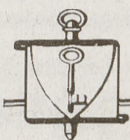


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STATE

Investigators focus on weapons used in Branch Davidian siege

WASHINGTON (AP) — The special counsel re-investigating the 1993 Branch Davidian siege has asked the FBI to turn over the firearms its on-scene personnel carried, in a bid to determine whether federal agents fired shots during the deadly standoff's waning hours.

The government has long denied that its agents fired any shots during the seven-week standoff, which ended when an inferno destroyed the Davidians' compound. Cult leader David Koresh and some 80 followers died during the blaze, some from the fire, others from gunshot wounds.

While the FBI and Justice Department always have maintained that the Branch Davidians died by their own hands, independent filmmakers, lawyers for survivors who are suing the government and others skeptical of the claim contend that government agents aimed gunfire on the compound.

Special counsel John Danforth, whom Attorney General Janet Reno appointed in September to investigate the revived controversy, has said the issue of government gunfire will be among the "dark questions" he seeks to answer.

Two weeks ago, Danforth asked the federal judge presiding over the Davidians' wrongful-death lawsuit to order an impartial simulation of the FBI's infrared videotaping during the siege to determine whether bursts of light captured on the original tapes came from gunfire from federal agents.

Now, he is asking the FBI to turn over the firearms for ballistics tests.

"Their request came in, and we are complying with the request," FBI spokesperson Bill Carter said, declining further comment.

Danforth's office declined to discuss the request, which CBS News first reported, or the questions it would conduct the ballistics tests.

Lawyers for the surviving Branch Davidians said shell casings found inside a sniper outpost were sharpshooters' weapons. Government officials said shell casings were fired during the Feb. 28 siege that triggered the 51-day standoff, when Branch Davidians, Tobacco and Firearms agents sought warrants on the Branch Davidians. ATF spokesman Jeffrey Roehm said he was unaware of any request for the office for the ATF weapons used at the siege.

But a spokesperson for the House Government Reform Committee, which is investigating the government's conduct during the siege, said aides believe that weapons the ATF and Branch Davidians figured in Danforth's request.

"The problem with the Davidian weapons is that 20 percent of them are severely damaged," a spokesperson Mark Corallo said. "They melted."

The Texas Rangers, who discovered the shell casings, 24,000 pounds of evidence they held in custody for the past two years, apparently have new questions about evidence. They will visit evidence lockers tomorrow that are under the supervision of a federal judge to examine some evidence that has been in the government's possession.



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Report: Mexico among least likely to comply in child abduction case

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — Mexico is among the nations least likely to comply with an international agreement for the return of children abducted by their own parents, an upcoming congressional report says.

The report singles out Mexico, Austria, Honduras, Mauritius and Sweden as "the most serious" violators of the agreement regarding international parental-child abductions, the *San Antonio Express-News* reported yesterday.

A final version of the report is expected in January.

The U.S. State Department reported this month that at least 750 children have been abducted by parents and taken to Mexico since 1991. It is the No. 1 destination — followed by Canada and Europe — for parents fleeing the United States with snatched children.

Norma Luna, who lives in Buda

near Austin, never suspected Texas' southern neighbor would become a hideaway for her now-missing daughter, Laura, and hundreds of other children taken from the country after often bitter custody battles.

"I love her and miss her; I am willing to do anything to get her back," a tearful Luna said. Her 7-year-old daughter has been missing two years.

Her father, Joel Garcia, is suspected of taking her to the Mexican border state of Tamaulipas. They may be living in the capital, Ciudad Victoria, or Rio Bravo, a city near Matamoros across the Rio Grande from Brownsville.

Officials say problems can arise when parents have dual citizenship and when a court order from one country pertains to a child in another country.

Jess Ford, director of interna-

tional affairs for the U.S. Accounting Office, the inner arm of Congress, said the government has had mixed success in recovering child reports of national child abduction.

"I love her and miss her; I am willing to do anything to get her back," a tearful Luna said. Her 7-year-old daughter has been missing two years.

At the center of debate is the 1980 Hague Convention, an agreement among 54 nations that outlines procedures to find and resolve custody cases. The United States honors about 90 percent of the Mexican requests, Mexico honors about 90 percent of the U.S. requests, according to statistics from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, a Virginia-based organization created by the federal government.

Back in Buda, Norma Luna clutches the clothes and her daughter left behind.

"I just want him to give her back," she said. "I will never give up

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