

The 1993 Waco Siege Script

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Well, Howdy, ya'll!!

Welcome back to the Texas Talkin Podcast. I am your host Terisa Holbrook ODowd. Welcome to episode 05. I apologize for my delay in posting this episode. We should have posted back on June 15, but as fate would have it, my first granddaughter was born, and I was kind of busy. I am glad to be back with you today to bring you the podcast all about Texas.

In this episode, we are going back in time to 1993, Waco Texas. Where we will find the agents from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) and later the FBI tangling with a group known now as the Branch Davidians and their leader David Koresh. What began with ATF agents serving an arrest warrant on Koresh at the Mount Carmel Location approximately 13 miles northeast of Waco, ended 51 days when fire destroyed the later with the Mount Carmel structure killing all 80 people inside. It was most controversial clash between U. S. Law enforcement agents and American citizens to date.

But first, let me tell you a bit about the Texas Talkin' podcast.

As a native Texan, I wanted to bring you a podcast about Texas. In each episode, I will bring you stories, information, and interviews about the history, culture, legend, mystique that is Texas. While Texas is for its hot weather, BBQ, cowboy hats, and large size, what else do you know about Texas? If you are a Texan, a Texan at heart, or just a curious by-passer who would like to know more about the Lone Star State, then you are in the right place. No topic is off-limits as this podcast will explore everything from Texas-style cuisine, attractions, places to visit, historical sites and figures, as well as topics suggested by you, my audience. So, please subscribe to the podcast at Spotify, Podbean, YouTube, Facebook, or go to our website texasalkin.com. That is Texas no space t-a-l-k-i-n dot com to find out more about the show. I do need your help and support to keep the show going. I hope that you will join us every two weeks for new episodes, like us Facebook, give us some 5-star reviews on Apple Podcast and support us at Patreon so that we can remain on the air commercial-free. That is P- A-T-R-E-O-N dot com slash Texasalkin and click become a Patreon. You can support the podcast each month for as little as \$1 per month. I want to thank the following patrons for their support:

Emma F., Richard H., Thomas G., Richard O., Jared O.

Now, let's get on with the show.

The events that occurred in Waco, Texas in 1993 when federal agents began their final siege on Mount Carmel is remembered by many Texans as a tragedy that could have, should have been prevented. But what happened on that fateful day of April 19, 1993? What were the events that led up to the final confrontation? And what have we learned that can prevent the same thing from happening again?

First, let me provide you with a little history lesson on the community of Waco. Waco is the county seat of McLennan County in north central Texas. Today it is best known for ties to the popular tv show "Fixer Upper" in which hometown celebrities Chip and Joanna Gaines flip houses. Waco is about an hour and a half drive from Dallas or Austin, Texas and it is also home to Baylor University and the Dr. Pepper Museum (the soft drink was first bottled in Waco by native Texas Charles Alderton, a young pharmacist that worked at Morrison's Old Corner Drug Store in Waco. According to the Dr. Pepper Museum website (which I will include a link to on my website texastalkin.com). Alderton spent most of his time mixing up medicine for the people of Waco, but in his spare time he liked to serve carbonated drinks at the soda fountain. But more on that topic in a future

podcast. Waco also lies on the Brazos River and was founded in 1840 on the site of the Waco (spelled in Spanish “Hueco” and pronounced Whaco) Indian village near a Texas Ranger fort in a farming and plantation area.

The history of the Branch Davidians began in Waco in 1935, with Victor Houteff. Houteff was a Bulgarian immigrant and a Seventh-day Adventist living in southern California who had some reform ideas for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He had broken from the Adventist church after presenting his views that were contrary to the church’s basic teaching, he and thirty-seven of his followers moved two miles from Waco to establish the Mount Carmel Center. His group became known as the Davidians. When Houteff died in 1955, his wife Florence took over leadership of the group. Florence was convinced that an apocalypse would occur in 1959 and restore the Davidic Kingdom of Israel so she and her council began gathering hundreds of their faithful followers at the Mount Carmel Center, for the fulfillment of the prophecy which is written in Ezekiel 9. When the anticipated apocalypse did not occur, many in the group were disappointed and allowed for member Benjamin Roden to take control of Mount Carmel and form another group which he called the Branch Davidians. When Benjamin Roden died in 1978, he was succeeded by his wife Lois Roden, but some of the Branch Davidian members were torn between allegiance to Lois or to their son, George.

