

James “Bo” Gritz

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INTRODUCTION

Bo Gritz (rhymes with “rights”), a former Green Beret and highly decorated veteran of the Vietnam War, became a prominent figure on the right-wing fringe after leading unsuccessful commando-style missions to rescue alleged American POW’s in Vietnam in the 1980s. He ran briefly for Vice President in 1988 and for president in 1992, both times on the Populist Party ticket. His non electoral activities have ranged from attempting to mediate high-profile standoffs between the government and far-right figures to founding survivalist-oriented land developments to leading paramilitary training sessions. With close ties to both the anti-government movement and white supremacists, he enjoys an unusually ecumenical appeal; in recent years, he has become an adherent of Christian Identity, and his efforts have reflected a new religious ardor.

Quick Profile

Year of birth: 1939

Organizations: Center for Action - Fellowship of Eternal Warriors

Headquarters : Sandy Valley, Nevada

Publications: Center for Action magazine, Called to Serve (book), A Nation Betrayed (video), Internet

Influences: Christian Identity, anti-government conspiracy theories

Projects: SPIKE (Specially Prepared Individuals for Key Events) paramilitary training, Almost Heaven land development

Interventions: Led unsuccessful commando-style missions to rescue alleged Vietnam War POWs; negotiated an end to Ruby Ridge standoff; was unsuccessful in similar attempts involving the Montana Freeman and Eric Rudolph

Connections: Has extensive connections to both white supremacists and anti-government groups and leaders

Strategy: Combines Special Forces military training with anti-government approach and Christian Identity religious beliefs

BEGINNINGS

Colonel James “Bo” Gritz, a Green Beret and highly decorated Vietnam veteran, first came to national prominence in the early 1980s after leading several commando-style missions into Southeast Asia to rescue American POWs he believed to have been imprisoned since the Vietnam War. These missions, financed in part by H. Ross Perot, were unsuccessful, but Gritz returned with what he purported to be evidence of another government conspiracy — CIA involvement in the drug trade. Most Americans paid little attention to these allegations, but Gritz found an open and accepting audience in the conspiratorial far-right. Building

new connections, including Willis Carto of the Liberty Lobby and Pete Peters of the LaPorte Church of Christ, Gritz was propelled into a world of conspiracies, paramilitary training and third-party politics.

POLITICS AND PATRIOTS

Gritz first tried to capitalize on his newfound popularity by seeking public office; in 1988 he ran as the Populist Party's Vice-Presidential nominee at the urging of Carto, who founded the nowdefunct Party in 1984 to provide rightwing radicals with a platform for political office. Gritz's candidacy was brief; he became leery of sharing the ticket with Presidential nominee David Duke, former Klansman and neo-Nazi, and stepped down after a few days. He ran instead (unsuccessfully) for a Nevada Congressional seat.

Despite these setbacks, the political arena still held attractions for Gritz. Though he was unlikely to win high elected office, campaigning helped cement his prominent farright standing. In 1992, he ran on the Populist Party ticket again, this time for president. Using the campaign slogan "God, Guns and Gritz," he campaigned on ideas that, a few years later, would help to spur the militia movement. His manifesto, "The Bill of Gritz," called for staunch opposition to "global government" and the "New World Order," an end to foreign aid and the federal income tax, and the dismantling of the Federal Reserve System. He decried gun control and asserted that the United States was a "Christian Nation" whose legal statutes "should reflect unashamed acceptance of Almighty God and His Laws." Gritz won only a tiny percentage of the vote, but the campaign, along with his intervention at the Ruby Ridge standoff (see below), made him temporarily the most recognizable leader on the right-wing fringe.

PREPAREDNESS

Three years earlier, in 1989, Gritz had created the Center for Action, based in Sandy Valley, Nevada, to "put accountability back into government." Focusing at first on his (unfounded) assertions that American POWs were still being held captive in Asia, and on conspiratorial allegations against the CIA, Gritz came to use the Center and its newsletter as a forum to advance his growing anti-government political beliefs and religious philosophies, as well as to provide updates on the legal battles of "Patriots." Gritz has also offered commentary on breaking events; during the 2000 presidential elections, for instance, he stated: "...Jews, feminists, sodomites and other liberal activists may install Gore over an apathetic moral majority....Runaway abortion, anti-Christ/God and globalism are certain."

