The Black Legion was an organization that splintered from the Ku Klux Klan and operated in the United States in the 1930s. The organization was founded by William Shepard in east central Ohio. The group's total membership, estimated between 20,000 and 30,000, was centered in Detroit, Michigan, though the Legion was also highly active in Ohio and one of its self-described leaders, Virgil "Bert" Effinger, lived and worked in Lima, Ohio.

The Associated Press described the organization on May 31, 1936, as a group of loosely federated night-riding bands operating in several States without central discipline or common purpose beyond the enforcement by lash and pistol of individual leaders' notions of "Americanism."

The death of WPA worker Charles Poole, kidnapped and murdered in southwest Detroit, caused authorities to finally arrest and successfully try and convict a group of twelve men, thereby ending its reign of terror.

Organization and structure The Black Legion was organized along paramilitary lines and had five brigades, 16 regiments, 64 battalions, and 256 companies. Although its members boasted that there were one million legionnaires in Michigan, it probably had only between 20,000 and 30,000 members in the state in the 1930s, one third of whom lived in Detroit. Members wore black uniforms with skull-and-crossbones insignia and were allegedly responsible for numerous murders of alleged communists and socialists.

Known killings were the slaying of black laborer Silas Coleman May 25, 1935[2] and a WPA worker named Charles Poole May 13, 1936.[citation needed]

Ritual murder An article in The Sydney Morning Herald, May 25th, 1936, alleges the Black Legion are a secret society who practice ritual murder.[3] In media .. A film based on the movement called Black Legion was released in 1937 by Warner Brothers and starred Humphrey Bogart. The April 1, 1937 episode of True Detective Mysteries, a radio show based on the magazine of the same title, was based directly on the Black Legion and the murder of Poole. The March 20, 1938, episode of the radio show The Shadow, with Orson Welles in the title role, was entitled "The White Legion"; it was based loosely on the Black Legion movement. Mentioned as being active in Lansing, Michigan during the 1920's and 1930's in the The Autobiography of Malcolm X.

References

[1] takes you to [http://www.nathanieltumer.com/blacklegion2.htm](http://www.nathanieltumer.com/blacklegion2.htm) *** see below


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Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Legion_%28political_movement%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Legion_%28political_movement%29) (I know, I told students never to use wikipedia... but I think this article is okay)

*** Black Legion: American Terrorists – FBI Investigation Files

Founder of Black Legion Is Just Plain 'Doctor' Billy to Bellaire Home FolkS

Bellaire, Ohio -- "General" Billy Shepard is a nervous, active little man with a jet black pompadour and squinting eyes. To the 8,000 residents of this Ohio river town he is known as "Doctor Billy," and for 15 years he has been health commissioner of Bellaire at a salary of $25 a month. They know "Doctor Billy" as a joiner, a jovial drug store orator and a man who likes to be a bit mysterious at times, but withal a shameless fellow who can absorb a lot of kidding. But William Shepard, commander-in-chief of the Black legion in America, is a title which draws little more than mock solemnity or open guffaws from the sophisticated members of the Round Table luncheon club, which meets regularly in the rear of Dankworth's drug store.

Admits Founding Legion: Upon such a man are the eyes of the nation and many parts of the world centered today, for "Doc" Shepard has become an international figure as the founder and leader of the Black Legion. He admits readily enough that he conceived the idea of the Black legion when he was thrown out of the Ku Klux Klan 11 years ago because he formed his own "Black Guard" by coloring the white hoods of his followers with lamp black.

Klan Was Jealous: Grand Dragon James A. Colecott was jealous of the Black Guards' popularity is the way Doctor Billy puts it. Colecott charged Shepard was trying to form a separate organization within the Klan. Source: News-clipping (FBI file 961-7398-52) FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION Cleveland, Ohio  5/24/35

Synopsis of Facts: Secret organization national in scope and military in nature, apparently organized by dr. Shepard, of Bellaire, O. membership restricted to native-born, white, genteel, protestant citizens. Former members. state organization is revolutionary and is terrorizing former members for withdrawing, general of organization, at Lima, O., has ordered subordinate to wreck picture shows, burn roadhouses and assault individuals. organization purports to have completely equipped machine guns company in detroit, Mich. Former members advise 80% of FERA employes at Lima, O., are members and relief in district is controlled by head or order. Chief of Police, Lima, is reputed to be a member; General of legion, lima, stated to former member that 60 to 70 members of department of justice were members; also stated that Cincinnati, o., agent was admitted to order fall '34, Event of unknown nature scheduled for Nov. 20-26. Ritual, organization, and partial list of members set forth Reference: Bureau letters dated 4-22-35 and 5-11-35

Details: Agent interviewed Mr. J. F. Cordrey, Post Office Inspector, stationed at Lima, Ohio, [was the FBI source of information] . . . . . . The following information relative to the history, ritual, organization, officers, members and meeting places of the Order were furnished by .. The Black Legion, historical in itself, was first formed prior to the Revolutionary War, and it was this organization that organized the Boston Tea Party, after the Colonies won their independence; there being no more need for the existence of the order it disbanded; however, those who were Generals at that time, there being one General for each of the 13 colonies, handed down their rank to their sons, and thus the order was kept alive. the next time that the order felt it must become active was immediately after the Civil war, and a band of gorillas [sic] under Quantrell was organized and operated until they had satisfactorily straightened out the country. it was again disbanded and has now been reorganized as the country is once again being threatened by various sorts ISMS. *(Note: the above is part of the speech made by General Effinger at meetings.)*
Ritual and Initiation: members are armed and masked, recruits are lined up for preliminary questions and oath. Grounds are patrolled by masked armed guards.