George took over as leader of the group after his mother died, but his reign was short lived as less than a year after becoming the Branch Davidian leader, Vernon Howell rose to become leader of the group. Howell had come to the community in 1981 while Lois Roden was still alive and according to sources, he had engaged in an affair with Lois who was in her late 60's. Howell was in his late 20's when the affair began, and he wanted Lois to have a child with him who according to him would be the Chosen One. Of course, this started a power struggle between George Roden (Lois' son) and Vernon Howell. It got pretty messy (something you can read all about online in the Wikipedia article on the Branch Davidians). To make a long story short, Howell and a few of his followers raided Mount Carmel equipped with semi-automatic rifles and an ensuing court case occurred over the raid, Howell eventually acquired the position of spiritual leader from Roden and changed his name to David Koresh. Why David Koresh? Well, it has been suggested he wanted to create biblical ties to King David and Cyrus the Great (Koresh is the Hebrew version of the name Cyrus). Koresh set out to create a new lineage of world leaders, a practice that would later serve as the basis of child abuse allegations that the ATF claimed contributed to the siege on Mount Carmel. Koresh's teachings centered on Revelations 5:2. He identified himself as being the Lamb mentioned in the passage that most Christians believe symbolizes Jesus

Christ. But Koresh never claimed to be Christ, instead he suggested the Lamb would come before Christ and pave the way for the Second Coming of Christ. Koresh encourage his followers to study the Seven Seals, and he preferred his followers be called “students of the Seven Seals” rather than the Branch Davidians, but during the 1993 Waco siege and standoff, the media would refer to David Koresh and his followers as the Branch Davidians or Koreshians.

So, when the media refers to the Branch Davidians as a splinter group of the Seventh Day Adventists, they are only partially correct. [Clip 02, Live Report Feb 28, 1993 - <https://youtu.be/L6apJl2P1XY>]

Most of the world did not know who David Koresh existed before the ATF attempted to execute a search warrant on him at Mount Carmel on Sunday morning, February 23, 1993. But some of the residents of Waco already knew about David Koresh. One of those was Sheriff Jack Harwell. Koresh first came to the attention of Sherrif Harwell in 1987, when Koresh (then named Howell) and seven of his armed companions tried to get into Mount Carmel to take control of the group and compound from George Roden as previously mentioned. Sheriff Harwell responded to the gun fight that ensued between Koresh and Roden and convinced Koresh to stop shooting and surrender. In a 1995 interview for ABC’s

Frontline, Sheriff Harwell described Koresh and the group as the Mount Carmel compound as “always courteous and I think he invited some of my other deputies who work for me out there to fish with him, and just come out and visit. The way they kind of looked at the property out there---that was their, their own country.”

[Clip 03, Sheriff Harwell - <https://youtu.be/5iT5Gx6eaRA>]

Others in the Waco community had a more sinister view of Koresh and his group. In February 1993, the Waco Tribune-Herald started publishing a series of articles titled “The Sinful Messiah” written by Marke England and Darlene McCormick reporting that David Koresh had physically abused children at Mount Carmel and had committed statutory rape by take underage brides. The paper claimed that Koresh had announced he was entitled to at least 140 wives and that he was entitled to claim any of the women in the group as his, that he had fathered at least a dozen children, and that some of these mothers became brides as young as 12 or 13 years old. In addition to allegations of sexual abuse and misconduct, Koresh and his followers were suspected of stockpiling illegal weapons. A fact that had been reported to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) in May 1992, by Chief Deputy Daniel Weyenberg of the McLennan County Sheriff's Department when a local UPS driver had reported delivering a

package to the Branch Davidian residence that contained firearms, grenade casings, and gun powder.

ATF began surveillance on Koresh on July 30, 1992, after interviewing a local gun dealer, Henry McMahon who sold guns to Koresh and his group. One of the ATF agents, David Aguilera approach Sherriff Harwell about Koresh and the alleged arms stockpile. Sheriff Harwell told the agents to "Just go out and talk to them, what's wrong with notifying them? Instead, the ATF began surveillance from a house across the road from the compound several months before the siege. It was also reported that the gun dealer Henry McMahon also tried to get the ATF to talk with Koresh on the phone and that Koresh even offered to let ATF inspect the Branch Davidians' weapons and paperwork and asked to speak with Aguilera, but Aguilera declined. Whatever happen during that summer, on February 25, 1993, the ATF used an affidavit filed by David Aguilera to obtain the warrant that led to the Waco siege. According to an article published by Eric Hristesen in Insight on the News, The ATF had planned their raid for Monday, March 1, 1993, with the code name "Showtime," but they the raid was moved up a day, to February 28, 1993, in response to the Waco Tribune-Herald's "The Sinful Messiah" series of articles (which the ATF had tried to prevent from being published). Beginning February 1, ATF agents had three meetings with *Tribune-*

