

US jury convicts leader of neo-Nazi threat campaign

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In this Feb. 26, 2020, file photo, Raymond Duda, special agent in charge in Seattle, speaks as he stands next to a poster that was mailed earlier in the year to the home of Chris Ingalls, an investigative reporter with KING-TV in Seattle, during a news conference in Seattle. A federal jury in Seattle on Wednesday, Sept. 29, 2021, convicted Kaleb Cole, a leader of a neo-Nazi campaign to threaten journalists and Jewish activists in three states. Cole and three others were charged last year with having sent Swastika-laden posters to journalists and people affiliated with the Anti-Defamation League in Washington, Florida and Arizona. (AP Photo/Ted S. Warren, File)

A federal jury in Seattle on Wednesday convicted a leader of a neo-Nazi campaign to threaten journalists and Jewish activists in three states.

The jury deliberated for about 90 minutes Wednesday following a two-day trial before convicting 25-year-old Kaleb Cole of five felony charges, including conspiracy, mailing threatening communications and interfering with a federally protected activity. He could face a decade in prison when Judge John C. Coughenour sentences him in January.

Cole, most recently of Montgomery, Texas, was a leader of a hate group called Atomwaffen Division. He and four others were charged last year with having cyberstalked and sent Swastika-laden posters to journalists and employees of the Anti-Defamation League in Washington state,

Arizona and Florida, telling them, “You have been visited by your local Nazis,” “Your Actions have Consequences,” and “We are Watching.”

The posters included images such as a hooded figure preparing to throw a Molotov cocktail at a house, and the words “Death to Pigs” — the same message followers of Charles Manson scrawled in victims’ blood during a home invasion murder.

Cole has been on law enforcement’s radar since at least 2018, when he was stopped at U.S. Customs upon returning from a trip to Europe. Authorities searched his cell phone and found photos of him at various sites throughout Europe, displaying a white supremacist flag and performing the Nazi salute.

In 2019, Seattle police obtained an “extreme risk protection order” against him, seizing nine guns from his home. They said Cole had “gone from espousing hate to now taking active steps or preparation for an impending ‘race war.’”

Those steps including organizing paramilitary-style “hate camps” in Nevada and Washington, investigators said.

During the trial, victims testified about the impact of receiving the posters, the U.S. attorney's office said in a news release. Some temporarily left their homes and installed security systems; one bought a gun and took a firearms safety class; and another left her job as a journalist.

In his closing argument, assistant U.S. attorney Thomas Woods told the jury Cole “was not simply sending a message of hate, he was sending a statement of terror.”

Cole did not call any witnesses or testify on his own behalf. His attorney, Chris Black, argued that the posters did not constitute threats.

“What we have here is a group of disillusioned young men who want to believe that they are engaged in some sort of propaganda war with journalists and organizations like the Anti-Defamation League,” Black said. “But they never engaged in violence. They never planned violence. And most importantly, they never intended to communicate an actual threat to commit violence.”

His three co-defendants pleaded guilty and have already been sentenced, with the other leader of the conspiracy, Cameron Shea, receiving a three-year term after apologizing and saying, “I cannot put into words the guilt that I feel about this fear and pain that I caused.”

Johnny Roman Garza, of Queen Creek, Arizona, was sentenced to 16 months for affixing one of the posters on the bedroom window of a Jewish journalist.

Taylor Parker-Dipeppe, of Spring Hill, Florida, received no prison time for attempting to deliver a flier but leaving it at the wrong address.

Parker-Dipeppe was severely abused by his father and stepfather and hid his transgender identity from his co-conspirators — the judge found that he had suffered enough.