

Holocaust at Waco

Investigative Report by Gary Null

This article came from the April, 1995 issue (U.S. Volume 26, Number 8) of Penthouse International, Ltd., 277 Park Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10172-0003

The story is now a series of fading memories and images in most Americans' minds, but mention Waco and people still call up many of those discomfiting pieces of the 1993 news story. There was a Jonestown-like suicide cult down in Texas headed by a psychopathic megalomaniac, David Koresh, a modern-day self-proclaimed messiah.... He had a tremendous arms cache.... His Branch Davidian cult abused children.... They were willing to take over the town of Waco.... They were defiant of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, and of the F.B.I.... They were planning to commit mass suicide....

All of these "facts" were supposed to explain why we saw that final image on TV—the Branch Davidian compound burning to the ground. They were supposed to explain why 96 children, women, and men had to die in that conflagration. The problem is, they are not facts. Many are distortions or outright lies fed to the media, swallowed, broadcast, and never questioned.

People in Waco describe the Branch Davidian community as a group of ordinary people and as helpful, friendly, and kind. The Branch Davidian sect was founded in 1893 as an offshoot of the Seventh-Day Adventist church. Many of the approximately 130 people in the compound held regular jobs outside, and the group had been in Waco since 1935. They had built with their own hands the house that was destroyed in the 1993 fire.

James Scott Trim, a researcher who studied the Branch Davidians for more than a year and a half, offers this perspective: "They were no threat, particularly, to anybody. They had been there since the 1930s and certainly hadn't done any damage to anybody thus far. They weren't a group of idiots." Various members of the group, he points out, were highly educated in theology, comparative religion, and law.

Was this a cult? One of the reasons that pejorative label stuck to this group was that film clips were widely broadcast in which David Koresh, the group's leader, was shown saying, "You better watch out—I'm God." What wasn't revealed was that this segment was actually part of a longer film clip. A reporter from an Australian network had been asking Koresh about accusations made by an ex-Branch Davidian leader that he, Koresh, had gotten the former leader's 70-year-old mother pregnant. In reply to this obviously around-the-bend assertion, Koresh had said that if he could get a 70-year-old woman pregnant, then you'd better watch out, because he is God. It was a *joke*. In the uncut film segment, laughter is heard in the background. In the clip, Koresh's remark was taken out of context and played as if it were a serious statement. This deceptive use of a piece of film was enough to paint Koresh as a nut.

Bill Cooper, a former member of the Office of Naval Intelligence, also has looked into the Waco affair. Cooper offers an interesting perspective on the idea of cults. "The definition of a cult is extremely difficult to pin down," he says. "It depends largely upon who is labeling something as a cult. If you really want to get honest with all of this, all of our forefathers who left Europe to come to the United States to escape religious persecution belonged to cults. You could say that this nation was built by cultists. Many of our forefathers belonged to the fraternity known as Freemasonry, which throughout history has been labeled a cult and persecuted."

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David Koresh believed that God wanted him to deliver the message of the Book of Revelations to the world. But concerning the apocalyptic aspects of the Branch Davidians' beliefs, Cooper points out that "the entire Christian religion and segments of the Jewish religion are apocalyptic. Both religions believe in the imminent return of a messiah and the end of the world as we know it, and the beginning of a new heaven on earth. That is certainly apocalyptic. The view of the Branch Davidians was no different. They believed in the interpretation of the Book of Revelations just as the church that they branched off from."

And, Cooper adds, "The truth is that we have protection in this country under the Constitution to practice whatever religion we wish, as long as we're not harming anyone else in the practice of that religion. The truth is that the members of the Branch Davidian religion, their church, were adults and had the right to believe and practice whatever they wished."

To support people's right to follow David Koresh as a leader does not mean that you have to agree with his teachings. Yes, the man may have been a fanatic. Yes, his followers may have been equally zealous. But being a religious zealot is not a crime. Christian fundamentalist groups and Jewish ultra-orthodox groups may keep to themselves, or dress, eat, and act in ways others find strange. And many religious groups follow charismatic leaders who act as if they have the inside word from God. You can call these leaders and their followers zealots or fanatics or cultists if you like, but they still have a right to live as they choose. The Branch Davidians had that right, too.

