

Assault, Fires, and Manhunt Shatter Island Serenity

Dispute Over Money Leads to Largest Police Action in Guemes History

Editors' note: The events of the night of April 2 and morning of April 3—including a lockdown of the volunteer fire department, deployment of the Skagit County SWAT team, and a fire that destroyed an island residence—have been the subject of much conversation and speculation, as well as numerous news accounts, most containing inaccuracies.

In an effort to set the record straight, volunteer Tide staffers conducted some two dozen interviews with participants, witnesses, and law-enforcement officials, and examined numerous public documents.

What follows is a chronology of the events of that night and morning. All information not attributed to an individual has been checked with at least two knowledgeable sources, and we believe it to be accurate.

It started with a disputed \$150 debt.

On Friday, April 2, Stephen Callero, 46, an island contractor, spoke by phone to a Skagit County sheriff's deputy. He wanted advice on how to approach fellow islander Charles Feld, 53, to get paid \$150 for some rototilling equipment he had rented for Feld. According to Callero, he had made repeated attempts to get paid but Feld had refused, responding with four obscene and threatening phone calls.

Sheriff's office records say the deputy told Callero that this was a civil court matter and advised him twice against confronting Feld—but that, if he did so, he should not go on his own but should take along some witnesses. Callero recalls the deputy saying, "There is strength in numbers."

Around 6:00 p.m., Callero and Guemes resident Tim Hanby, 58, say they drove to the Feld residence on Edens Road in Hanby's pickup truck, stopping about 50 feet from the house. They were followed at a distance by Callero's son Aaron, 21, who parked close to Edens Road and never left his truck.

Callero and Hanby approached the house on foot, Hanby carrying a 16-inch fish club. Feld appeared on the deck of the residence, and Callero asked



JUSTIN JAMES

The fire utterly destroyed Callero's trailer residence and all its contents.

for the money. A heated argument ensued between Feld and Hanby.

Eventually Feld went into the house and returned with a white plastic bucket, from which he slung a yellow liquid at Hanby and Callero, hitting Hanby's head, face, and body and splashing Callero. Feld then produced a lighter and threatened to light them on fire. According to court documents, Feld later told deputies that he had anticipated Callero confronting him and had prepared a mixture of gasoline, ammonia, bleach, and dish soap.

Hanby, temporarily blinded, asked Callero to call 911. The Skagit County dispatch center received the call at 6:21 p.m. and remained on the line with Callero for about 10 minutes as the incident unfolded.

According to Callero and Hanby, Feld began throwing items from the deck, then went back into the house. He emerged holding a semiautomatic pistol and threatened to kill the two, firing at least two shots. As Hanby and Callero began to retreat to the truck, Feld fired again. Hanby got in the driver's seat and Callero reached the passenger seat with the door open. Feld approached Callero and, at a distance of two to three feet, pointed the gun at Callero's head. The gun clicked but did not fire. Callero got

the door shut, but Feld broke the passenger-side window with the butt of the pistol and began trying to pull Callero out. Hanby hit Feld on the arm with the fish club and ran around the truck to pull Feld off Callero. Callero and Hanby drove off, as did Aaron Callero.

Volunteers and authorities respond

At 6:22, dispatch called the Skagit County Sheriff's Office with a priority-one-event alert and ordered a hold for the Guemes ferry. The Guemes Island Fire Department and Anacortes paramedics were alerted. Hanby and Callero went to the Fire Hall for medical treatment and as a safe haven.

Volunteers from the fire department, including the incident commander (IC), responded to the assault-with-injury call at about 6:30 p.m. (Fire Chief Mike Stamper was out-of-state.) Medical treatment of the two victims commenced. Around 6:45, three deputies and the Anacortes paramedics arrived. The victims refused transport to Anacortes, and the paramedics left.

One deputy remained at the Fire Hall while the other two went to the Feld residence to secure the crime scene. A deputy reported that someone had seen Feld heading toward the Fire

Hall, and at 7:03 the IC was officially instructed to initiate lockdown procedures: cover windows, lock doors, stay in a safe place, and keep calm.

Two firefighters continued to treat the victims while the deputy began to take their statements. Another deputy went to the Callero residence to escort his two sons back to the Fire Hall for their protection.

