

Local

Hammonds imprisoned

CONTINUED FROM
PAGE 1

Bundy's sons, led by eldest, Ammon, gathered together with an electrician and veteran from Montana, Ryan Payne, and held a community meeting in Burns attended by about 60 individuals in mid-December to lend support to the Hammond family.

The situation drew the attention of groups like Idaho 3%, Oregon 3% and the Oath Keepers. At this point, many Harney County residents welcomed the outside support, while many others feared that the mixture of the supporters may include some inclined toward violence.

Nonetheless, supporters organized a rally last Saturday in Burns, drawing hundreds to the streets to support the Hammonds.

During the rally, however, participants became aware that the Bundy brothers along with about 20 others, had additional plans in mind to take over the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge headquarters near the Hammond property.

At that time, points of view began to diverge in the crowd with some against a takeover, believing such an act would take attention away from the Hammond family's situation. A minority supported the move, believing it would garner national media attention.

Firsthand Rally Accounts.

More than a dozen Baker County residents, some traveling independently and some carpooling, attended the support rally. Though reported incorrectly elsewhere, the Baker County Oath Keepers Chapter did not attend; some of its members did in their individual capacities. One gentleman put it this way: "That's like saying the Protestant Church attended just because I'm Protestant."

Jake Brown of Halfway was in one of the carpools. He said, "Ten of us from Baker and Union counties had the opportunity of participating in the peaceful march in Burns, January 2nd, on behalf of the Hammond family who has received a very raw deal at the hands of federal overreach. I estimated the attending crowd to be between 450 and 500 individuals well equipped with flags, signs, flowers and coins. At around 12:30 p.m. and in a single-digit temperature, we commenced from our starting point at Safeway up the hill to the Sheriff's Office, then to the Hammond's home, around the corner and down to the Courthouse, and then back down to Main Street and back to our starting point. This lasted about an hour."

Jim Iler of Baker City also attended. Said Iler, "The event was staged at the Safeway parking lot in Burns. After some speeches and flag-waving and prayers and Pledge of Allegiance, several hundred people marched up the street to the County Courthouse about two blocks away. Some of us guessed that the crowd might reach 500 souls, but other estimates in the liberal media placed the number closer to 300 or



Submitted Photo.

Protestors came out in droves to support the Hammond family Saturday in Burns.

less. When asked to raise their hands, it seemed that about half were actually from Harney County, and the rest from all over the region and country. One of our group recognized about 100 who had participated in the Sugar Pine Mine event this fall."

Iler added, "We were carrying flags and posters decrying the fraudulent use of 'terrorism' charges. The streets were extremely icy and dangerous, and some marchers fell down. All were solemn and peaceful. The temperature had hit minus 14 earlier that morning, but it had warmed up to merely another cold winter day in Burns by the time we marched in the early afternoon.

"At the west side of the Courthouse is the Sheriff's Office. All stopped there and most made noises denouncing Sheriff Ward for his failure to protect the rights of his People by allowing unconstitutional federal jurisdiction into his county. Many threw hundreds of pennies on the entry sidewalk to symbolize his 'sell-out.'

"Neither Sheriff Ward nor his deputies were at work that Saturday, and I saw no one inside the building. Nor did I see any police vehicles from any jurisdiction at any time. The marchers continued north for a couple more blocks and stopped in front of the Dwight Hammond home. The elderly Mr. and Mrs. Hammond received handshakes and flowers and speeches and songs from the marchers and they seemed very touched that so many would show up in their support.

"From there, the marchers turned down the hill and back to the front of the Courthouse, where some continued to mill around."

Brown added, "Many of the residents whom we passed walked out from their front doors, filmed us, read our signs, waved, and wished us well. With only one minor exception, I saw nor felt any opposition to our rally from the local community during this part of the day.

"Upon returning to our starting point, there was conversing and chatter amongst the crowd that was interrupted by Ammon Bundy taking the 'snow hill' with the microphone. He very succinctly stated that it was time for 'those of you who understand what is really happening,' to follow him to the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge 40 miles away and be prepared and ready to make a 'hard stand.' Those who chose not to

assist in this endeavor were welcome to continue to the heated gathering hall at the fairgrounds where there would be a town hall style meeting. Upon being questioned by someone in the crowd what he meant by 'hard stand,' he repeated the term and said that it was time to make a choice. He stated that they would be occupying the refuge property and that there was currently federal agents and/or law enforcement blocking the road leading to the that property. He was asked if this would simply be a peaceful protest at that location and his implications were that he and an armed group would be 'occupying' the property. He then departed and left for the refuge.

"I immediately noticed intense conversation among leadership in the III's, the Oath Keepers, Central Oregon Constitutional Guard, Pacific Patriot Network, and members of various other patriot organizations. They were shocked and felt sideswiped with this new plan and determined that without the consent and authorization of the local Committee of Safety that had been duly elected at the public meeting held in Burns on December 19th, that this action was definitely wrong. They felt nothing of this order should move forward without the consent and authorization of the residents of Harney County. Talk show radio host Peter Santilli, who was rolling camera with a live stream across the internet of the day's events, seemed confused and not sure which direction to go.

