

DIBBLE and the DEVIL

Fort Campbell expert discovered some old black magic in Panama

By BRUCE ALLAR
Special Writer

FORT CAMPBELL, Ky. — College credits have seldom been earned in a more bizarre setting.

Consider the location: a classroom on the grounds of Fort Campbell military base in southwestern Kentucky and part of Tennessee.

Consider the props: an altar with a skull, black candles in devil-like shapes, a book opened to cryptic messages in Theban script (the "witch's alphabet") — all arrayed in front of an American flag. Uncle Sam meets "the Great Satan."

Finally, consider the prof: 38-year-old Chief Warrant Officer James R. Dibble, a special agent in the Army's criminal-investigation division. Dibble may know more about black magic, Satanism and paganism than anyone else in government issue.

It should come as no surprise that 15 students enrolled through nearby Austin Peay State University in Tennessee are diligently taking notes during his three-credit course: "Sects, Cults and Deviant Movements."

Dibble's specialty brought him notoriety in the wake of the U.S. invasion of Panama. His mission in Panama was to sort through the occult paraphernalia uncovered in the home, office and "witch house" of deposed strongman Manuel Noriega. In the cache he found signs of animal entrails and vats of blood believed used in ritualistic ceremonies, as well as a diary written by one of Noriega's "personal witches."

Such evidence indicated to Dibble that Noriega was using brujeria, a term for witchcraft associated with Afro-Caribbean religions. Brujeria is a combination of Cuban-based Santeria and Brazilian-based Candomble, which has been described as similar to voodoo.

Noriega also may have been involved in Palo Mayombe, a cult of African origin that uses human body parts, especially skulls and brains, in attempts to conjure up spirits.

"The witch house contained brujeria directed toward politicians and journalists not only in Panama but in the United States as well," Dibble said.

Targets of Noriega's black magic reportedly included President Bush, ex-President Reagan, former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and U.S. Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C.

Because Noriega's drug-trafficking trial is pending in federal court in Miami, Dibble will not tell all he learned about the former dictator's dealings with the occult. Much of the evidence remains in boxes in Panama, he said, unreleased by the new government there.

But Noriega's activities appear to have run the gamut from the innocuous (wearing red underwear during his arrest in January to ward off demons) to the insidious (sacrificing animals and possibly humans in an attempt to manipulate the spirits of his enemies).

"He was using everything at his disposal to administer his country," Dibble said. "He is a formidable opponent, but he was ultimately corrupted him. He felt he was so untouchable that he decided to take on the U.S."

Dibble's main goal in teaching has been to promote understanding of the occult, particularly Afro-Caribbean religions. Most of his listeners are law-enforcement officers. Besides his Austin Peay course, he also has taught at the University of North Florida's Institute of Police Technology and Management.

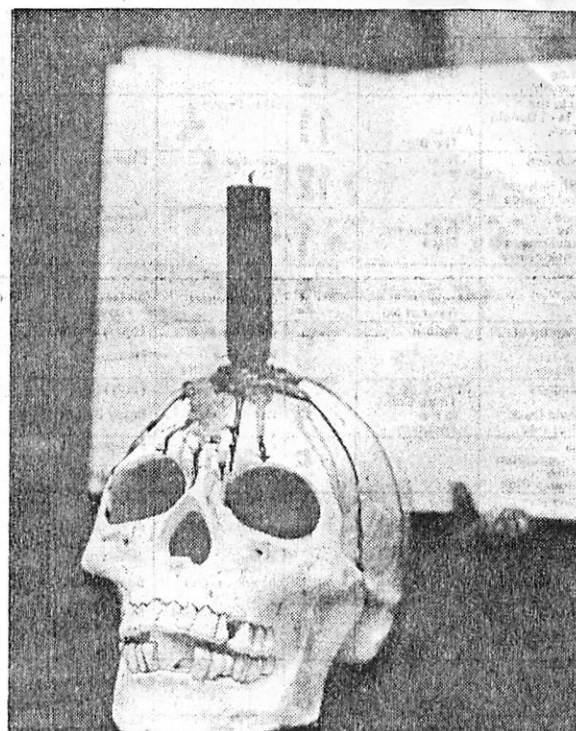
His message: Understand the beliefs of religious cults and deviant movements, and you'll be better prepared to

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Chief Warrant Officer James R. Dibble, a special agent in the Army's criminal-investigation division, uses occult paraphernalia to illustrate his lectures.