At least they thought they did. Two of the people who found out that this was not the case, and who managed to live through that discovery, were Sheila Martin and Clyde Doyle. Martin had lived at the Waco complex at Mt. Carmel for five years, with her husband and seven children. She lost five members of her family in the fire. Doyle had lived with the group for at least three years, and he lost his daughter in the fire. Their descriptions of life at the compound are certainly at odds with the picture of a bunch of crazed cultists that the media portrayed.

People came to Mt. Carmel from many different walks of life, Doyle recalls. "Many of them were educated. They were high school teachers, computer programmers, university teachers, and so forth. They were ministers, and they were common people. They were from all different countries and all different nationalities. We lived in harmony. We got along great for such a diverse group of people."

Although people lived communally, they had their independence, Martin says. "Some people say we were controlled and that we had to live a certain way, but that's untrue. We had a choice." She goes on to refute the myth that the Branch Davidians stayed within their complex and never came out. "That's not how it was. We had freedom there. We could go into town. We could go shopping. We had all different types of things, but the main object was to know that we were there to read the Bible."

Daily life was primitive, but since people were there for Bible study, they were usually able to overlook the lack of amenities. Doyle recalls that the Mt. Carmel complex was evolving. "When we first began to develop the place, there were a series of small houses in poor condition. Many of them were deteriorating so badly that we began to tear them down. We took the ones that were worst first and used what lumber we could. We bought new lumber and began to build the complex [shown in media cover-

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age of Waco]. There was continual building going on. New rooms were being added to make new room for people to come and stay.”

But what of the allegations of child abuse at the Davidians’ compound? They are not true, says Martin. “There was no abuse of children. David said the worst abuse children could suffer was when their mothers and fathers did not bring them up to love God and to respect their parents and other people. David said that any of us there who did not treat our children with love and respect were really abusing them.”

So where did the allegations come from? Linda Thompson, a lawyer who is investigating the case, believes they started with one man—Mark Breault, often described as a disgruntled former member of the Branch Davidians. A documentary produced by KPOC-TV in Oklahoma reported that some other former Branch Davidians may have alleged that child abuse was taking place in the complex. In any event, the government has never presented any evidence that any child was ever abused at the Waco compound.

And what about allegations of illegal gun caches at the group’s compound? For one thing, Thompson says that the Waco sheriff’s department found these allegations to be false. Bill Cooper elaborates, “The sheriff investigated on several occasions the allegations that they had illegal weapons, were engaging in illegal activities with those weapons, and had one time even confiscated all their weapons and taken them to the sheriff’s facilities for inspection, and ended up returning them all. There were no illegal weapons, nor illegal activity concerning those weapons, whatsoever. In fact, [per capita] the people at the Mt. Carmel facility possessed less than half the number of weapons possessed by the average citizen of the state of Texas.”

Doyle and Martin, as Branch Davidians, certainly have a stake in proclaiming the group’s innocence. But this claim has been corroborated by others. A special investigative team under former United States attorney general Ramsey Clark has been researching the events leading up to the deaths at Waco. They found a number of discrepancies between the public story and the actual events, and they support what Doyle and Martin are saying. And Dave Hall, a reporter and the manager of KPOC-TV, has done extensive work on the Waco story. Much of what he and his colleagues at the station have uncovered about this tragedy has been so disturbing that Hall has presented his findings to the members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, with the hope that they will commission a special independent investigation of the whole affair. Hall’s is another voice that asserts there was no evidence of illegal firearms at Waco. He mentions something else, too. “We saw evidence the A.T.F. admitted that they had left their weapons mingled in with the weapons that were taken into evidence [at the trial].... That was put in the court records. So the evidence that was admitted in court in the trial period was contaminated. Why the judges let it happen, I do not know.”

The Initial Raid

No crimes had been committed by David Koresh or the members of his group when, on February 28, 1993, they were invaded by agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms. There had been some unsubstantiated talk about the group planning to commit mass suicide, but even if it had been true, this is not within the A.T.F.’s purview. Nor is child abuse—not that *that* charge had been substantiated, either, nor had the weapons-cache charge. So the first attack on the compound was totally uncalled for.

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Film footage of the raid is included in a revealing video put together by Linda Thompson. (The video, *Waco: The Big Lie*, can be obtained from the American Justice Federation, 3850 S. Emerson Ave., Indianapolis, Indiana 46203; [317] 780-5204 or [800] 749-9939; fax: [317] 780-5209. A second video, *Waco //: The Big Lie Continues*, is also available.) In the first video, the viewer can see A.T.F. agents firing at the Branch Davidian compound with automatic weapons. There are helicopters flying overhead. The A.T.F. fire does not seem to be returned.

