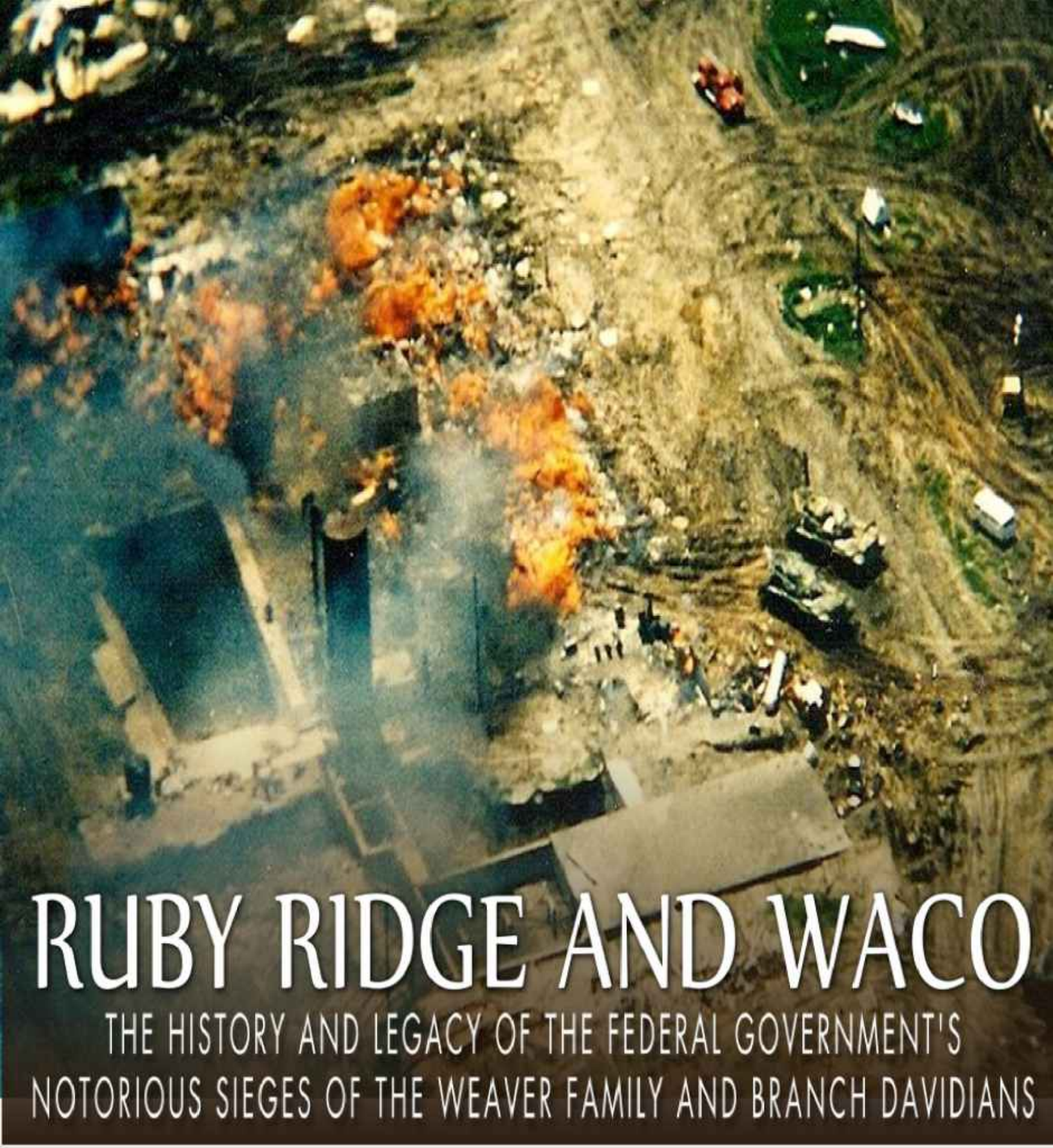

RUBY RIDGE AND WACO

THE HISTORY AND LEGACY OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S NOTORIOUS SIEGES OF THE WEAVER FAMILY AND BRANCH DAVIDIANS

by

CHARLES RIVER EDITORS

Ruby Ridge and Waco: The History and Legacy of the Federal Government's Notorious Sieges of the Weaver Family and Branch Davidians

By Charles River Editors

A surveillance photo of Vicki Weaver during the siege

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Introduction

The Weaver cabin at Ruby Ridge

Ruby Ridge (1992)

*Includes pictures

*Includes accounts of the standoff by federal agents and members of the Weaver family

*Includes online resources and a bibliography for further reading

*Includes a table of contents

"The Subcommittee is […] concerned that, as Marshals investigating the Weaver case learned facts that contradicted information they previously had been provided, they did not adequately integrate their updated knowledge into their overall assessment of who Randy Weaver was or what threat he might pose." – Excerpt from a report by the Senate Judiciary Committee

In the summer of 1992, federal agents surrounded a few acres of land isolated in Ruby Ridge, Idaho, where Randy Weaver, his wife Vicki, his 14 year old son Samuel, and his three young daughters were staying. Weaver was a former Green Beret who had come to the attention of the ATF and other federal agencies for a number of reasons, including associations with white supremacist groups and the possession of illegal shotguns. After being arrested and released on bail in 1991, Weaver failed to appear in court when necessary and was thus treated as a fugitive, bringing in the involvement of U.S. Marshals. For the rest of that year, attempts to bring in Weaver were rebuffed, and Weaver threatened to shoot anyone who came to his cabin to bring him in.

After a number of reconnaissance efforts and operations to arrest Weaver took place in 1992, federal agents from the U.S. Marshal Service and FBI surrounded the area on August 21 and wound up engaging in a firefight that ended in the deaths of 14 year old Samuel, one of the family dogs, and Marshal Bill Degan, who was shot by Weaver's friend Kevin Harris. In the aftermath of the shooting, Randy and Vicki brought Samuel's body to a shed near their main cabin, and they remained inside with Harris for the rest of the day.

On August 22, the federal agents were given new rules of engagement that were much more lax when it came to authorizing the use of deadly force. Instead of using the standard FBI policy that authorized deadly force to prevent suffering grievous harm as a method of self-defense, the agents, including snipers, were given the green light to shoot Randy and Kevin Harris if they were carrying weapons, regardless of whether they were actually targeting the federal agents. They were also authorized to shoot any adult after they surrendered if they were carrying a weapon.

Before negotiators could even reach the scene on the 22nd, an FBI sniper shot Randy in the back as he headed towards the shed where his son's body lay. As Randy, his 16 year old daughter Sara, and Harris headed back for cover in the cabin, the same sniper fired a shot at Harris' chest, which wounded him but also struck and killed Vicki, who was standing behind the cabin door holding her 10 month old daughter.

Ultimately, it would be several more days before negotiators talked Harris and the Weaver family into surrendering, but the recriminations were just starting. Due to the way the operations were handled, Harris would end up

being acquitted of all charges, and Weaver was acquitted of every charge except those involving his refusal to show up in court. Meanwhile, Ruby Ridge severely shook confidence in the way federal law enforcement operated, leading to investigations and reforms. Just as importantly, in addition to influencing how the government approached potential future conflicts with other groups, Ruby Ridge's most important legacy was that it enraged people who already had an anti-government bent. The most notable, of course, was Timothy McVeigh, who conducted what was at the time the deadliest terrorist attack in American history in Oklahoma City in April 1995 and cited Ruby Ridge as a motive.

Ruby Ridge and Waco: The History and Legacy of the Federal Government's Notorious Sieges of the Weaver Family and Branch Davidians chronicles the controversial event and the influence it had on subsequent events like the Oklahoma City bombing. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about Ruby Ridge like never before.

The Siege of Waco (1993)

Picture of a tank breaking down one of the compound's walls

*Includes pictures

*Includes accounts of the standoff by federal agents and members of the Branch Davidians

*Includes online resources and a bibliography for further reading

*Includes a table of contents

“If you are a Branch Davidian, Christ lives on a threadbare piece of land 10 miles east of here called Mount Carmel. He has dimples, claims a ninth-grade education, married his legal wife when she was 14, enjoys a beer now and then, plays a mean guitar, reportedly packs a 9mm Glock and keeps an arsenal of military assault rifles, and willingly admits that he is a sinner without equal." – The opening passage of "The Sinful Messiah", published in the *Waco Tribune-Herald* on February 27, 1993

“I am more willing to come out when I get my message from my commander.” – David Koresh

In February 1993, President Bill Clinton had only been in office for a few weeks when one of the most important events of his presidency began to take shape. Ironically, it would involve a group that the vast majority of Americans had never heard of and knew absolutely nothing about.

The Branch Davidians were an obscure religious sect located in Texas, but members of the group led by David Koresh in Waco, Texas stockpiled enough weaponry to catch the attention of the federal government. The U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) ultimately decided to serve arrest and search warrants at the compound for the possession of illegal weapons, even though they fully expected it would require a raid that could potentially turn fatal.

The ATF hoped to use the element of surprise when it commenced the raid on February 28, but the Branch Davidians were ready for them, which led to an intense firefight between the two sides that resulted in the deaths of 4 ATF agents and a number of Branch Davidians. With that, the FBI got involved, and federal agents settled in for a standoff that would last about 50 days, trying everything from negotiating to using sleep deprivation tactics to coerce the Branch Davidians into ending the confrontation. Finally, on April 19, government agents breached the compound’s walls and tried to use gas to

flush the Branch Davidians out peacefully, but a series of fires broke out and quickly spread, killing the vast majority of the occupants inside, including many young children.

Naturally, controversy spread over how the siege ended; for example, while most believe the Branch Davidians intentionally started the fires as part of a mass suicide, others insist it was the fault of the ATF. Debate also raged over whether the government could have and should have made different decisions to defuse the situation. As Alan Stone put it in a study of the siege, “The tactical arm of federal law enforcement may conventionally think of the other side as a band of criminals or as a military force or, generically, as the aggressor. But the Branch Davidians were an unconventional group in an exalted, disturbed, and desperate state of mind. They were devoted to David Koresh as the Lamb of God. They were willing to die defending themselves in an apocalyptic ending and, in the alternative, to kill themselves and their children. However, these were neither psychiatrically depressed, suicidal people nor cold-blooded killers. They were ready to risk death as a test of their faith. The psychology of such behavior—together with its religious significance for the Branch Davidians—was mistakenly evaluated, if not simply ignored, by those responsible for the FBI strategy of ‘tightening the noose’. The overwhelming show of force was not working in the way the tacticians supposed. It did not provoke the Branch Davidians to surrender, but it may have provoked David Koresh to order the mass-suicide.” In 1999, a report prepared by the federal government itself concluded, “The violent tendencies of dangerous cults can be classified into two general categories—defensive violence and offensive violence. Defensive violence is utilized by cults to defend a compound or enclave that was created specifically to eliminate most contact with the dominant culture. The 1993 clash in Waco, Texas at the Branch Davidian complex is an illustration of such defensive violence. History has shown that groups that seek to withdraw from the dominant culture seldom act on their beliefs that the endtime has come unless provoked.”

No matter which side people came down on, the violent confrontation embarrassed government officials, and Dick Morris, an advisor of Clinton’s, even claimed that Attorney General Janet Reno only kept her job after Waco by threatening to pin the blame on the president: "[H]e went into a meeting with her, and he told me that she begged and pleaded, saying that . . . she didn't

want to be fired because if she were fired it would look like he was firing her over Waco. And I knew that what that meant was that she would tell the truth about what happened in Waco. Now, to be fair, that's my supposition. I don't know what went on in Waco, but that was the cause. But I do know that she told him that if you fire me, I'm going to talk about Waco."

In addition to influencing how the government approached potential future conflicts with other groups, Waco’s most important legacy was that it enraged people who already had an anti-government bent. The most notable, of course, was Timothy McVeigh, who conducted what was at the time the deadliest terrorist attack in American history in Oklahoma City on the second anniversary of the final confrontation at Waco.

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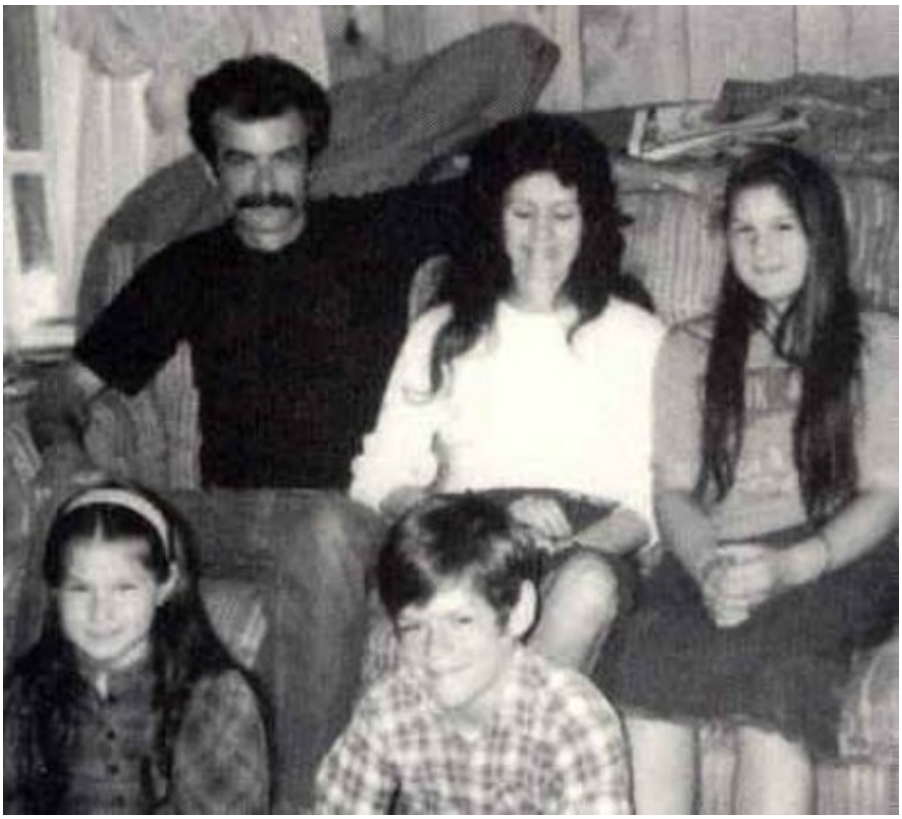
Ruby Ridge

Chapter 1: An Investigation by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms

"The events that led to the death of three persons at Ruby Ridge, Idaho in August 1992 and to the subsequent prosecution of Randall ('Randy') Weaver and Kevin Harris had their origin with an investigation by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms ('BATF'). Serious allegations have been made about the role of BATF in the Weaver matter. Included among these allegations are that a BATF informant entrapped Weaver into selling illegal weapons; that a BATF reward system created the incentive for the informant to entrap Weaver; and that BATF and the informant tried to conceal this future compensation arrangement from the defense, the court and the U.S. Attorney's Office. It has also been alleged that BATF exaggerated to the U.S. Marshals Service, the U.S. Attorney's Office, and the court the extent of Weaver's involvement with the Aryan Nations and the Order and that federal law enforcement unconstitutionally targeted Randy Weaver for prosecution because of his religious views." – Excerpt from the U.S. Department of Justice Report of the Ruby Ridge Task Force, June 10, 1994

The events that culminated with one of America's most notorious government standoffs had their roots in actions that went all the way back to when Randy and Vicki Weaver began dating in 1970. At that time, she was working as a secretary for a Sears store near her family's home in Coalville, North Carolina, while he was an Army private stationed at nearby Fort Bragg. The two got married in November 1971, not long after Randy finished up his military service, after which the young couple moved to Cedar Falls, Iowa so that Randy could attend the University of Northern Iowa and prepare for his dreamed of career in law enforcement. He later lost interest in this path and instead got a good job at a local John Deere factory, and a few years later, in 1976, Vicki gave birth to Sara, thus starting a family that appeared to be a model of peaceful, familial bliss.



Picture of the Weaver family

Ironically, the first important changes came not from Randy but from Vicki. Raised in the Southern Evangelical tradition, in 1978 she heard about Hal Lindsey's book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, and decided to read it. In this book, Lindsey used Old Testament prophesies to conclude that the world was nearing the End Times, and that the return of Christ was imminent and would be preceded by a series of disasters ranging from world war to nuclear holocaust. The Great Tribulation, Lindsey predicted, would see natural disasters plague the planet, and Christians would be persecuted for their faith before ultimately being "raptured," taken bodily from the planet into Heaven.

