

RUBY RIDGE

Ruby Ridge is a small rock formation in far northern Idaho near Naples, where US Marshalls tried to arrest a survivalist Randy Weaver on August 21, 1992. Mr. Weaver had failed to appear in court to face a charge of selling two shotguns whose barrels were ½ inch shorter than allowed by law to an undercover informant for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF). Weaver claimed never to have received the notice to appear at his mountain cabin where he lived with his wife, Vicki, a friend, Kevin Harris, four children and a dog. When the Marshalls came upon Harris, Weaver, and his 14-year old son Sammy, one of them shot the dog, which prompted Sammy to fire back. An exchange of fire left Sammy and U.S. Marshall Michael Degan dead.

A standoff ensued and an FBI hostage team joined the ATF. The next day, FBI sniper Lon Horiuchi wounded Weaver and Harris outside the cabin. As they attempted to get back inside, Horiuchi then inadvertently killed wife Vicki Weaver who was holding the door open for them. Thus began an 11-day siege that generated intense publicity and hundreds of spectators, which ended when a retired Army Colonel Bo Gritz, who had considerable support throughout the mountain west, convinced Harris, Weaver and his surviving children to surrender on August 31.

This controversial standoff generated a nationwide debate on the use of force by Federal law enforcement. It is claimed by some to have catalyzed the birth of militia organizations like the Montana Freeman and the Sovereign Citizens movement. It certainly encouraged narratives that the Federal government was out to subvert the Second Amendment of the US Constitution and to get people's guns by any means necessary.

Upon later trial for many charges including murder, Harris was acquitted of all charges in an Idaho court, and Weaver was convicted only of the original failure to appear and bail violation for the arms charges. The Weavers later won civil judgments against the government for excessive use of force including \$3.1 million in damages, and Harris was awarded a \$380,000 settlement in September of 2000. A US Senate panel accused the federal agencies of "substantial failures" in 1995, and noted parallels with an even larger disaster in 1993 in Waco, Texas, where four federal agents and 76 other people including 25 children died.

Today, the Ruby Ridge case is an exercise for FBI trainees on how not to do law enforcement in rural areas. It illustrates delicate balances in appropriate use of force, and shows how hundreds of new, armed opponents can be generated by trying to arrest one minor scofflaw. 22 years later, in 2014, another western family headed by Cliven Bundy of southeast Nevada attracted hundreds of armed supporters to drive off federal agents from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) who were confiscating cattle from BLM land due to failure to pay grazing fees by the Bundy family.

The practical lesson from Ruby Ridge for efforts to combat terrorism worldwide is that excessive uses of force against citizens can increase the numbers who are willing to take up arms against

governments, and decrease the political legitimacy of law enforcement among millions of onlookers in the internet age where vivid images can quickly be available worldwide.

Michael Andregg

(Word Count excluding Further Readings = 547)

Further Readings

PBS, *Ruby Ridge* is an episode of a documentary series, [American Experience](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/ruby-ridge/). It aired on August 24, 2017, accessible at: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/ruby-ridge/>

Editors of [The Encyclopedia Britannica](https://www.britannica.com/event/Ruby-Ridge-incident), “*Ruby Ridge Incident*,” accessible at: <https://www.britannica.com/event/Ruby-Ridge-incident> .

“*Shootings at Ruby Ridge*,” at history.com, <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/incident-at-ruby-ridge> .

US Department of Justice, June 10, 1994, *Report of the Ruby Ridge Task Force to the Office of Professional Responsibility of Investigation of Allegations of Improper Governmental Conduct in the Investigation, Apprehension and Prosecution of Randall C. Weaver and Kevin L. Harris*, 40 pages, accessible at: https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/opr/legacy/2006/11/09/rubyreportcover_39.pdf .

US Department of Justice, 1994, *Department of Justice Report Regarding Internal Investigation of Shootings at Ruby Ridge, Idaho, During Arrest of Randy Weaver*, 431 pages, accessible at: <https://www.scribd.com/document/17106356/DOJ-Report-on-the-Internal-Investigation-of-the-Shooting-at-Ruby-Ridge> .