

Siege at Ruby Ridge: The Forgotten History of the ATF Shootout That Started a Militia Movement

The Siege at Ruby Ridge is often considered a pivotal date in American history. The shootout between Randy Weaver and his family and federal agents on August 21, 1992, is one that kicked off the Constitutional Militia Movement and left America with a deep distrust of its leadership – in particular then-President Bill Clinton and Attorney General Janet Reno.

The short version is this: Randy Weaver and his wife Vicki moved with their four kids to the Idaho Panhandle, near the Canadian border, to escape what they thought was an increasingly corrupt world. The Weavers held racial separatist beliefs, but were not involved in any violent activity or rhetoric. They were peaceful Christians who simply wanted to be left alone.

Specifically for his beliefs, Randy Weaver was targeted by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) in an entrapping “sting” operation designed to gain his cooperation as a snitch. When he refused to become a federal informant, he was charged with illegally selling firearms. Due to a miscommunication about his court date, the Marshal Service was brought in, who laid siege to his house and shot and killed his wife and 14-year-old son.

Randy Weaver was, in many ways, a typical American story. He grew up in an Iowa farming community. He got decent grades in high school and played football. His family attended church regularly. He dropped out of community college and joined the United States Army in 1970. After three years of service, he was honorably discharged.

One month later he married Victoria Jordison. He then enrolled in the University of Northern Iowa, studying criminal justice with an eye toward becoming an FBI Agent. However, he dropped out because the tuition was too expensive. He ended up working in a John Deere plant while his wife worked as a secretary before becoming a homemaker.

Both of the Weavers increasingly became apocalyptic in their view of the world. This, combined with an increasing emphasis on Old Testament-based Christianity, led them to seek a life away from mainstream America, a life of self-reliance. Vicki, in particular, had strong visions of her family surviving the apocalypse through life far away from what they viewed as a corrupt world. To that end, Randy purchased a 20-acre farm in Ruby Ridge, ID, and built a cabin there.

The land was purchased for \$5,000 in cash and the trade of the truck they used to move there. Vicki homeschooled the children.

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