Captain of the Guard –
1. Are you a native-born, white, gentle, protestant citizen?
2. Do you understand that this organization you are about to join is strictly secret and military in character?
3. This organization is classed by our enemies as an outlaw organization; are you willing to join such an organization? (The above questions are asked each recruit.)

Preliminary Oath – Kneel on your right knee; place your left hand over your heart and raise your right hand; repeat after me: (Say I and repeat your name.) "Do solemnly promise and swear that I will never reveal any part or portion of the work I have already received or that which is about to be commuted to me. I further promise and swear I will never reveal a single word of anything that has transpired here tonight or the identity of anyone I may recognize in case I am refused membership in this organization. The penalty for violation of this is -- DEATH." (The recruits having passed this test and placed under oath are now taken before the larger body of Night Riders and surrounded by armed masked men.)

Do you believe in the separation of church and state? Will you lie to protect a comrade in this organization, if ordered to do so by your superior officer? To what political organization do you now belong? will you forget your party and vote for the best man if ordered to do so by your superior officer? Can you keep a secret?

(On the last question a phoney password is passed around and one of the Blacks purposely repeats it, and then he is taken out and hung before all the recruits; a special harness is used and the rope is hooked on; a strap in the back; in the dark it looks like a true hanging. Carter stated that he has frequently been the victim in this act.)

Colonel to Lieut. Colonel – "Do you think these men have shown their fitness to join this organization by their answers to questions?"
Answer: "Sir, I wish to subject these men to further questioning, have I your permission?" Answer: "You have."

Questions By Lieut. Colonel – "Can you ride a horse and shoot a rifle?" "Are you properly armed?" "Will you properly arm yourself as soon as possible?" "Do you believe in Lynch Law?" "Will you sign your name in Blood?"

Lieut. Colonel to Colonel – "Sir, these men have answered all questions properly, and if they are bound by the oath that we are bound by -- they are acceptable to me."

Black Oath – Kneel on your right knee; place your left hand over your heart; raise your right hand; repeat after me: (orders are then given to cover these men with loaded guns, and if they fail or falter, you know your duty.) "In the name of God and Devil and by the power of light and darkness, good and evil, here under the black arch of heavens avenging symbol, I pledge and consecrate my body, my limbs, my heart and my mind and swear by all powers of heaven and Hell that I will devote my life to the obedience of any superior officers in this organization and that I will never betray a comrade in this organization. I further promise and swear that I will destroy, without mercy, all FEDERALS, Jay hawkers and their abetors, whose serpent trail has winnowed the fair fields of our allies and sympathizers; these I will fight without mercy as long as breath remains. Before divulging a single work or implied pledge of this, my solemn oath, and obligation, I will pray to an avenging God and unmerciful devil that my limbs be broken with stones and cut off by inches; that they may be for carion birds; that my body be ripped open and my bowels torn out and fed to the foulest bird of the air, and that my head be split open and my brains scattered over the earth, my heart be torn out and roasted over flames of sulphur. And, lastly, may my soul be given unto torment, may it be submerged in a molten metal and stifled in the flames of Hell, and may this punishment be meeted out to me through all eternity."

Signs and Pass Words –
Pass word: PUT (name of place) Americans only on guard.
Call word: LIXTO (When this word is received by a Black Knight, either by word of mouth, telephone, telegraph or mail, he is supposed to drop anything he is doing and take up arms and go to the place named: for instance, if a call was made for Cleveland, the word would be LIXTO, CLEVELAND.)
Test word: (Under the star of the guard, which is answered by the party approached saying Until Death)
Signs: At night-time either a flashlight, match or auto head lights are flashed three times, and if the party flashed is a Black, he will answer with three flashes. In day-time the hat is pushed back on the head three times and is answered the same way. Any sign may be used in multiple of three and must be answered the same way.

Degrees:
1. Lowest rank -- Foot legion
2. Night Riders
3. Black Knight
4. Armed Guard
5. Bullet Guard (consists of only selected Black Knights)

Organization
1. Squad -- consists of 6 men and a corporal
2. Company -- consists of 78 privates, 18 corporals, 6 sergeants
3. Battalion -- consists of 3 companies and is commanded by a major
4. Regiment -- consists of 3 battalions and is commanded by a colonel

In "Black Legion" (the film directed 1936 by Archie Mayo), Humphrey Bogart gives an outstanding performance as factory laborer Frank Taylor, who loses a promotion to a foreign-born coworker. Filled with hatred, Taylor joins the Black Legion, a secret white supremacist organization. The group burns down the barn of Taylor's coworker, scaring him out of town. Thus, Taylor receives the promotion. But when Taylor is forced to spend his time recruiting new members for the Legion, he is demoted from plant foreman back to factory laborer. The Legion attacks Taylor's new boss, making friends suspect Taylor's involvement, while Taylor himself begins drinking heavily in a fit of self-loathing. When Taylor finally loses his job and the Legion gears up for an attack on a former friend, it appears that Taylor has hit rock bottom—with only himself to blame. This fast-paced, black and white tale of moral decay and redemption is based on the true story of the Black Legion's condemnable actions in Michigan in the 1930s. Warner Home Video, Running Time: 83 minutes, Not Rated, B&W, Item #VWVA65273 – NOTE: This film is terrific ... watch it if you can find it.