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# World again held spellbound as bloody Texas siege unfolds

Compiled from Staff and Wire Reports

It was the summer of 1974 when the eyes of the world focused on a prison in the Texas city of Huntsville.

For 11 days, officials were held at bay by three prison inmates — with drug kingpin Fred Gomez Carrasco of San Antonio in charge — who had taken over the prison library at the Walls Unit of the Texas Department of Corrections.

Armed with three pistols and nearly 300 rounds of ammunition smuggled into the prison in cans of peaches and a ham, Carrasco and his two convict associates held 16 hostages, at hundreds of officials dug in for a long siege.

Finally on Aug. 3 — Day 11 of the siege — Carrasco and the two inmates, using both women and men hostages as shields, attempted to escape inside a Trojan horse fashioned from library blackboards.

During the break, gunfire erupted. Before he was shot to death, Carrasco and another inmate shot and killed two women hostages.

Another convict was slain while the other inmate was wounded and captured.

The other hostages were wounded but survived.

Also in 1974, a young director named Steven Spielberg released his first theatrical feature, "Sugar Land Express," filmed in South Texas.

The base-on-fact movie followed a young couple fleeing across Texas with a child they refused to give up for adoption. A caravan of hundreds of law-enforcement officers followed.

## Focus again on Texas

Now — 18½ years later and some 100 mile northwest of Huntsville — the focus has returned to Texas, to a 77-acre compound known as Mount Carmel, where cult leader David Koresh and his Branch Davidian sect were holed up surrounded by 400 federal, state and local officials.

There already is talk of a movie about the drama.

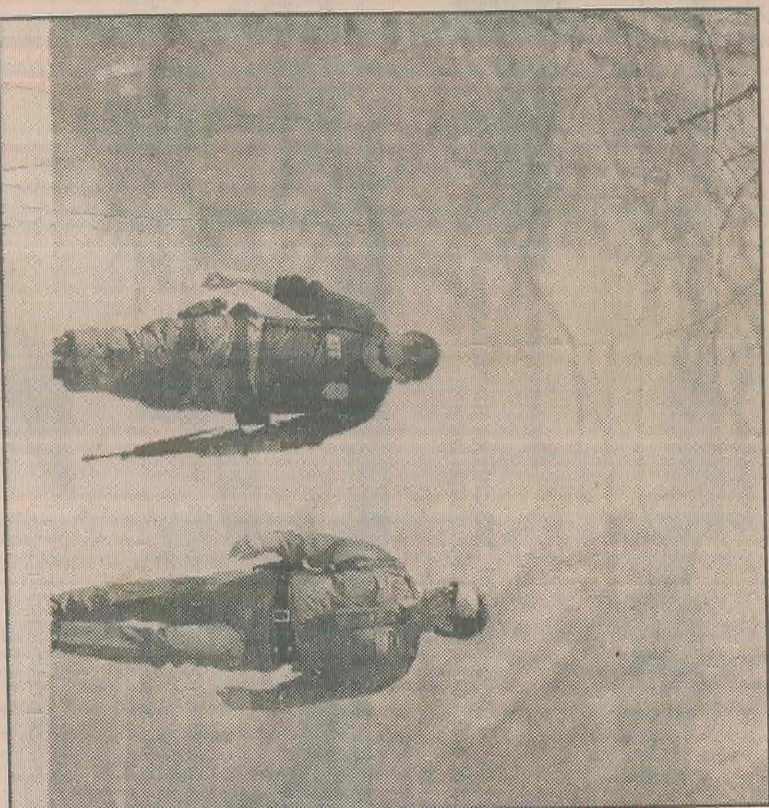
Military firepower — including Bradley fighting vehicles — stand in reserve.

Sunday marks the eighth day of the disastrous assault and subsequent siege at Mount Carmel that, every day since, has made front-page headlines around the world.

It began on a chilly and drizzly Sunday morning a week ago when 150 agents from the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms converged on the compound to arrest Koresh, a man whose followers claim is the messiah and whose detractors say uses mind-control to entrain listeners.

The agents had trained in secret for nearly eight months after receiving word that Koresh and his followers were stockpiling weapons and explosives and possibly building bombs.

The timing of the raid, said one senior ATF official who asked not to be named, "was a (coin) flip



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Two law enforcement officers patrol a country road Saturday morning near the Mount Carmel compound, scene of a tense standoff between sect members and authorities.

