

CITY LIFE

MOVE: An Oral History

For years, the hostility between the city and the radical West Philly group MOVE had escalated. But nobody was prepared for the horrific way the fight would end one May afternoon in 1985. Now, decades later, the people who were there that day tell the still-unbelievable story.

by **VICTOR FIORILLO** • 3/26/2010, 6:00 a.m.

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Frank Powell, *retired police lieutenant*: Late April of '85, we got word that the city wanted them out, to come up with a plan. I was the head of the bomb squad back then. So we got together — the bomb squad, the firearms training unit and the tactical division.

^The plan was to go to the homes adjacent to the house — remember, this was a rowhouse — and blow small holes in the wall using a charge and inject tear gas.

Ed Rendell: I guess maybe 10 days before the fire, I went out there and talked to one or two members over the fence. I said, “Look, guys, you can’t go on like this. No good can come of this. Why don’t you just surrender?” They were very respectful, but they basically said no. And I didn’t have any further contact.

Frank Powell: MOVE had built a bunker on the roof of the house, and it was clearly a problem. It covered any operations on Osage. Police Commissioner Sambor asked me if I could get up on the roof and put a charge on the bunker. But I couldn’t. I’d be exposed to shooters in the bunker.

Bob Brady, current Congressman and then-deputy mayor for labor: I was in Goode’s office. There were a lot of people there. Richmond. Sambor. All these military men giving advice. I thought it would be a good idea if we got a boom crane to knock that bunker off. But somebody above my pay scale decided against it.


Ed Rendell: The police came to me in Goode’s office and showed me aerial photographs. There were weapons and big cans of oil on the roof. I authorized arrest and search warrants.

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Wilson Goode, in testimony before the MOVE Commission, October 15, 1985: I directed [police commissioner Gregore Sambor] to be in charge of [a] ... plan that would enable us to make arrests of such MOVE members as the D.A. was able to provide warrants for ... the protection of police officers and firefighters and occupants of the house was paramount. ... We did not want persons involved who may have a hot temper, who may emotionally have been attached to 1978. ... What I said to him was ... “I’m the mayor, and I must rely upon you to go and do a proper kind of plan.”

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