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Day began with eerie feeling, ended in tragedy

By JAIME ARON Associated Press Apr 19, 1993

To those outside a heavily armed religious cult's compound, there was a strange feeling about the 51st morning of a standoff with federal agents.

The routine that law enforcement agents had fallen into suddenly changed. Instead of fleets of vehicles coming and going for their 5 a.m. shift change, there only was a trickle of Texas Department of Public Safety vehicles headed in. They didn't stop to chat at the checkpoint, as they usually do.

Then, a few minutes before 6 a.m., a trooper warned members of the media camped out about two miles from the compound to "take cover. It's coming down."

Within minutes, flashes of light came from a section of the sprawling rural fortress. Armored vehicles could be seen converging on the building where Koresh is holed up.

A school bus and ambulances went into the sealed off compound.

Officials with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms have long said the nearly eight-week standoff started with a phone call tipping off cult leader David Koresh to a massive raid by the ATF.

The phone call, the ATF says, cost agents who were seeking to arrest Koresh and search for illegal weapons the element of surprise. It may have also caused the deaths of four ATF agents.

Koresh has said six cultists died in the raid.

Early Monday, Koresh received another critically important phone call - this time from the FBI, warning him that authorities were going to force him out if he didn't surrender.

A person inside the compound hung up.

Moments later, an armored vehicle smashed into the front wall of the compound.

Cult members hung a banner saying their phone was dead, but the assault continued.

Koresh had said he would surrender after completing a religious manuscript deciphering the Bible's seven seals, which hint at an end to the world.

But the FBI said Saturday they had grown tired of broken promises by Koresh to surrender.

Monday, the FBI showed their patience was not inexhaustible.