Excited and frightened by what she was reading, Vicki shared the book with Randy, who was also caught up in its dramatic language, and the two began to make plans to survive the tribulation by withdrawing from society and living somewhere deep enough in the woods that they would be safe from the "false governments" Lindsey predicted. Weaver later explained, "My wife and I, if you knew us and followed us from the late 1970's, even before that, early 1970's, through 1992, you would see change after change after change after

change. We studied and read, and we were, you might say, on a search for, quote, the truth. Our beliefs changed constantly."

Vicki continued to read other works, including moving on to *Atlas Shrugged* by Ayn Rand. A materialistic atheist, Rand was Lindsey's polar opposite but nonetheless predicted that a government that continued to take more and more money from producers to support and sustain those who produced nothing would eventually collapse. Rand also described a utopia, hidden away from the rest of the world, where like-minded people would gather and survive to be ready to take possession of the nation once the government finally collapsed on itself. This concept also appealed to the Weaver's, as did some apocalyptic tales told by the legendary sci-fi writer H.G. Wells.

Naturally, as Randy and Vicki were drawn more into these works, they soon found others who shared their beliefs and began to meet with them. Though the people involved claimed to be Christians, they were considerably far away from the mainstream, but regardless, the group met in a Sambo's restaurant near Weaver's home in Cedar Falls and studied the King James Version of the Bible, the only version they considered "inspired." The group carefully picked out verses that they felt could support their beliefs, and they also began to try to follow Old Testament dietary laws, such as not eating pork or shellfish, and they looked to the Scriptures for advice on how to be ready for the global catastrophe that they felt was surely coming. They were particularly obsessed with a passage in Matthew 24, which read, "3 And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? … 6 And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. 7 For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. 8 All these are the beginning of sorrows. 9 Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. 10 And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. … 15 When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) 16 Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: 17 Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: 18 Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his

clothes. … 21 For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.”

Each day saw the Weaver’s drift further away from the neighbors and closer to the new friends they had made. Their entire family became increasingly paranoid and began to believe that the Jews, in conjunction with the Illuminati, the Masons and the Trilateral Commission, were planning to declare war on Christians in general and them in particular. Randy became so alarmed that he began wearing a flak jacket to bed and sleeping with a loaded gun under his pillow.

Chapter 2: Illegal Weapons

"In October 1989, Randy Weaver sold illegal weapons to a BATF informant. When BATF agents later attempted to enlist Weaver as an informant in their investigation of the Aryan Nations, Weaver refused to cooperate. Seven months later, the government indicted Weaver for the illegal weapons sales. We have found no evidence to support the claim that BATF targeted Weaver because of his religious or political beliefs. Similarly, we found insufficient evidence to sustain the charge that Weaver was illegally entrapped into selling the weapons. When Weaver was arraigned on the weapons charges in January 1991, he was told that his trial would commence on February 19, 1991. Two weeks later, the court clerk notified the parties that the trial date had been changed to February 20, 1991. Shortly thereafter, the U.S. Probation Office sent Weaver a letter which incorrectly referenced his trial date as March 20, 1991. After Weaver failed to appear for trial on February 20, the court issued a bench warrant for his arrest. Three weeks later, on March 14, a federal grand jury indicted Weaver for his failure to appear for trial." – Excerpt from the U.S. Department of Justice Report of the Ruby Ridge Task Force, June 10, 1994

Perhaps not surprisingly, as Randy and Vicki increasingly demonstrated odd behavior, they began to attract attention around the area. Eventually, reporter Dan Dundon was sent to interview Weaver about his lifestyle and beliefs in 1983. About a decade later, in the wake of Ruby Ridge, Dundon wrote, "Nearly 10 years ago, Randy Weaver predicted he would face authorities in an armed confrontation. … The intensity of his conviction left little doubt that he meant what he was saying. … He was living in Cedar Falls at the time of the interview, but he and his family were preparing for their move to Idaho, where he described what amounted to an armed fortress in which he could survive an onslaught by authorities. He proudly showed a small arsenal in his basement, consisting of military assault rifles and shotguns, bragging that he had more than 4,000 rounds of ammunition. All of this would be used to establish a 300-yard 'kill zone' encircling his Idaho hideaway, he said. The weapons, he cautioned, would only be used in self-defense. While Weaver concentrated on weapons, Vicki was stockpiling food. She was learning techniques for dehydrating all types of home-grown fruits and vegetables, and showed me shelves full of preserved food. They wanted to have at least two years' of food

stockpiled. The Weaver's were preparing for what they considered to be the inevitable confrontation with authorities. They were convinced that the government, using martial law, eventually would try to take control of society."

According to Dundon, Weaver emphasized his belief that what he was doing was the will of God: "The Bible teaches that somewhere near, during the reign of the one world leader. God will remove his restraining hand from Satan, the destroyer, and let him wreak havoc with the inhabitants of the earth for a period of time known as the great tribulation…The ones who seek the truth will accept us, the ones who do not want the truth will call us crazy. But that's fine, people can call us anything they want. I will speak the truth and they won't stop me." However, when he was later asked about what he said that day, Randy claimed, "That was a straight-up lie. That reporter at that time, when he left our house that day, he told Vicki and I—Vicki asked him, she said, 'Well, what do you think?' He came in there looking for a bunch of nuts, and when he left, he stood there at the door, and he says, 'I don't know whether to feel relieved or disappointed.' And he went and made up his own story."

Either way, not long after the interview was published in the *Waterloo Courier*, the Weaver's packed up their weapons and their stockpiles of food and moved from Iowa to a deserted mountain in the northernmost tip of Idaho. They arrived on September 6, 1983 at 15 acres of rocky hillside named Ruby Ridge. According to Vicki, the place was "just what the Lord showed [our home] would look like." Concerning their reasons for moving so far away from civilization, Randy said, "I believe that if there is separation of the races, scripturally speaking, that is what I believe is right. It sounds like an impossible task and most likely is, but I believe that people of every race should be proud of who they are and what they are. There are good people in every race; there are bad people in every race…when we moved from Iowa to Idaho, we wanted to separate into a remote area to give the children a good area to grow up, and we had had beliefs that, you know, if there ever was a natural disaster or downfall of the Government or whatever, we wanted to be separated from the rest of the world. We did not want to be a part of it. Survival, you might call it. We wanted to separate out and be able to survive, you know, in bad times ahead if there were going to be."

When they arrived, the Weaver family wasn't welcomed with open arms by everyone they met in Idaho. After meeting them for the first time, many felt uncomfortable, intimidated or even threatened by his views, and even among those who shared his perspective, there was often trouble. During Weaver's appearance before a Senate investigatory committee looking into the Ruby Ridge incident, Senator Herb Kohl questioned Weaver about the following incident that occurred not long after the family settled in this new home: "Two neighbors who had bought land near your house apparently came to you once to inspect property markers. According to them, the neighbors, they were greeted by you and your son holding rifles. They told law enforcement officials later that you told them that you would shoot Federal law enforcement officials who came on your property. According to them, you said, if they take me I will take some of them with me, and that is why we have guns."

Weaver denied this incident happed, but another neighbor, Ruth Rau, also did not get along with them and subsequently claimed that she and her family "suffered several months of torment and harassment from the Weavers and their friends" during 1990: "Some of the crimes they committed against us were vandalism, theft, disturbing the peace, trespassing, and Randy Weaver threatened my husband's life. Randy once forced an innocent woman's car off the road and threatened her life in front of her small children. He supposedly did this because she had warned someone about what a crook that he was. … Their children used to march back and forth by our house wearing Army jackets with Nazi arm bands, carrying guns, shouting white power slogans, and doing the Hitler salute. They would stop occasionally to draw swastikas and write dirty words on the road. They have been raised to be little Nazi soldiers."

By the mid-1980s, Randy was involved with a group known as the Aryan Nations, a white supremacist and anti-Semitic organization that was already under investigation by both the FBI and the ATF. For his part, Randy claimed he had little interest in the organization: "To this day I am not sure what their total purpose is. We attended—or I should say I had been to Aryan Nations three, maybe four times over a 4-year period, and I was originally invited to go down there by some guy who had claimed to be a friend of mine, and I found out later he was not. …I went down there to exchange ideas with people, talk

to people, and usually ended up arguing with people that attended regularly. But I never joined, did not want to join."

A few of the more militant members of the Aryan Nations split off and called themselves The Order, and they went on a crime spree across northern Idaho, bombing a synagogue and ultimately murdering Jewish talk show host Alan Berg in Denver, Colorado. In response, the government became determined to stop them and began closely monitoring the movements of the Aryans.

Meanwhile, the Weaver's were also honing their shooting skills, often doing target practice on a hillside near their home. Weaver openly admitted to arming all his children at young ages: "In the mountains, mountain kids, a lot of them, they will get a gun and a dog like the city kids get a basketball and a bicycle. My children, I taught them, when they turned 8 years old I taught them all how to use BB guns safely; how to use the sights, and they used the BB gun for 2 years and could practice with it whenever they wanted. When they turned 10 they could go to a .22 rifle or whatever and they could progress in the use of firearms. And out in that area we were right in the middle of grizzly territory, mountain lions, moose. They are very dangerous animals. … It was just a real habit that we had. To this day I believe that, you know, a man should be able to pack a weapon. I am a gun advocate. But I believe in self-defense. … I taught my kids that the day may come when all heck breaks loose, there might be hungry people coming up there who would want to take their food. … I taught my children [to shoot] only in self-defense against anything, animal or people, or in the case of animals if they were going to shoot an animal they eat it. My children were taught never to point a gun at anybody."

Weaver and his family may have been making waves locally, but they did not come to the attention of federal law enforcement officers until January 1985, when, according to a Department of Justice Report, "the U.S. Secret Service investigated allegations that Randy Weaver had made threats against the President and other government and law enforcement officials." Weaver was also accused of threatening the Governor of Idaho, but he denied all these accusations, later calling them a "smear campaign" and demanding an apology.

Of course, no apology was forthcoming. The report noted, "The Secret Service was told that Weaver was associated with the Aryan Nations, a white

supremacist group, and that he had a large cache of weapons and ammunition. Weaver had spoken of the world's ending in two years ‘when [his] home will be under siege and assaulted.’ Secret Service agents interviewed Weaver, who denied the allegations. No charges were filed.”

Far from being the end of the problem, this proved to be just the beginning. Only a month later, both Randy and Vicki Weaver gave "legal and official notice that [they] believe[d] [they] may have to defend [themselves] and [their] family from physical attack on [their lives]" in a handwritten affidavit filed with the county clerk.

While they certainly had concerns about Weaver, it wasn’t until later that the agents had any real proof of wrongdoing on his part. Randy was at the Aryan Nations Congress in Hayden Lake when he came to the attention of an ATF agent. The Department of Justice report explained, “Weaver came to the attention of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (‘BATF’) in July 1986, when a BATF informant was introduced to him at a World Aryan Congress. The informant met Weaver several times over the next three years. In July 1989, Weaver invited the informant to his home to discuss forming a group to fight the ‘Zionist Organized Government,’ referring to the U.S. Government. Three months later, Weaver sold the informant two ‘sawed-off’ shotguns.”

In October 1989, Randy told the informant, Kenneth Fadeley, that he felt war between the United States and the Soviet Union was imminent. Randy also indicated he needed to raise some money and offered to sell Fadeley two sawed-off shotguns, so two weeks later, the men met in a city part and completed their deal. Randy complained that Fadeley was a “deceitful, lying con man working for ATF to push me for almost 3 years to make a sawed-off shotgun for him. I…allow[ed] myself to be tempted in a weak moment when my family needed money.” Fadeley later testified that Weaver told him "he could supply me with four or five [guns] a week" and "supply me with shotguns all day long."

At this point, the agents felt that Weaver could be more useful to them as an informant than he would be locked up somewhere, so in June 1990, two agents met with Weaver and showed him the substantial evidence they had against

him. They then offered to drop the charges if he would work on their behalf within the organization. Weaver refused and told them “You can go to hell.”

Once Weaver refused to become an informant, he was indicted for manufacturing and possessing an unregistered firearm, and a warrant was issued for his arrest. However, the ATF concluded that it would be too dangerous for the arresting agents and the Weaver children to arrest Weaver at his isolated mountain residence, and it was perhaps at this point that the agents made the first in a series of ultimately fatal mistakes, primarily by not appreciating how paranoid and even spoiling for a fight the Weaver’s were. The Department of Justice report explained, “Instead, in January 1991, BATF agents, posing as stranded motorists, surprised Weaver and his wife when they stopped to offer assistance. Weaver told the arresting agents "nice trick; you'll never do that again." Weaver was arraigned and was released on a personal recognizance bond. A trial date was set for February 19, 1991.”

Chapter 3: An Undercover Operation

“The government, especially the USAO [United States Attorney’s Office], was unnecessarily rigid in its approach to the issues created by the erroneous letter; that the USAO improvidently sought an indictment before March 20, 1991; and that the USAO erred in failing to inform the grand jury of the erroneous letter. From February 1991 through August 1992, the Marshals Service was involved in efforts to apprehend Weaver to stand trial for the weapons charges and for his failure to appear for trial. These efforts included gathering information about Weaver and developing a plan to arrest him. Based on information that it collected, the Marshals Service learned that for many years Weaver had made statements about his intent to violently confront federal law enforcement officials. As a result, the Marshals Service concluded that Weaver intended to resist violently governmental attempts to arrest him. Thereafter, the Marshals Service investigated and carefully considered alternatives that would enable it to arrest Weaver without endangering his family or law enforcement personnel. It concluded that an undercover operation would be the most prudent way to proceed.” – Excerpt from the U.S. Department of Justice Report of the Ruby Ridge Task Force, June 10, 1994

Since she lost her life at Ruby Ridge, it is easier to see Vicki as some sort of victim of Randy’s ideas than to admit that she also harbored extreme racist and anti-government feelings, but when she learned about her husband’s conversation with the ATF agents, she wrote a letter warning "Aryan Nations & all our brethren of the Anglo Saxon race" that the ATF was recruiting informants. Moreover, not long after Randy was arrested, Vicki sent two letters to the United States Attorney’s Office (USAO) in which she called the people working there “servants of the Queen of Babylon.” She also insisted, "The tyrants’ blood will flow…. Whether we live or whether we die, we will not bow to your evil commandments.”

No matter what one may think of the ultimate outcome of the crisis, there can be no doubt that there were many mistakes made along the way, mistakes that set the stage for a tragic showdown. The first of these occurred in March 1991 when, according to the Department of Justice report, a “U.S. Probation Officer sent Weaver a letter incorrectly referring to a March 20 trial date. Weaver did not appear for the February trial, and a bench warrant was issued

for his arrest. On March 14, 1991, Weaver was indicted for failure to appear for trial. The matter was referred to the U.S. Marshals Service, which learned that Weaver had attended Aryan World Congresses and that he and his family were constantly armed. Weaver sent a letter to the local sheriff, stating that he would not leave his cabin and that law enforcement officers would have to take him out. The Weavers 'felt as though the end [was] near.' Weaver was quoted as threatening to shoot law enforcement officers, who came to arrest him. Weaver and his family remained in a cabin, atop an isolated mountain."

It only later became clear that missing his trial date was not Randy's fault, but the way in which he responded to the situation only confirmed the belief among the Marshals that they were dealing with a mentally unstable individual. At the same time, had they kept this fact in mind during their subsequent dealings with him, the outcome might have been less bloody for all concerned.

When Weaver failed to show up for court in February, the judge put out a warrant for his arrest and sent the United States Marshals Service to find him. By this time, the Weaver's were spending much of their time writing and mailing threatening letters to the federal government, and as a result, Dave Hunt, the Deputy Marshal in charge, contacted the Special Operations Group (SOG) for help in bringing Randy in.

Things became even more complicated when they learned that Vicki had given birth to a daughter, which meant that in addition to Randy and Vicki, there were now 5 others in harm's way: Sara, now 15; Sammy, 13; Rachel, 9, baby Elisheba; and Kevin Harris, a friend whom the Weaver's had taken in.

The Marshals also knew that Randy often sent the children out armed to confront strangers coming on the property, so they decided to first try to persuade Randy to come out to them rather than go in after him. These efforts included a three page letter that assured Weaver, "[I]t is not our wish to cause any conflict concerning your personal beliefs. Nor do we have any desire to reach a point of confrontation or violence against you or members of your family. … We do not have any personal vendetta with either you or your family. We are law enforcement officers who have taken an oath to uphold the constitution and laws of our country. In this capacity we are prevented from entering into or inferring judgments. … It is my hope that we can resolve this

situation, although I see no hope if we cannot talk about this in good faith to bring this to an end. Then everyone can move on with their lives."

In fact, according to the report, the Marshals “also made plans to arrest Weaver without harm to law enforcement officers or the Weaver family, particularly the children. The marshals exchanged messages with Weaver through intermediaries, until the U.S. Attorney directed that all communications go through Weaver's appointed counsel (with whom Weaver would not speak).”