Herald staff regarding a delay in publication of "The Sinful Messiah". According to a Department of Treasury report on the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms Investigation, the ATF preferred to arrest Koresh when he was outside Mount Carmel, something ATF planners said Koresh rarely did. But the planners evidently received inaccurate information because plenty of people local to Waco stated after the initial raid that members of the Branch Davidians including David Koresh attended local events, frequented local businesses, and had cordial relations with locals including attending gun shows which partially supported the residences of the Mount Carmel compound and took care to have the relevant paperwork to ensure their firearms transactions were legal. Whatever the case, on February 28, 1993, a Sunday morning, the ATF commander ordered the warrant be served on David Koresh and the residences of Mount Carmel. Here is reporter Alan Hemburger live from Mount Carmel on that fateful day reporting with Eyewitness News, Houston. [clip 04, Eyewitness news - <https://youtu.be/2bkyer7vkXI>]

The residents of Mount Carmel were reportedly attending their Sunday morning worship services when ATF agents arrived at 9:45 AM in a convoy of civilian vehicles containing uniformed personnel in SWAT-style tactical gear. Several of the male followers began arming themselves and take defensive positions when they heard the agents' vehicles arrive. What the ATF hoped

would be a surprise execution of an arrest warrant on Koresh, actually came as no surprise at all. Any advantage of surprise was lost when a KWTX-TV reporter who had been tipped off about the raid asked for directions from a U.S. Postal Service mail carrier who was coincidentally Koresh's brother-in-law. The women and children were told to take cover in their rooms and Koresh told them he would try to speak to the agents. What happened next has been greatly debated. ATF agents stated that they heard shots coming from within the compound, while Branch Davidian survivors claimed that the first shots came from the ATF agents outside. What ever the reason, a firefight ensued between the ATF agents and several of the armed Branch Davidians. In all, four ATF agents (Steve Willis, Robert Williams, Todd McKeehan, and Conway Charles LeBleu) were killed during the firefight. Another 16 were injured.

Five Branch Davidians were killed in the raid, Winston Blake, Peter Gent, Peter Hipsman, Perry Jones, and Jaydean Wendell; Nearly six hours after the 11:30 am ceasefire, Michael Schroeder was shot dead by ATF agents who alleged he fired a pistol at agents as he attempted to re-enter the compound. During the first shots, Koresh was wounded, shot in the hand and the stomach.

Within a minute of the raid's start, Branch Davidian Wayne Martin called the sheriff's office, pleading for them to stop shooting. Martin asked for a ceasefire, and audiotapes record him saying, "Here they come again!" and "That's them shooting! That's not us! Sheriff Lt. Lynch of the McLennan County Sheriff Department contacted the ATF and negotiated a ceasefire [Clip 04, Lt. Lynch - <https://youtu.be/iFGNvLuRADg>]

The bloodiest and most controversial clash between U. S. Law enforcement agents and American citizens was just beginning. The remaining 62 adults and 21 children, refused to leave the Mount Carmel compound, and now their standoff with the government began. Before it was all over 51 days would pass when Koresh and his followers holed up in the compound surrounded by hundreds of federal agents from the ATF and FBI and a barrage of new media outlets. At first, the Davidians had telephone contact with local news media, and Koresh gave phone interviews. Eventually, FBI would cut Davidian communication to the outside world and for the next 51 days, communication would only occur between the Koresh and a select few of his followers and a group of 25 FBI negotiators including the head of the FBI's negotiation team Gary Noesner. The FBI negotiators eventually would secure the release of 44 people during the standoff. At one point Koresh and the FBI negotiators came to an agreement for

Koresh to surrender and for all of the remaining Branch Davidians to come out peacefully. To secure this deal the FBI agreed to allow to broadcast a tape of Koresh to a national radio audience. Here is a recording of that taped played on Dallas radio station KRLD. The voice you hear is that of David Koresh. [Clip 05, KRDL tape of David Koresh] But even as the negotiator tried to reason with Koresh and secure a peaceful outcome, the FBI commanders were ratcheting up the pressure. Beside cutting the phone lines, the FBI cut off power to the compound and began moving their tanks closer to the complex. As negotiations stalled when Koresh delayed his agreed upon surrender. Here is Dave Ward, from the 10:00 PM Eyewitness News broadcast that ran on March 2, 1993. [Clip 06, Waco Standoff Eyewitness news - <https://youtu.be/2bkyer7vkXI>]