As reporter Dave Hall explains his findings, "For nine to 12 minutes, these people were being attacked, unannounced, with bullets flying indiscriminately through that building. They were calling for help from the sheriff's department.... Wayne [a Davidian] is telling the 911 operator that there are men out there shooting at them. He was asking them to get the police out to call these people off of them.... We have reporters that have told us that the A.T.F. did not announce themselves until well into the shooting. And judging from the 911 tape, we come to the conclusion that, at the very least, they were under attack for nine minutes by over 100 men, and possibly as much as 15 minutes, before firing back."

Hall points out that the A.T.F. men were not identifiable to the people in the house because the lettering labeling them as A.T.F. agents appears on the back of their black uniforms, not the front. So to the Davidians, the men attacking them were unknown assailants dressed in black. Adding to the confusion and fear of February 28, as well as to the body count, was a helicopter gunship firing down on the roof of the house. Why this brutal military-style assault, in which six Davidians died, was necessary is puzzling. Hall asks, "Why did they not take the sheriff out there, who several times before had served warrants down there and never had a problem? Why didn't they just go down there with a couple of men in business suits?"

An account of the raid by a Davidian survivor is chilling. Clyde Doyle recalls, "David [Koresh] advised everybody to stay cool and to go back to their rooms. He would go and talk to [the officials] at the front door. I then went back to my room, which was in the front of the building on the first floor, up towards the north end. Within a minute or so, I heard his voice at the door saying, 'Hold on a minute. There are women and children here. We need to talk about this.' Before he could get the last words out of his mouth, shots came from the outside...."

"My reaction was to run down the hall towards the front door. I was thinking that some people were bound to be shot and hurt. As I ran down the hall towards the door, I found Perry Jones laying in the hall crying in great pain, saying he had been shot. Perry Jones was an older man, in his sixties. He apparently had been standing behind David as David opened the door. I asked him if he could hang in there a minute. I wanted to see if anyone else was hurt, but as I ran towards the door, I found nobody there...."

"I ran back to Perry and helped him up. A young black man from England appeared and gave me a hand. As he began to lift Perry up on the left side, Perry let out a scream. We helped Perry up into the north end of the building, where the men's quarters were, and put him on a bunk bed away from the front wall, where the bullets were continuing to fire. Perry was in great pain."

"I asked two or three guys to stay with him to help him with whatever he needed and went running back down the hall to see what had happened at the door. As I was running, people were yelling at me to get down. People were shooting through the walls from the outside. I noticed a line of bullets down the hallway from the kitchen

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on down through the front door. It was as if somebody with a machine gun on the outside blindly sprayed bullets, hoping to hit somebody running down the hall without being able to see them because there were no windows. It was like somebody made a sweeping arc with a machine gun. This row of bullet holes penetrated into the hallway.

“Wayne Martin was in the process of getting the 911 calls going. During the shootings that day, I spent part of my time running back and forth, getting messages. The sheriff’s deputy that was talking on the 911 line with Wayne was asking various things.

“He was trying to get things set up, because we didn’t have any communications with David. You would have to run up and down stairs to verbally pass these messages along. We eventually did get a cease-fire, but in the course of running back, I was told that Winston Blake had been shot.

“I went to [Blake’s] room, which was at the very far north end of the men’s section, on the inside. His was the only room on the right-hand side of the hall looking north that had any windows in it. All the rest didn’t have windows in the bedroom because they were up against the cafeteria. You couldn’t see out of his windows because there were three big plastic water tanks outside, where our water supply was.

“As I went up towards his room, I could hear water running. By the time I got to the doorway, I could see Winston laying down in a pool of water. The water tank, which was right up against his window, was riddled with bullets. Since the tank was at an angle, I would almost bet my life on it that Winston was shot from a helicopter. That was the only thing out there that could shoot at that angle. There weren’t any buildings there. There weren’t any A.T.F. people on the ground who would be able to shoot at that angle. I checked his pulse and was convinced that he was dead.

“There was a lot of pandemonium. I went upstairs with messages for David and the whole top-level hallway, where the women and children were. The women were all laying in the halls, almost one on top of the other, so as not to get shot. One of the women, Jadine Wendell, had been shot in her bed. She had a nursing baby, just a few months old.”

