

Ken Mieske, skinhead imprisoned in notorious Portland hate crime, dies in Salem hospital

Published: Wednesday, July 27, 2011, 1:51 PM Updated: Wednesday, July 27, 2011, 1:52 PM



By **Bryan Denson, The Oregonian**



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Ken Mieske

Ken Mieske -- who in 1988 perpetrated Portland's most notorious hate crime, the beating death of Ethiopian immigrant Mulugeta Seraw -- has died.

The Oregon Department of Corrections confirmed this morning that Mieske, an inmate since 1989, died on Tuesday at Salem Hospital at 4:30 p.m.

Mieske, 45, had long suffered from hepatitis C, according to those familiar with his treatment for the disease. Prison officials declined to comment on his cause of death.



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Mulugeta Seraw

On Nov. 13, 1988, Mieske and two other members of a skinhead gang called East Side White Pride attacked a group of Ethiopian men in Southeast Portland after a traffic altercation.

Mieske, known as "Ken Death" during his days as a death metal rock musician, took a Louisville Slugger baseball bat and beat Mulugeta Seraw to death.

The Seraw murder stunned Portland, but it shouldn't have.



Racist skinheads began to roost in the city in about 1985, even as white supremacists grew in number across Oregon, Washington and Idaho -- robbing banks, assaulting and killing minorities and trying to spark a race revolution.

On the night of Nov. 12, 1988, Mieske and two other Skinheads, Kyle Brewster and Steve Strasser, spotted Seraw as he stood outside a countryman's Oldsmobile, parked in the middle of



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Attorney Morris Dees questions Kenneth Mieske about bats confiscated from skinheads following the beating death of Mulugeta Seraw. Mieske clubbed Seraw to death.

the narrow side street where he lived.

The skinheads screamed at the Africans to move before attacking with boots and a baseball bat.

Brewster was punching Seraw when Mieske moved behind and struck the African twice on the head with the bat. Seraw fell bleeding on the cold pavement when Mieske took a final swing.

"It crushed his head between the bat and the hard pavement," said Portland police Detective Sgt. Tom Nelson, a key detective in the case.

All three of the skinheads were arrested and later pleaded guilty to murder, assault, and racial intimidation. In a 1990 subsequent civil suit brought by the Southern Poverty Law Center, a jury returned a \$12.5 million verdict against Metzger -- a record judgment for a U.S. racism case at the time.

Mieske was serving a life sentence for murder at the Oregon State Penitentiary before he died, said Department of Corrections spokeswoman Tonya Sly.

Many years after Mieske's incarceration, white power groups still referred to him as a "prisoner of war."

The killing of Seraw was a story carried worldwide and gave notoriety to Portland as a haven for racist skinhead groups. A major civil rights organization dubbed the town "Skinhead City."

-- **Bryan Denson**

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