

INSIDE SCIENTOLOGY | A TIMES SPECIAL REPORT

ECCLESIASTICAL JUSTICE

DEFECTORS: LEADER EMPLOYS VIOLENT CONFESSIONALS, DEGRADING RITUALS. SCIENTOLOGY OFFICIALS: WE'RE NOT FOR EVERYONE.



David Miscavige, at the 2004 opening of the Church of Scientology, Madrid: "We want you to know who we are, what we believe, and all we stand for." Getty Images

LAST OF THREE PARTS

BY THOMAS C. TOBIN AND JOE CHILDS
TIMES STAFF WRITERS

The four high-ranking executives who left Scientology say that church leader David Miscavige not only physically attacked members of his executive staff, he messed with their minds.

He frequently had groups of managers jump into a pool or a lake. He mustered them into group confessions that sometimes spun into free-for-alls, with people hitting one another.

Mike Rinder, who defended the church to the media for two decades, couldn't stomach what was happening on the inside.

The tactics to keep executives in line "are wrong from a Scientology viewpoint," said Rinder, who walked away two years ago. "They are not standard practice of Scientology. They are just not humanitarian. And they are just outright evil."

Church spokesmen confirm that managers are ordered into pools and assembled for group confessions. It's part of the "ecclesiastical justice" system the church imposes on poor performers.

Rinder and the other defectors couldn't cut it in the tough world of Scientology's Sea Org, a group whose members dedicate their lives to service of the church, the church says. Rather than accept their own failings, the defectors are putting a sinister twist on something that is normal.

The Sea Org is a "crew of tough sons of bitches," said church spokesman Tommy Davis, an 18-year veteran of the group.

"The Sea Org is not a democracy. The members of it agree with a man named L. Ron Hubbard. They abide by his policies ... and we follow it to the T, to the letter, to the punctuation marks. And if you disagree with that and you don't like it, you don't belong. Then you leave."

A BETTER THETAN

The order came about 10 p.m. on a winter's night: Report to the swimming pool.

From around the church's postcard-pretty base in the mountains east of Los Angeles, some 70 staff members turned out in their Navy-style uniforms. David Miscavige was unhappy with the troops, again.

The punishment the leader had in mind was not new to members of the Sea Org. Hubbard, the church's late founder, "overboarded" Sea Org members in the 1970s when he ran Scientology from a ship named the *Apollo*.

Miscavige had the staffers line up at the diving board in their uniforms, and one by one, jump into the pool. Before each person went in, Norman Starkey, once the captain of the *Apollo*, called on them to be better spiritual beings. He recited a traditional Sea Org saying:

We commit your sins and errors to the deep and trust you will rise a better thetan.

Miscavige ordered the group to go to an office in their wet clothes and stay put until they figured out where they had failed.

Tom De Vocht says he can't recall what angered Miscavige that chilly night early in 2005. But he well remembers the doubts that crept into his head as he sat wet and shivering.

What am I doing here?

De Vocht had joined the church with his mother when he was just 10 and rose to a top executive post at Scientology's spiritual headquarters in Clearwater. But in the months after that mass dunking, he no longer recognized the organization.

Neither did Rinder, who went into the pool that night with De Vocht. Two others already had acted on their doubts. Marty Rathbun, one of

STORY CONTINUES ON PAGE 5A

EXCLUSIVE VIDEO INTERVIEWS WITH CHURCH DEFECTORS AND MORE AT TAMPABAY.COM/SCIENTOLOGY

At moment of death, an icon of Iran revolt

The killing of a 26-year-old woman in Tehran, caught on video, becomes the emotional heart of the uprising.

BY MICHAEL KRUSE
Times Staff Writer

First the eyes.
Then the blood.
"Don't be afraid! Don't be afraid! Don't be afraid, Neda dear, don't be afraid!" the man with the white hair yells at the younger woman flat on her back on the street in Tehran.

This was Saturday evening, inside the unrest in Iran, captured by cell phones held so close the viewer feels like a kneeling eyewitness to the moment of her death. By Monday, two short video clips had gone global on Facebook and YouTube — gruesome, horrid, impossible not to watch.

Neda Agha-Soltan, 26, shot, one bullet to the heart, had become the face of the protests.

She is to this crisis, already, what the man in front of the tank was to Tiananmen Square. She could be even more — a martyr in a country where that word is not used lightly.

Neda, whose name in Farsi means "voice" or "calling," was the second of three children from a middle-class family, a former university student and



Iranian-Americans carry posters with Neda Agha-Soltan's image at a protest Monday in Los Angeles. Getty Images

3 million votes questioned
Iran's Guardian Council acknowledges problems in 50 voting districts. **3A**

See the video: To watch the scene of Neda's death in Tehran, go to links.tampabay.com.

IN TAMPA BAY
\$69M tax bill

The IRS says Ralph Hughes owed \$69.3 million when he died. **1B**

IN TAMPA BAY
221 citations

Spectators who show up at street racing on Fourth Street N are ticketed. **1B**

IN SPORTS
Glover shines

Lucas Glover ends up as the star of the U.S. Open, Gary Shelton writes. **1C**

TODAY'S WEATHER
Scattered storms

8 a.m. 86° Noon 92° 4 p.m. 89° 8 p.m. 83°
50% rain chance.
More, back page of Sports

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Bickering Lightning owners on track for messy divorce

Commissioner will decide who gets custody of the team.

Turns out, the Lightning's troubles did not end with another lost season.

This morning, the woes grow deeper. Perhaps, by this evening, they will turn uglier.

There is unrest in the ownership group. There is dissension in the ranks. And, almost one year to the day after OK Hockey took control of the franchise, the possibility of a messy divorce between bickering owners is a real possibility.

Oren Koules and Len Barrie are scheduled to have a meeting today with NHL commissioner Gary Bettman to determine which one of them will have the authority to make decisions for the franchise. In essence, the commissioner is determining custody of a hockey team.

And so the humiliation of an ownership group reaches a new crescendo. If you thought it was bad when Dan Boyle called them liars, or John Tortorella described them as cowboys or Barry Melrose accused them of being meddlers, then this is worse.

This makes them look like complete incompetents.

Which, hopefully, is the message Bettman delivers.

For months, there have been whispers of a rift between Koules and Barrie. Of differences of opinion on payroll, on



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Vinny Lecavalier, and on general manager Brian Lawton. And that is fine. Reasonable people disagree all of the time.

But these guys rarely seem to reach the level of reasonable. They do not understand compromise, and they do not grasp the concept of cooperation. Or, for that matter, honesty.

You see, Koules and Barrie have long denied any hint of boardroom brawling. They have talked and acted as if they are moving in unison, and dismiss anyone who suggests otherwise as a misguided critic.

Yet numerous people inside the organization and around the Tampa Bay business community have painted a much different portrait of the ownership group during recent interviews with *Times* beat writer Damian Cristodero. **See ROMANO, 9A**