

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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Tommy Mellor: They had pulled us out of the house, so I went to Cobbs Creek Parkway. Ducking bullets all day tires you out. I went to sleep in the dirt. Somebody woke me up, and I heard they were going to throw a device to knock the bunker off. Of all the strange things going on then, it didn't seem strange.

Gregore Sambor, in testimony: The use of the device itself gives me the least pause. It was selected as a conservative and safe approach to what I perceived as a tactical necessity. I was assured that the device would not harm the occupants. What has imprinted that device on the mind of the city is, in fact, the method of delivery. If it had been carried or thrown into position or if it had been dropped from a crane, the perception of that action would be quite different.


William Richmond: So the decision was made to take a helicopter, and use a satchel charge — that's the term for explosives in a gym bag. The helicopter made two or three passes with Frank Powell strapped in.


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Frank Rizzo Jr.: I'll never forget it. My father was in the family room, watching it all on TV. When he saw the state police helicopter, all the intelligence he had started coming together, and he said, "Son, they're going to drop a bomb on this headquarters."

Frank Powell: As soon as I dropped the satchel, the pilot got the hell out. The rotor wash blew it across the roof. I said, "Oh shit!" And then it went off. There was a football-shaped hole. It missed the bunker.


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Michael Ward, *in testimony*: That is when the big bomb went off. It shook the whole house up.

William Richmond: Frank dropped it, which took a lot of moxie. The concussion knocked out windows of nearby homes. Debris went everywhere. Minutes later, someone said to me there was a fire on the roof. These things start small and build up over time.

Ed Rendell: When I heard that they used an incendiary device on the roof, I was amazed, because you could clearly see drums of oil up there. And it would seem to me to have been lunacy under those circumstances to drop an incendiary device. But they did. And as the afternoon rolled on and the fire started, it became almost a holocaust.

Frank Rizzo Jr.: When my father saw the fire department shut the water off, he couldn't believe that anyone in the U.S. would use fire to force people from a building.

William Richmond: Originally, the police wanted to access the property via the hole in the roof. We couldn't leave the squirts on, because we'd wash off police attempting to breach. And the squirts caused a tremendous amount of smoke — the fear was that MOVE members would exit shooting from different locations. There was a managing director's directive in place. One commander in place: the police commissioner. We were under authority of police.

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