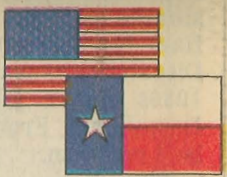




Weather
 Decent proposal.
 Partly cloudy.
 High 83, low 59.
 Details, page A-40

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★★★ FINAL EDITION

2 cultists confirmed shot in head



Not clear if wounds were self-inflicted

Autopsy results show

...killed 3 others

...Lester Lapsan

...the Houston Post

...wounds were found at the

...at Kennedy's funeral and

...officials confirmed

...Yelton

...hands fate

DEGUERIN: Houston lawyer at center of storm

From A-1

out the truth.

"I don't want this to end up being oversimplified into the wacko in Waco that killed all the women and children," DeGuerin says. "I don't think that happened."

When fire consumed Koresh's compound Monday, presumably killing all 86 cult members inside, DeGuerin lost a client and adopted a cause.

DeGuerin had been brought into the case by Koresh's mother, Bonnie Haldeman. Before he agreed to go to Waco, he asked her to fax him a letter stating that he was the attorney she'd chosen.

"I didn't want to be seen as one of those ambulance-chasers that follow every disaster," he says.

Such perceptions have persisted nevertheless.

"To what level does one have to stoop to make money?" FBI agent Bob Ricks asked, referring to DeGuerin during a television interview last week. "Some people could describe it as blood money. You're making money off the misery of others."

While the FBI was happy to let DeGuerin and fellow Houston attorney Jack Zimmermann get involved in negotiations, Ricks now says the two men were being duped by Koresh, used to buy the cult more negotiating time.

Susan Keelin, Koresh's aunt, went so far as to partially blame DeGuerin for the siege's fiery end. "He was just in it for the movie rights," she said a few hours after the blaze Monday.

DeGuerin bristles at the criticism. "I didn't ask for this," he says. "I didn't ask to be contacted (by Haldeman), but I was."

Some might have balked at such a request.

"My God, that's what a lawyer does, is help people in trouble," DeGuerin says. "I felt there wasn't anybody in the United States that needed my help more at the time."

And why does he continue to represent Koresh's interests?

"It's a universal desire to see that something like this isn't repeated," DeGuerin says. "Regardless of whether you see David Koresh as a saint or the devil incarnate, what happened didn't need to happen."

DeGuerin's version of what happened in the cult siege differs sharply from that of federal agents.

He blames the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms for taking unnecessary risks in the initial raid. He blames the FBI for losing patience and rushing into the final raid on the cult. And he believes the FBI, not Koresh, was responsible for the fire in the compound.

And he blames the government for putting innocent people in harm's way.

"If David Koresh had done absolutely everything the govern-

ment suspected . . . that leaves 80 or 90 people, God-fearing members of the community (for whom) the government has no evidence of any misconduct whatsoever," he says. "For the most part, they're all dead now."

But does DeGuerin view his client as saint or devil? "I think it's some place in between. He was an intelligent, articulate, friendly, strong personality. . . . He had deep religious beliefs that are beyond my ability to understand, and I don't think it's fair for me to be judgmental about them."

The 52-year-old Houstonian took up Koresh's cause and quickly became a central player in the drama surrounding the Waco standoff. He made seven trips inside the Branch Davidian compound between March 29 and the end of the siege. From the beginning, he caused a sensation, appearing on an array of nationally televised news programs to push his client's side of the story.

DeGuerin dismisses FBI agent Ricks' charges, painting them as an attempt to deflect his own criticism of the bureau's tactics.

"I have within my knowledge factual information that the world needs to know, and I don't have a monetary motive," he says.

He says he hasn't been paid for any of his work thus far and doesn't expect to be, adding that he's spent \$15,000 to \$20,000 on the case thus far.

And while DeGuerin expects a lawsuit to be filed against the government by survivors or relatives of the victims, he pledges to have no involvement. "I don't want to be accused of money-grubbing," he says.

Although he's not getting paid, he's reached a level of national exposure that can't be bought.

"I can't deny that," DeGuerin says. "But I'm also risking a lot of criticism. I'm sure there are a lot of people who can't understand how I'd be on the side of someone so evil as the public perception of David Koresh."

DeGuerin says he doesn't particularly enjoy the media attention.

If that's the case, he's a glutton for punishment. DeGuerin's involved himself in a dizzying array of high-profile trials, including the John Hill murder case made famous in the book *Blood and Money*. He was portrayed in a television movie about one of his clients, Barbra Piotrowski, who claimed her ex-lover arranged for her to be gunned down; the attack crippled her.

Former U.S. Attorney Ron Woods, who went to the University of Texas law school with DeGuerin and tried plenty of cases against him, doesn't believe his courtroom nemesis is in this for the money or the glory.

"He just truly loves a big fight, and the higher profile it is, the more exciting it is," Woods says.

"And he's got a good temper; it

often works against him," Woods says, suggesting that DeGuerin's indignation may be pushing him now. "He's like a bulldog with a bone. He's not going to let go."

That DeGuerin is taking sides with the cult comes as no surprise. "That's the way he is," Woods says. "He's going to believe the other side of the story first, then discredit the government."

With the apparent death of his client, DeGuerin has sharpened his attack.

"I don't want to see this be a whitewash, and it's already starting," he says, noting that U.S. Sen. Dennis DeConcini, who'll head Senate hearings into the matter, has been speaking out in support of federal agents.

In recent days, he's taken on Attorney General Janet Reno on *Nightline*, taken shots at ATF and FBI agents in countless interviews and news conferences and is preparing to go head-to-head with FBI chief William Sessions on *This Week With David Brinkley* this morning.

He doesn't mince words, as when analyzing claims by some federal officials in Washington, D.C., who said three bodies had been found inside the compound with recent bullet wounds. The coroner on site has disputed that. "They're trying to cover their asses," he said.

Does DeGuerin get a charge out of skewering those in authority?

He pauses for a moment, then can't suppress a grin. "Yeah," he acknowledges, but says he isn't sure why. "Maybe you ought to talk to a psychiatrist or something."

He then engages in a little self-analysis, remembering that during his stint with the District Attorney's Office he realized that those in positions of authority are merely human. "They're ordinary people, yet they have the force and power of authority behind them."

He also remembers examples set by the legendary defense lawyers with whom he's worked, the first-and-foremost being Percy Foreman. DeGuerin says his role models never backed away from the tough cases.

"I learned early on, if you stand up to a bully you win, even if you get beat up."

So does DeGuerin expect to get beaten up this time?

"Well, they're already starting to blame the messenger for the message," he says. "But I hope not. I feel like I can do this with dignity and with my reputation, which I value, intact."

He sums up his desire to take on the Koresh case by deferring to his mentor, Foreman.

"Percy used to say, 'If you're coasting, you've got to be going downhill.' Until the day he died, he continued to risk his reputation on controversial cases and clients. That's what this business is about."