Doyle reports that David Koresh had been shot twice, once in the wrist and once through his abdomen. The bullet had gone through his back. For a time, Doyle says, Koresh believed he might die from his wounds.

“I never saw anybody shoot back,” Doyle says, “although I’m not saying that they didn’t. From all the evidence presented, I believe there were a few people who grabbed some weapons. I believe they retaliated because Perry and David had both been shot at the front door without being armed. I guess some people took the stand that they were defending the women, the children, and their teacher. You might say it was in self-defense, or as a reaction to seeing people gunned down for no reason.”

Among the results of Dave Hall’s KPOC-TV investigation are these:

- A.T.F. agent Darrell Dyer, when he arrived at Waco on February 23, 1993, was stunned to find that no mandatory documentation of the raid plan had been made. Dyer and agent William Krone set out to draft a plan. But on the morning of February 28, the plan was never distributed. It remained in Krone’s desk.
- The very warrant they were to serve was also left behind.

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- Ten days after the raid, A.T.F. agent Roland Ballesteros made two statements to the Texas Rangers that the A.T.F. shot first and made no announcement that they were federal agents.
- A.T.F. agent Eric Ever made a tape-recorded statement to the Texas Rangers just after the raid that the first shots he heard came from a team of agents with dogs.
- It is well-documented that David Koresh had left the complex many times while under the surveillance of as many as eight A.T.F. agents. Agent Robert Rodriguez told Hall that the reason Koresh was not arrested when he was observed leaving was that they had a search warrant, but no arrest warrant. But when Hall checked at the courthouse in Waco, he found that the warrant was, in fact, an arrest warrant.

Linda Thompson's video footage raises other questions. It shows a group of four agents climbing ladders to reach a first-floor roof. Once there, they break into a second-floor window, apparently after throwing some kind of smoke grenade into the house. No one seems to be firing at them as they do so. The fourth man seems to throw a grenade and then fire a machine gun into the room. Is the fourth man attacking his fellow agents? As the film narrator informs us, the three agents who entered that window died in the assault.

Branch Davidian Mike Schroeder's death that day was particularly shocking. He had left the compound before the raid and later attempted to return home. He never made it. According to his father, Ken Schroeder, who has spent enormous energy investigating the death of his son, "There was an outer perimeter already established at that time. And he and these two other guys that were with him were disarmed by the Texas Rangers and let go to go on in. At that time, they were ambushed... Surprisingly, the particular spot where his body was found, all the ground 20 feet around where he was found, a foot deep, has been removed." Schroeder's son had been shot seven times, with most of the shots in his back, and his body had been left to rot for several days. The official lie at the time was that Mike and his compatriots had tried to shoot their way out of the compound. Ken Schroeder's attempts to get his legislators to do something about this aspect of the Waco tragedy and cover-up have been met by bureaucratic non-answers.

The F.B.I. took charge of the Waco scene a few days after the initial assault, and during that bureau's long siege of the compound, the media was kept three miles from the Mt. Carmel center. Every morning at 10:30, a press conference was held in which an F.B.I. spokesman told the nation what was supposedly going on.

If the news media had been fully informed about the Branch Davidians and about the nature of the attacks against them, there would probably have been outraged protest by the American people, who were paying for the siege and for the killings.

The Siege

During the 51 days between the initial A.T.F. raid and the final holocaust at the compound, the F.B.I. cut off all utilities and sanitation. Phone lines to everyone but the F.B.I. were severed, and radio communications were jammed. Government loudspeakers blared nonstop with such sounds as chants by Tibetan monks, jet planes, Nancy Sinatra singing "These Boots Are Made for Walking," and the cries of rabbits being slaughtered. Tanks fired percussion grenades. Stadium lights kept the house illuminated around the clock. Black helicopters flew overhead. Linda Thompson notes that around the 40th day of the siege, Koresh indicated that the children and

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babies were out of milk. Yet relief efforts to bring baby food to the compound were turned back. The authorities were supposed to be concerned about the children inside the compound; in fact, that was the main rationale for the government's actions. So why were its agents trying to starve the children?

Sheila Martin describes the aftermath of the February 28 raid. "We began to stock up on water," she says. "When it rained, we collected water in buckets and brought it back into our rooms to wash our hands and clothes. We stayed close to our rooms and didn't venture down hallways as much. We tried to avoid walking past windows.