More importantly, Gritz traded on his growing prestige to promote, through the Center, his survivalist paramilitary training sessions – what he refers to as SPIKE (Specially Prepared Individuals for Key Events) training. For those able to afford the registration fee (which in the spring of 2001 ran as high as \$300), SPIKE offers the opportunity to "learn what weapons and ammunition type is best in grave peril; how to...efficiently engage multiple targets....Weapons and ammunition will be furnished." Gritz also offers specialized SPIKE training, including SPIKE Weapons, whose purpose is to "send you home ready to perform as a specialist in the full range of integrated operative, environment, resource, mission skills



"Bo" Gritz as he appears on his Web site. Ephesians 6:12: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

including management of field operations.” In addition to actual training, Gritz sells SPIKE videos in the Center for Action newsletter. Video topics include: Gun Control – Hitting The Target With Every Shot, Counter Surveillance Course, Counter-Terrorist Driving, and Changing and Manipulating Locks. For those who want still more training, Gritz promises that “the Grand Ultimate SPIKE remains on the agenda to be accomplished.”

For several years Gritz also promoted his wares and survivalist views through “Freedom Call,” a daily shortwave radio call-in program. In addition to providing a forum for the like-minded, Gritz hosted such far-right luminaries as David Duke. He went off the air in March of 2001, avowedly dedicating himself to completing two books.

ALMOST HEAVEN

In 1994, contractors broke ground in a remote section of central Idaho that was to become a land development Gritz called Almost Heaven. He started the project, he said, out of disgust with both “an encroaching, ravenous, predator government” and the “grip of international bankers.” He said that the isolated, like-minded community of separatists would be specially prepared for civil unrest and the onslaught of government: “I believe by 1996 you’re going to see the noose tighten up around liberty’s neck....For that reason we’re training people, not to be paramilitary, but to live off the grid...so they can have a choice....tyranny always wears a badge of authority.”

Gritz denied, however, that his intentions were to establish a complex like that of Aryan Nations. His community would obey all laws “unless they go against the laws of God and common sense,” and a council would be set up to govern the community. Members of the community also signed a “covenant” promising to defend their neighbors against any “predator threat.” Promoted by Gritz, with the help of police officer-turned-militia proponent Jack McLamb (head of Police Against the New World Order) and another associate, Jerry Gillespie, land parcels sold quickly at both the original site and a second development, Shenandoah.

Before long, however, the Idaho Eden was troubled by a growing rift between Gritz and residents who called themselves the Freeman Patriots. Critical of Gritz for not living up to the anti-government cause — he did not initially move to the community — the Patriots were constantly armed, anxiously warning of “helicopter-borne microwave weapons that fry households without photogenic smoke and flame.” One of these dissidents stated, by way of denigrating Gritz and his supporters in Almost Heaven for their perceived reluctance to engage the “tyrannical” government: “We all feel we’ve been led here not to hide, but to act.”

Almost Heaven and eight similar developments still exist today, although Gritz, having lived there for a few years, moved back to his home in Nevada after his third marriage ended and has very little involvement in the daily activity of the communities. He has talked passingly of starting similar developments in the Ozarks, but has devoted his energies elsewhere.

STANDOFFS AND INTERVENTIONS

While overseeing remote survivalist communities, Gritz has been able to maintain a high media profile through a series of attempts to negotiate an end to government standoffs with farright activists. He first

intervened in this way in August 1992 on behalf of white supremacist Randy Weaver who, with his family, was holed up inside his home in Ruby Ridge, Idaho, after United States marshals attempted to arrest him on weapons charges. The 11-day standoff, which resulted in the death of a marshal and Weaver's son and wife, ended after Gritz convinced Weaver to leave his cabin. While the media windfall that followed heightened Gritz's national profile, his possible sympathy with white supremacists also received attention. Most notably, it was widely reported that after leaving Weaver's cabin, Gritz gave a Nazi salute to a group of skinhead onlookers, saying "Mr. Weaver wanted me to pass this along to those of you out here." Gritz referred to the gesture as a "special wave."

Gritz's next attempt at mediation occurred in 1996, this time involving the Montana Freeman during their 81-day standoff in Jordan, Montana. Determined to insert himself into the situation, Gritz, with Weaver and McLamb in tow, wrangled entrée from authorities. He had little success talking to the cantankerous Freeman, though, and after five meetings left in frustration, even urging others not to support the group. When the siege finally ended, however, Gritz gladly took credit for helping "to negotiate a peaceful resolution."

Gritz's interventionary tactics won him considerable publicity, but they were not without risk. In fact, not long after the Freeman standoff, his attempt to insert himself into a child-custody case landed him in jail. In late 1996, a woman named Linda Weigand appealed to Gritz for assistance in a custody battle in which she had accused her exhusband of child sexual abuse with "Satanic overtones." Gritz publicized Weigand's cause heavily, but eventually went beyond mere words and was arrested at the Connecticut school of one of the children and charged with attempted kidnapping and conspiracy. Gritz claimed he was merely attempting to attract publicity and was eventually acquitted, but the Weigand case seriously injured his reputation among his peers. Many thought Weigand had duped him, and Militia of Montana leader John Trochmann even testified against Gritz at the trial. Chastened, Gritz disavowed Weigand, who has been charged with child endangerment and conspiracy, among other things, and is currently at large.

