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Oregon Standoff: Last Four Occupiers Surrender At Malheur Refuge

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[February 11, 2016](#)



[This article comes from OregonLive.com](#)

by Les Zaitz

UPDATE 11 a.m.: FBI confirms that final protester David Fry in custody.

BURNS – The occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, undertaken 41 days ago with guns and threats, ended Thursday with the peaceful surrender of four holdouts after an hourlong negotiation with the last protester.

Those taken into custody by the FBI were David Fry, 27, of the Cincinnati area, Jeff Banta, 46, of Elko, Nevada, Sean Anderson, 47, and his wife, Sandy, 48, of Riggins, Idaho. They each face a federal conspiracy charge for their role in the occupation, joining at least 12 others already arraigned on that charge.

At the final moment after the first three had walked out, Fry said he was feeling suicidal and wouldn't give himself up. He demanded to talk to an FBI negotiator by phone as others repeatedly urged him to calm down and walk out.

"I'm a free man and I will die a free man," Fry said as the frantic conversation played out on a live feed online.

Over an hour, Fry rebuffed supporters again and again, saying he feared going to prison and losing his freedom.

Fry had played a role throughout the occupation providing social media help to the protesters.

“We will pray you out,” a woman’s voice was heard saying at one point, but then Fry said he was pointing a gun at his head.

“I’m really confused right now,” he said as the entreaties continued for him to leave the refuge.

Finally, Fry said he wanted a cigarette and cookie and started walking out.

The FBI confirmed minutes later that he was in custody.

“We are all relieved our prayers were answered,” Fry’s father, Bill Fry, said in a text message to The Oregonian/OregonLive.

By contrast, the surrender of the others appeared to go off as planned.

No one was injured and no shots were fired, the FBI said in a statement.

“The occupation of the Malheur Wildlife Refuge has been a long and traumatic episode for the citizens of Harney County and the members of the Burns Paiute tribe. It is a time for healing, reconciliation amongst neighbors and friends, and allowing for life to get back to normal,” said Billy J. Williams, U.S. attorney for the District of Oregon.

Earlier Thursday, Sandy Anderson wrote on Facebook: “It’s a very sad day for me as we plan to turn ourselves over to the very people we fought so hard against.”

Her husband said in his own post that their stand against what they believe is an overreaching federal government is coming “to an end.”

Their surrender came with the involvement of Nevada Assemblywoman Michele Fiore and evangelist Franklin Graham. Fiore, a Republican running for Congress, spent hours on the phone with the occupiers, discussions that were transmitted live into the night via YouTube.

Graham, president of the North Carolina evangelistic operation founded by his father Billy Graham, confirmed in his own Facebook post that he expected to arrive in Oregon early Thursday.

He wrote that he had been talking to the holdouts every day for the last week, done at their request and of the FBI.

“Last night I was on the phone with them for several hours, was able to have prayer with them, and they have said they would come out today,” Graham wrote. He said he was expecting to arrive in the area of the refuge by 7 a.m.

The surrender followed days of video posts and telephone calls from the occupiers to supporters to say they would leave only if they were granted immunity.

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