Despite their efforts, the Marshals were only too well aware that they might have to resort to some sort of violent takedown and began preparing for it. The report continued, “Teams from the Marshals Service Special Operations Group (‘SOG’) conducted surveillance of the Weavers’ mountaintop property to devise methods to take Weaver into custody safely. Surveillance cameras were installed and aerial photographs were taken of the property. The marshals observed that Weaver and his children responded to approaching persons and vehicles by taking armed positions over the driveway leading to the Weaver cabin. During this period, Weaver continued to make statements that he would not surrender peacefully and that his family was prepared to defend him. The Director of the Marshals Service ordered that no action be taken that could endanger the Weaver children. In the Spring of 1992, the marshals developed an undercover plan to arrest Weaver away from his cabin and family.”

As things dragged out, the press caught wind of the story of the white separatist who had the federal government stymied, and reporters from all over the country poured into Idaho hoping to score an interview with one of the Weaver’s. It soon became obvious that the family was becoming something of a cause célèbre for far rightwing groups, and the federal Marshals realized they were going to have to act, and soon.

Chapter 3: Exchange of Gunfire

"In August 1992, six marshals travelled to an area in northern Idaho known as Ruby Ridge to conduct surveillance of the Weaver residence in preparation for the undercover operation. During the surveillance mission, the Weaver dog discovered the marshals and began to bark. The marshals retreated with the dog, Harris, Randy Weaver and his son, Sammy Weaver, and other family members in pursuit. At an area known as the 'Y,' a gun battle occurred in which Deputy Marshal Degan and Sammy Weaver were killed. … With regard to the responsibility for the deaths that occurred at the Y, the marshals assert that Harris initiated the fire fight when he shot Deputy Marshal Degan while Weaver and Harris claim that the marshals fired the first shots. After a thorough review of all of the evidence made available to us, we have been unable to determine conclusively who fired the first shot during the exchange of gunfire. Although there is evidence that one of the marshals shot Sammy Weaver during the exchange of gunfire, we found no proof that the shooting of the boy was anything other than an accident. In fact, the evidence indicates that the marshals did not know that Sammy Weaver had been killed or wounded until his body was discovered by the FBI in a shed outside the Weaver cabin two days later." – Excerpt from the U.S. Department of Justice Report of the Ruby Ridge Task Force, June 10, 1994

In late August, the situation came to a head, and it proved to be a disaster. One thing after another went wrong, beginning with an innocent yellow Labrador named Striker trained to protect the family. According to Deputy Marshal Larry Cooper, "Our reconnaissance group started up the mountain toward the Weaver property at about 4:30 a.m. When we arrived at the area known as the Y…we split into two teams in accordance with our surveillance plan, maintaining contact via radio. The three-person team comprised of Deputies Hunt, Norris, and Thomas took the left fork of the Y and made their way to an observation post - we referred to it as 'OP' - north of the Weaver property. Deputies Roderick, Degan, and I took the right fork of the Y to a point well below the road leading up to the Weaver compound…. After a considerable period of observation, we retraced our steps back down to the Y and then proceeded up to the OP where the other three man team had been conducting surveillance. At the OP…I observed various members of the Weaver family carrying firearms as they moved about the Weaver compound.

It was then agreed that Deputy Roderick would show Deputy Degan and me additional vantage points around the Weaver property where we might consider locating surveillance/security teams for the proposed undercover operation. Deputies Roderick, Degan, and I then moved down to a location that I recall was near a stand of birch trees…and we spent a considerable amount of time observing the driveway area from a high point on the ledges. Then Deputy Roderick and I left our packs and rifles at this high position with Deputy Degan and crawled down to a lower point on the ledges to observe the lower driveway area more closely."

Degan

During their reconnaissance efforts, the agents threw rocks to test whether or not the Weaver's could hear them from different parts of the compound. They were later accused of trying to elicit a confrontation, but they denied this accusation. About an hour later, they moved into a new position on the property and scouted that location before deciding to give up their efforts for the day and join the other team.

This is when the trouble started. Cooper continued, "Just as we began to move out of the lower garden area, we heard a radio transmission from Deputy Thomas that he heard a vehicle approaching. At this very moment, we heard the Weavers' dogs begin to bark, so we took cover and listened closely to our radios. Almost immediately, Deputy Hunt radioed, 'They're responding,' referring to the occupants of the Weaver cabin compound. Deputy Roderick then stated that he observed the dog coming down the driveway, and the three of us began to retreat in accordance with the plan that we had discussed in the

event our position was detected. We dropped back to a second line of trees and again took cover, at which point Deputy Roderick said that he also saw Kevin Harris running down the driveway with a rifle. We then continued our retreat along the route we had discussed with Deputy Roderick in the lead. … Deputy Degan and I followed Deputy Roderick as we retreated. I recall hearing radio transmissions from the OP team as we ran. The OP reported that members of the Weaver family also were responding and that they were armed. We continued our retreat over hundreds of yards, stopping from time to time to look back at our pursuers and to exchange a few words about our situation. Although Harris and the dog were gaining ground on us, we continued to retreat in the hope that Harris and the Weavers would stop at some point and not pursue us further."

As they found themselves being pursued through a wooded area with which they were unfamiliar, Cooper and his colleagues began to prepare for the worse. Cooper explained, "I dropped to the rear position as we ran in case the dog got well ahead of Kevin Harris and overtook us. In that event, I was prepared to shoot the dog if necessary in order that we could accomplish our escape. However, I did not want to take this measure unless it was absolutely necessary. Certainly there were a number of points along our retreat route when I could have stopped and taken a clear shot at the dog or at Kevin Harris. I did not do this, as our unwavering intention was to avoid a confrontation if at all possible."

However, this attitude changed when the forest gave way to an open field without any place to hide. Cooper continued, "We reached a point along our retreat route, however, where it was evident we could not continue our escape efforts in the same manner without exposing ourselves to injury or death. … As he entered the Y, Deputy Degan apparently reached the same conclusion because he stepped off the road into the woods. As I entered the Y, Deputy Roderick was ahead of me, while the dog was gaining on me from the rear…. At about the point…I looked up and saw Randall Weaver coming down the right fork of the Y. My first thought was that Randall Weaver was approaching the Y from that direction as part of an ambush. At this same moment, the dog was closing in on me, and I also saw Kevin Harris approaching the Y behind the dog. I yelled toward Harris, "Back off. U.S. Marshal" because I believed that Deputy Roderick, who was down the road to my right, had Randall Weaver covered and that Deputy Degan had covered Kevin Harris above me, I

focused on the dog and kept him at bay with my rifle as he moved in a semicircle past me. Although I had the opportunity to do so, I did not discharge my weapon either at Randall Weaver or the dog.”

In a sense, the agents were now surrounded and certainly in fear for their lives. Each man, in keeping with his training, focused on the task at hand and tried to put all other concerns out of his mind. According to Cooper, “As I focused on the dog, I saw with my peripheral vision that Randall Weaver was moving away from my position. I took this opportunity to back off the road and follow Deputy Degan into the woods to a cover position. Deputy Degan took cover behind a stump that was only a few feet from the edge of the road. …I saw Kevin Harris and Samuel Weaver moving fast into the Y.”

Sadly, the stage was set for a showdown, and the Weaver’s meant to have one. Cooper recalled, “The events I will describe next are etched in my mind, and I am certain of what I saw. As Kevin Harris and Samuel Weaver moved past Deputy Degan's position, Samuel Weaver was a step or two ahead of Kevin Harris. When Kevin Harris reached a point about 10 feet in front of Deputy Degan's position, Deputy Degan called out, ‘Stop. U.S. Marshals.’ As I heard Deputy Degan begin to announce, I joined in, but before I finished my words, Kevin Harris turned, fired from the hip, and shot Deputy Degan. I have a clear mental picture of Kevin Harris firing that first shot at the Y. There is no other aspect of this tragedy about which I am more certain. When Deputy Degan was hit, his body moved to the left in the direction of the stump. I could see Kevin Harris starting to raise his rifle from his hip, so I fired a three-round burst at Kevin Harris. When I fired, Kevin Harris dropped from my sight, so I assumed I had hit him. I turned my rifle in the direction of Samuel Weaver. However, at this moment I heard what sounded like two shots off to my right, down in the direction where I last saw Deputy Roderick.”

Meanwhile, Roderick had heard Cooper’s radio transmission and explained the consequence of what he heard: “I understood this to mean that people in the Weaver compound were armed and were coming to the rock ledge overlooking the driveway as we had seen them do many times during our surveillance. I told everyone to take cover and I immediately got down behind a small tree.”

At this point, Roderick also saw Harris approaching: “I saw Harris, carrying a rifle and running directly at me as if he had seen me. Ahead of him was a

yellow Labrador retriever. Harris and the dog were approximately 80 yards from us. … We ran for approximately a half a mile in order to avoid a confrontation, but the pursuit continued. We ran through the fern field and entered the area under the tree canopy. We were afraid of getting shot in the back so we looked for a defensible position. … As I turned to look at our pursuers, I saw Harris and the dog and, for the first time, I saw Samuel Weaver. … As I ran into the ‘Y’, I saw a figure that I soon realized was Randall Weaver. He moved off the right fork of the ‘Y’, the road leading to the Weaver compound, and toward the woods out of my sight. The man was yelling, and I yelled at him several times: ‘Stop, U.S. Marshals.’ … I heard Degan also yell ‘Stop. U.S. Marshals.’ The next thing I heard was the report of a heavy caliber rifle fired from my left where Cooper, Degan, Harris, and Samuel Weaver were. At this moment I saw the dog stop, look in the direction of the gunfire, and then back toward me. Realizing that we now were in the midst of a potentially deadly encounter, I fired a shot at the dog and I saw the dog fall. I dove into the woods to find cover, and I heard the sound of constant gunfire.”

Once the first shots were fired, no one could tell with absolute certainty the events that happened next and the order in which they took place. Kevin Harris later insisted that Roderick fired the first shot, killing Striker and leading Sammy to cry out, "You killed my dog, you son of a bitch!" and begin shooting. He claimed it was at this point that the Marshals returned fire and that he only shot at Degan because he was trying to protect Sammy. Randy later supported this version of events: “On August 21, 1992, Federal marshals shot my son Samuel in the back and killed him. He was running home to me. His last words were, ‘I'm coming, Dad.’ They shot his little arm almost off and they killed him by shooting him in the back with a 9-millimeter submachine gun. The gun had a silencer on it. He was not wanted for any crime. He did not commit any crime. The marshals killed his dog right at his feet. He only tried to defend himself and his dog. Sammy was just 14 years old. He did not yet weigh 80 pounds. He was not yet 5 feet tall. The marshals who killed Sammy were grown men. They were in combat gear. They had their faces painted with camouflage. They were wearing full camouflage suits with black ninja-type hoods. They were carrying machine guns and large caliber semiautomatic pistols. They were trained to kill. Two of them were hiding behind trees and

rocks in the woods where they could not be seen. The third was around a bend in the trail in thick forest.”

According to Cooper, “Samuel Weaver reacted to this sound by yelling, ‘You son of a bitch,’ and running down the road to my right. I did not fire at Samuel Weaver. Instead, my attention was fixed on Deputy Degan calling to me for help, and the gunfire that began to come into my position from the direction of the right fork of the Y where I had seen Randall Weaver. I believe it was at this point, as gunfire came into my position, that I yelled over the radio to the OP team that Deputy Degan was shot and I needed help. I also knew that I could not get to Deputy Degan while the gunfire was coming into my position. I therefore rose up and fired a second three round burst in the direction of the incoming fire. At that point, the incoming fire seemed to shift down to my right, where Deputy Roderick was located. I took this opportunity to move to my left, up to Deputy Degan's position. When I reached Deputy Degan, he was laying on his side, his arm in the sling of his rifle. He was conscious, but he did not respond to me. … I tried unsuccessfully to locate the entry wound in order to stop or slow the bleeding. I also tried to pull Deputy Degan back, pack and all, to a position of more cover. However…I sensed that I was losing him. I reached for the artery on his neck to feel for a pulse, and his pulse stopped beating under my fingertips. I knew he was gone. I took his rifle off his shoulder and arm and moved back to the cover position behind the rock.”

For Cooper, time stopped at that moment, and he admitted having difficulty remembering the exact chain of events: “Sometime later—I have difficulty estimating just how long because my immediate thoughts at the time were focused on my friend Bill Degan—I had radio contact with Deputy Roderick. I told him he needed to move up to my position, and I gave him direction by radio regarding my location.”

Cooper eventually managed to get the attention of Deputy Norris, who was a medic and tried to save Degan, but it was too late. Speaking for his fellow deputies, Cooper said, “They seemed stunned momentarily, but then they responded to my direction to move Bill's body back to the cover position that Deputy Roderick and I had behind the rock. They could not carry Bill, but they dragged him back to where we were, and all of us, with Bill's body between us, took defensive positions behind the rock.”

Of course, the men had to turn their attention from the dead back to the living. Cooper recalled,
“We decided that some of our team members had to go for help. It was agreed that Deputy Hunt, who was familiar with the area because of his prior reconnaissance trips to the mountain, would go for help with Deputy Thomas. … It was more than 12 hours before help arrived. … The weather turned bad as the day wore on. Although we were cold and wet, we did not believe it was safe to move about freely in our immediate area. … The Idaho Critical Response Team arrived to assist us around 11:30 p.m., and we did not get Billy's body off the mountain until almost 1 am. We were taken to the hospital in Bonners Ferry for examination, and then returned to our base residence in Schweitzer Mountain, ID, where it was almost dawn before we finally got to sleep.”

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of the government’s story is that fact that the trained officers remained unaware they had even hit Sammy, much less killed him, until they discovered his body two days later. In speaking later about the tragedy, Cooper observed, “I was saddened when I learned of Samuel Weaver's death. I have a son of my own, and I can understand the enormous sense of loss that a father must feel at the death of his son. That sense of loss must surely be magnified in a situation such as this one where it is the father who must accept responsibility for the death of his son. Regardless of the false theories and inaccurate media accounts advanced by his lawyers and others, I suspect Randall Weaver recognizes in his heart that he is responsible for Samuel Weaver's death. That is a tragedy and a terrible cross for Randall Weaver to bear. Certainly, I take no satisfaction from the fact that he must bear that cross.”

Chapter 4: Specially Formulated Rules of Engagement

“Soon after learning of the August 21 incident at Ruby Ridge, the FBI officials in Washington, D.C. evaluated the information made available to them and decided to deploy its Hostage Rescue Team ("HRT") to Idaho to deal with the crisis. HRT members assumed their positions around the Weaver compound late in the afternoon of August 22, 1992 but before doing so they were instructed that their conduct was to be governed by specially formulated Rules of Engagement ("Rules"). These Rules instructed the HRT snipers that before a surrender announcement was made they could and should shoot all armed adult males appearing outside the cabin.” – Excerpt from the U.S. Department of Justice Report of the Ruby Ridge Task Force, June 10, 1994

Once word got out that Degan was dead and five other Marshals were pinned down, the entire situation changed. No longer were the men going in to serve a warrant on a reclusive, somewhat fanatical religious zealot; now they were out to arrest a cop killer. Therefore, the Marshals decided to reach out to the FBI for help. The Department of Justice report noted, “As soon as the U.S. Marshals Service received word of Marshal Degan's death and the ongoing situation at Ruby Ridge, they sought and received FBI assistance. The FBI had primary jurisdiction for assaults on federal officers, and its Hostage Rescue Team (‘HRT’) is seen as uniquely skilled for crises. FBI and Marshals Service Headquarters immediately activated command centers to coordinate communications. Special Agent Eugene Glenn was assigned the command and began to arrange for the personnel and equipment required for the crisis. Concurrently, state and local law enforcement and a few FBI agents who were in the immediate area came to the scene and began securing the area. The rescue of the marshals was delayed until after dark. A team led by the Idaho State Police reached the marshals at approximately 11:30 p.m., more than twelve hours after the shooting. The rescue effort was ongoing when Glenn arrived and deployed FBI SWAT teams to secure the command post's perimeter. He planned to maintain the status quo until the HRT had arrived. Local law enforcement continued to guard the access road as a crowd of sympathizers and onlookers gathered. The marshals were successfully removed from the mountain without additional gun fire. Once rescued, they were examined at a hospital and transported to a command post where they

were given food and allowed to rest. FBI agents interviewed the marshals, starting the following afternoon."

