

POLICE DROP BOMB ON RADICALS' HOME IN PHILADELPHIA

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May 14, 1985



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A state police helicopter this evening dropped a bomb on a house occupied by an armed group after a 24-hour siege involving gun battles.

A 90-minute shootout this morning came after a week of growing tension between the city and the group, known as Move. Residents in the western Philadelphia neighborhood had complained about the group for years. The only known survivors from within the house were a woman and a child.

The fire spread to 50 to 60 other houses in the neighborhood, said the Fire Commissioner, William Richmond. He declared the fire under control about 11:40 P.M.

Aimed to Hit Bunker

The Police Commissioner, Gregore Sambor, said tonight that it was his decision to drop the charge, a square package of explosives designed to destroy a bunker atop the house and drop it through to the second floor. He said the charge succeeded in eliminating the threat from the roof, but touched off the fire.

Steve Harmon, a resident of the area, said: "Drop a bomb on a residential area? I never in my life heard of that. It's like Vietnam."

The Move group, which says it disdains modern technology and materialism and the establishment, was involved in a confrontation with the police in August 1978. One police officer was killed in that shootout. Nine members of the group were convicted on murder charges and are in prison. The group has been demanding their release.

The Police Commissioner said that the authorities did not know whether there were any bodies in the house.

One Officer Injured

Commissioner Sambor said that one police officer whom he did not identify was bruised in the back by gunfire. "And the only thing that saved him was his body armor," the Commissioner said.

The police said earlier that at least three officers had suffered slight injuries, including smoke inhalation, exhaustion and hyperventilation.

No other casualties were reported, but the whereabouts of some occupants of the house were unknown.

Mayor W. Wilson Goode said this evening that a 9-year-old left the building with a woman, identified as Ramona Africa, shortly after the fire began. The child, who was taken to a hospital, told the police there were four or five adults and four or five children in the house when the bomb was dropped, the Mayor said at a City Hall news conference. The child was not identified, but the police said the woman was in custody.

Leo Brooks, the City Managing Director, said tonight at the scene that one of the first things the authorities wanted to do Tuesday was to search the charred area.

A Fire Department officer, who requested anonymity, said the authorities did not know where the other children were.

Mayor 'Saddened' by Fire

The Mayor said that three armed adults had been in an alley behind the house, where they were firing at the police. He said there were no known deaths and that he was heartened by that, but he was "saddened" by reports that many homes had been destroyed by the blaze spreading from the house that was bombed.

A Fire Department officer at the scene this evening had said houses burned on both sides of the street in the 6200 block of Osage Avenue, where the Move headquarters was situated, and houses in the block behind it on Pine Street.

The Mayor, when asked why the bomb was dropped, said, "It was an attempt to remove the bunker," the structure on the roof of the house.

He repeatedly took responsibility for the outcome, although he said he had given his department heads complete freedom to decide on the tactics they thought best. "As Mayor of this city I accept full and total responsibility," Mr. Goode said. "There was no way to avoid it. No way to extract ourselves from that situation except by armed confrontation."

Arrived With Warrants

Mr. Brooks, the City Managing Director, said tonight that the police arrived at the house this morning with arrest warrants for four individuals and asked them to come out of the house. He said the police had promised them there would be no firing.

Commissioner Sambor, according to Mr. Brooks, gave them 15 minutes to come out. They refused, Mr. Brooks said, and responded with "vitriolic talk" over a loudspeaker and then started firing.

"We took a significant number of rounds in our positions," said Mr. Brooks.

In the siege this morning, Commissioner Sambor said, the police started returning the fire, with frequent lulls. He said the Move people refused all overtures of family, friends and clergy to mediate and to attempt to talk them into coming out. "At no time did the police fire in an offensive posture," he said. He said the bunker on the roof had wooden beams and steel plates, and that it would not budget despite the authorities' use of water cannon.

Commissioner Sambor said the bomb was dropped to flush out people who were firing at the police. "If you were in a firefight and the opposition held the higher ground," he said, "what would you do?"

Fire Starts to Spread

Fire engulfed the house hit by the bomb and spread to neighboring row houses, but firefighters delayed attempts to battle the blaze for at least an hour out of fear that they would become targets of any surviving members of the heavily armed group.

"There is no question in my mind that from the time the fire started until this time there was a real danger" for the firefighters, the Mayor said at the news conference.

Mr. Brooks said that four people came out of the back of the Move house during the blaze. Two of them were the woman and the child. He said they were with another woman and a man.

The man fired at the police, Mr. Brooks said. He said the police did not return the fire, and the man and the woman disappeared back into the smoke.

Commissioner Sambor said earlier that the police were looking for three armed men who might be in alleys or tunnels dug from under the house.

After the fire broke out, the police reported gunshots from houses behind the one under siege. Police officers kicked down doors and searched houses in the four-block area around the Move group's house, which had been evacuated Sunday after the police began trying to evict the armed group.

