

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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MOVE members with sawed-off shotguns and automatic weapons at the Powelton house in 1977: AP Photo

Tigre Hill: In 1978, I was 10. My mom and I drove to the compound to stop and look. There were TV trucks. Police barricades. The next day was the shoot-out.


Ramona Africa: In the middle of the night, hundreds of cops marched out with the fire department. Not to arrest, but to kill.

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James Berghaier: Bullshit. I didn't go out there to kill. I went in to put in my eight hours. I was there to call their bluff.

William Richmond: We set up deluge guns to knock down the wooden slats they had over the windows.



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Ramona Africa: They pumped almost six feet of water into that basement, knowing there were men and women and babies and dogs in there.

James Berghaier: After Monsignor Devlin wasn't able to talk them into coming out, the fire department started the deluge gun. I thought they were going to come out, I really did. I didn't think they were that devoted. The worst thing you can do is underestimate your adversary.

Tommy Mellor: We broke down the fence surrounding the house. I was the third person through the front door. We eventually got to the basement with the tear gas.

James Berghaier: Pretty soon, gunfire erupts. I fired two or three rounds.

Tommy Mellor: Bullets were flying, hitting pipes. We were in water up to our waist, and there were rats and feces. It was a bad place to be.

William Richmond: When the shooting started, our firefighters were in the wrong place. We had a number hit. Whatever plan was in place didn't flow.

Tommy Mellor: I couldn't tell what was going on.

James Berghaier: I can't say I saw a MOVE member shoot, and I can't tell you I saw a cop shoot. But I did see the result of it. Officer Ramp was dead. After the shooting, the women came out with the kids. That was the end of it. They knocked the house down.

Ramona Africa: The cops emptied their guns and then emptied them again. James Ramp was on street level facing MOVE, and he was shot by a bullet traveling downward. Obviously, somebody above him killed him.

Tigre Hill: From all of the documentation I've seen, it's clear that Ramp was killed by MOVE.

Angel Ortiz: Did the MOVE members shoot Ramp? This has never been fully answered. The MOVE compound was razed without proper forensic analysis.

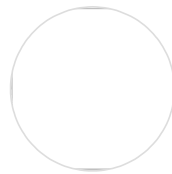
Ramona Africa: A team came to demolish MOVE headquarters. They were accusing my family of killing a cop. That makes it the scene of a crime. Why destroy the evidence?

Frank Rizzo Jr.: A lot of people feel there was a police cover-up. Friendly fire. The person who killed Ramp was in the basement of that house. And the person who killed him, those people are in jail.

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