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Waco's 'Dark Questions' Elude Answers, Solace

Davidians: After 6 1/2 years, investigation into the siege is beset with conflicting reports, missing evidence, distrust.

September 26, 1999 | JERRY SCHWARTZ | ASSOCIATED PRESS

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The nine Davidians who escaped the fire denied that any such suicide took place. They claimed the FBI's tank squashed containers of propane and other fuels. Perhaps, they say now, the pyrotechnic grenade or some other projectile set off the fire.

But that morning, FBI surveillance picked up troubling conversations at Mount Carmel: "I already poured it. . . . It's already poured." "Don't pour it all out; we might need some later." "So we only light 'em at first if they come in with that tank, right?"

The FBI says that its snipers saw a Davidian start a fire, and that an infrared camera in a plane overhead detected three fires beginning in three separate parts of the compound, almost simultaneously.

Not all of the Davidians burned to death, however. Twenty-three, including Koresh, died of gunshot wounds. Investigators say they killed themselves or each other or both.

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"The FBI never fired one shot at the Davidians," said Dick Rogers, head of the hostage-rescue team.

But Michael McNulty, maker of the Oscar-nominated documentary "Waco: Rules of Engagement," says the same overhead infrared footage that showed the fires igniting shows something else: automatic weapons fire into the compound, out of journalists' view.

And the Texas Rangers say 12 .308-caliber rifle shell casings and 24 .223-caliber casings were found in a house used by the Hostage Rescue Team.

The FBI says the shell casings could have come from ATF agents who used the house during the Feb. 28 shootout. It has been noted that the FBI agent in charge of the post was Lon Horiuchi, who killed the wife of white separatist Randy Weaver at a 1992 standoff in Ruby Ridge, Idaho.

Dr. Nizam Peerwani, the Tarrant County medical examiner, would like to revisit his autopsies of the Davidians. "The focus at the time was not whether the FBI was doing the shooting."

The corpses themselves will be of little use. Weeks after they were autopsied, the morgue's refrigeration failed. The bodies liquefied.

There are other concerns about the investigation and the evidence.

There were no independent ballistics tests. The Texas Rangers complained that the FBI confiscated their photographs and returned just a few. Spent illumination flares have turned up in the store of government evidence--again, devices that could have set off a fire, although the government says they were used long before, to illuminate

the compound.

Mount Carmel's door, which the Davidians believe would prove the ATF was the aggressor, has vanished. Cars and tracks at the scene were destroyed by FBI armored vehicles. A cap worn by one of the Davidians who died that day disappeared and has only recently been found; it may show that he was executed, shot point blank, the Davidians say.

Nearly six in 10 Americans now say they believe the FBI lied about Waco, according to an ABC News poll--an indication of the skepticism that Danforth will encounter as he tries to answer Waco's dark questions, 6 1/2 years after these sad events.

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