Before the FBI agents reached the scene on the morning of August 22, the FBI made a critical decision that would forever haunt many of those involved; those in charged proposed to change the Bureau's standard rules of engagement to allow, in this one situation, more people to be killed under less threatening circumstances than normal regulations regarding self-defense. Specifically, the rules stated:

> "1. If any adult male is observed with a weapon prior to the announcement, deadly force can and should be employed, if the shot can be taken without endangering any children.
>
> 2. If any adult in the compound is observed with a weapon after the surrender announcement is made, and is not attempting to surrender, deadly force can and should be employed to neutralize the individual.
>
> 3. If compromised by any animal, particularly the dogs, that animal should be eliminated.
>
> 4. Any subjects other than Randall Weaver, Vicki Weaver, Kevin Harris, presenting threats of death or grievous bodily harm, the FBI rules of deadly force are in effect. Deadly force can be utilized to prevent the death or grievous bodily injury to oneself or that of another."

Once they arrived at Ruby Ridge on the morning of August 22, the HRT worked quickly to establish a command site, and its members had already been briefed on the Weaver's and their unique beliefs. By this time, someone had already arranged for the necessary paperwork to be put through to authorize their actions. The report explained, "On the afternoon of the shooting, the U.S. Attorney's Office obtained a search warrant and complaints for Randy Weaver and Kevin Harris's arrest on charges relating to the death of Marshal Degan." Furthermore, "Assistant U.S. Attorney Ronald Howen, who was assigned to the case, went to the site. Howen remained until Weaver and Harris surrendered a week later. Howen took no role in developing the Rules of Engagement or drafting operations plans, but he did participate in crime scene searches, interviews, and negotiations." Having a federal attorney on site

during the crisis was a bold move and signified just how touchy the situation was.

Perhaps the greatest fear among those there that day was that the Weaver's were hiding in the woods that they knew so well, waiting to ambush anyone that set foot on the property. The report made this clear: "According to the HRT plan, communication with the occupants of the Weaver cabin, including a surrender demand, was to take place using armored personnel carriers, which would deliver a telephone to the cabin site. The HRT was concerned that the Weavers or sympathizers might be hiding in the woods and planning an ambush. Therefore, teams of HRT sniper/observers were stationed overlooking the cabin before the carrier drove up the hill. Although FBI headquarters had not approved a tactical operations plan, permission was granted to begin negotiations with the Weavers when HRT agents arrived at their positions. At 3:30 p.m. on August 22, HRT sniper/observers, along with members of the Marshals Service SOG, began their ascent to the cabin."

This would prove to be even worse than they anticipated. As they were trying to get themselves in position, word came that there were people, presumably the Weaver's or Harris, in between them and the cabin. With the new Rules of Engagement ringing in their ears, the snipers got into position, and at nearly 6:00 p.m., the agents saw a young girl, apparently unarmed, run out of the cabin to a nearby area and then run back indoors. Next, an unarmed young man was also seen, this time on the back deck of the cabin.

By this time, a helicopter was overhead and those aboard were reporting their observations. The report noted, "When the helicopter's engine was started, the female seen earlier and two males ran from the cabin to the outcropping. The last person to emerge was carrying a rifle. Sniper/observer Horiuchi identified him as Kevin Harris. A few seconds later Horiuchi saw a person he believed to be Harris near an outbuilding known as the 'birthing shed.' The man appeared to be scanning above and behind the snipers for the helicopter. Horiuchi believed that he was trying to position himself to shoot at the helicopter from the more protected side of the shed. Horiuchi fired one shot as the man suddenly moved along the side of the shed out of sight. When Horiuchi fired, the man's back was toward Horiuchi and the helicopter. Because the man moved unexpectedly, Horiuchi assumed he missed. The man he aimed at was not Harris, but Weaver, who was slightly wounded. … After

ten or twenty seconds Horiuchi saw the target of his first shot following the other two people as they ran to the cabin. The first two entered the cabin through an open door. Horiuchi fired, aiming slightly in front of the last running man. The bullet went through the curtained window of the open door, fatally wounding Vicki Weaver and seriously injuring Kevin Harris. The sniper testified that he did not know that Vicki Weaver was standing behind the door."

Horiuchi

While there may have been confusion at the time the shots were fired, the report indicated how the final results were attributable in large measure to the different Rules of Engagement: "Operating under these Rules on August 22, an FBI sniper/observer fired two shots in quick succession. The first shot was at an armed adult male whom he believed was about to fire at a HRT helicopter on an observation mission. The first shot wounded Randy Weaver while in front of a building at the Weaver compound known as the birthing shed. The second shot was fired at Harris while Harris was retreating into the Weaver cabin. The second shot seriously wounded Harris and killed Vicki Weaver who was behind the cabin door."

Not surprisingly, the Weaver family had a far different perspective. Sara later testified, "I was coming around-side the shed…So I told Kevin, I said, 'I gotta follow my dad. I gotta get over there with him.' So I started following him,

and he was around the corner, and I heard this shot, and I was just coining around the corner, and I missed him. He just went around the other side. And I came around, and he turned around, and I said, ‘Dad, what happened?’ He said, ‘I've been shot.’ And my mom had popped out the door at that time and was screaming, ‘What happened, what happened?’ And Dad goes, ‘I've been shot.’ And I put my hand on his back, and I said, ‘We gotta go home. We gotta get in the house now.’ And I pushed him, and we started running as fast as we could, which wasn't very fast because we had to make this curve over some tree roots and rocks, but as fast as we possibly could, we were running to the house. And she was standing behind the door, holding it open, the whole time, saying, ‘Come on, come on, get in the house.’ … She was standing right…in the window, holding it open, holding the baby, saying, ‘Get in the house, get in the house.’ … If I had taken one more step, he would have gotten all three of us, because I felt everything just hit my cheek and it sounded like the person was standing right behind—it sounded like it was right there.”

Harris, who was closest to Vicki at the moment of her death, later said, “As I started through the door, I heard a loud boom. I was looking at Vicki, at her face. As I heard the shot, it was as if there was something moving under her skin, then her face was deformed, almost seemed to explode. Next thing I knew I was lying on the floor. When I couldn't feel my left hand, I realized I'd been hit.”

In the aftermath, Horiuchi maintained that he had no idea his shot would injure anyone in the cabin: "When I fired the shot, I knew the cabin door was standing open, but I believed even though the subject at whom I fired was on the porch at the door, that my shot would not impact the cabin itself. As the shot impacted, I believe that I saw the male subject at whom I fired flinch, and I believe that I had hit him low, around the hip area.”

Back in the Weaver cabin, things were beginning to really fall apart. Harris said, “Rachel was screaming really bad. I think she's the only one who saw what happened besides me. Randy picked the baby up, and she was all sprayed with blood and tissue. Randy handed her to Rachel, then turned to Vicki, lifted up her head, and said, ‘Oh, Ma…’. Vicki convulsed several times, and then was still. Randy pulled her body into the kitchen. There was a big pool of blood flowing out of her onto the floor. At first I thought it was my blood and for sure I was going to die. Sara and Randy helped me take my leather coat

off. My chest felt all mushy, and there was blood caked everywhere inside my coat and on my shirt. They'd killed Sam and Vicki and almost killed Randy and me, and we were afraid that if we came outside they'd finish us all off. So we stayed inside."

Meanwhile, the Marshals and agent were trying to figure out what to do next. They began by trying to make contact with the Weaver's, unaware that Vicki was dead. According to the report, "When Commander Rogers, who had been aboard the HRT helicopter, learned of the shootings, he and an FBI negotiator went in a personnel carrier to the cabin to make a surrender announcement and to begin negotiations by leaving a telephone. There was no response. … The next morning the snipers returned to their positions. Rogers once again went to the cabin area and issued repeated surrender announcements, which included warnings that the outbuildings would be removed if Weaver failed to comply. By Sunday evening, there was still no response or indication that the Weavers were going to surrender or negotiate, so the first outbuilding, the birthing shed, was moved. Sammy Weaver's body was discovered in the birthing shed. Negotiation efforts continued for days, but were unsuccessful. No one from the cabin picked up the telephone, which was on an armed robot outside the cabin. Although the weapon on the robot was not loaded, Weaver reported that he was afraid that anyone who went outside would be shot. Attempts to intercept conversations inside the cabin were not successful. By Wednesday, no aggressive action had occurred for days…"

The stalemate lasted for another week, during which the FBI's handling of the entire situation fell into increasing disrepute. On Wednesday, August 26, Weaver surprised the agents by saying that he wanted to speak to his sister, so the FBI brought her to the site, but the two were unable to communicate because of problems with the equipment. Two days later, Weaver agreed to talk to Bo Gritz, a former Green Beret and fellow right-winger who at the time was running for president. This proved to be the key, according to the Department of Justice report: "Two other private citizens assisted Gritz in resolving the standoff. Gritz and a Weaver family friend carried Vicki Weaver's body out of the cabin."

For his part, Harris had had enough by now: "You've heard from others about the siege. I lay in a chair for 9 days, in and out of consciousness, my

wounds beginning to rot and stink. I only got up twice the whole time, both times to go to the bathroom. Both times I fainted. There were bright search lights at night and always the voice of the negotiators, calling out to talk to Vicki, as if she were still alive. I kept hearing on the radio that I was wanted for murder. By then Bo Gritz and Jack McLamb had come up to help out, and we were talking to them. They brought me a paper where the FBI promised that if I went out, they would leave Weaver and the girls alone. I decided to go and went out with Jack McLamb."

Harris voluntarily surrendered on the 30th of August, and the rest of the Weaver family followed the next day.

Chapter 5: Indictments

“Shortly after their arrest, separate preliminary hearings were held for Weaver and Harris. While arguing the government's motion requesting a continuance of the Harris preliminary hearing, U.S. Attorney Ellsworth made statements indicating that the government would allow Harris to have a complete preliminary hearing in return for consenting to the continuance. Thereafter, Harris consented to the continuance with the understanding that he would have a full preliminary hearing. An indictment was returned against Harris while his preliminary hearing was in progress. We have found that the U.S. Attorney did not intentionally misrepresent the government's position but that he failed to appreciate the impact of his statements and that he neglected to pay sufficient attention to the information that he received concerning the probable length of the preliminary hearing. After the first indictments were returned against Weaver and Harris, the Assistant U.S. Attorney continued to present evidence to the grand jury which led to the return of two superseding indictments, each containing a conspiracy count.” – Excerpt from the U.S. Department of Justice Report of the Ruby Ridge Task Force, June 10, 1994

As soon as Harris and the surviving Weaver’s surrendered, the FBI did all that it could to cordon off the “crime scene” and collect evidence, but they were dealing with a lot of space. In fact, taking into account the gunfight that precipitated the end of the deadly siege, the scene was more like a battlefield than somewhere a typical arrest was made, and searching the area was both difficult and time consuming. Their report noted, “Searches of the Y were ongoing during the crisis. After the surrender, the cabin and surrounding area were searched. The FBI also sent a team of inspectors to begin an internal inquiry into the sniper shootings.”

Once everybody was in custody, the FBI moved quickly to arrest and question Harris and Weaver. The former recalled, “At the hospital two FBI agents questioned me while I was on a bed, with doctors and nurses working on me. I explained as best I could while the doctors were trying to treat me what had happened at the Y. I was in the hospital for about 2 ½ weeks. After I got out of the hospital, I was taken to Boise and placed in jail, where I was charged in Federal district court with the first degree murder of William Degan. The prosecutors demanded the death penalty. I was amazed by what

they said I was guilty of. They threw the book at me: conspiring with the Weaver family to cause an armed confrontation with the Government; assault with a deadly weapon on Roderick, Cooper, and Degan; assault with a deadly weapon on a helicopter; harboring a fugitive—Randy; aiding and abetting the possession of firearms by Randy; and using a firearm to commit these crimes.”

According to the FBI’s report, “After their surrender, Harris and Weaver were placed under arrest and charged with the murder of Deputy Marshal Degan. Separate preliminary hearings to determine probable cause for these charges were begun. Before their preliminary hearings concluded, a grand jury indicted Harris for assaulting and murdering Degan and indicted Weaver for aiding and abetting in Degan's death. Thereafter, the magistrate judges terminated the preliminary hearings of Weaver and Harris. Both defendants pleaded not guilty to all charges. On October 1, 1992, a grand jury returned a superseding indictment charging Weaver and Harris with numerous offenses including conspiracy. On November 19, 1992 a Second Superseding Indictment was returned charging Weaver and Harris with the same offenses as the previous indictment and alleging additional overt acts. In October 1992 the Marshals Service and BATF provided four agents to assist the U.S. Attorney's Office in preparing the case for trial.”

During the trial, Harris had a court-appointed attorney named David Nevin, but Weaver was represented by the famous defense attorney Gerry Spence, whom someone once called “the Lone Ranger of the law, not just a good guy, but something more, a mythical figure, a hero.” Spence was joined by his son, Kent, and a young attorney named Chuck Peterson, and they were up against prosecutor Ron Howen, who was determined to convince the jury that the events at Ruby Ridge were ultimately Weaver’s fault. Spence countered that the issue at hand was one of religious freedom, while Nevin asserted that the case ultimately turned on the death of the dog.

Spence

From the beginning, the defense team faced certain challenges from the FBI, some of which were detailed in the agency's own report: "On January 8, 1993, on motion by the defense, the February 2 trial date was extended to allow time for the defense to review evidence and the results of FBI Laboratory tests. The defense complained about the government's failure to provide timely access to evidence and documents, and the trial judge admonished the prosecutors to have the laboratory examination completed quickly. … During the trial, the defendants brought to the court's attention problems they had in obtaining documents and information to which they believed they were entitled under either federal law or a discovery stipulation with the government."

The trial began on April 12, 1993, in Boise, Idaho, with U.S. District Judge Edward J. Lodge presiding. The prosecutors began by describing Degan's death and calling it cold-blooded murder, while Harris' attorney Nevin countered be describing Sammy's death and how he was "shot in the back, running away, running home." Nevin insisted that he did not want his client to carry the weight of an incident that he never intended to be involved in, and Harris maintained that he was only at the location that day by accident.

The prosecution called numerous witnesses, many of them FBI agents and federal Marshals, but few of them could stand up under Spence's expert cross-examination, especially when he asked Larry Cooper, "Does it make sense to you that Officer Roderick would be shooting the dog after Mr. Degan is dead, after Mr. Degan is shot?"

Prosecutor Ron Howen called on Maurice Ellsworth, the U.S. Attorney for Idaho, to testify about some of the letters Vicki had written during the years, but Spence turned the argument into one over free speech in the following memorable exchange:

> Spence: “If I were to call you the Queen of Babylon, it might insult you a little bit, maybe, [after all] you don’t look like a queen.”
> Ellsworth: “It would not be my favorite address.”
> Spence: “But you would recognize that I, as a citizen of the United States, have a right to call you the Queen of Babylon if I want to, true?”
> Ellsworth: “Sure.”
> Spence: “The Constitution guarantees it, doesn’t it?”
> Ellsworth: “With some limitation...”
> Spence: “Do you believe… we should have a threat assessment of the Bible?...”

In dealing with the issue surrounding the gun charges, the prosecution dramatically brought in a cart containing 14 weapons seized at the Weaver compound. They also showed the jurors extensive taped footage of the Weaver children roaming around the area carrying rifles. However, this evidence did little good in the face of ongoing testimony by the agents themselves in which they often came across as cold and unfeeling about the lives that were lost in the altercation. Richard Rogers testified unequivocally, “I don't operate under state law. I operate under federal law, which supersedes state law." While this was true, it wasn’t exactly tactful.

Ultimately, the worst blow to the prosecution’s case came not from Spence but from the FBI. After a trying day of testimony in which Horiuchi himself was raked over the coals, Howen returned to his office to find a package from the FBI. In it was a drawing that Horiuchi had made the day after the shooting, showing his line of sight. It featured the drawing of two heads in the window, presumably of Vicki and her baby. This information, which he had to share with the defense, came in hours after Horiuchi testified that he had not seen anyone near the window at the time he fired the fatal shot. The FBI report later explained, “The most extreme breach of the stipulation involved the late production of the underlying materials and notes related to the FBI Shooting Incident Report which had been produced as the result of an internal inquiry into the sniper shootings. Although the defendants had received the final

Shooting Incident Report before trial, during trial the FBI, in response to a defense subpoena, sent by fourth class mail materials that were not part of the documents that the FBI had produced earlier in discovery. These materials included a drawing Horiuchi made days after the shooting. The drawing arrived in Idaho after Horiuchi had completed his testimony, thus requiring his return for additional testimony. The court fined the government for the attorney's fees incurred by the defendants for the lost trial day."

In all, the prosecution called 54 witnesses, keeping the jury in court for more than a month, and to everyone's surprise, the defense rested without calling a single witness; Spence and the others believed that they had done such a good job in rebutting the government's witnesses that they needed none of their own.