Shortly after that broadcast, on April 19, 1993, FBI commanders and the Attorney General of the United States, Janet Reno gave the go ahead to begin moving their tanks closer to the complex and shooting tear gas inside to force the Branch Davidians out. Amid the chaos, a fire erupted. The FBI blamed the Branch Davidians for starting the fire, the surviving Branch Davidians say the FBI cause the fire. The end result was that Koresh and 75 of his followers including all of the remain children were found dead after the blaze. Many of the deceased had fatal gunshot wounds to the head, chest and face, authorities said. Koresh

had a gunshot wound in the middle of his forehead. Among those killed were a 3-year-old boy who was fatally stabbed in the chest and two other minors who suffered fatal blows to the head, according to the FBI. David Thibodeau, one of only nine Branch Davidian members to survive the fire, told TIME in a 2018 interview that he believes the dead Branch Davidians were shot by the FBI. (The FBI claims no law enforcement officer had fired a single bullet since the initial shootout.) Thibodeau said it's also likely some of the Branch Davidians may have shot each other to prevent a slower, more painful death in the fire.

Who started the fire, is still unclear. The Justice Department's lengthy report on the events at Waco and the 51-day standoff at the Branch Davidian compound filed in October 1993, concluded that the fire was "deliberately set by persons inside the compound and was not started by the FBI's tear gas insertion operations", but on December 28, 2000, a report submitted to the 106th U. S. Congress by the U. S. House Committee on Government Reform stated that "the decision to end the standoff on April 19, 1993, was 'premature, wrong, and highly irresponsible,' and that "The

possibility of a negotiated end should have been further pursued”

(<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CRPT-106hrpt1037/html/CRPT-106hrpt1037.htm>).

As for my thoughts on the 1993 Waco Siege, they have changed over the year. When I first heard about the FBI raid on Branch Davidians, I was greatly influenced by the news media, who reported that Koresh was a child molester and bigamist set on leading his group of follows to an apocalyptic end. I remember hearing Attorney General Janet Reno testify before congress as to why it was necessary for the FBI found it necessary to invade the Mount Carmel compound using tanks and tear gas. Here is a recording of AG Janet Reno [Clip 07, <https://youtu.be/mlw7cPIRnyw>]. But after reading *Stalling for Time* by FBI negotiator Gary Noesner, and David Thibodeau’s *Waco: A survivor’s story*, and the countless news articles of others who have examined the evidence, my opinions of what happened at Waco have changed. In an interview with Megyn Kelly on Today back in 2018, David Thibodeau who survived the Waco ordeal as a Branch Davidian, talks about what it was like during the 51 day siege [Clip 08, David Thibodeau <https://youtu.be/V55XeKByEXM>]. Gary Noesner the FBI lead negotiator also spoke to Kelly back in 2018 about his difference of opinion with the FBI

commanders in charge and how they were handling the 51 day standoff [Clip 09, Gary Noesner - <https://youtu.be/V55XeKByEXM>] Was David Koresh guilty of a crime and did he deserve to be arrested? I believe he was guilty and should have been arrested. Should the FBI execute that warrant on April 19, 1993, and subsequently used tear gas to enter the Branch Davidian compound 51 days later? I think not. What was the hurry? There were children in that compound. Surely a more humane plan could have been hatched by the government to save those children.

Today, many in Waco do not even remember or know the story of David Koresh and the FBI Siege on the Branch Davidian compound just outside their town. One law officer who does remember it is the current McLennan County Sheriff Parnell McNamara. Here he is reflecting on the lessons law enforcement learned from the Waco Raid [Clip 010, Parnell McNamara - https://youtu.be/NnFP5BVLq_s]

I have read that the events that took place at Waco have changed federal law enforcement. Commanders and agents of the FBI and ATF receive more training in hostage and mass shooting operations. There is more collaboration between agencies and the training and equipment

agents have access to have improved greatly since 1993. That the FBI made significant changes after Waco. To improve communication and cohesion among the different elements involved in critical incidents like the Waco siege, the bureau created the Critical Incident Response Group. Notably, the agency's tactical and negotiating teams now train together. I can only hope that this is true and that with the better management and command structure of the Critical Incident Response Group tragedies like the one at Waco, Texas in 1993 will never happen again.

I hope you have enjoyed this episode of Texas Talkin. Join us again in two weeks for more stories, interviews, and legends from Texas. Thank you so much for joining me. You can find show notes from this episode and how to become a patron at texastalkin.com. Don't miss an episode. Subscribe to apple podcasts, Patreon, or anywhere you get your podcasts. Follow Texastalkin on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. Subscribe to Texas Talkin YouTube. Thanks for listening!

Until next time!

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