

## OFF THE RECORD

## Of Cops and Right-to-Lifers

Elizabeth Kadetsky

Local advocates for Operation Rescue, the anti-abortion league known for its tenacious and sometimes violent battles against family planning clinics, feel they have found a friend in the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. July 28 in San Francisco, the eight-member federal commission will review video tapes from organizers of pro-life sit-ins, who claim they have evidence that can put law enforcers like Sheriff Al Noren behind bars.

Operation Rescue's protest at the Choice Medical Clinic in Santa Cruz on May 6 is one of at least nine demonstrations nationwide the commission will examine for evidence of

parently switching tactics, "and we're satisfied." Noren refused comment on footage showing him blocking a camera and evaded specific allegations by repeating, "As far as any investigation in the Bay Area goes, I have no comment and nobody's contacted me about anything." Asked if someone on his staff might be better equipped to respond, he retorted, "They'd better not. No one in my office will comment."

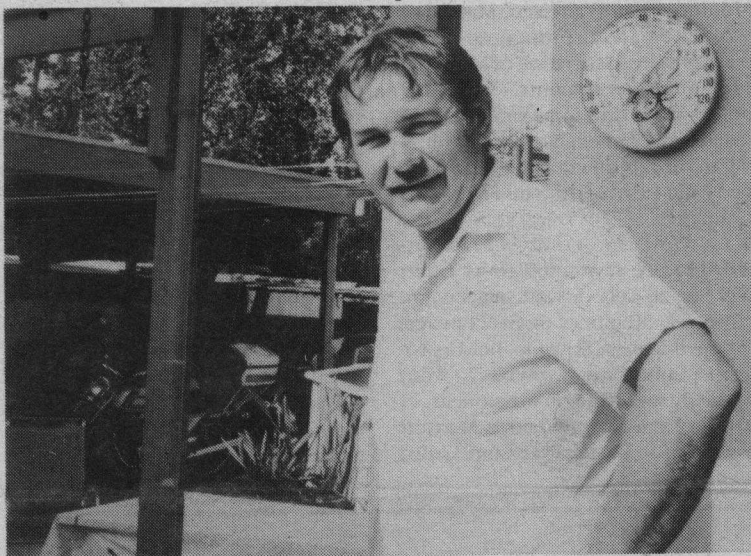
Unlike some people, Operation Rescue knows the value of politics well played. The group garners heavy television and newspaper coverage due to its confrontational tenor at protests. In a video it distributes to

His coworker Barbara Brooks, however, suggested the contrary—attitude is key—when she matter-of-factly noted that commission chair Evans is "very much involved in that whole [anti-abortion] issue." The upshot of that involvement could be even more national attention focused on Operation Rescue. Evans told *The Sun* his colleagues should press for a full investigation. "I hope they will join me in calling on the president," he said, and seeing the issue play out before the most prominent of tribunals, the Justice Department.

Ronald Schubert, local organizer for Operation Rescue, understands the significance of the investigation. He also knows the value of the media well played. Responding to a call for routine comment on Operation Rescue trials now wending their way through the county court system, Schubert suggested this reporter view a selection from his cache of videos. At his Santa Cruz home, the Polish immigrant trotted out a cut-and-edited version of the May 6 protest also to be perused by the federal commission, slowing it down and repeating sections where he believes sheriffs broken a woman's arm and inflicted undue pain.

"We attempt to identify with the babies," explained Schubert, an evangelical Christian, as he likened his movement to the form of nonviolent protest employed by Martin Luther King Jr. and in Germany against the Nazis. "We're limp and helpless like this. We try and assume that same posture," he continued, pointing at his cohorts on screen and then holding up his arms, throwing back his head and mimicking images pro-lifers use to depict the remains of third-trimester abortions.

The odd part, though, is that the protagonists of Schubert's video *don't* resemble waves of peaceful protesters passively submitting to police arrest. Schubert's subjects seem to be a more active breed of civil disobeyers. They lock their fingers under their knees as officers grab at their arms; their bodies go rigid as they resist the prodings of the law enforcers entrusted with carting them away; and they sometimes flip their bodies rather than acquiesce to officers pulling at their arms. To someone who has witnessed countless civil disobedience protests of a more leftist ilk, Operation Rescue appears to provoke police violence. We'll see how the feds view it.



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Operation Rescuer Ron Schubert

police brutality and uneven application of the law. According to the commission's director of congressional and public affairs, John Eastman, the allegations include that police slapped protesters with outlandish bail, used the RICO anti-racketeering statute inappropriately and manhandled protesters just a little too zealously.

In the case of the Santa Cruz demonstration, Sheriff Noren bears the brunt of the allegations. Santa Cruz Operation Rescue forwarded the commission footage that shows Noren clearly blocking one videotaper fixed on an arrest. Noren's deputies, the group claims, used force so excessive they twisted wrists, bruised knuckles and broke one arm.

Not known for public relations savvy, Noren's instinct when contacted for response was to stonewall. "I have no knowledge whatsoever about any investigation or the office of whatever you call it," Noren told *The Sun*. "We've looked into it," he added, ap-

win over skeptics and ferret out new leaders, national Operation Rescue organizer Randall Terry points out repeatedly, "Politicians respond to heat, not light." So it's no surprise a virtual deluge of affidavits from the right-to-life camps have flooded the Commission on Civil Rights. "The number of complaints is so large," said commission chair Bill Evans, who will bring the issue before his peers this week, "and the charges so serious, this deserves attention from the highest agencies." Evans would not enumerate the communiqués, but said they have been coming in a steady stream since last November.

This is not to say the commission's probe is political. The agency's Washington spokesperson, Eastman, went out of his way to claim that the potential investigation reveals no bias on the part of commissioners. His department has probed police conduct at all sorts of protests "numerous times," he explained.