One of the pictures of the standoff presented by the prosecution

In its closing statements, made by prosecutor Kim Lindquist after Howen fell ill, the prosecution maintained that Sammy and Vicki ultimately died because they chose to risk their lives to defy the legitimate law of the land. Lindquist pounded this point home by telling the jury, "These were people who were determined to defy the law and to resist the enforcement of that law with violence. … Why is Vicki Weaver dead? Because of that resolve. Why is

Bill Degan dead? Because of that resolve. Why is Sammy Weaver dead? Because of that resolve."

But naturally, Spence was the one that everyone had come to hear, and when it was finally his turn to speak, he did not disappoint. According to one *Associated Press* article, “Gerry Spence accused the government of demonizing the Weavers and co-defendant Kevin Harris, who only wanted to be left alone to practice their religion that mixes Old Testament values with white separatism. If anyone should be on trial, it should be the government, he said. ‘Randy Weaver is guilty of having poor judgment, but that doesn’t make him a criminal,’ Spence said as he repeatedly pounded the podium with his fist. ‘This is a murder case, but the people who committed murder are not here in court.’” In a more practical vein, according to the article, “Defense attorney David Nevin emphasized the inconsistencies in the sworn statements of dozens of government witnesses. He focused on statements that supported the defense claim that the marshals fired the first shot in the gunfight that left Deputy U.S. Marshal William Degan and Weaver’s teen-age son, Samuel, dead.”

After closing arguments, the case was turned over to the jury, which deliberated its merits longer than any other jury had ever considered a case in Idaho’s history. It finally returned its verdict on July 8, acquitting Harris on all charges and finding Weaver guilty of only the minor charges related to his failure to appear in court. On October 18, the judge sentence Weaver to 18 months in jail, 14 of which he had already served; he was out in time to spend Christmas with the family he had left.

The FBI agents and federal Marshals also celebrated Christmas that year, but they also remained under the cloud of Rudy Ridge as investigations continued that would eventually see everyone involved with the case criticized and many of them reprimanded. The Department of Justice eventually released a 500+ page report on the incident, one that was highly critical of Ruby Ridge was handled, and the Senate Judiciary Committee held its own hearings in the fall of 1995, giving Harris, Weaver and the others involved a chance to defend their actions. Weaver complained in his testimony before Congress that no federal agents were prosecuted:

> “I am not without fault in this matter. I was convicted of failure to appear for trial on charges I had sold a sawed-off shotgun to an ATF

informant named Gus Magisano. He testified at trial under a different name—Kenneth Fadeley. That was probably not his real name either. I was found not guilty of the original weapons charge, and I was found not guilty of every other crime I was charged with, including murder and assault on Federal officers. I was charged with conspiring against the Government, and I was found not guilty of that charge. I was in jail for about a year before and during the trial. I have served time after the trial and am now on unsupervised probation. I faced my accusers at a trial. I faced the FBI, the Marshals Service, the U.S. attorney, a Federal judge and a jury of my peers. I faced the death penalty. I have been accountable for my actions. I now face you Senators to ask that those responsible for the killings of my wife and my son be brought to account for their actions.

"If I had it to do over again, knowing what I know now, I would make different choices. I would come down from the mountain for the court appearance. I would not have allowed a deceitful, lying con man working for ATF to push me for almost 3 years to make a sawed-off shotgun for him. I would not allow myself to be tempted in a weak moment when my family needed money. I would not let my fears and the fears of my family keep me from coming down. But my wrongs did not cause Federal agents to commit crimes. Nothing I did caused Federal agents to violate the Constitution of the United States. I did not cause Federal agents to violate the oath of their office. My actions did not cause Federal agents to violate direct orders from Washington. My choices did not cause Federal agents to violate State and Federal law. My behavior did not cause Federal agents to violate their own agency policies. Federal agents have admitted to illegal acts. Judge Freeh, the head of the FBI, has made statements to the press that the so-called rules of engagement were unconstitutional. Federal agents have tried to cover up their illegal actions. That was their choice, not mine. I have been accountable for my choices. They should be held accountable for their wrongs. But no Federal agent has been brought to justice for the killings of Sam and Vicki Weaver…

> “Because of our confusion and fear and mistrust, my family made a decision that I would not come down. That decision brought the marshals to my home on the mountain on August 21, 1992. But that decision did not cause the marshals to kill my son and the FBI to kill my wife. That decision did not cause Federal agents to lie and coverup what they had done, leading to further tragedy. That decision did not cause the FBI to send snipers to the mountain with orders to kill my family, to shoot them on sight without investigating what had happened the previous day. When the sniper killed my wife, he had not witnessed any one in my family commit a crime. No sniper or FBI agent on the mountain had witnessed any of my family commit a crime. No FBI agent had even with the marshals that had been involved in the shooting the previous day. The FBI sniper was executing suspects and witnesses. The FBI sniper was judge, jury, and executioner.
>
> I am here today to do all in my power to avoid such tragedies in the future. I want the citizens of this country to learn from our tragedy so that no one else will have to suffer as my girls and I have had to suffer.”

As Weaver’s testimony made clear, in the end there were never going to be enough words to bring Vicki, Sammy, and Degan back to life. The only hope, one to which the Justice Department devoted itself, was that nothing like Ruby Ridge could ever happen again, at least not on its watch.

By then, of course, a similar incident had taken place at Waco in February 1993, and both Ruby Ridge and Waco became rallying cries for many who condemned big government. A few years later, in the wake of what was then the deadliest terrorist attack in American history, Timothy McVeigh would cite Ruby Ridge as a motive for the Oklahoma City bombing, and when pressed over whether he felt any remorse for the lives lost in that bombing, McVeigh later conceded that it might have been wiser to go with his alternative plan of "a campaign of individual assassination." One of the individuals McVeigh said he considered targeting was Lon Horiuchi, the FBI sniper whose shot killed Vicki Weaver. Horiuchi was charged with manslaughter for his actions at Ruby Ridge in 1997, but his case was dismissed.

McVeigh

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Waco

Chapter 1: I Got to Know David

"Back in 1990 I had been drumming in a local rock band. I needed some new sticks, and on the way to a gig stopped in at the music store. Seeing the sticks in my hand, two strangers introduced themselves and asked if I was in a band. The two were Koresh and Steve Schneider. Schneider gave me his card and I handed it back. The backside was full of Bible verses. 'You guys are a Christian band,' I said, uninterested. But after some small talk, I took the card back, and a few days later gave him a call. Over the next few weeks I hung out with Koresh and some other musicians in his band. I got to know David and was somewhat impressed. Having never paid much attention to the Bible, I was astonished to find that it actually did have some relevance to my life." - David Thibodeaux, one of the survivors

Prior to 1993, few people outside of Waco, Texas had heard of the Branch Davidians, and most of those who had wrote them off as just another strange religious cult. In fact, the group initially formed during the Great Depression as Shepherd's Rod after breaking off from the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. When the cult's founder, Victor Houteff, died in 1955, the group expanded, moving to the Waco, Texas area. Benjamin Roden took over leadership of the group in 1959, and he remained in charge until he died, at which point his wife Lois took control. She groomed a young man named Vernon Howell to take her place. In 1984, the group split again and Howell moved with his people to Palestine, Texas, while the rest stayed in Waco with George Roden, Benjamin and Lois' son.

Houteff

Benjamin Roden

Lois Roden

George Roden

Following Lois' death in January 1987, George Roden and Howell sparred over who should get possession of the Mount Carmel Center. According to a

story published a few years later, “Roden dug up the body of Anna Hughes from the cemetery at Mount Carmel, storing the casket inside a shed. Roden then issued a challenge to Howell: the man who raised Hughes from the dead would be the Branch Davidians' true prophet. Howell and his followers asked the McLennan County Sheriff's Department to arrest Roden for corpse abuse. Officials demanded proof, such as a photograph of Hughes' body. Howell and seven men, all dressed in camouflage fatigues, sneaked into Mount Carmel on Nov. 3, 1987, supposedly to take such a photograph. They carried assault rifles. When daylight came, a shootout ensued. Deputies, notified by neighbors, broke up the skirmish. They filed charges of attempted murder against Howell and his followers. Although the Branch Davidians claimed to be carrying weapons for protection, they had put 18 bullet holes into the small tree Roden hid behind.”

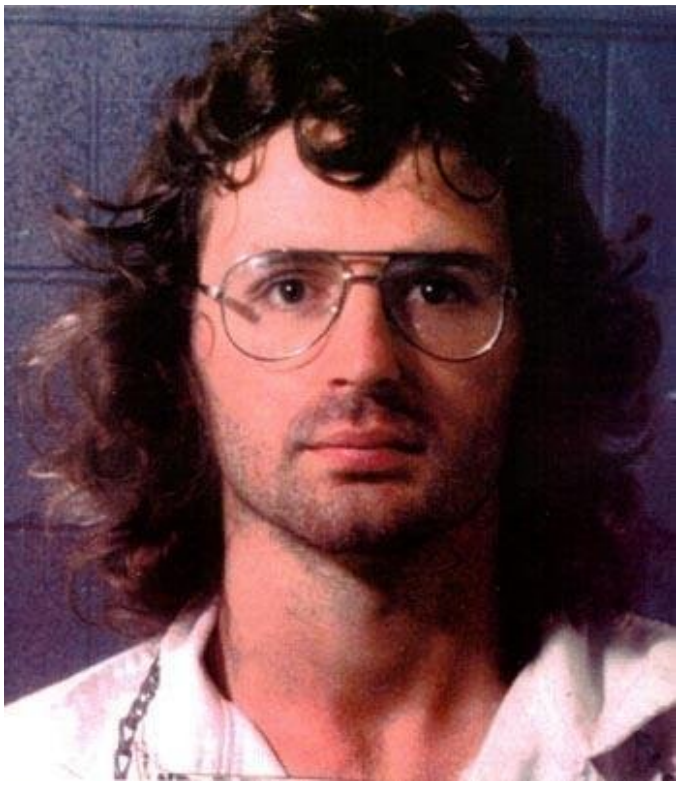
The trial was notorious and brought the Branch Davidians unwanted publicity that no doubt contributed to their downfall just a few years later. The story continued, “Howell's followers clogged the third floor of the McLennan County Courthouse for the trial. Most of the women wore dresses to their ankles and blouses buttoned up to their necks. They clamored around their men during breaks. Children clung tightly to their mothers. Roden, the prosecution's chief witness, came to the courtroom straight from the county jail, where he was serving a six-month sentence for filing legal motions asking God to inflict AIDS and herpes on Texas Supreme Court judges. Before the trial started, visiting Judge Herman Fitts asked if there were any witnesses in the courtroom who needed to be sworn in. No one arose. Howell's attorney Gary Coker intervened. He turned to Branch Davidians in the gallery, urging potential witnesses to stand. Again no one got up. Howell, smiling slightly, then stood. ‘It's all right,’ he said, raising a hand. ‘You've done nothing wrong. Stand.’ The doubt parted and the witnesses stood. In his testimony, Roden told of trying to raise Hughes from the dead and with not a hint of chagrin, admitted ending a prayer, ‘In the name of George B. Roden, amen.’ The jury acquitted Howell's followers. It could not reach a verdict on Howell. Charges against him were later dropped. With Roden in jail, the Branch Davidians settled back into Mount Carmel.”

Once back in Waco, Howell acted quickly to solidify authority over his followers by striking at the very heart of their personal lives with his “New Light” tapes, released on August 9, 1989. In them, he claimed that God had

told him to take the women, even the married ones, of the group and have children with them. Meanwhile, their husbands would remain celibate.

Needless to say, this had the effect of separating the true believers from the rest. Howell went on to tell them, "Only the Lamb is to be given the job to raise up the seed of the House of David, isn't he? … You [women] have only one seen that can deliver you from death…There's only one hard-on in this whole universe that really loves you and wants to say good things about you. Remember Mary and God? Yeah? God couldn't make any advances because the world would misjudge. … If the Bible is true, then I'm Christ. But so what? Look at 2,000 years ago. What's so great about being Christ? A man nailed to the cross. A man of sorrow acquainted with grief. You know, being Christ ain't nothing. Know what I mean?…If the Bible is true, I'm Christ. If the Bible is true. But all I want out of this is for people to be honest this time. … God allows men to be born into sin. It is natural for man to sin. If you're going to be fair, you've got to give man a way out."

In the summer of 1990, Howell legally changed his name to David Koresh, a change that was supposed to symbolize to his followers a connection to two Old Testament figures. David symbolized a lineage to King David, from whom the Messiah would come, while Koresh is the Persian name of Cyrus the Great, the Persian king seen as a messiah figure because he allowed the Jews to return to the land of Israel after the Babylonian captivity. By changing his name to David Koresh, he was professing to his followers that he was the spiritual descendant of the biblical David and, therefore, the Messiah.



Koresh

Such was his control over his followers that they accepted Koresh's claim. Livingstone Fagan was one of the believers who survived, and he remained faithful to Koresh's teachings long after the siege was over and the smoke had cleared. He later wrote, "David Koresh is Messiah, being first amongst men to be born into God Consciousness. Having been born under the first creation into this consciousness, he was established as a sign post (sic) before this creation, to show Adam's race a way out should they fall short of the standard set at the beginning. Hence the phrase "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the earth." As a matter of fact, Adam was created like unto God the Son at the conclusion of the first creation, which is the material image of God. God the Son, of the first creation, has been raised up from death for the salvation of man. This time however he is to be made Messiah over the coming kingdom of God on earth. The Spirit of God is to dwell in all its citizens."

Chapter 2: Just Bible Students

"That fall I went to Waco to play music and meet the larger community. The people at Mount Carmel were extremely involved in knowing and learning the Bible. People have made it seem as if Mount Carmel came out of nowhere. In fact, Koresh was the third leader of a community that spun off from the Seventh Day Adventists in the 1930s. They had been living outside of Waco since 1933. The people around Koresh came from many backgrounds. One irony of Waco is that right-wing extremists and racists look to Mount Carmel as a beacon. If they realized that so many of us were black, Asian and Latino, and that we despised their hateful politics and anger, they would probably feel betrayed. We weren't political at all – just Bible students. We had a 'live and let live' attitude that had allowed us to get along well with our neighbors for over 60 years. We certainly weren't as isolated as people seem to think. We shopped in town, worked in the community, and our band played weekend gigs in Waco nightclubs. I worked as a bartender in Waco and I doubt a single customer would tell you that I stood out in any way."

In 1992, Koresh sold most of the group's land around Waco and kept only 77 acres, which he fortified with increased security measures. By this time, there were multiple generations living on the compound, including young adults who knew of no other life. Nonetheless, those living in and around the compound slowly became aware that there was something strange going on at "Mount Carmel," which had been named after a mountain in Israel considered sacred in the Old Testament. Bob Lott, the City Editor for the *Waco Tribune Herald*, later observed, "[His followers] truly believe that he was the messiah. … And his role was to open the seven seals that are mentioned in the Book of Revelation. He had what was called his new light revelation and that was that as the messiah, he should generate a new population of people to inherent the kingdom of God and to do that all of the women in the group belonged to him." One survivor, Clive Doyle, agreed, saying, "He began to present the ideas that he had and I'd say 99 percent of the leadership of the church that were living at Mount Carmel accepted him as having a message from God. … David was constantly talking to God. God told me to do this. God told me to do that. And we accepted that. … The men in the group would choose to become celibate. And if they were married, they would, you know, not have any more relations with their wives. … When David first started teaching, he

began to show that God asked prophets to do what we might consider strange things a lot of times.”

Not surprisingly, Koresh told a different but equally disturbing version of the story: “God speaks to me. I have a message to present. … I mean, there are some things that God has concealed in his written word that are to be brought to do right before the end of time. … It's true. I do have a lot of children. And it's true I do have a lot of wives. I mean, I just -- it is my great, wonderful looks, something that women can't resist.”

However, it wasn’t just the number of wives he had; it was the age they were when he “married” them. Lott explained, “We had evidence that he had sexually abused girls as young as 12. We also discovered that that had been going on for a couple of years and law enforcement had not done anything really to prevent it or stop it.”