Still, the lure of high-publicity intervention was too great to ignore when, in 1998, another opportunity for self-promotion presented itself — this time involving Eric Rudolph, who had allegedly bombed an Alabama family-planning clinic, killing a guard, as well as a gay nightclub and Atlanta's Centennial Park during the 1996 Olympics. In a statement entitled "Let's Save Eric Rudolph," Gritz urged fellow militia members to join him in his search through North Carolina's Smoky Mountains, where Rudolph was thought to be hiding out, hoping they could provide "a safe corridor for Eric to enter the system." Gritz also promised that if he received any of the \$1 million reward, it would go to Rudolph's mother or for Rudolph's defense. Though he claimed to have spotted the fugitive several times, Gritz ended his eight-day search unsuccessfully.

Most recently, Gritz tried to come to the rescue of the Indianapolis Baptist Temple, the site of a standoff with federal authorities. Temple leaders, as part of the unregistered church movement, refused to acknowledge the authority of governmental laws or regulations; consequently, they did not collect withholding taxes for employees or pay social security taxes. After a protracted court struggle, the government was authorized to seize church property. Gritz joined a number of militia leaders and other fringe activists who came to Indianapolis to lend the Temple their support; Gritz even broadcast his radio program from inside the church. Church leaders, fearing that his presence might provoke violence, asked Gritz (and some of the other outsiders) to leave prior to the uneventful seizure of the property in February of 2001.

Speaking about his involvement with the Temple, Gritz offered a rationale for his readiness, generally, to intercede on behalf of those who reject governmental authority: “My purpose was and is to put patriotism in action and do more than talk about problems. I became actively and directly involved in more than 22 episodes wherein Americans, acting in the spirit of the law, found it can be dangerous to be right when the government is wrong!”

CALLED TO SERVE

Throughout his career, Gritz has willingly accepted, even courted, the company of racist and anti-Semitic ideologues. One of his first public supporters was Willis Carto, who asked him to serve on the advisory board of the Liberty Lobby’s Populist Action Committee. Gritz also became friendly with Christian Identity minister Pete Peters and addressed Peters’ Identity Bible camps, as well as other Christian Identity conferences. The Third Christian Heritage National Conference in 1993, for instance, featured Gritz along with veteran anti-Semite and conspiracy theorist Eustace Mullins and white supremacists Richard Kelly Hoskins and Col. Jack Mohr. Gritz also developed a mutually beneficial relationship with Richard Flowers, leader of the anti-Semitic Christian Patriot Association. Flowers has been selling books and materials at many of Gritz’s speaking engagements at Preparedness Expos (traveling trade fairs designed to appeal to the Patriot market) and gun shows, and now publishes and prints Gritz’s magazine, *Center for Action*. While many of those Gritz was closest to, therefore, made no secret of their bigoted beliefs, he remained largely noncommittal, often offering veiled derogatory references while at the same time repeatedly denying that he shared his friends’ overtly racist and anti-Semitic viewpoints. Even since unreservedly accepting Christian Identity, upon his marriage to Judy Kirsch in 1999, he has avoided the bigoted language typical of that movement.

Through Kirsch, Gritz became active in Dan Gayman’s Missouri-based Church of Israel, attending and speaking at its religious celebrations. The influence of Gayman and Christian Identity led Gritz to rename, and spiritualize, the *Center for Action*. It became the *Center for Action – Fellowship of Eternal Warriors*. Pursuing his new mission, and adding a religious gloss to old themes, he “anointed” a small number of God’s “Israelpeople” to “meet the increasing challenge of Satan’s globalism.” He spent a year, he said, identifying a dozen “warrior-priests” who clearly “embody the strengths of God’s Israelpeople” – including old friend Richard Flowers, Steve Kukla of the Oklahoma-based Sovereign Studios and Sheldon Robinson, co-defendant in the Weigand case. Gritz recruits new candidates on his Web site, telling readers: “Contact me if you feel that God has called you to be a spiritual warrior for these last days.”