"We were in the dark every night. Except for the lights outside, we couldn't see anything. We were glad when the morning came because we felt they weren't going to get us then. We stayed as close as possible to each other for encouragement. We prayed a lot and read our Bibles.

"One time they told David to tell the people to come out, and he answered that he didn't see us. For three weeks we did not really see him. We did not have studies. We stayed there because we wanted to. We believed that if we stayed close to each other, they would not do anything to hurt us. We believed that God would take care of us.

"We didn't know what was going to happen to us. One Tuesday morning, Margaret and Catherine Madison went out and were taken to jail. David said, 'Those are 70-year-old women. How could they put them in jail? How could they accuse them of conspiracy to murder?' The government removed those charges after they stayed in jail for a week or so.

"After that happened, we knew that we would be going to jail. We accepted that. Since we didn't do anything, we believed that we would be out just as soon as they realized that we weren't capable of committing any of those actions."

The F.B.I. was supposedly urging the Branch Davidians to surrender all this time. Yet Linda Thompson reports that a bureau spokesman announced on April 17, that "anyone who came out would be considered a threat to the A.T.F. agents and would be shot. Shots and percussion grenades were fired at a person who tried to leave through a window that day."

Holocaust

A sickening event occurred early in the morning of April 19, 1993. A tank maneuvered repeatedly back and forth over a large underground bunker. This bunker was a short distance from the house, connected to it by an underground passageway. The tank shown in the video seems to be destroying the means of egress for the people in the bunker, and the viewer sees smoke coming up out of the ground there.

The fire in the house started at about noon. The video shows a tank with an extension that looks like a blazing blowtorch pushing into the house, then pulling out. Also, A.T.F. agents are shown jumping from the burning building, and it looks as if they are removing fire-repellent clothing as they head away from the building. The question of government men being inside the compound and then leaving during the fire has never been investigated.

Again, an account of what happened at Waco from a Branch Davidian's prospective is riveting. Clyde Doyle describes his experience. "Shortly after noon," he begins, "somebody came running into the church saying the building was on fire.... There was

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a two-by-four partition on the stage of the chapel, with Sheetrock on one side only. We had put a big-screen TV there to watch videos. There was a little doorway cut on the left of that. I went through the doorway, still on the stage but around the back of this partition. The tanks had knocked a fairly large hole in the south wall of the chapel behind this partition. It had a lot of rubble in front of it.

“People began to gather in that area, not knowing what to do. They would ask, ‘Where’s the fire?’ ‘What’s going on?’ ‘What should we do?’ ‘Should we jump out?’ More and more people crowded into this narrow area. I was closest to the opening.

“We made efforts to throw a little dog out, but she attached herself to me and kept coming back in. She had pups in the church during the siege. David Tibida kept on throwing her out. He said he didn’t want to see the dog get burned. Eventually, she stayed out.

“Just about that time, a lot of smoke started coming in. Within 30 seconds to a minute, the whole place was pitch-black. You could hardly see a thing. You had the feeling you were totally surrounded by heat. You couldn’t see any flames for a while, but you could feel this tremendously unbearable heat.

“One time a tank came in the front door and sprayed gas. It got all over a couple of the guys. All they had on were tank tops. Their discomfort was unbearable, and they were hollering from the stinging sensations.

“[The authorities said] that they stepped up the gas after 200 rounds of firing went off from the inside that day. That’s not a true statement. There was no firing going on from inside. I have never seen any proof of it, but they continue to claim that is the reason they stepped up the gassing.

“I put on as much clothing as I could. I had on a couple of jackets, a hood, and a gas mask.... I began to feel the heat in gusts. The wind caused the heat to hit us in tremendous waves. The next thing I knew, I was on the floor. A lot of people further into the building were also on the floor. I could hear them rolling around in pain and praying and screaming, ‘Oh my God!’ Hearing that voice, the pain, the trauma, and everything that was going on galvanized me to jump up and make a lunge for the hole that was in front of me. I couldn’t see it in the smoke and darkness, but I knew it was there, and I lunged for it.

“I landed on a heap of Sheetrock and wood, and didn’t make it to the outside. I just bellied down this Sheetrock and slid over it until I landed on a heap outside.

“As I stood up, I could see the skin rolling off my hands. I wasn’t blistering regular blisters. The skin was just rolling off in big rolls. My hands were badly burned. I looked back over my shoulder at the hole I had just come out of. It was a mass of flames. I thought, ‘My God, I’m the only one who got out.’”