Concerned, Lott assigned two reporters, Mark England and Darlene McCormick, to investigate the accusations. After eight months following the story, the two reported their findings in a series of seven articles published in the *Tribune-Herald* in February 1993. In the paper, the two turned a harsh spotlight on group: “If you are a Branch Davidian, Christ lives on a threadbare piece of land 10 miles east of here called Mount Carmel. He has dimples, claims a ninth-grade education, married his legal wife when she was 14, enjoys a beer now and then, plays a mean guitar, reportedly packs a 9mm Glock and keeps an arsenal of military assault rifles, and willingly admits that he is a sinner without equal. David Koresh is now his legal name. He changed it two years ago in California, supposed to enhance his career as a musician. To former cult members and law enforcement authorities, though, he is still Vernon Howell. Many of Howell's followers are former Seventh-day Adventists. The Seventh-day Adventist Church strongly denies any connection with Howell's group. Howell's followers have come to 77 acres near the Elk community from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, England, Hawaii and throughout the continental United States. The end of the world is near, they believe. Howell, 33, is their salvation. … Although many followers have fled, Howell remains with about 75 faithful in a compound they built to await the end of the world. Former cult members and authorities say it is heavily armed. Guards reportedly walked the grounds at night. Perched above the compound is a tower with lookout windows facing all directions.”

The articles went on to accuse Koresh and other leaders of the cult of gross and violent abuse against children. According to the reporters, Koresh was a polygamist who regularly “married” underage girls and claimed to be entitled to sexual favors from any female living in the compound. These accusations were backed up by an anonymous woman who said,"[Koresh] was supposed to be the son of God. He said God was really lonesome, and he wanted grandchildren. It was like the Scriptures kind of said it, but they didn't really. It was like he was giving God grandchildren.”

While the allegations made in the articles were horrific, they had been made against numerous cult leaders in the past. Instead, what set Koresh apart was the fact that the paper reported the Branch Davidians also had stockpiles of weapons. These rumors came courtesy of a UPS driver who was delivering a package that broke open and contained a number of weapons, including unarmed grenades and black powder. On July 9, 1992, the ATF opened an investigation into these claims and to others made by people who claimed they had heard what sounded like automatic gunfire coming from the compound. A member of the Branch Davidians, Marc Breault, later admitted that Koresh indeed had the parts necessary to convert regular guns into automatic weapons, which was in clear violation of the Hughes Amendment of the Firearm Owners Protection Act of 1986.

In the course of the investigation, FBI Agent Randy Parsons summarized what the government discovered: “They had acquired…weapons, rifles, pistols, shotguns, grenades, grenade launchers. Almost two million rounds of ammunition. A fully automatic rifle is, of course, illegal to possess.” David Aguilera, an agent with the ATF, was assigned to investigate and later recalled, “I was discovering a lot of AR-15s. They were converting these weapons from semiautomatic to automatic weapons. I was outraged and I was able to go out and get enough probable cause to make sure that, you know, I'm going to get my warrant for this guy.”

The ATF sent a surveillance team to rent a house across the road from the compound in January 1993. The agents posed as college students and sent one man to “meet the neighbors.” Aguilera explained, “We had an undercover agent, Special Agent Robert Rodriguez, who actually had interaction and met with David Koresh. He says, you know, I don't care what the ATF says or

does. It's my right to -- you know, to bear weapons, and nobody is ever going to take me down. That's a red flag.”

A bunch of 30-something guys sharing a house and claiming to be college students struck Koresh as suspicious, and he stopped leaving the compound as he had regularly used to do. By then, however, the agents had enough information to obtain search warrants for the compound and an arrest warrant for the cult leader himself. On February 25, 1993, Aguilera presented U.S. Magistrate Dennis Green with an affidavit stating that the Branch Davidians had purchased a large number of legal gun parts that he felt could be used to create illegal weapons. “As a result of my training and experience as a Special Agent for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, I am familiar with the Federal firearm and explosive laws and know that it is unlawful for a person to manufacture, possess, transfer, or to transport or ship in interstate commerce machine guns, machine gun conversion parts, or explosives which are classified, by Federal law, as machine guns, and/or destructive devices, including any combination of parts either designed or intended for use in converting any firearm into a machine gun, or into a destructive device as defined by Federal law, and from which a destructive device may be readily assembled, without them being lawfully registered in the National Firearms Registration and Transfer Record, U.S. Treasury Department, Washington, D.C. During my 5 years’ experience with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, I have investigated persons who have unlawfully possessed, transferred or shipped in interstate or foreign commerce firearms and/or explosive devices which were not registered to them with the National Firearms Registration and Transfer Record, and have successfully participated in the prosecution of several of these individuals.”

In addition to telling the court about all the investigations and interviews he had performed himself, Aguilera related a very disturbing tale told to investigators by a social worker with the Texas Department of Human Services, Joyce Sparks. “Ms. Sparks said that she noticed a trap door in the floor at one end of the building. When she inquired about it, Koresh allowed her to look into the trap door. She could see a ladder leading down into a buried school bus from which all the seats had been removed. At one end of the bus she could see a very large refrigerator with numerous bullet holes. She also saw three long guns lying on the floor of the bus, however, she did not know the make or caliber of them. She stated that there was no electricity in

the bus. Everything she saw was with the aid of a pen light. When questioned by Ms. Sparks, Koresh said that the bus was where he practiced his target shooting in order not to disturb his neighbors. … When she asked to speak with some of the children and other residents, Koresh refused, stating they were not available. She said that during her conversation with Koresh, he told her that he was the ‘Messenger’ from God, that the world was coming to an end, and that when he ‘reveals’ himself the riots in Los Angeles would pale in comparison to what was going to happen in Waco, Texas. Koresh stated that it would be a ‘military type operation’ and that all the ‘non-believers’ would have to suffer.”

Chapter 3: Guns Blazing

"Many have suggested that Koresh was a Jim Jones-like madman. He wasn't. He had no plans for mass suicide. In contrast to Jones, Koresh allowed members to leave at any time, and many of them did, even during the siege. But many stayed, too, not because we had to, but because we wanted to. We felt the FBI and ATF had been dishonest from the start. Few Americans realize that on February 28, 1993 when ATF agents in National Guard helicopters zoomed in on Mount Carmel Center, they did so with guns blazing. The initial raid, in which four ATF agents and six Davidians were killed, was a publicity stunt for the 20/20 television show, who were there to document it. ATF employees would later admit the underlying charges were 'a complete fabrication.' Everyone knew David Koresh hated drugs. Charges that we were assembling an arsenal of weapons to be used against the government were equally off-base. We had nothing to hide. In fact, weeks before the raid, Koresh offered the ATF the opportunity to come out to Mount Carmel and inspect the compound." - David Thibodeaux, one of the survivors

Having obtained the warrants he needed, Aguilera scheduled the raid for February 28, the same day the *Herald Tribune* published the last article in their series, one that included the story of escaped cult member Marc Breault's triumph in getting a 10 year old girl named Kiri Jewell away from Koresh. By this time, the paper had also heard that there was going to be a raid, and thus reporters were there to cover what happened. Lott explained, "One of our reporters had gotten a tip from a confidential informant who told him that they were going to do something, so we made plans to have people out there to cover whatever it was."

The ATF planned to send 75 agents into the compound at once, and it was hoped that they would be able to spread out quickly and take control of the situation. Then they would search the premises and arrest Koresh. Unfortunately, the Branch Davidians were expecting trouble and were ready for the agents. As Aguilera subsequently put it, "I thought the plan had it not been compromised would have worked. … [When Robert found out he] immediately excused himself, look, I had to leave. David said, no, stay. Robert said, no, I got to go. And as Robert tells me, he walks out the door, and he says, I was just waiting for them to put a bullet in my back. And he said they're

looking at us. They know we're coming. You need to call this off. But it was too late, too much had been done and the agents felt that they had no choice but to go forward."

Thus, on Sunday morning, February 28, "Operation Showtime" went into action. 76 ATF agents left the Bellmead Civic Center before the sun came up, headed for Waco in a mile long convoy that featured, among other things, two cattle trailers in which the agents were to hide during the approach to the compound.

They arrived at the compound around 9:45 a.m., and as helicopters buzzed overhead, the agents rushed the building. Aguilera described what happened: "Those that made the initial entry, their concern, where are the children? They had candy bars in their pockets to give out. Chocolate for the kids. Wow. … A barrage of gunfire just went right through the door. [Agent Roland Ballesteros] died…. How could these guys just start shooting at us?" Clive Doyle, one of the cult members, admitted that some of the Branch Davidians began shooting at the agents: "Suddenly there was some that shot back. We're not denying that. Because they…weren't trusting us and we weren't probably too trusting of them because they were continuing to shoot."

The agents' goal was to capture Koresh, and within the first minute of the assault, three agents made it to his bedroom window before being fired upon. Agent Bill Buford was one of the agents involved that day and later testified, "Initially, prior to exiting the trailer, I heard a tremendous amount of gunfire at the front of the building. It seemed to be all the way across the building, automatic weapons fire, machine gun fire. My team went to the east side of the building, we put our ladders onto the roof. As we were ascending the roof, we received a lot of fire. I could hear the rounds cracking around my head as we went onto the roof. Almost immediately upon getting on the roof, Conway LeBleu, one of my agents, was shot through the head and killed immediately. After he was shot, the Davidians continued to shoot into his body, even though it was obvious he was dead. This happened on several occasions. The window I was going to make entry through, we broke the window out, entered the window and received a withering gunfire on the inside. I encountered one armed individual on the inside. He had backed through a doorway. I went to the doorway and he attempted to enter the room again with an AK-47. I shot and I believe I hit him. He fell. I shot him in the doorway there. Almost

immediately. Special Agent Glen Jordan yelled that he had been hit, and I went back to where Glen was. The amount of fire coming into the room was tremendous. I remember thinking I cannot believe I am not getting hit. … I asked him if he could go, that we needed to get out. About that time, I was shot the first time. A round came through the floor, an M-16 round, I believe. It struck me in the left buttocks and traveled up my thigh and lodged next to my thigh about midway in the thigh."

Obviously, this was not the way warrants were usually served, so most of the agents had never even fired a weapon outside of a shooting range. Now they found themselves in a war zone. Buford continued, "I at that point was knocked back and looked down and observed that this was the arms room as we had thought it was. There were weapons in a gun rack there. There was also a box of hand grenades that I was kneeling beside. And I remember thinking to myself I am glad that those did not go off, because I had to put a distraction device, a flashbang upon going into the room. I again asked Glen if he thought he could go, and the other agent in the room Keith Constantino said he could give us cover. About that time, I was shot twice, once in the hip and once in the upper thigh with an AK-47, I believe. At that point, I realized that I was severely wounded and we needed to get out of the room. I again helped Agent Jordan get to his feet, and Agent Keith Constantino covered for us as we made our way out the window. After I got out onto the roof, I was unable to get to my feet. I rolled off of the roof, fell to the ground and broke several ribs when I hit the ground, and that pain led me to believe that I had been shot again. However, I had not. Two of our agents dragged me around to the side where they thought I would be out of the line of fire. They…went to get some medical equipment to take care of me. As I laid there, obviously, no threat to anyone, they began to shoot at me again. The rounds were hitting all around my head. I was unable to move because of the wounds I had already received. I was struck in the face at that time with a round, and Special Agent Ken Chism ran over and jumped on top of me and covered me with his body. They then took me around to the side of the building where I remained for the remainder of the firefight, which lasted about 2 1/2hours."

ATF agent Gerald Petrilli testified about the raid and described his vantage point: "We never made it to the front door of the structure. …the entire front of the compound erupted in gunfire ... I heard all the gunfire coming from the compound at us. I saw muzzle flashes. I saw curtains billowing out at the same

time I saw muzzle flashes. … There was no way for us to simply get up and walk out without being slaughtered ... We were stuck there."

The agents quickly realized that they were in over their heads and withdrew, calling for ambulances and help from the FBI. Byron Sage, one of the Bureau's best crisis negotiators, got there first, a little over an hour after the first shots were fired. He remembered, "The morning of February 28th, 1993, I will never forget. [When] I got there a little after 11:00, [the] gun battle was still raging, which was significant. The average gun battle with law enforcement lasts about two seconds. This was a gun battle that had raged now for well over an hour. … Our top priority right from the start was to get a lid on the violence and then to bring their emotionality down." Bob Ricks, a Special Agent in Charge of the FBI's Oklahoma City Field Office, arrived soon after Sage and agreed, saying, "Bullets were coming out of every window within the compound. [The agents] had the look of defeat, the look of despair, the look of despondency. They had gone through a horrible day and were forcibly required to retreat from that scene."

The task of trying to reason with the Davidians fell to ATF Agent Jim Cavanaugh, who recalled, "We were taking an awful beating. So many men were hurt and wounded and lying down there. When I called the compound, it was Steven Schneider. And he started screaming through the phone that we had no right to be there, to get off the property immediately. I tried to stay calm. I said, Steve, we have to talk. We have to work this out. You and I have to work this out. People are dying. People are hurt. We need to stop the shooting."

Next, Koresh himself got on the phone, leading to the following strange exchange:

> "CAVANAUGH: Everything is OK. Just you and me are talking. And that's the main thing. Because you care for people and then you're sincere and honest.
> KORESH: I care about my father.
> CAVANAUGH: That's right.
> KORESH: My father in heaven."

Cavanaugh later mused, "I had a radio mike in one ear with an agent pleading for his life, and I had this guy on the phone who thought he was God.

… When you drove up, the Davidians opened fire, and I am sickened by any other assertion. We didn't shoot first. We didn't. They shot first. And if I thought that an ATF agent would drive up in front of a structure and shoot, I'd throw my badge in the garbage. It didn't happen.”

Cavanaugh and the other negotiators persisted and finally arranged a ceasefire at around 11:30 a.m. By then, four agents were dead and 14 more were injured. A number of cult members were also injured, including Koresh himself, and five were killed, two by their own people.

Both sides later claimed the other fired the first shot. At 4:00 that afternoon, David Koresh released a message to KRLD Radio in which he claimed he and his people were innocent bystanders attacked by the federal government. “They started firing at me and so then what happened was some of the young men started firing on them. They fired on us first.”

Less than an hour later, Michael Schroeder, one of the kingpins in the cult’s gun business, was shot while returning to the compound.

Around 7:30, Koresh himself did a phone interview with CNN, after which the FBI requested that no more interviews be done because the situation had been classified as a hostage crisis. Nonetheless, KRLD did another on-air interview with Koresh at around 10:00 that evening, during which he devoted his remarks to preaching about his role as a Messiah and claiming that no one else in the compound had been as severely injured as he was:

> “REPORTER: Mr. Koresh, how are you doing?
>
> KORESH: (INAUDIBLE)
>
> REPORTER: I understand you've been wounded. Would you describe your position?
>
> KORESH: Weakening.
>
> REPORTER: Are you shot, sir?
>
> KORESH: Yes, I am.”

Ultimately, the Department of the Treasury (which the ATF was a part of at the time) concluded in their report on the original raid, “On February 28, 1993, near Waco, Texas, a major law enforcement operation failed. The Bureau of

Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms tried to carry out a flawed raid plan based on one critical element, the element of surprise. Despite knowing in advance that the element of surprise was lost, the raid commanders made the decision to go forward. This decision was brutally exploited by Koresh and his followers. Despite the courageous efforts of ATF agents, four agents were murdered and twenty others were wounded. The vivid and painful conclusion of the operation focused national attention on these events and on ATF. The Review was a response to that public concern."

Chapter 4: Under Siege for 51 Days

“The most disturbing allegation was that we were engaging in child abuse there. The children of Mount Carmel were treasured, and they were a vital part of our small society. Occasionally kids were paddled for misbehaving, but the strict rule was they could never be paddled in anger. The parents did the paddling themselves. Our kids were happy, healthy, and well cared for. The biggest lie, though, is the government’s claim that we set the building fire ourselves, to commit suicide. On the April morning when the FBI finally made its move, we had been under siege for 51 days. It was the coldest spring in Texas history that year. The FBI had cut off our power, so we had to heat the building with kerosene lamps. It was kerosene from these lamps and the storage canisters, spilled as a result of collapsing walls and FBI munitions fire, that is cited as evidence that we doused Mount Carmel with an intent of burning it. The 400 rounds of CS gas that the FBI shot into Mount Carmel was mixed with methylene chloride, which is flammable and can explode. The United States and 130 other countries signed the Chemical Weapons Convention banning the use of CS gas in war. Apparently there is no prohibition against its use against American citizens. The amount of gas the FBI shot into Mount Carmel was twice the density considered life threatening to an adult and even more dangerous for little children.” - David Thibodeaux, one of the survivors

After the failed raid, a siege around the compound commenced, and the FBI took over in Waco. Jeff Jamar, out of San Antonio, was made the Site Commander, and Richard Rogers, already infamous for his involvement in the Ruby Ridge incident a year earlier, headed the Hostage Rescue Team. Ricks recalled, “Shortly thereafter they were told that we were going to be taking over the handling of the response to the events on that day and that was crushing for them as well.” Aguilera explained it from an ATF viewpoint: “At the time, you know, it's personal. You have some animosity. I felt a little, you know, hey, someone is coming in and taking away what I started. But you know, it was for the best because you never know because of what we just went through, what we could have done.”