**“ You don't have time to think. He doesn't give you time to think about what you're doing. ”**  
— former cult member

(over whether) they would attack the citizens of Waco or do a Jones-town," a reference to the 1978 cult mass suicide led by the Rev. Jim Jones.

The early-morning raid, timed during the cult's daily religious service, was to have been a surprise.

But cult members, supposedly tipped by telephone that ATF agents were on the way, appeared to be waiting for the federal officers.

"We were outgunned," was one reason given by ATF officials for the failure of the raid, which left four agents dead, 15 wounded and as many as 10 cult members killed inside the compound.

"It appeared that they knew we were coming," Special Agent Ted Royster said. "We practiced for it. They drilled over and over again. We had a diversion down, all put into effect, and they were waiting."

Deadly gunfire from within the compound — one of the cult's weapons was said to be a 50-caliber machine gun capable of shooting down an airplane — greeted the agents.

"My helicopter took fire," said Royster, who was in one of three Texas National Guard helicopters.

The agents retreated after a 45-minute firefight, and the siege began.

Those who know Koresh and the Davidians held little hope for a

peaceful resolution.

"I think he will stay there until they kill him," one relative said.

"They're protective of what's theirs," said former McLennan County District Attorney Vic Feazell, who unsuccessfully prosecuted seven cult members for attempted murder.

"They're protective of their land. They view their land as Muslims do Mecca and Jews view Jerusalem," he added.

The ninth-grade dropout holed up with followers in a heavily fortified compound was born 33 years ago to a single mother in Houston.

He was unremarkable in school, with a history of learning disabilities. The only record of any extracurricular activity was one semester in the band at Garland High School.

But if there was one striking trait about Koresh, it was his ability to memorize passages of the Bible. Even as a youngster, he had an uncanny ability to string passages together and to preach Scripture.

Although a poor student in school, Koresh had memorized the New Testament by age 12.

He joined a Seventh-day Adventist Church in Tyler in 1979 but left two years later, apparently unhappy with the church's ban on smoking, drinking and bearing arms.

Before he left Tyler, Koresh was distellowshtipped — taken off church rolls — for violating rules.

## Consumed by prayer

During those years, he was often consumed by prayer.

"He would come home and go out to the barn and pray for hours," said his mother, Bonnie Haldeman.

"I've seen him sitting by his bed, on his knees for hours, crying and praying."

Koresh drifted to Southern California after leaving the Tyler church.

He divided his time proselytizing on behalf of the Branch Davidians, a renegade offshoot of the Seventh-day Adventists, and playing the guitar.

Slowly, he built a following by preaching the Scriptures with unwavering conviction.

"He had this amazing ability to recite verse," said Robyn Bunds, who joined the sect in California. "He just has a good way of interpreting the Scriptures. He is very believable."

Koresh always has enjoyed total devotion from his followers, who have ranged from young people who had lost their jobs to retirees and even a lawyer.

They come from California and small Texas towns. He even has attracted followers from Canada, Great Britain and Australia.

Attracting women was easy for the young man with long, wavy brown hair, dimples and a boyish grin.

Women congregated at a five-bedroom sect house near Los Angeles. During the siege, Koresh was said to have at least 19 "wives" and countless children.

When the Davidians split into two factions in 1984, Koresh assumed leadership. That same year he married 14-year-old Rachel Jones, the daughter of a Branch Davidian follower, and his only legal wife.

## Transformation

Former cult members said that by 1987 Koresh began transforming himself into a self-proclaimed messiah. He also had taken control of the Mount Carmel compound after a long and bloody battle with rivals.

It also was at Mount Carmel that Koresh began developing the conviction that his followers should prepare for a bloody confrontation with non-believers.

"If the Bible is true, then I'm Christ," he has been quoted as saying.

Many of his followers inside the compound believed they were living with the messiah and would do whatever he commanded, a former cult leader said.

"They believe so much in who they think he is that his more fanatical followers might shoot anyone who tried to stand up to (him)," said former cult member Marc Breaunt, an Australian recruited by the sect at a Riverside, Calif., supermarket.

Attorney Gary Coker, who successfully defended Koresh at his 1987 trial for attempted murder, said he never felt threatened.

"But he is an absolute leader, sort of like Hitler," Coker added.

He also said Koresh wouldn't hurt anyone unless he was both-ered by outsiders.

"It's sort of like a rattlesnake," Coker said. "Unless you step on him, he's not going to hurt anyone."