Doyle wound up in a medical tent, where he lost consciousness. He woke up the next day in the hospital.

This is some of what Sheila Martin remembers of the inferno:

“Five members of my family died in the fire. My husband, Larry Lynch, was killed on April 19. We did not know the complex was on fire at first, but we started smelling smoke. We didn’t know what to do. We were afraid that if we came out of the building, we would be shot. All of a sudden, the smoke came. I couldn’t see my husband any more.

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“Recently, Marjorie Thomas, a woman who was burned very badly in the fire and who lives in England now, said that she came down a ladder from the third floor on the left side, facing the building that eventually started leaning. She stepped on someone and realized that it was my daughter, Sheila, and apologized. She said, ‘Oh, I’m sorry,’ and my daughter replied, ‘That’s all right.’

“My first thought was, ‘Oh, my goodness, that means she was alive during all that smoke and fire and hadn’t died yet.’ Then I thought, here we are, in the midst of all this horror, and we had the time to say, ‘I’m sorry.’”

The Suicide Story

It has been said and generally accepted that the Branch Davidians committed suicide. But Gordon Novel, the strategic planner for Ramsey Clark’s investigative team, believes that the government may have murdered people.

According to investigators, C.S. gas was pumped into the compound from 6 A.M. to 12 noon on the day of the fire. C.S. is a toxic tear gas designed for open-air use to disperse riots. In confined spaces, it has been known to combine with other compounds to form the deadly hydrogen-cyanide gas. At noon, government tanks hit the compound with a big injection of an atomized mixture of orthochlorobenzylidene malononitrile and ethanol. The mixture was heated so that it would release hydrogen cyanide and carbon monoxide into a vapor. Autopsies indicate that large numbers of people were already dead from hydrogen cyanide gas before the fire. People died from cyanide poisoning within four to five minutes.

In a documentary videotape produced by KPOC-TV and aired on more than 100 stations last year, Novel states, “I believe [the government’s] intent was to trap them, and to incapacitate them, and to poison them with cyanide gas, and they probably came through there in the last three or four minutes, right when the fire began to ignite and the hydrogen cyanide was in there—we have indications of that from the F.B.I. agents taking their respirators off right after the fire started, and you can see them exiting the building—so based upon...the fact that the Davidians had no .45-caliber pistols, one can reasonably deduct that they were shot while they were wriggling on the ground, including the babies.”

According to Novel, .44- and .45-caliber pistols were found at the scene of the fire. But the government must have known that the Davidians did not own these types of guns, because they had a list of every weapons purchase the Davidians had made. Although the government claimed many of the Davidian deaths were demonic suicides, Novel says, “The Davidians were totally non-suicidal...very Christian in their mentality.”

The government’s use of C.S. gas inside the house is one of the most disturbing aspects of the entire tragedy. C.S. gas is never supposed to be used inside a building. Used inside, it can create fires, and it can produce cyanide, which can immobilize and kill. Dave Hall, who has conducted his own exhaustive investigation of the role of C.S. gas, believes that the gas contributed to the mass casualties at Waco. He talked with the manufacturer of C.S. gas, Aldridge Chemicals. The company emphasized that this product was intended for *outdoor* riot control only; it was not supposed to be a weapon. In fact, the company says it stopped selling C.S. to Israel in 1988 because the government there was shooting the chemical into buildings occupied by Palestinians. Many of those people subjected to the gas became ill, and others died from the

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exposure in enclosed quarters, as reported by Amnesty International's Chemical Report on C.S. Agent #6.

Hall has learned that the C.S. gas played a large part in the Waco tragedy. It both contributed to the very-high-temperature fire and incapacitated its victims so that they could not move to escape the building. In the autopsies of Waco fire victims, cyanide—from breathing C.S. gas—was found in the victims' blood. Also, Hall reports, "Our state fire marshal says they aerated the building in such a way as to create the fire and to contain the gas in there, which was as flammable as coal dust. They knew all these things."

There was a very long delay before fire trucks reached the site. Hall explains that the fire trucks were held back by the A.T.F. because, had they shot water on that fire, the gas present would have combined with the water to create a hydrogen-cyanide steam cloud that would have been deadly to the agents surrounding the place.

