

Federal agents kill one, arrest eight in confrontation with Oregon militia leaders

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28 January 2016

US government forces under the leadership of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) arrested eight leaders of the armed occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in eastern Oregon on Tuesday afternoon. During the arrests, they repeatedly shot Robert “LaVoy” Finicum, killing him. Ryan Bundy, who was among those arrested, was wounded. Ammon Bundy, who functioned as the leader of the occupation, was also arrested.

The standoff at the remote refuge began on January 2, when Ammon Bundy, at the head of about two-dozen armed militia members, took over the government offices. Calling themselves the Citizens for Constitutional Freedom, they claimed to be protesting the re-imprisonment of ranchers Dwight and Steven Hammond for setting fire to federal lands.

They received extensive and generally sympathetic coverage in the mainstream media, which often depicted them as “patriotic” ranchers. The occupation became something a lightning rod for armed right-wing militia elements throughout the western United States. Supporters came to join them from Montana, Utah, Arizona and Texas, coming and going freely from the compound.

The majority of the leadership of the occupation chose on Tuesday to travel about seventy miles north to the town of John Day to hold a community meeting. The drive along Highway 395 between John Day and the Wildlife Refuge is remote and largely unoccupied. Law enforcement personnel shut down the highway to traffic and set up roadblocks to capture the militia leaders.

Press photographs reveal that the FBI deployed at least five armored vehicles and at least one Blackhawk helicopter.

Press reports state that Finicum, who had functioned

as something of an informal spokesperson for the group, was shot multiple times and killed at the roadblock. Details are not yet clear, but even the brief official account supplied at the press conference held in Burns, Oregon did not claim that Finicum opened fire or even held a gun.

The militia leaders were traveling in two vehicles. The vehicle occupied by Ammon Bundy surrendered immediately to law enforcement. Finicum’s vehicle seems to have driven past the roadblock.

An audio interview was published on LiveLeak and YouTube that purported to be with Victoria Sharp, who was in the vehicle with Finicum throughout the shooting. Sharp claimed that Finicum stopped at the roadblock but that government agents opened fire on the vehicle and then killed the unarmed man.

Other accounts claimed that Finicum “charged” at the officers and they opened fire.

In a simultaneous sting, the FBI arrested several other leaders of the occupation who were in the town of Burns. According to reports, six militia members under the leadership of Jason Patrick still occupy the Wildlife Refuge. Ammon Bundy, having surrendered to the authorities, called on the remaining occupiers to surrender. Patrick issued a statement refusing.

The forces occupying the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge are a deeply reactionary lot. Most were not even ranchers, as they were styled to be in the press. Among those arrested were a former marine reservist who led anti-Muslim protests; a talk show radio host; a tattoo artist; an electrician; a retired firefighter; and another ex-Marine. All were members of various right-wing militia organizations. Ammon Bundy operated a valet car fleet.

The violent response of the government, however, was motivated by a desire to defend the power of the state. It will use the standoff with right-wing militia

elements in Oregon as a pretext for the further expansion of the police powers and its freedom to murder at will. It is building up these powers in preparation for the emergence of genuine opposition to the state within the working class.



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