Understandably, the FBI agents who arrived were concerned about what they were getting themselves into. Special Agent Randy Parsons later admitted,

“When I first got there, it was a very tense, uncomfortable environment. It was an uncomfortable situation because the Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms felt a great sense of loss. It was their own men, their own agents, who were down and were gone.” Furthermore, they were dealing with a frustrating character in Koresh. According to Parsons, “Communications opened up pretty quickly. He loved to talk. He loved to hear himself talk. So there was no lack of communication. There was a lack of productive communication.” Sage had a similar opinion: “[Koresh] was so calm to a point where we began to immediately start questioning what kind of personality are we dealing with? What we ultimately had come to realize is that we had well over 100 individuals inside of the heavily fortified compound that were there voluntarily because they had backed what they felt was their messiah.”

Of course, there were a number of people who were not in the compound voluntarily, and Koresh knew that the FBI’s top priority was rescuing the children, so he used that knowledge to his advantage. At one point, he told agents, “There's a lot of children here. I've had a lot of babies these past few years. … I gave them a message for the radio so that the public can listen to where I'm coming from. And I explained that every time they play it, I would send two of the children out.” The FBI allowed the message to be played, after which Koresh did release a number of children and even a few adults.

Once that happened, Koresh told the agents that if they would play one of his sermons on national television, he would come out peacefully: “If they'll show me and show the world what the seven seals are and where they're at in the prophesies, then I will be satisfied and then we'll all come out to you.”

For a short time, the agents hoped they had found their answer through this proposal. Sage noted, “That tape was played in the afternoon about 3:00. Went for about an hour and then the clock starts ticking.” However, nothing happened until Koresh spoke up and said God had told him to remain inside. Ricks explained, “We're all waiting. We're anticipating. We had buses lined up to receive everybody. … Now we knew when we had a person who said he was speaking directly to God and God had told him to wait that this was not going to be normal.” For his part, Cavanaugh said he believed “that was our last best chance to get him to ever come out. He was fatigued. He was wounded. He was hurt. We had been working on him for three days. But at the very last moment he couldn't do it. He couldn't leave this place where he was

God with unlimited sexual favors and walk out to a cold jail cell. He tricked us. He fooled us. He played with us.”

The FBI remained focused on rescuing the children, but it became clearer that the Branch Davidians were not going to release them, and Sage described how this colored the agents’ attitudes: “That was one of the first and more significant glimpses of the disingenuous nature of how David was dealing with us as far as promises and truthfulness. … [With one exception] We never got another child out. We've got a total of 21, and I will be eternally grateful for the fact that we were able to accomplish that. … We continued to press David on that. David finally became very upset with the negotiator, and he stopped and yelled at them. He said, hey, you don't understand. The rest of these children are my children. They're not coming out. The battle of Armageddon was on.” The only other child released was a little girl who came out with a note pinned to her jacket saying, "Once the children are out, the adults will die."

The children who had been released, ranging from infants to 12 year olds, told horrific stories of physical and sexual abuse, strengthening the FBI’s commitment to arrest Koresh. According to its report to the Attorney General, “On or about March 6, Director Sessions called Gary Coker, Esq., a private practitioner in Waco, to discuss the possibility of Coker acting as a negotiator with Koresh. Sessions explained he decided on his own to contact Coker because, as he said, no one seemed to have the ‘key to Koresh.’ Sessions said that in his discussions with Coker, Coker said that he had represented Koresh previously (as Vernon Howell), that he was currently representing one of the first women to leave the compound, and that he would walk into the compound to ‘pave the way.’ Director Sessions recalled that Coker was confident that Koresh was remorseful. Coker told Sessions that Koresh had come from a broken home, and described Koresh as egotistical, messianic, and craving attention. He said that Koresh needed to exert ‘strong control,’ and that the Branch Davidians did whatever Koresh told them to do. Sessions further recalled Coker saying that Koresh feared going to prison. Sessions noted that Koresh had been acquitted in the earlier shooting case involving George Roden. He and Coker agreed it would be helpful if someone -- perhaps Branch Davidian Wayne Martin, a lawyer -- discussed the fairness issue with Koresh. The conversation ended with Coker offering to speak by telephone with Koresh and to introduce Koresh to the Director. … On March 12, the first

young adults -- Kathy Schroeder and Oliver Gyarfas -- exited the compound. When they called back into the compound, the FBI recorded and later broadcast those conversations over the P.A. system to those inside.”

Desperate for more information, the agents hid microphones in cartons of milk they sent in for the children, and they also gave Koresh a video camera so he could record statements made by those in the compound. Naturally, all the video material that came back supported Koresh’s claim that everyone was happy to remain with him. Ricks observed, “We really wanted to talk to as many of the children as we could. To see their faces and maybe talk to the mothers if possible, see if they were being held against their will. We were trying to determine what was the nature of the people inside the compound? Were they healthy? Were they suffering? We learned very rapidly that these people came from all walks of life. Some of them very bright people.”

Of course, things were even more tense for people in the compound. According to Clive Doyle, who was in the compound throughout the siege, “there was a lot of fear. People were making remarks like, well, if they have got this kind of firepower, if they open up on us, this place is going to look like swiss cheese. People were very concerned that they'd either be shot by the tanks or if the tanks made incursions into the building that we would be crushed by falling timbers and so on.”

While the FBI continued to wait and hope for a peaceful resolution, they used various tactics to make things inside the compound as uncomfortable as possible, often playing loud music or shining bright lights in at night. They also cut off both the phones and electricity periodically. Doyle mentioned the effects those tactics had: “And so people like myself who was occupied with various jobs of taking care of garbage, taking care of human waste and so on, throughout the 50 days felt that in all likelihood the women, the children, the elderly would be the first ones out and those of us who were able-bodied and able to take care of necessary chores would probably be the last, but we were sincerely expecting to come out. Everybody I know in there had their bags packed, but as the 50 days wore on, as the tactical team and the tanks began to do things on a more and more — you know, more and more pressure was expended by them, which seemed to work at cross-purposes with what the negotiators were promising and so on, people began to balk. … We had the electricity turned off, of course, and most of our fresh or frozen foods were

destroyed or spoiled. So as I say, we went through varying degrees of hell with noise, music, bright lights. The children were suffering along with the adults. We were without water. Having had our water tanks shot up, we were living on rainwater. Whenever it would rain people would put buckets out the window and collect rainwater. It was rationed. I doubt whether anybody got more than eight ounces a day, if that. I lost 25 pounds by April 19. I know others that lost about the same amount.”

Chapter 5: The Tanks Rolled In

“I never heard any discussion of suicide or starting fires. If we wanted to kill ourselves, we would not have waited 51 cold, hungry, scary days to do it. It remains hard for me to clearly remember what happened after the tanks made their move. Walls collapsed, the building shook, gas billowed in and the air was full of terrible sounds: the hiss of gas, the shattering of windows, the bang of exploding rockets, the raw squeal of tank tracks. There were screams of children and the gasps and sobs of those who could not protect themselves from the noxious CS. This continued for hours. Inside, the notion of leaving seemed insane; with tanks smashing through your walls and rockets smashing through the windows, our very human reaction was not to walk out into a hail of death, but to find a safe corner and pray. As the tanks rolled in and began smashing holes in the building and spraying gas into the building, the FBI loudspeakers blared, “This is not an assault! This is not an assault!” It was a very surreal and personal apocalypse.” - David Thibodeaux, one of the survivors

Two weeks into the siege, Koresh agreed to send out two of his people to meet with the FBI. Sage explained, “He had selected Steve Schneider, his number one lieutenant, and Wayne Martin, their Harvard-educated attorney, to come out and talk to our representative. The tension was extremely high. You could quite literally feel the crosshairs on him from the Branch Davidian compound, as I'm sure Steve Schneider and Wayne Martin could feel from our tactical teams and had everybody covered.”

A few days later, Sage had a very interesting phone conversation with Koresh. “At one point he's talking about my salvation. And I said, David, I am absolutely confident in my salvation as a Christian, and you, partner, are not in a position to judge me. Now that was a very calculated move because stop and think about it. If this individual was delusional and thought that he was Jesus Christ, who is in more of a position to judge me as a Christian than Jesus Christ? But in my mind it had resolved a very critical question, and that is, I did not feel that he was delusional or felt that he was the second coming of Christ. I think that he was a conman and his chosen area of con was religion.”

On March 29, Koresh met with Richard DeGuerin, an attorney his mother had hired. According to the FBI’s report to the Attorney General, “The

following day, DeGuerin again met with Koresh, from approximately 10:00 a.m. until noon, and from 2:00 until 6:00 p.m. Also on March 30, at 3:18 p.m., Steve Schneider spoke with his attorney, Jack Zimmerman, by telephone. DeGuerin returned to the compound on March 31st for approximately five hours. On April 1, both DeGuerin and Zimmerman were inside the compound for eight hours. Three days later, on April 4, they were back in for just over five hours. SAC Jamar said there had been extensive conversations and some disagreement regarding Mr. DeGuerin's access to the compound. Because he thought that any effort to remove the Branch Davidians from the compound peaceably should be attempted, Jamar decided to let him in. Due to the attorney-client privilege, there was no court-authorized Title III monitoring of the conversations that occurred within. DeGuerin did not report anything of value to the FBI after his visits with Koresh and the Davidians. Likewise, Mr. Zimmerman, Schneider's attorney, did not produce any useful information. In SAC Jamar's view, subsequent monitoring of conversations inside the compound revealed that Koresh had used the attorneys to buy time and make it appear that he was interested in resolving the standoff."

By this time, the area around the siege had taken on the look of a circus as all sorts of outsiders began to flood into the area. Branch Davidian supporter David Treibs gave the following account of what happened on April 3, just two weeks before the final assault. "Others were gathering, including men, women, children, and at least 1 baby. Some made their signs. We left around 7:43 am…caravaning to the hill above the roadblock, after picking up Gary Hunt who said he had power of attorney for Koresh. He said this came about because during an interview on the radio which Koresh was apparently listening to, it was asked if K wanted someone come to Mt. C, and if Koresh wanted Mr. Gary Hunt to act as his attorney, or to have power of attorney, and the satellite antenna moved, indicating a positive. … One vendor guy was selling buttons to support the ATF, and was arguing with some in our company that this (Waco) was his area and he supported what ATF was doing and we were wrong. … We met up with folks from Dallas, Austin, and several other places. … It seemed there were more media than us, and more police than us. We had at least 40-50 people, because at least 25 people came from San Antonio. … Some local residents came by just to see what was going on today, to get the latest scoop. Sometime after arrival, some bigmouthed rather obnoxious guy came and started picking arguments with anyone who would

argue. John Zimmerman took the bait, and a rather heated, loud discussion ensued. The media quickly flocked around this altercation. People from our side tried to quiet JZ and any others down, saying the dude was an ATF plant trying to make us look like bozos. Someone said the ATF also has sympathizers or plants at press conferences who rescue ATF whenever a good line of questioning was playing out by asking trivial questions."

While the world watched in horror as the Branch Davidian Compound went up in smoke on April 19, 1993, no one was aware that there was a man standing in the shadows who would bring about another conflagration just two short years later. Timothy McVeigh, the product of an unloving, broken home, was a self-professed "survivalist" and a student of such books as *The Turner Diaries*, a novel raving against the United States and urging others to overthrow its government. Michelle Rausch was a journalism student at Southern Methodist University when she heard about the standoff in Waco, and she decided to head out to the compound to see for herself what was happening. By doing so, she became the one human connection between two historic events. She later testified, "I was writing for the school paper and had kind of been following the Waco standoff, and I knew there was another angle to the story, and I wanted to find what that angle was. … So I took it upon myself during my spring break to travel to Waco to find what other angle to the, quote, 'Davidian standoff' there might be. … This is how I found Mr. McVeigh, when I walked up on the hill. He was sitting on the hood of his car with some bumper stickers that were for sale. … One of them I recall -- I can't see them clearly in this picture -- but Fear the Government that Fears Your Gun, Politicians Love Gun Control. … I told him who I was and I was doing a story for my school paper and asked him why he was there. … He said he just come in response to the standoff and that he -- he went on to say that he was opposed to how they handled the initial raid, that he thought it would be more appropriate had just the local sheriff gone down and issued an arrest warrant. … He had a lot of views that he shared with me, which is -- as a writer and a journalist, I enjoyed speaking with him to write about his views in my article."

Rausch was eventually asked to share with a court some of the quotes from McVeigh that she used in her article. "The first quote: I think if the sheriff served the warrant, it would all be okay. They're not tactical at all. They're government employees. This was in reference to the ATF. Next one: It seems like the ATF just wants a chance to play with their toys, paid for by

government money. The next direct quote: The government is afraid of the guns people have because they have to have control of the people at all times. Once you take away the guns, you can do anything to the people. You give them an inch and they take a mile. I believe we are slowly turning into a socialist government. He said, The government is continually growing bigger and more powerful, and the people need to prepare to defend themselves against government control." Rausch concluded her remarks by telling the court, "McVeigh said a sheriff should have served the warrant to Koresh without involving the ATF. Although McVeigh said he is sorry for those killed and injured, he said the ATF had no business being there in the first place. McVeigh said those in the ATF were merely pawns working under the control of government orders. The government thinks it has to spend taxpayer dollars on something, McVeigh said, adding that they saw this as an opportunity and seized it. McVeigh said he believes the government is greatly at fault in Waco and has broken constitutional laws. He quoted the U.S. Constitution and said U.S. armed forces should not be used against civilians, yet they were used against Koresh and his followers. McVeigh said he does not believe the Brady Bill is a solution or an adequate attempt at a compromise. McVeigh said the Koresh standoff is only the beginning and that people should watch the government's role and heed any warning signs."

Of course, even as people flocked to the scene, it remained a very dangerous situation seemingly waiting to get out of hand. Treibs remembered, "On arrival at the roadblock we saw brown suited DPS, ATF, Texas Rangers, Waco Police, lined across the road. One ATF guy had an all-black suit and bullet vest. The ATF were in full gear, with bullet vests and either M-16s or AR-15s, MP-5s with both magazines loaded, and shotguns. The ATF each had a sidearm, and most of them had several additional mags for the sidearms. Some of the longarms had mini mag flashlights attached on the business end. … Some of the ATF were spread out beyond the road, as if to keep us from venturing around the block. They were all holding their rifles, as you would expect in any military operation. … . Overhead every once in a while a Huey copter with 2 men on each side with their legs dangling off the edge, I could make out 'FBI' on one jacket, each with an M-16/AR-15 or some other rifle watched us. The helicopter landed at one point in the field, and several times flew quite close and slowly around us."

At this point, no one on either side of the argument was accomplishing anything productive. The FBI tried to get things moving by allowing Koresh to speak to his attorney, but this merely proved to be a stalling tactic on the part of the cult leader. Sage explained, “After the attorneys went in, there was -- David said that he was going to write his manuscript of the meanings of the seven seals. … Finally, on about the 18th of April, the decision was made that we've had enough delays, we've had enough disingenuous lies coming from these individuals. It was time to exercise a tactical resolution.”

Indeed, Koresh’s estimation on how long the project would take to complete had stretched from two months to a year, and everyone was tired of waiting. Janet Reno, the new Attorney General of the United States, was anxious to be seen as tough and quickly approved the FBI’s plan of action. She later said, “I approved the plan and I'm responsible for it. I advised the president, but I did not advise him as to the details.” For his part, President Clinton asserted, “Finally, I told her that if she thought it was the right thing to do, she could go ahead."

According to a report subsequently sent to Reno, “The first stage of the operation required two Combat Engineering Vehicles (CEVs) to remove all fortifications, obstacles, and vehicles from the front side of the compound. Double rows of concertina wire were to be placed along the front of the building so that the compound would be completely encircled with wire. On execution of the operation order on April 19, two CEVs were to enter the compound inside the concertina wire prior to sunrise. One CEV would have its boom penetrate the structure on the first floor on one corner and project tear gas…. After delivery, the CEV would withdraw from the structure and stand by. Once the first CEV withdrew, the second CEV would insert additional tear gas into the second floor, on the middle of the right side of the building. The booms were to push aside obstructions and, if necessary, sweep left and right into the windows, making an alternative opening to facilitate the injection of the gas. … The second stage of the "chemical agent plan" called for the injection of the gas through a corner in the rear of the structure. It was hoped that by introducing gas at opposite ends of the compound, the Branch Davidians would be forced out the front door and surrender. If firing commenced from the compound, the Bradleys [tanks] would be prepared to deliver ferret liquid tear gas rounds into all windows and openings in the compound structure.”