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STAFF PHOTOS BY JEANIE ADAMS

handle their criminal elements.

Many of the drug lords and their followers who move cocaine into the United States, for instance, belong to either the Santeria or Palo Mayombe sects, Dibble said. They believe that their rituals can manipulate fate.

Drug runners often use ceremonies to invoke a god they

Dibble's work is knowing the occult

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believe protects them from bullets, knives and other weapons. Many then think this makes them invulnerable to police.

"You understand why runners caught in Miami will get out of their cars with automatics in their hands and shoot it out with police, or why police have to go in and kill everyone in an arrest," Dibble said. "This is what prompts such bizarre activity. They think, 'I'm in my spiritual world. You can't touch me.'"

Since he has been called upon regularly over the past four years by law-enforcement agencies to assist with cult cases, Dibble's sideline has been labeled "goatbusting" by friends. (Goats and chickens are frequently sacrificed in ritualistic magic.)

He is not a dispassionate researcher. He admits to feeling the presence of forces in places touched by the occult. He said he has sensed them where altars have been set up and recently at a grave-desecration site in Georgia, where robbers may have been searching for bones to be used in Satanic ceremonies.

"I have the utmost respect for this subject matter," said Dibble, a Catholic. "But do we perpetuate its secrecy by ignoring it? Or do we go after it and try to understand it, even though it makes us feel uneasy?"

He believes that deviant sects have given many Afro-Caribbean religions a bad name.

Born when Catholic beliefs were superimposed upon African pagan traditions, such religions have wide followings. Candomble, for instance, can claim 9 million believers. And Santeria is so popular around Miami that, according to Dibble, lawmakers there are considering the legalization of certain ritualistic animal sacrifices. The religions also

are popping up in other large U.S. urban centers as Latin Americans move in.

"I think a little more religious tolerance is the key," Dibble said.

"Santeria is one of the most beautiful religions I've ever encountered. It's colorful. It's humanistic. . . . People don't understand the benevolent side of it. They only see it when it gets out of hand."

Dibble will be leaving Fort Campbell soon. The Army has assigned him to a two-year stint with NATO security, based in Brussels, Belgium, a routine reassignment that has nothing to do with his specialty in the occult.

He'll leave this summer, devoting his spare time there to learning about European witchcraft and Satanism.

While he advocates tolerance for Afro-Caribbean religions, he has nothing but contempt for Satanism. In fact, Dibble can become preachy on the subject.

The 18-year Army veteran's first encounter with the occult came a decade ago, while investigating a grave-desecration site on federal property. At first he received little encouragement from the Army or his wife, who worried that he would become obsessed with the subject. Since then, his views on the occult have hardened.

"Does Satanism pose a threat to modern-day law enforcement?" he asked his students at Fort Campbell. "Yes, yes, yes."

Dibble traces modern Satanism, the antithesis of Christianity, to Aleister Crowley, an occult English poet who died in 1947. His advocated a credo that "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law."

This means that Satanist practitioners feel free to assert their wills without fear of moral judgment, Dibble said. He said it's a short step from there to deviant sexual practices, grave desecrations and suicide pacts.

Adolescents are particularly drawn to Satanist philosophy, according to Dibble, because its precepts are easy to grasp and self-gratifying.

"Superficially, these occult traditions offer no rules," he said. And cult trappings offer a sense of belonging to a group.

"I'm really disturbed with what I see," he said. "I see a world of blind people, where everybody is caught up in such a microcosm that they can't even see what's going on in the society around them, even in their own houses."

"Children are being brought up in a vacuum, and spiritually deviant ideas are permeating their thoughts."

The subject consumes Dibble. He believes that adult Satanists are systematically abusing children — emotionally, physically and sexually — as ritualistic offerings of innocence to Lucifer. Their sophistication allows them to remain underground, Dibble said, but he thinks their numbers are growing.

Dibble said that Satanists are drawn to urban areas, where they can safely blend in with their surroundings, but areas near rural locations where they can practice their rituals. The area surrounding Fort Campbell, despite a military presence, is seeing an increase in signs of Satanic activity, he said.

"Mostly what we're seeing now is dabblers," said detective Sam Knowlton of the nearby Clarksville, Tenn., police force, one of Dibble's students. "It's starting to become a concern because of gang-related activity that may be moving into Clarksville."

"We're not safe," Dibble maintains. Malevolent cults are not things that grab a few headlines in Panama and then fade from view. He returned again to Satanism:

"We're not shielded from it," he said. "It's very pervasive in the South."