"Moments later, close to 300 people poured into the meeting at the fairgrounds were two hours of heated exchanges and frustrations were vented regarding Bundy's actions. Over the course of the open discussion facilitated by leadership of Idaho's and Oregon's III's, it was discovered that Bundy's friends had actually taken possession of the refuge prior to Bundy's statements after the main rally. A young couple who had driven out to refuge reported observing at least 20 armed individuals with supplies and resources to sustain an ongoing operation of occupation. The girl, Sarah Spurlock, told me after the meeting that she recorded the first interview of Ammon Bundy and Blaine Cooper since arriving at the refuge. After posting this short interview to Facebook, hers is the video that has

gone viral and picked up by mainstream media since Sunday morning after the event. It was also revealed that there had in fact been no government vehicles at the property and no road blocks whatsoever.

"Peter Santilli finally took the floor and created some controversy that finally settled down. Emotions were high and many felt that the peaceful demonstration had been organized as a decoy to further the 'refuge' agenda. Santilli was suspected and accused of playing along with Bundy and knowing the plans all along as it had been he, who had been conducting interviews and spending time with the main players of Bundy's plan.

"We had plenty of conversation for our three hour ride home!"

Iler's account corroborates Browns. He went on to say, "We all ended up back at the Safeway lot, and milled around in groups until Ammon Bundy climbed up on a snowbank and told everyone that those who wanted to come should immediately go to the Malheur Refuge headquarters about 40 miles to the south. We all thought it was to be just another stand-in-front-of-a-building-and-protest waste of time, and I didn't see anybody making a move to go.

"But a minute later, one in our group ran up to me with wide eyes and said that he had just heard that Ammon Bundy had seized and occupied the Refuge headquarters. Visions of a shootout and all hell breaking loose flooded my mind. The rumor was starting to pick up speed among the crowd, and everyone was getting agitated.

"Other 'leaders' of the march then pleaded with everyone to go to the Fairgrounds Memorial Building to talk about this surprising twist. We joined the parade going there, and were among the first hundred or so. I guessed that perhaps 300 came and went during the next couple of hours.

"As one after another of the 3% cadre from Idaho and other event organizers spoke to the crowd, several people became angry over what they thought was a 'hijacking' of the event for another purpose that they had not known about, a purpose that was potentially deadly and that eroded the effect of the public demonstration just finished."

SEE HAMMONDS PAGE 7

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

1870s. Harney Basin is settled. Up to 300,000 head of cattle historically documented grazing this area.

1908. President Theodore Roosevelt declares a wildlife refuge for birds around the lakes in the area, later to be known as the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge.

1964. The Hammond family purchases their nearly 6,000-acre ranch, complete with water rights, about an hour south of Burns in the Harney Basin.

1970s. Over a period of years, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) grows the Refuge to 187,000 acres after purchasing many of the ranches adjoining. The Hammonds and some neighbors refuse to sell.

1991-1993. The Hammonds file for new water rights on a source to water their livestock. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and USFWS express their disagreement with this filing to the family. The USFWS files suit to block the water rights and loses in court.

1994. USFWS and BLM begin fencing off the Hammonds' new water source. Dwight Hammond is arrested for interfering with Federal contractors. Dwight spends two days behind bars, eventually to be released with no charges filed.

1994-1995. The BLM revokes the Hammonds' grazing permits without a stated cause. In order to prevent cattle trespass from their private lands onto the BLM-managed lands, Hammonds are required to build miles of new fencing. With costs estimated in the hundreds of thousands of dollars, the Hammonds are unable to afford the fencing and instead, remove the cattle. They sell one of their houses to purchase new land that includes grazing rights. BLM then revokes those grazing rights.

2001. Steven calls the local fire department to notify them of a planned burn on their land, common to area farmers and ranchers. The fire jumps onto BLM land, burning 127 acres. The Hammonds put out the fire themselves.

2006. A lightning storm touches off multiple fires on the adjoining BLM lands to the Hammond Ranch. The Hammonds set a backburn to protect their property. The backburn extinguishes the fire. Harney County Sheriff Glerup arrests Steven after inviting him into town for coffee. Dwight is also subsequently arrested. The District Attorney reviews the case and makes the decision that the evidence does not warrant prosecution.

2011. Five years after the 2006 arrests, the U.S. Attorney brings charges under the Federal Anti-terrorism Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996.

2012. The Hammonds are found guilty of the charges and sentenced. Judge Mike Hogan waives the minimum 5-year sentence under the 1996 Anti-Terrorism Act, stating a violation of 8th Amendment.

January 4, 2013. Dwight and Steven turn themselves in to authorities and serve out their sentence. Dwight serves three months. Steven serves a year.

December 15, 2015. Ammon Bundy, son of Nevada's Cliven Bundy, Ryan Payne of Montana, and others help organize a community meeting in Burns to support the Hammond family. About 60 attend. A community safety group is formed.

January 2, 2016. A rally in support of the Hammond family is held in Burns, attended by hundreds of individuals, including locals and some out-of-area groups such as Oath Keepers, Oregon 3% and Idaho 3%.

January 2, 2016, late afternoon. Ammon Bundy and two of his brothers head up a group of about 20 individuals to take over the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge Headquarters. Oregon Department of Transportation closes highways around the area due to law enforcement activity. FBI is en route to Burns.

January 4, 2016. Dwight and Steven surrender to Federal authorities to begin incarceration in a California prison.