One concern constantly on the FBI's mind was that Koresh and his followers would commit suicide, just as the Peoples Temple group had in 1978 under the leadership of Jim Jones. A report to the Attorney General noted, "The input the FBI received regarding the suicidal tendencies of Koresh and his followers was conflicting. …The negotiation team reported its 'growing concern' that, despite his statements to the contrary, Koresh might be planning a mass suicide similar to-Jonestown. Nevertheless, the [Behavioral Science Unit] concluded that mass suicide was probably unlikely, because Koresh possessed, among others, the following personality traits: (1) generally acts only in self-interest; (2) statistically shows a low suicide rate; and (3) more likely to arrange a 'suicide by cop' situation than to commit suicide. … The experts who analyzed the letters Koresh sent out between April 9 and April 14 also reached different conclusions regarding the possibility of suicide. Dr. Miron rejected the possibility of suicide…: 'In my judgment, we are facing a determined, hardened adversary who has no intention of delivering himself or his followers into the hands of his adversaries. It is my belief that he is waiting for an assault. . . . Koresh's communication does not resemble the suicidal sermon made by Jim Jones in the last hours of Jonestown. His is not the language of those at Massada or Jonestown. He intends to fight.' However, Krofchek and Van Zandt analyzed the same letter from Koresh and reached a somewhat different conclusion: Koresh was 'willing to kill, to see his followers die, and to die himself [and was] …'fully capable of creating the circumstances to bring this matter to a 'magnificent' end, in his mind, a conclusion that could take the lives of all of his followers and as many of the authorities as possible.'"

Now it simply remained for the FBI to decide when to act. According to Ricks, "We went 27 days with nobody being released. David Koresh became more violent in his rhetoric. He has made such statements as we are ready for war, let's get it on." Thus, on April 19, 1993, the 51st day of the siege, the agents moved in. Sage was given a bullhorn and told to warn the Branch Davidians, telling them, in effect, "David, individuals inside the Branch Davidian compound, we are in the process of placing tear gas into the building. Exit the compound now. Submit to the proper authority, David. You are under arrest. This standoff is over. Believe me, it will not get any better. It will only get worse. David, you have had your 15 minutes of fame. It's time to leave the building."

The final assault began at around 6:00 a.m. that morning, and at first, things went off as planned. The agents were able to breach the compound, allowing them to attempt to flush out the compound's occupants with gas. However, the Davidians managed to resist the tear gas, some by wearing masks and others by hiding in a concrete bunker within the compound.

Pictures of a tank breaching various parts of the compound

The Branch Davidians remained in place for nearly six hours, and throughout this time, FBI surveillance devices that recorded comments from within the building indicate that some members were planning to start a fire. Unfortunately, the analysis of the tapes would only come after the confrontation ended because some of the most damning comments couldn’t be made out in real time. These included remarks such as "Pablo, have you poured it yet?" "In the hallway" "Things are poured, right?" "Don't pour it all out, we might need some later." "The fuel has to go all around to get started." and "Well, there are two cans here, if that's poured soon." Sometime after 11:30 a.m., other, more obvious comments came through, including "I want a fire." "Keep that fire going." and "Do you think I could light this soon?"

Graeme Craddock, one of the men who escaped the compound, was interviewed by the FBI, and according to the report made to the Attorney General, he told investigators that the Branch Davidians voluntarily started fires: "Craddock advised that when the Bradley came in through the front entrance, they started moving fuel. Craddock believes that the compound had a total of approximately one dozen, one gallon containers of lantern fuel and that they had been located in the lobby area. He said he saw a lot of people grabbing fuel containers and moving them to other areas. Craddock believes that possibly three or four of these containers had been put next to the window that had already been knocked out by the Bradley on the southern side of1the chapel area. Craddock said he had heard someone talking about shifting the fuel from the hallway near the chapel to the (northern?) side window of the chapel. . . . He said he had heard someone complain about fuel being spilled inside. … Craddock indicated that he had heard shouts about starting the fire. … Craddock said that he did not believe the fire in the chapel was the first fire because before the fire in the chapel had begun, he had seen smoke outside. Craddock also said that he had heard someone say, 'Light the fire,' and that he had also heard someone else say, 'Don't light the fire.'"

Not long after noon, smoke was seen coming from one of the windows in the compound. One Hostage Rescue Team agent told federal investigators afterwards that around 12:10 p.m., “he was able to identify and observe [a] male who was behind a piano inside the front door of the compound. This individual was wearing a dark mask and was carrying a long gun. Seconds

after noticing this individual he noticed the man was moving back and forth behind the piano and the individual then assumed a kneeling position. [The HRT agent] noticed the man's hands moving and immediately after that [he] noticed that a fire started in that position. The man immediately departed the area of the piano. At the same time [the HRT agent] noticed a fire start on the red or right side of the building."

Pictures of a fire that started in a second floor bedroom and then spread to a kitchen and dining area

David Thibodeaux, one of the few survivors, recounted the scene inside the compound and blamed the federal agents for the fires: “Around noon I heard someone yell, ‘Fire!’ I thought first of the women and children, whom I had been separated from. I tried desperately to make my way to them, but it was impossible: rubble blocked off passageways, and the fire was spreading quickly. I dropped to my knees to pray, and the wall next to me erupted in flame. I smelled my singed hair and screamed. Community member Derek Lovelock, who had ended up in the same place as me, ran through a hole in the wall and I followed. Moments later, the building exploded. In the years since the fire, I’ve tried desperately to find out what really happened. What I’ve discovered is disturbing. There is convincing evidence that the FBI did more than just create the conditions for a deadly inferno. The disclosures about the use of pyrotechnic weapons and incendiary flares show that they might have actually sparked the blaze. A Defense Department document says that members of a US Army Delta Force unit were present at the siege. The military is barred by law from domestic police work. Infrared images taken from surveillance planes indicate that the FBI was – despite its denials – firing shots into the building and shooting at Branch Davidians who tried to flee. There are photographs that show one of the metal double-doors at the entrance riddled with bullet indentations that could only have come from shooters outside Mount Carmel.”

As the fires became visible, Sage began to plead with Koresh: “My instructions over the loudspeakers went from instructions to, please, David, don't do this. David, don't do this to your people. This is not the way to end this. Lead your people out, David. Be a messiah, not a destroyer.”

However, it was too late. Once the fires started, the agents acted quickly to try to have them put out, but there was little they could do. According to their report, “Three minutes after the first reports of fire, (12:13 p.m.) the forward command post requested that firefighting assistance be obtained. At 12:15 fire department units were ordered to respond. At 12:34 the fire vehicles arrived and headed straight for the compound. At 12:41 the fire units approached the remains of the building. Although the fire crews did not approach the burning building until 31 minutes after the fire had first been reported, it would not have been safe for them to do so earlier given the reports of gunfire from inside the compound. The FBI has noted that to fight a building fire successfully, firefighters must be able to enter the inside of the building. The

FBI has stated that it would have been unacceptably risky for the firefighters to have attempted to approach, much less enter, the burning compound until it was safe to do so. To do otherwise could well have resulted in the deaths of firefighters. Indeed, SAC Jamar stated that even if the firefighters had arrived at the compound earlier he would not have permitted them to enter due to the great risk to their lives. SAC Jamar has also noted that due to the lack of available water in the Mt. Carmel area it would have been extremely difficult for conventional firefighting operations to succeed."

While people continue to debate how the fires started, what is clear is that the fires quickly spread. Aguilera recalled, "Then all of a sudden you see bursts of flames. I'm, like, my god, I hope they allowed the children to leave. … It was quick. Didn't last very long. The structure of the building was very shadfly made of plywood and it's like a wooden match. … I did not think that he would fulfill his prophecy. That's what he did. … I was not just shocked but just horrified. I mean, to think that these children had perished in the fire, and women, and I started asking questions, I'm like, why did this happen? Who started the fire?"

Parsons was also horrified but hopeful that people might still escape: "I will never forget the exact thought that went through my head when I saw the flames. Thank God those mothers will bring their children out now, and we waited and waited and waited, and they didn't bring their children out."

Pictures of the fires engulfing the compound

Sage noted that even as the fires spread, the agents tried to end the standoff: “We never stopped our negotiation efforts. We continued right up until I turned off the speakers on that last day at 12:35 in the afternoon. … I don't think we, the FBI, ATF, anybody else ever had any control over how this was going end. I think the only control we truly have was when it was going to end. … We banked on the fact that a parent, if they found their children exposed to that kind of discomfort, would move heaven and earth to get them to a position of safety. And we were wrong. … But how in the world could they have done that to their kids? Nine people came out, not one of them brought a child.”

Clive Doyle was one of the people Sage was talking about; while he escaped, he left behind his teenage daughter, whom he had allowed Koresh to “marry.” He later admitted, “You beat yourself up, and why didn't I go looking for one, why didn't I rescue, why didn't I save anybody? I've kicked myself ever since. People do strange things…. Whether anybody actually deliberately lit a fire in there, I don't know. But my question would be, even if they did, whose fault is it? Is it our fault because we were bent on dying or is it FBI's fault for taunting David?”

His remarks were hardly the only accusations subsequently leveled against the FBI and the ATF. Many went so far as to accuse the agents of starting the fire, which infuriated Ricks: “Everyone was in tears. We could all see the faces of the children. We all knew who they were. We had seen them. And that's what we were dedicated to doing, was trying to rescue those kids out of there. And that had all gone up in smoke and we knew that they were all dying and there was nothing that we could do about it. … It almost became common belief that the FBI had shot the people in there or that the FBI had perhaps started the fire. … I'm not saying the FBI did everything right or that ATF did everything right. But we did not set the fires, we did not murder anybody.”

Despite the anger and conspiracy theories, the evidence was on the government’s side. That evidence included infrared images shot by helicopters at the time the fires started. These pictures clearly showed three separate ignition points within the building before any agent ever reached it. Furthermore, as Sage pointed out, “Nine Branch Davidians exited that compound that last day. Seven of the nine had accelerants on their clothing.”

Chapter 6: Questions

"Tapes of the negotiations between the FBI and Koresh catch government agents lying about details big and small, as if they wanted the discussions to fail, and wanted only an excuse to attack. There are other questions: Why did the FBI call the local hospital hours before the fire and ask how many beds were available in its burn unit? Why did it not allow firefighters in? What did the FBI negotiator mean when he threateningly said we 'should buy some fire insurance'? Why did the FBI not allow anyone access to the crime scene, despite their promise to the Texas Rangers that they would be allowed to inspect first? Why did they ever raid the compound to begin with, since no charges from the original warrant were ever filed or substantiated? I often wonder why I survived the blaze. Perhaps it was to be some sort of a witness. Federal agents conducted a police raid that wasn't necessary based on charges that would never stand up in any US court. They refused to negotiate in good faith, played horrible sounds of animals being slaughtered for weeks, and finally set our home on fire." - David Thibodeaux, one of the survivors

By 1:00, the fire was out and the compound was gone, as were the lives of 78 men, women and children who had lived there. Ricks claimed, "The children themselves were mostly executed. They were either beat to death, stabbed to death, or shot. … David Koresh was never going to walk out of that place on our terms. It was doomed from day one that that place, which went by the name of Rancho Apocalypse, was destined to end up in flames." Those who were not shot likely died by their own choice, since there were plenty of routes available for their escape (though a large concrete wall fell on some, killing them or rendering them unable to get out). According to Parsons, Koresh himself was also shot. "It appears as though his second in the command, Steve Schneider, shot David Koresh in the head with a pistol and then Schneider turned the pistol on himself."

The loss of life stirred the American people, and many began to criticize the nascent Clinton administration. Defending her boss, Reno issued an unequivocal statement taking responsibility: "I made the decision. I'm accountable. The buck stops with me and nobody ever accused me of running from a decision that I made based on the best information that I had." For his part, Clinton issued a statement distancing himself from the incident: "I am

deeply saddened by the loss of life in Waco today. My thoughts and prayers are with the families of David Koresh's victims. The law enforcement agencies involved in the Waco siege recommended the course of action pursued today. The Attorney General informed me of their analysis and judgment and recommended that we proceed with today's action given the risks of maintaining the previous policy indefinitely. I told the Attorney General to do what she thought was right, and I stand by that decision."

Reno

The controversy around Waco led to a number of civil and criminal trials. 12 of the remaining Branch Davidians were indicted on a variety of charges, including being "part of the conspiracy that Vernon K. Howell, also known as David Koresh, would and did advocate and encourage an armed confrontation, which he described as a 'war,' between his followers and representatives of the

United States government. … David Koresh, originally predicted that this ‘war’ would occur in the Nation of Israel and later changed the location to Mt. Carmel Compound, near Waco, Texas.” The accused were also charged with being “part of the conspiracy that in order to arm his followers for the ‘war’ with the United States…David Koresh, would and did direct that a business location called ‘The Mag Bag’ be established near the Mt. Carmel Compound for the purpose, among others, of receiving shipments of paramilitary supplies. The supplies purchased and received at The Mag Bag included: firearms parts (including parts for fully automatic AK-47 and M-16 rifles); thirty (30) round magazines and one hundred (100) round magazines for M-16 and AK-47 rifles; pouches to carry large ammunition magazines; substantial quantities of ammunition of various sizes (including .50 caliber armor piercing ammunition); grenade launcher parts, flare launchers, K-bar fighting knives, night vision equipment, hand grenade hulls, Kevlar helmets, bullet proof vests and other similar equipment.”

Finally, there was the matter of the fires. The indictment placed the blame for the fires squarely on the Branch Davidians’ shoulders: “It was a part of the conspiracy that on April 18, 1993, Vernon K. Howell, also known as David Koresh, and Steven Schneider would and did finalize a plan to burn the Mt. Carmel Compound in the event an effort was made to finally end the siege by the FBI. This plan was communicated to other residents of the compound. It was part of the conspiracy that on April 19, 1993, the conspirators would and did fire upon tanks and other vehicles manned by FBI agents in an attempt to drive them back from the Mt. Carmel Compound. It was a part of the conspiracy that on April 19, 1993 Vernon K. Howell, also known as David Koresh, would give instructions to spread flammable fuel within the Mt. Carmel Compound upon learning that the FBI was to introduce tear gas into the Compound to end the Siege. It was a part of the conspiracy that a coconspirator would and did give instructions at about noon on April 19, 1993, to start the fires within Mt. Carmel.”

Kathryn Schroeder, whose husband Michael had been killed by agents, arranged a plea bargain in return for her testimony. Eight of those tried were convicted and sentenced to prison terms up to 40 years long. Six appealed, and though the court agreed with some of their claims, it did not overturn their convictions. Eventually, the Supreme Court heard the case and cut each

sentence by either five or 25 years. By July 2007, every Branch Davidian who was convicted had been released.

On the other hand, those who escaped alive and the families of those who did not filed a number of civil suits against the federal government and a number of other agencies, but their attempts to collect damages did not amount to much.

Faced with no way to correct the past, the government decided to at least learn what it could in order to prevent similar tragedies in the future. The report concluded, “This review of ATF's investigation of Koresh, ATF's attempt to plan and to execute search and arrest warrants at the Compound, and its efforts to ‘manage’ the aftermath of the raid, provides a rare opportunity to identify what went wrong, to understand the mistakes that were made, and to learn from this experience to make future operations wiser and safer. Although a few in ATF's management saw the Review as an effort to be resisted, the line agents, throughout the process, have been partners with the Review team. They have been cooperative and committed to finding the truth as an essential effort to advancing the professionalism of their agency. In the course of its examination, the Review identified significant failures on the part of a few individuals. But more importantly, it uncovered serious, systemic defects in ATF's ability to plan for and to conduct a large scale, tactical operation in the context of the difficult circumstances confronted near Waco. These shortcomings, however, should not minimize the difficult challenge such a situation presents to all law enforcement…ATF should not be judged by the events of February 28 alone. There is strength, experience and professionalism throughout the agency, and this Review identifies no problems that cannot be corrected. ATF's leadership can take steps to repair the agency's bruised morale and sharpen and refocus its skills on those unique capabilities which have contributed to its pride and its effectiveness in the past. However, to do so the leadership must be committed to positive change and reform. … ATF's leadership has much to accomplish; they also have much to build upon. Despite the flaws exposed by the events outside Waco, the agency is made up of dedicated, committed and experienced professionals, who have regularly demonstrated sound judgment and remarkable courage in enforcing the law. ATF has a history of success in conducting complex investigations and executing dangerous and challenging law enforcement missions. That fine tradition, together with the line agents' commitment to the truth, and their

courage and determination has enabled ATF to provide our country with a safer and more secure nation under law.”

Remains of a swimming pool at the compound in 1997

A 1995 picture of the road leading to the compound

A 1997 picture of the entrance to Mount Carmel

A 1997 picture of the remains of a burned bus and bathtub at Mount Carmel

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