Hall provides this chronology: Smoke was seen coming from the complex at 12:05 P.M. Within minutes, fire was spotted in four different locations. But fire trucks were not called until approximately 12:30 P.M. They were held back under the claim of danger from exploding ammunition.

Dr. George F. Uhlig is a professor of chemistry at the College of Eastern Utah and a retired Air Force lieutenant colonel. Here's some of what he had to say in a report for KPOC-TV:

"In my opinion, the C.S. was diluted with either acetone or ethanol, as the autopsies indicated both solvents were in the lungs of the individuals killed at the Branch Davidian complex.... The liquid aerosol...came into contact with a flame, and the flame front traveled from particle to particle rapidly to create the 'fireball' described by survivors. We used a similar concept in designing fuel-air explosive devices in the Air Force. An explosive device would detonate, sending out an aerosol of either liquid or solid material of the proper particle size. A second explosion would then 'touch off' the aerosol mix, with devastating results. While the flame front in the case of the Branch Davidians' complex did not generate the overpressure of the fuel-air explosive device, the results were similar. The structure burned rapidly to the ground, and the C.S. agent was burned in the process. Cyanide radicals were generated as the C.S. burned, combining with normal fluids in the lungs of the people to generate hydrogen-cyanide gas....

"It was probably a good decision on the part of federal agents on the scene not to attempt to put out the fire using water. The resulting steam generated by the water coming into contact with the hot structure would further generate hydrogen cyanide, and the resulting cloud of cyanide gas and steam could have been carried by the prevailing winds over populated areas. This could have killed people not even involved in the incident, or at least made them extremely sick."

Dave Hall says that for six hours straight—from 6 A.M. to noon on the day of the fire—massive amounts of the C.S. gas were injected into the Davidians' home. This was despite a previously agreed-upon plan to use "light doses" because the children had no gas masks. At this point, Hall notes, we must keep in mind that the F.B.I. and the A.T.F. were fully aware that the Davidians were using kerosene lanterns inside the compound both day and night. They knew this because they had infrared surveillance equipment in the air and on the ground at the complex. They were also, of

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course, aware of the lethal capabilities of C.S. gas, because these were spelled out in their manual.

A telling fact is that after the fire, the A.T.F. destroyed everything that remained of the Branch Davidians' home and its site. Usually, after a disaster, authorities take pains to preserve evidence so that it can be studied to fully understand what happened. So why would they immediately level the evidence at Waco?

Texas state fire marshals were refused access to investigate the fire scene. They were told it was the jurisdiction of the A.T.F. (After the whole thing was over, the A.T.F. raised its own flag over the ruins.)

A disturbing constitutional aspect of the events at Waco is that helicopters from the Texas National Guard were supplied, along with military tanks and manpower from Ft. Hood, Texas, for a police action against civilians. This is probably illegal. How did this happen? How did the military get involved? The F.B.I., through the Department of Justice, requested that Texas Governor Ann Richards allow the use of helicopters from the Texas National Guard at Waco. Texas law forbids the use of the National Guard in police action against a citizen of the state, except when drugs are involved in a criminal action. But the A.T.F. apparently fabricated a drug charge to gain the use of the helicopters. Later, Governor Richards stated publicly that she had been lied to by the Department of Justice.

One other fact was not publicized. The Davidians would have run out of water a week or two after the fire date. To achieve their total subjugation, there was never really any need to incinerate their home.

The survivors of the fire at Mt. Carmel have not had an easy time. Clyde Doyle recalls his agony in the hospital after the fire. "When I finally came to, the doctors and nurses asked me to identify two females who were brought in who were badly burned," he says. "They didn't want me to get of bed, but they described them to me. The first woman they described as tall, black, and around 30. The only tall black woman I could think of was Marjorie Thomas. It turned out that I was correct. She was badly burned on her face and just about all over.

"Then they began to describe the other woman. All of a sudden, I welled up, thinking that it might be my 18-year-old daughter. I wanted to see her, but they told me I couldn't. They said they would get something and that I might be able to identify her from that. I was thinking they would bring me some clothing to look at. Instead, one of them walked in with a great big hunk of hair, like a scalp. They said, 'Do you think this is your daughter?' Looking at the hair, I had the feeling it wasn't hers, unless the fire had changed the color slightly. But I still wasn't sure.

