



The Ruby Ridge Siege: The History of the Federal Government's Deadly Standoff with Randy Weaver and His Family

By Charles River Editors

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*Includes pictures *Includes accounts of the standoff by federal agents and members of the Weaver family *Includes online resources and a bibliography for further reading *Includes a table of contents “The Subcommittee is [...] concerned that, as Marshals investigating the Weaver case learned facts that contradicted information they previously had been provided, they did not adequately integrate their updated knowledge into their overall assessment of who Randy Weaver was or what threat he might pose.” – Excerpt from a report by the Senate Judiciary Committee In the summer of 1992, federal agents surrounded a few acres of land isolated in Ruby Ridge, Idaho, where Randy Weaver, his wife Vicki, his 14 year old son Samuel, and his three young daughters were staying. Weaver was a former Green Beret who had come to the attention of the ATF and other federal agencies for a number of reasons, including associations with white supremacist groups and the possession of illegal shotguns. After being arrested and released on bail in 1991, Weaver failed to appear in court when necessary and was thus treated as a fugitive, bringing in the involvement of U.S. Marshals. For the rest of that year, attempts to bring in Weaver were rebuffed, and Weaver threatened to shoot anyone who came to his cabin to bring him in. After a number of reconnaissance efforts and operations to arrest Weaver took place in 1992, federal agents from the U.S. Marshal Service and FBI surrounded the area on August 21 and wound up engaging in a firefight that ended in the deaths of 14 year old Samuel, one of the family dogs, and Marshal Bill Degan, who was shot by Weaver’s friend Kevin Harris. In the aftermath of the shooting, Randy and Vicki brought Samuel’s body to a shed near their main cabin, and they remained inside with Harris for the rest of the day. On August 22, the federal agents were given new rules of engagement that were much more lax when it came to authorizing the use of deadly force. Instead of using the standard FBI policy that authorized deadly force to prevent suffering grievous harm as a method of self-defense, the agents, including snipers, were given the green light to shoot Randy and Kevin Harris if they were carrying weapons, regardless of whether they were actually targeting the federal agents. They were also authorized to shoot any adult after they surrendered if they were carrying a weapon. Before negotiators could even reach the scene on the 22nd, an

FBI sniper shot Randy in the back as he headed towards the shed where his son's body lay. As Randy, his 16 year old daughter Sara, and Harris headed back for cover in the cabin, the same sniper fired a shot at Harris' chest, which wounded him but also struck and killed Vicki, who was standing behind the cabin door holding her 10 month old daughter. Ultimately, it would be several more days before negotiators talked Harris and the Weaver family into surrendering, but the recriminations were just starting. Due to the way the operations were handled, Harris would end up being acquitted of all charges, and Weaver was acquitted of every charge except those involving his refusal to show up in court. Meanwhile, Ruby Ridge severely shook confidence in the way federal law enforcement operated, leading to investigations and reforms. Just as importantly, in addition to influencing how the government approached potential future conflicts with other groups, Ruby Ridge's most important legacy was that it enraged people who already had an anti-government bent. The most notable, of course, was Timothy McVeigh, who conducted what was at the time the deadliest terrorist attack in American history in Oklahoma City in April 1995 and cited Ruby Ridge as a motive. The Ruby Ridge Siege: The History of the Federal Government's Deadly Standoff with Randy Weaver and His Family chronicles the controversial event and the influence it had on subsequent events like Waco and the Oklahoma City bombing.

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