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Ex-prosecutor laments agents' 'storm trooper' tactics

By **ROY BRAGG**
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WACO — Former McLennan County District Attorney Vic Feazell — who unsuccessfully prosecuted seven Branch Davidian members for attempted murder — criticized federal agents for "storm trooper" tactics in laying siege to the group's compound.

Feazell, himself the target of a federal probe six years ago and later acquitted of racketeering charges, also predicted a grim end to the standoff.

"The feds are preparing to kill them," he said, noting the mobiliza-

tion of military equipment into nearby staging areas. "That way they can bury their mistakes. And they won't have attorneys looking over what they did later at a trial."

Feazell's office prosecuted sect leader David Koresh — then known as Vernon Howell — and other Davidians in 1988 for a shootout with rival cult leader George Roden. The others were acquitted and charges against Howell were dropped.

"We had to arrest them to prosecute them in 1987," Feazell said. "We had no problems."

In that instance, McLennan County Sheriff Jack Harwell and a deputy called Howell and told him there were pending charges, that they



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would have to turn themselves in and surrender their weapons.

Deputies went to the compound and the Davidians complied with orders, Feazell said.

Later, after the acquittals, the weapons were returned.

"We treated them like human beings, rather than storm-trooping the place," Feazell said. "They were

extremely polite people. After the trial — although we didn't agree with everything they believed or said — many of the members of the staff were pretty sympathetic with them."

Key to the dispute, Feazell said, is understanding the way the Davidians think.

"They're protective of what's theirs," he said. "They're protective of their land. They view their land as Muslims do Mecca and Jews view Jerusalem."

The shootout with Roden, he said, occurred when Roden and followers forcibly attempted to take the Davidian land.

Sunday's siege "was a vulgar dis-

els usually end there.

play of power on the part of the feds being met with fear and paranoia on the part of the Davidians," he said. "If they'd called and talked to them, the Davidians would've given them what they wanted."

Although he tried to send them to jail for life in 1988, Feazell, now an Austin attorney, said he'd help mediate a truce if asked. He offered to help afterward, too.

"I'd represent these boys for free if they'd surrender without bloodshed," he said. "But I'm afraid I'm going to wake up and see headlines that say they all died."

"It's sad for the Davidians. And it's sad for our government."