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Six Branch Davidians Due for Release 13 Years After Waco Inferno

By | Associated Press



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WACO, Texas – Thirteen years after the [Branch Davidians'](#) armed standoff with federal agents ended in an inferno that killed nearly 80 people, six sect members who were sent to prison are about to be released from custody.

Most of those who will be freed over the next two months escaped from the compound near Waco as it burned to the ground on April 19, 1993 – 51 days after a shootout that erupted when federal [Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms](#) agents tried to arrest religious leader [David Koresh](#) for stockpiling guns and explosives.

The six men went to federal prison for manslaughter, weapons offenses or both in connection with the shootout, which left four federal agents and six Davidians dead.

Once the men are out, they will be on supervised release for three to five years. Among other things, they will be barred from associating with one another.

A seventh Davidian is also still behind bars but is not scheduled for release until next year.

One of the six, Paul Gordon Fatta, said he remains angry about the government's actions.

"They needed their pound of flesh, so they took the survivors and put them on trial. Somebody had to pay," Fatta, 48, told The Associated Press by telephone.

Koresh and nearly 80 followers, including two dozen children, died in a blaze that survivors say was ignited by tear gas sprayed into the compound buildings from military tanks. Authorities claim the Davidians committed suicide by setting the fire and shooting themselves.

Fatta is to be released next month in San Diego, where he was moved to a halfway house last year and now works at a restaurant. He was not at the compound during the standoff and was at a gun show in Austin during the shootout with the ATF. He said will live with his family after his release.

"I'm proud of my friends, and it was a privilege for me to have gone there to study the Bible, regardless of what the world thinks," Fatta said. "If I had it to do all over again, I would do the same thing."

Jaime Castillo, who is to be released next month from a Los Angeles halfway house, said he plans to remain there and try to rebuild his life by forming another band – which is how he met Koresh in 1988 – or by working as a personal trainer. The 37-year-old Castillo said he might visit the compound site, where a few survivors still meet for Bible study each weekend.

In 1994 in San Antonio, 11 Davidians went on trial; all were acquitted of murder and conspiracy to commit murder. However, five were convicted of voluntary manslaughter and weapons charges and three were convicted on weapons charges. A 12th Davidian pleaded guilty to a lesser charge and testified against the others; she was sentenced to three years and was released in 1996.

The federal judge sentenced most to 40 years but in 2000 reduced most terms to 15 years after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned his decision. One of the eight was sentenced to five years on a weapons charge and got out in 1997.

Jane McKeehan of Johnson City, Tenn., whose 28-year-old son Todd McKeehan was one of the ATF agents killed, said she and her family have tried to focus on their son and not think too much about the Davidians.

"It is in our minds every day; it completely changes your life," McKeehan said. "We're Christians, and we know we're going to see Todd again, so we try to focus on the good. He was doing what he wanted to do and was adamant about making it a better world."

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