The police were acting to clear the group out in response to neighbors' complaints of filthy conditions in the house and nightlong amplified lectures from Move members.

After the bomb was dropped at 5:27 P.M. the fire sent thick dark smoke that could be seen throughout the city this evening for two hours after the charge was dropped.

Helicopter Circles House

The state police helicopter circled the house once, then dove toward it. The bomb, dropped by a city police officer, according to the police, fell near the structure on the roof of the house. Seconds later it exploded, sending pieces of wood and metal flying through the air. Flames began immediately. Within minutes the roof was ablaze.

Mr. Richmond, the Fire Commissioner, said tonight that at the fire's peak it was rated six alarms with about 60 pieces of equipment in use.

As he stood on the sidewalk on this humid night within sight of the dying flames, Mr. Richmond said he had been in the Fire Department 25 years and never had he seen so many houses "totally destroyed" in a single fire.

He said the worst fire in Philadelphia was an 12 1/2-alarm fire in an occupied eight-story apartment building on Jan. 1, 1963.

Mr. Richmond said the fire today was "one of the toughest I ever fought." He said it was one where a firefighter would fear for his life.

"We came out here with the very purpose of not getting anybody hurt," he said. "We regret what happened, but we are not going home with any firefighters with bullet wounds tonight, and I thank God for that."

The confrontation became violent a few minutes before 6 A.M. when members of Move fired on officers, the police said. The first sporadic shots soon gave way to an incessant rattle of automatic and semi-automatic gunfire that echoed through the neighborhood.

Thick clouds of smoke and tear gas coursed through narrow streets while bullets glanced off buildings and whizzed overhead.

Bystanders, who had been watching the police assemble their firepower, ran for cover coughing and sneezing.

Residents said they were threatened with arrest if they refused to leave. Most were reported to have been moved to a shelter in the area.

Police officials and community activists have negotiated intermittently with the group for the last two days, but Move leaders refused repeated requests from the police to leave the house.

Michael Nutter, an assistant to a city councilman who is a member of the team that had been negotiating with the group, said, "They've said they're willing to die for whatever happens."

"This is a group of people whose philosophy is based on conflict and confrontation," Mr. Nutter added. Before the confrontation, Mr. Goode said: "I am totally convinced the group is bent on violent confrontation. I pray to Almighty God the children will not be hurt."

Theodore Price, 50, a retired military man who lives on Pine Street, said the police asked his family, including his wife and three children to vacate on Sunday. He said they went to the Green Valley Inn to spend the night. He had planned to go back to the house this morning to get clothes, but was not permitted to pass the police lines.

He said he was not concerned but this afternoon he pointed out to a firefighter that the fire appeared to be spreading. His wife and daughter were at a friend's home in the neighborhood, and his two sons were wandering about.

The hard part, Mr. Price said, was losing the personal items, including things he had brought back from his years overseas.

Until the fire he said he thought the city was handling the situation properly.

Tensions in Neighborhood

Three years ago the group moved into the neat neighborhood of tree-lined streets, one block east of the leading edge of Philadelphia's western suburbs.

Responding to growing pressure from neighborhood residents, the city has been seeking to evict the group from the two-story house.

A number of neighbors complained that the house is infested with rats and roaches. Some nearby residents alleged that members of the group have beaten several neighbors.

The neighborhood's anger was aggravated last year when Move members blocked residents' access to an alley behind their house by building an animal shelter. Next they fortified the front windows with wooden slats and built the pillbox on the roof.

Lectures Amplified at Night

The group then installed powerful electric bullhorns and began what soon became daily lectures, that neighbors said often lasted through the night.

"All last year and the year before it has been a lot of aggravation," said Dee Peoples, the owners of Dee's Food Market, a small general store less than two blocks from the Move house. "All you hear is aggravation. You sleep with it, you wake up with it, you live with."

Mayor Goode, who had tried to avoid a confrontation with the group, said a year ago that he preferred "to have dirt and some smell than to have blood."

In recent weeks, residents became more outspoken and last week the Mayor called the situation "very, very explosive."

Founded in 1972

Since its founding in 1972 by a former handyman, Vincent Leaphard, and a student activist, Donald Glassey, the group's most serious clash with police occurred in August 1978 when Mayor Frank L. Rizzo ended months of negotiations by ordering the police to storm the house that was the group's headquarters at that time.

During the ensuing shootout then, which lasted several minutes, Officer James Ramp Sr. was shot in the neck and killed. The nine Move members were convicted in Officer Ramp's death.

The group has said it disdains the conveniences of modern technology, such as electricity and artificial heat.

A version of this article appears in print on May 14, 1985, Section A, Page 1 of the National edition with the headline: POLICE DROP BOMB ON RADICALS' HOME IN PHILADELPHIA