

Stopping Bundy gang took three weeks too long

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

The FBI and Oregon State Police finally caught up with Ammon and Ryan Bundy.

More than three weeks after they led an armed occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge outside Burns, Ore., law enforcement stopped the Bundy gang as it was driving to attend a meeting at the John Day Senior Center. One member of that group, LaVoy Finicum, was shot and killed - reportedly as he was reaching for a handgun.

Which has to make you wonder: Why did it take three weeks?

Would police give a tax protester three weeks to occupy the local Internal Revenue Service outlet?

Would anybody allow anti-war activists to seize a college campus ROTC building and remain there for 25 days?

How would people react if a bunch of left-of-center agitators refused to leave a Commerce department office until Congress reformed Wall Street regulations?

Or if anti-nuclear demonstrators captured a Department of Energy administrative office building?

Say a group of environmentalists opposed to oil and gas leases on federal lands seized and held buildings at one of the national parks?

But you've never seen that kind of protest. Instead, you've typically encountered non-violent civil disobedience. People break the law but then are willing to suffer the consequences.

Did anyone ever think of bringing guns to the equation? Not until the

Bundys came along and unsheathed a willingness to shed blood, essentially holding the cops and the public hostage if they did anything about it.

The surrounding community, state and local authorities, ranchers, even most of the movement that remains skeptical of the federal authority never warmed to their cause.

But the Bundy occupation dragged out because it benefited from a Western mythology that initially confounded urban-based observers to the realities of a region that resents the federal government on which it depends for its survival.

Until they talked to local experts, such as Boise State University's John Freemuth, many national journalists had trouble understanding such concepts as public lands, grazing fees, subsidies and the Bureau of Land Management.

The Bundys were aided by a federal law enforcement community that had been sickened by the legacies of the Branch Davidians at Waco, Texas, and the Weaver family at Idaho's Ruby Ridge.

How could it not? Federal authorities are dogged by the 20-year-old images of their agents employing deadly force against people who were in their own homes and were wanted for suspected weapons violations.

Waco, Ruby Ridge and relatively untested leadership - Interior Secretary Sally Jewell and BLM Director Neil Kornze were new to their jobs - played into the feds walking away from an armed confrontation nearly two years ago with the Bundy boys' father, Nevada rancher Cliven Bundy.

Allowing Bundy to continue grazing his cattle on public lands while he refuses to pay more than \$1.1 million in fees he owes the federal government only emboldened his sons and other agitators like them.

And until Tuesday, they openly mocked laws the rest of us must obey.

Apprehending Ammon and Ryan Bundy - and their supporters - restores some measure of equilibrium. The Idaho Statesman's Rocky Barker quoted FBI Agent Greg Bretzing expressing just the right message: "As the FBI demonstrated, actions are not without consequences."

But not entirely. Until the feds drag Cliven Bundy in front of a judge, you're faced with the nagging possibility that we've not seen the last of

this. - M.T.