The Fellowship of Eternal Warriors represents the most thorough merger to date of Gritz’s paramilitary training, opposition to the federal government and religious ardor. While he has since parted ways with the Church of Israel and Dan Gayman, his efforts to prepare for spiritual warfare remain undiminished. Gritz now attends both the Christian Identity Rose Hill Covenant Church in Oklahoma and the Inter-Continental Church of God in California, continues to promote SPIKE training, whose newest edition qualifies participants as a “Master Blaster,” and runs the *Center for Action*. His religious beliefs remain somewhat vague, however, in part because he has not, at least publicly, articulated the racial implications of his Identity faith. Nonetheless, Gritz has upped the ante by enlisting God against the government and its supporters. He says:

I can assure you that if I was ever convinced that it was God’s Will for me to commit an act of violence against the laws of our land, I would hesitate only long enough to, like Gideon, be certain. I

would then do all within my power to accomplish what I felt he required of me....If God does call me into the Phinehas Priesthood¹...my defense will be the truth as inspired by the Messiah.

¹Particularly radical far-right activists sometimes call themselves Phinehas (or Phineas) Priests to denote that they oppose, and will use violence against, those not committed to the superiority and “purity” of the white race. Phineas was a Biblical character who killed a Jew because of the Jew’s sexual relations with a gentile. Those who call themselves Phineas Priests are usually Identity adherents; the idea derives from the sect’s theological race-hatred and was first articulated by veteran Identity exponent Richard Kelly Hoskins.

Report Updates (2004-2005)

GRITZ PUBLISHES NEW BOOK, AND IS REJECTED BY THE AMERICA FIRST PARTY

February 1, 2004

In 2003, Bo Gritz published his third book, *My Brother’s Keeper*, a 653-page tome he describes as a “How-To Liberty Manual.” The book purports to reveal the “hidden truths” behind America’s foreign and domestic “crimes” and describes how to “successfully stand against the government, media, and misguided public opinion.” He continued his practice of holding religious feasts commemorating ancient Israelite holidays; most recently he sponsored for his followers a Feast of Tabernacles celebration from October 10-17, 2003, in Tyler, Texas.

Gritz was slated to speak at the national convention of the America First Party ([a conservative political party originally connected with Pat Buchanan](#)) in Nashville, Tennessee on July 24-26, 2003. A faction within the party opposed giving Gritz a forum, however, and shortly before the convention Gritz was disinvited. In a press release, convention organizers wrote that Gritz’s “extreme intolerance” was unacceptable. Apparently referring to Gritz’s ties to militant anti-government and white supremacist groups, they added that “anyone who supports theories that we hoped had died with Adolph Hitler is not welcome in the America First Party.”

SMALL DECLINE IN GRITZ ACTIVITIES

October 25, 2004

Gritz has maintained a lower profile of late, but he is not inactive.

- He has ended SPIKE, his survivalist paramilitary training program. Interested individuals can still purchase his series of twelve SPIKE training videos, “the equivalent of 3 ½ years of intense mobile training.”
- He continues to participate in Christian Identity religious celebrations. In the early fall of 2004, he held Feast of Tabernacles celebrations in Tyler Park, Texas.

- He hosts his daily radio program, "Freedom Call," six days a week from his home in Sandy Valley, Nevada.
- Interest in Almost Heaven and other housing developments promoted by Gritz has waned since Gritz moved to Nevada and law enforcement cracked down on a handful of violent extremists. By one estimate, about 350 people still live in "covenant" developments in the area. "Covenant" communities require that members promise to defend their neighbors against any "predator threat."

BO GRITZ BECOMES INVOLVED IN TERRI SCHIAVO CASE

March 29, 2005

Gritz traveled to Pinellas Park, Florida, in mid-March in an attempt to make citizen's arrests of individuals involved in removing the feeding tube of Terri Schiavo, a Florida woman diagnosed as irremediably brain damaged.

In a press release titled "True Grit(z) rides again," Gritz announced:

Former Green Beret Commander Bo Gritz is charging-in once again. The 66 year-old retired Army Lt. Colonel with his wife, Judy, drove straight through from their Southern Nevada home to Pinellas Park, Florida in their own effort to rescue Terri Schindler-Schiavo. In his typically unconventional fashion, Gritz is arresting Pinellas Circuit Judge George Greer [who ruled the tube should be removed] and Terri Schiavo's estranged husband, Michael Schiavo, plus anyone else who would aid or abet in removing Terri's feeding tube.



Gritz, who did not know Schiavo, said he becomes involved in public controversies "when it appears Americans are in needless life-and-death situations with the law."

"Most people wisely don't arrest important officials, it can be non-habit forming. It's my contribution, as I see it," Gritz said.

On March 18, he handed the warrants to authorities guarding Schiavo's hospice. The following day he and three others were arrested for trespassing as they tried to bring bread and water into the hospice in a symbolic effort to feed Schiavo. He was released the following day.