

# Cowan Was 'Nice Man' to Some in New Rochelle, But to Others 'Real Prejudiced'...

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## Cowan Was 'Nice Man' to Some in New Rochelle, But to Others 'Real Prejudiced' Backer of Nazis

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NEW ROCHELLE, N.Y., Feb. 14—An Army sharpshooter twice convicted by courts-martial, and a good neighbor who would take teen-aged boys on outings, a Nazi sympathizer who said he hated blacks and Jews, and a parochial schoolboy who would not let an old woman shovel her own snow—these were some of the pieces of the puzzle of Fred Cowan that emerged today.

In the hours after Mr. Cowan shot five people and then killed himself, neighbors and friends described him alternately as a "nice man" and "real prejudiced."

His drinking companions of the Galway Bay Bar had heard him talk for years of his hatred of Jews and blacks and they heard him express ardent support for Nazism.

They said they just considered this a sort of eccentricity, and a rather harmless one. A few said they thought he was a bit "weird."

They knew that he wore a belt buckle with a swastika and an Afrika Korps hat and that among the tattoos on his big, powerful body was a swastika.

This they also considered no more threatening than his passion for guns or his dedication to weightlifting.

He would sometimes display his huge muscles in front of the mirror in the bar.

### No Reports of Violence

No one had ever known him to be violent, threatening or of ever having been in a fist fight.

In the neighborhood, schoolboys in particular, even those who had seen his guns and his weightlifting apparatus, and his Nazi flags in the house where he lived with his parents, had never felt any fear of him.

Yet Army officials say that Mr. Cowan was convicted twice by special courts-martial, in November 1964 for being absent without leave and slightly more than a year later for leaving the scene of an accident in West Germany, where he was stationed at the time. Records show he did not serve in Vietnam, was never wounded in battle, and served six months for his Army offenses. The Army would not disclose what kind of discharge he had received.

One of Mr. Cowan's brothers, David, is a fireman, and the other, Jim, works in the post office. Both are married and have their own homes.

Fred Cowan never married. He did not seem to like women particularly. This was recalled vividly by John O'Neill, 14 years old, who lives at 32 Woodbury Avenue, near the Cowan house. At one time, he said, when he and some other boys were listening to Mr. Cowan talk about guns, one of the boys asked him if he would rather have a gun or a girl.

"He said he did not need girls," the boy recalled, and then he said Mr. Cowan then said, "if you want to be a man, get a gun."

The boy said Mr. Cowan once said, after reviling Jews and blacks:

"I am the second Hitler."

Tommy Gee, 14 years old, who shines shoes in the Galway Bay Bar, said:

"I thought he was all right. I never thought he would do anything like this. He used to take us kids to the auto races in Trenton. He took me to the rifle range. He even let me use his .22. He was always good to us."

Anthony Frustaglia, who has lived next door to the Cowan house, at 40 Woodbury Avenue, for about 50 years, and had known Fred since he was a little boy more than 30 years ago, said: "He was a nice fellow. You couldn't find a better neighbor. He used to sit in the backyard and read. He mowed the lawn and raked the leaves.

"When you hear something like this today about your neighbor you get skinned like a chicken."

He told how during the past summer, Mr. Cowan put new green siding on their two-story house.

A couple of winters ago, he said, when he had gone to the hospital, his wife started to shovel snow.

"Freddy told her not to shovel the snow," he said. "He took the shovel and did it himself."

Minna Thompson, who is now middle aged and has been a school crossing guard for some 20 years, recalled:

"He was always so nice. Even as a boy. I cannot believe it. And such the family."

Mr. Cowan attended Roman Catholic schools here. He spent eight years at Blessed Sacrament Grammar School, graduating in 1957, and was described as a "brilliant, but sensitive child," by Sister Constance, the principal there.

He went on to Archbishop Stepinac School in White Plains, where he received an academic diploma in 1961 and where he was in the top quarter of his class. After one year at Villanova University in a suburb of Philadelphia, he failed to enroll for his second year of engineering studies.

At the Galway Bay Bar, with its pool table at the rear, its American flag, its pictures of Mickey Mantle and a trotting horse, Francis J. McKenna said he had known Mr. Cowan for about 30 years, and insisted that he always felt that "one of these days Freddy was going to snap."

But he could not remember a single instance in which Mr. Cowan had ever threatened anyone or had had a fight. Neither could anyone else in the crowded bar. Some people thought it strange that Mr. Cowan had had a sticker on his car reading: "Impeach Carter." But this they considered another one of his harmless eccentricities.