want with the rascal. I'm goin' to let you boys handle this one yourselves, as I've got some important business of my own to 'tend to."

"Yeah, I know," the Klavaliar next to me whispered again. "Cliff pulls most of these cases out of his hat to get away from his wife once a week so he can get in the pants of a lil ole gal he knows out in East Point. . . ."



Author (right) and colleague Elizabeth Gardner showing Klan "trophies" to Dr. James Shelton, director, Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League, where Kennedy worked as director of covert operations (New York City, 1948). Photograph courtesy Llewellyn Ransom.