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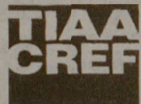
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Cause of compound fire at heart of Waco lawsuits

WASHINGTON (AP) — For all the recent furor over the FBI's use of potentially incendiary tear gas canisters on the final day of the Waco siege, a lawyer suing the government on behalf of Branch Davidian survivors and relatives contends the inferno may have been triggered by other causes.

Cult leader David Koresh and some 80 followers perished during the fiery climax to the siege on April 19, 1993.

Michael Caddell, the lead lawyer in a wrongful-death lawsuit against the government, is wary of tying his legal case to the military canisters lobbed by federal agents.

Alternate theories under examination include the possibility that the fire was caused by contact between exhaust from military tanks used in the assault and the flimsy wooden walls of the Davidians' compound, he said, adding that the exhaust could have reached 1,200 degrees Fahrenheit.

"There are a number of possible explanations, and I don't want to get sucked in too much into the whole pyrotechnic issue," Caddell

said in a recent interview. "It may turn out to be a red herring."

Federal officials have always said the fire was set by the Davidians, not agents — a position maintained after the FBI acknowledged last month that its agents fired a few pyrotechnic tear-gas projectiles on the siege's final day. There is no evidence those canisters, lobbed several hours before the fire, ignited the flames, they said.

"I don't want to get sucked too much into the whole pyrotechnic thing."

— Michael Caddell
Branch Davidian lawyer

That view is shared by an arson expert on the team that investigated the tragedy as part of the Justice Department's 1993 Waco probe.

"I still say what we came to the

conclusion on at the end of the investigation down there today, regardless of what was saying about these pyrotechnic devices," Thomas Hitchcock, deputy fire marshal in Lancaster County, Pa., said.

Caddell and others who filed the government of a congressional examining theories that the FBI cut off electrical power to the building. Military tanks that fired non-burning tear gas canisters, a lanterns the Davidians used to illuminate the building.

Flash-bang devices used by federal agents ignited the fire, filmmaker Michael McNeiser has offered that theory, saying the devices were found near the origins. The government has never made his assertions.

Heat from the tanks could have ignited the building's walls, which were reinforced with makeshift barricades of lumber.

Caddell said a special investigator told him of once seeing warm his gloved hands blowed the exhaust from such tanks to see his leather gloves.

Congress nears F-22 deal

Agreement looms for purchase of six stealth fighters

WASHINGTON (AP) — House-Senate negotiators were on the verge of a deal that would provide \$1 billion for the Air Force to buy up to six test models of its coveted F-22 stealth fighter, congressional officials said last night.

But the agreement — which could be announced as early as today — would not allow production of the final version of the ultra-sophisticated warplane until at least 2001, the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said.



ARMEY

The deal, struck during a closed-door meeting of Republican congressional leaders last night, would end a weeks-long stalemate that has blocked progress on a nearly \$270 billion bill financing the U.S. military in fiscal 2000, which begins tomorrow.

"We made a good breakthrough," House Majority Leader Dick Arme, R-Texas, an F-22 supporter, said while leaving the meeting. But he and other lawmakers would provide no detail.

The deal would represent a victory for House law-

makers, who have opposed purchasing the plane next year. It would be a defeat for the plane's defenders, including Senate Appropriations Committee Chair Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, and the Lockheed Martin Corp., its prime contractor.

The Air Force looks upon the F-22 as its primary warplane for the beginning of the century and wants to buy more than 300 of them, total cost close to \$65 billion. The plane would replace the F-15 jet fighter.

The \$1 billion would probably be used to purchase four of the test aircraft, one official said, which would be used for trials that would help determine the plane's final configuration.

The Air Force could build up to six of the F-22s with the money, but that would take additional money that it would have to request next year.

In its defense bill, the Senate had provided \$1 billion for the Air Force to buy its first six F-22s the plane next year.

But the House deleted the money in July, arguing that the plane's computers were not fully tested and the money was needed for other defense programs.

Police departments test web gun

BOSTON (AP) — Police soon may be able to do what Spiderman can: net suspects by firing a web.

Police departments are increasingly looking for nonlethal ways of capturing criminals, and a device called the "Webshot" could be the answer.

It looks a bit like a shotgun but fires a Kevlar net that can wrap up a suspect long enough for officers to slap on a pair of handcuffs.

At least 20 law enforcement agencies around the world are trying the product, which is made by Foster-Miller Inc., a company in the Boston suburb of Waltham.

"It's going at about 65 mph toward you, so you have no time to react," Shawn Gaskell, a Foster-Miller engineer who has played the role of suspect during testing of the

Webshot, said. "It also kind of stuns you because it's loud and there's a big flash."

A consensus is emerging in law enforcement that officers need more alternatives to their guns and nightsticks, partly to avoid the lawsuits and public relations problems that result when officers shoot lightly armed but belligerent suspects.

Some departments have tried guns that fire bean bags to knock down uncooperative suspects. Others have experimented with a pump-like device that coats suspects in a sticky foam.

"The police officer today has basically the same instruments at his or her disposal as Wyatt Earp had," Michael Buerger, a professor of criminal justice at Northeastern Univer-

sity, said. "But they recognize not all situations involving uncooperative suspects require such force."

Foster-Miller's Webshot grew out of an Army contract that has been in development for eight years, Gaskell said. The company had wanted a nonlethal weapon for peacekeeping operations.

But that is enough to meet the needs of police, who also carry the Webshot — nets sell for \$50 each. Foster-Miller makes a gas-shield unit that sells for \$300.

Foster-Miller Vice President nis Mangolds said he did not know of a situation in which an officer had fired it at a suspect. But he had heard of several instances in which suspects surrendered when they saw the mean-looking Webshot aimed at them.

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