

REGIONAL

White supremacists trial begins in Idaho

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — A paid FBI informant encouraged and incited an alleged conspiracy by three northern Idaho white supremacists to bomb a gay nightclub in the Seattle area, defense lawyers told jurors Wednesday.

After opening statements, the supremacists' trial began before an eight-woman, four-man federal court jury with presentation of the first example of some 100 hours of audio and video tape gathered by the FBI.

The first tape was an April 14 sound recording of defendants Robert Winslow and Procter James Baker with informant Rico Valentino at the test detonation of a pipe bomb inside a coffee can filled with roofing nails.

Throughout the half-hour recording, Valentino could be heard making statements apparently aimed at drawing the other men out on the subject of using a similar bomb to attack what he called a "fag bar" in Seattle.

Their less-audible comments on the topic generally were only in response and were milder than Valentino's.

"You might say when it goes off you'd have the faggots nailed," Valentino said at one point during the episode on national forest land north of Hayden Lake.

He later congratulated Winslow for the successful test blast.

"Thanks for the demonstration, brother," Valentino said. "It was well worth the wait, that's for sure. I definitely got a bang out of it."

Prosecutors began presenting their case Wednesday afternoon against Winslow, 29, of LaCleve; Baker, 58, of Coeur d'Alene; and Stephen Nelson, 35, of Hayden Lake.

All three have been held

without bail since their May 12 arrests. The trial was expected to last as long as four weeks.

Gar Hackney, Nelson's lawyer, told jurors during his opening statement that Valentino could not be trusted. He called the former professional wrestler and bodyguard to the Rev. Richard Butler of the white-supremacist Church of Jesus Christ Christian-Aryan Nations "a flimflam man, a hustler and a con artist."

Hackney said Valentino instigated the bombing plot after three unproductive years as an undercover informant.

"He lied for three years and he was paid to lie," Hackney said. "Now the government will ask you to believe everything that comes from his mouth as if it were true."

In his opening statement, Assistant U.S. Attorney Ron Howen said the government would prove the defendants conspired to bomb Neighbours, a Seattle restaurant and nightclub described as popular with gays, lesbians and other minorities. He also gave a detailed outline of what prosecutors contend was the chain of events beginning last March that led to the May 12 arrests shortly before the alleged bombing was to occur.

Howen repeatedly referred to the defendants as "Aryan warriors" who wanted to further their white-supremacist beliefs, who discussed using violence to make "fag burgers" and then tried to follow through on their plans.

By the end of March, Howen said, "the group had turned from talk and rhetoric to action."

But Douglas VanderBoegh, Winslow's court-appointed lawyer, urged the jurors to remember everyone is entitled to

freedom of speech.

"It's only when you start to act upon it that the government should be concerned," he said.

Although he indicated earlier that Winslow's defense would not be based primarily on arguments that Valentino had entrapped him, VanderBoegh said Wednesday he would prove the FBI informant furthered his own goals by taking advantage of Winslow's vulnerability following a medical discharge from the Army.

Valentino had received more than \$90,000 since infiltrating the Aryan Nations but had uncovered nothing until Winslow appeared on the scene last March, VanderBoegh said.

Valentino is "going to appear as a con man. He's going to appear as a liar. He's going to appear as a cheat," the attorney said. "Rico Valentino is a seducer. He's a tempter. He preys upon the weak."

"Mr. Valentino uses three tools to ply his trade," VanderBoegh said. "He uses liquor, he uses money and he uses braggadocio."

Hackney discounted the significance of taped conversations involving the defendants that he acknowledged contain racial epithets the jury would find repugnant. And he urged the panel to carefully study the audio and video recordings to differentiate between "right-wing fantasy talk" and concrete plans for violence.

Winslow and Nelson are charged with conspiracy to bomb, knowingly making, receiving or possessing bombs or grenades, carrying firearms in relation to a crime of violence and crossing state lines to commit a felony.

Baker is charged with the conspiracy and bomb-possession counts.

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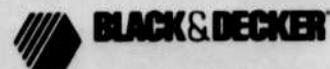
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