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Bush backer barred over Nazi links

By David Lee Preston
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A Massachusetts architect who has been a volunteer ethnic leader of Republican George Bush's campaign was a member of the Latvian Legion, an auxiliary of the Nazi Waffen SS, during World War II.

The Bush campaign suspended Alexander Mangulis, of Andover, who is the Latvian American Republican Federation, as national chairman of Latvians for Bush last night after being asked about his wartime affiliation.

Mangulis, 67, of Andover, was a leader in the Latvian Legion during the war, according to Bush campaign officials, and another Latvian GOP leader, Ruth said that Mangulis had not been a volunteer in the Legion.

Mangulis has been unavailable for comment since Wednesday, when he said yesterday that he could not be reached.

"The charges lodged against Mr. Mangulis are serious and deserve to be clarified by him away from the Bush-Dukakis campaign," said Mark Goodin, a Bush campaign spokesman. "We have asked the Republican membership on the Coalition for American Nationalities to suspend as he pursues that right."

Seven dropped earlier

Mangulis was the only Latvian in the Bush campaign's Coalition of American Nationalities, seven of the coalition's original 30 members to drop out in the last month, largely because of the following published reports linking them to fascist or anti-Semitic organizations.

The Nazis organized the Latvian Legion in 1943 from police battalions the Waffen SS from police battalions in Latvia that had been under German control. Andrew Ezergailis, a history professor at Elizabethtown College and an expert on the subject.

"It was part of the Waffen SS," Ezergailis said in a telephone interview yesterday. "It was called the Latvian SS Voluntary Legion, the Germans called it that, but it was basically a drafted unit."

A Bush campaign spokesman said that the Bush ethnic coalition now has more than 100 members, all of them Americans who are active in their own parties or in the Republican National Committee.

"They are not campaign functionaries," the spokesman said. "They have no role in the day-to-day operations of the campaign. The vice president has been very clear to say that he does not want to see any Nazism, anti-Semitism or even the appearance of any kind of racial intolerance or bigotry in his campaign."

Not a volunteer

Mangulis' wife said that the Latvian Legion was part of the German army, the Wehrmacht, and that her husband was not a volunteer. She said she did not know when he served. When told that the Latvian Legion was an auxiliary of part of the Waffen SS, she said, "That's not my business."

"It was Wehrmacht, I was Wehrmacht," she said.

She said that he had not volunteered for duty, saying: "Latvians had to go, and if they wouldn't go, if they hid, if they didn't go, they would be caught, then what you call the Nazis would [have] shot them without mercy. ... He was very young, he wasn't even 20 years old. He was drafted. He had to go. ... The situation was very, very bad."

Andrejs Basulis, coordinator of Latvians for Bush, said yesterday that Mangulis had told him that he had served in the Latvian Legion.

"That is a fact. There is nothing to hide about that," Basulis said. "It was included in Waffen SS, yes, but not by desire of Latvians to join Waffen SS."

Mangulis and his wife were at the National Press Club in Washington in August when Bush announced the formation of the ethnic coalition.

'Obviously anti-Nazi'

In an interview in September, Elizabeth Mangulis said her husband's grandfather had been fatally clubbed by Germans in 1941 "because he was nationalistic and obviously anti-Nazi, but the Nazis' time is gone."

She said that she met with the aid her husband are members of Daugava Vanags, an organization formed by veterans of the Latvian Legion.

Basulis said that Mangulis was drafted into service, and that the Waffen SS was not a specifically Nazi unit.

"It was fighting on the side of Germany. If you look at the credentials of German army officers, very few of them were members of the Nazi party," Basulis said.

Mangulis, who is writing a book about the Holocaust in Latvia, said the Latvian Legion was set up in two SS divisions — the 19th and 15th.

"Some people who were drafted and the Wehrmacht would have nothing to do with non-Germans personnel, and so the SS got involved in it," he said. "Those people who were drafted, they were not SS, and they were sent to the Waffen SS were originally likely to be volunteers, so their personnel records were mixed over to the Latvian Legion, and then the majority of the members of the Legion were drafted."

Mangulis was born in Liepaja, Latvia, according to his wife. He was naturalized as an American citizen in 1957 in Boston.

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