"The next day, I was watching television when the news came on and identified two of the bodies," Doyle continues. "One, they said, was David Jones. The other was identified as my daughter.... Usually on the news, names are withheld until the next of kin is first notified. Here, my mother was never told. My other daughter was never told. And I was never told. We learned about my daughter's death from television, To me, this was just another indication that we were not considered normal people, and that anything was good enough for us. They could do anything they liked and it would be all right."

Sheila Martin was similarly mistreated by the authorities, but she overcame her hardship through prayer and faith. "With all our people dead," she says, "we didn't have a normal life. We couldn't see family and friends. We couldn't go anywhere. We

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had to stay in the correctional institution. We were watching TV, seeing the building burn, hearing them say there are 20 survivors, there are nine. We wondered what was really going on.

“They asked us who died, and wanted to know their ages. It’s not like someone came and put their arms around you and said, ‘Oh, we’re so sorry.’ We had none of that. We had to be strong. We didn’t want to look like we were giving up or that we hated anyone. At the same time, we wanted to cry our eyes out. I had three children who still needed me, and they were somewhere else. I only got to see them one hour a week for three weeks.”

The Trial

The surviving Branch Davidians were sentenced harshly in the aftermath of Waco. According to Doyle, “We’ve been accused of killing four A.T.F. agents and wounding 15 other people. I feel sorry that four agents died and that some of them are badly wounded, but I went through a trial in San Antonio and spent ten months in jail after the fire. I was one of three who were eventually totally acquitted, although everyone was found not guilty of any major crime, such as conspiracy, murder, and aiding and abetting murder.

“[The judge] did not follow the recommendations of the jury. In fact, during the sentencing, which was in July [1994], he made a statement that he personally believed that we were all guilty. He said the only reason some of us were not being sentenced that day was that some of us had better lawyers. He said we were all guilty of conspiracy and murder

“Back in February, when the verdict was handed down, we were found not guilty on count one and not guilty on count two. Then the jury turned around. It might have been due to a confusion on their parts. We talked to a few of them, and that seems to have been the case. There were so many instructions and misconceptions that they basically made a grave mistake as far as certain charges go....

“[But] I believe that as a result of the trial, for the first time, the media began to have a different feeling about this whole thing. During the 51-day siege, very few people in the media bothered to question what was happening. They never asked hard questions or rocked the boat in any way. Instead, they just printed up whatever was told to them in the morning briefings from the F.B.I. and the A.T.F.

“By the time this case came to trial, based on all the evidence that was being compiled at the time, I believe they began to see that there was a massive cover-up and a massive injustice done.”

Sheila Martin adds, “It’s very sad. The people who put this whole thing together have said that they’re sorry. They’ve taken the blame for it, but our people are still in jail. How can you say you’re the cause of it and that all this has happened as a result of things you did wrong, but still keep our people in jail?”

In his letter to the Senate Judiciary Committee asking for an independent investigation, Dave Hall summarizes the conclusions of his TV station’s investigation of the tragedy. Those conclusions read, in part, “The Branch Davidians were shot upon without warning; subjected to psychological warfare tactics; their children were killed before their very eyes; and, finally, after 51 days, they were cyanided, many to the point of incapacitation, others to the lethal point. The building was set on fire with pyrotechnic tear-gas shots to destroy the evidence of the crimes the agents had

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committed. Within two days, bulldozers were brought in to further complicate any further investigation.”

Why did this nightmare happen?

The government’s confrontation with the Branch Davidians may have started as a kind of public-relations ploy to show how good the government was at maintaining law and order by cracking down on cults with illegal arms caches and weird ways. But then the publicity stunt got out of control.

Linda Thompson’s opinion is that “Waco was merely one of the first tests of using federal law enforcement with military, and using military tactics. The government proved it could use the major media to tell the government’s version of the story to the public. It was a victory for mass propaganda.

“They murdered 96 people in front of our eyes on national TV, and the public bought it.”

And Waco has one final, totally chilling message to the people of America: “it is useless to resist.... Don’t confront your government, or you’ll be dealt with.” Anyone who accepts without question the official version of the government’s war against the Branch Davidians has, in reality, already surrendered.

Editor’s note: Dave Hall, of KPOC-TV in Oklahoma, has been a major investigator of the government’s mishandling of the Waco disaster and was of great assistance to us in preparing this article. Hall and KPOC-TV have produced a documentary entitled The Waco Incident that is available from Southwest Video ([800] 284-7566).

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