At 9:10, dispatch received a call from Feld threatening to kill the officers if they didn't leave his property. At 9:30, Chief Deputy Tom Molitor arrived at the Fire Hall. Soon thereafter, a callout was made for all available uniformed officers in the county.

Between 9:30 and 9:45, neighbors near the Callero residence on Holiday Boulevard began hearing what sounded like fireworks and saw an orange glow. Witnesses say they saw two fires about 150 feet apart—a one-ton dump truck ablaze and a trailer residence engulfed in flames 20-40 feet high, with ammunition apparently exploding inside.

Dispatch received the first of many fire calls at 9:54 p.m. and notified the sheriff's office and the Guemes Island Fire Department. Fearing a potential ambush and/or hostage situation, officials determined the scene was not safe to respond to.

Around 10:00 p.m., the 10-member sheriff's office SWAT team arrived on the island in an armored van and a converted military transport vehicle.

Meanwhile, an island resident checking on a friend near the Callero residence noticed the glow and went to investigate. He encountered a friend of Aaron Callero's; for more than an hour, these two, along with two neighbors, tried to control the fires with household fire extinguishers and garden hoses. They managed to move the truck Aaron had been driving—which now had a slashed left rear tire—away from the dump truck to keep it from catching fire. They focused their efforts on

keeping the fire from spreading to some nearby propane tanks and to surrounding trees.

Around 11:00 p.m., four members of the SWAT team, armed and in full protective gear, arrived to secure the burn area. They notified the IC, who called out firefighters to respond to the fire. At 11:36, the first rig was en route to the fire scene. Two pumper trucks, one water tanker, and six firefighters arrived at the scene and put the remains of the fire out.

The trailer was completely destroyed, along with all of Callero's personal and business possessions and records. The dump truck and a flatbed trailer were also destroyed. Callero was not insured.

A long night and then a surrender

As rumors began spreading around the island, dispatch was receiving more and more calls from panicked people. At 11:18 p.m., at the behest of a volunteer for the island's Community Emergency Response Team (CERT), dispatch consulted with a deputy, who issued a request to activate CERT. Calls first went out to residents of Holiday Hideaway telling them there was a gunman loose and they should lock their doors and windows and stay indoors. Around 1:00 a.m., the effort was expanded to cover the entire island. However, numerous residents did not receive calls.

Throughout the evening, the ferry had continued its normal runs while transporting at least 30 law-enforcement vehicles and as many officers onto the island. It continued to run all night until the morning shift (10 extra runs).

A hostage-negotiation team from the Mount Vernon Police Department arrived on the island around midnight. At about 2:30

a.m., the two victims and one family member were escorted to Anacortes and housed by the Red Cross.

According to Molitor, until about 2:30 or 3:00 a.m. authorities attempted to negotiate with Feld but were unsuccessful. At that time they made phone contact with Phyllis Feld, Charlie's wife, and convinced her to leave the house.

At 4:30, they executed a search warrant to secure evidence of a crime and apprehend Feld. Using tactics that included tear gas, the SWAT team secured the Feld residence and outbuildings and determined Feld was not inside. According to court documents, the search turned up about 100 rounds of ammunition, though the pistol used in the confrontation was not found.

At 6:09 a.m., as preparations were being made for the next phase of the operation, Feld appeared at the property, surrendered to a deputy, and was taken into custody.

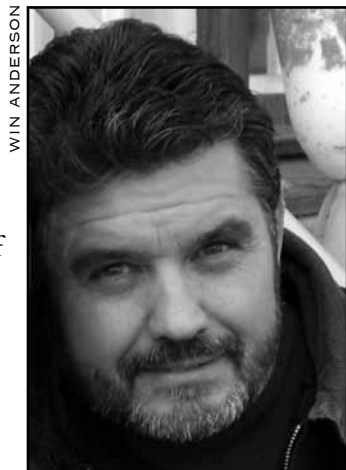
On April 7, Feld was charged with first-degree attempted murder, first-degree assault, first-degree arson, and unlawful possession of a firearm. Bail was set at \$1.5 million. The case was continued until May 7.

Feld is a respondent in a current no-trespass order issued by the sheriff's office for an island property. Charles and Phyllis Feld are both respondents in a current anti-harassment order issued by Skagit County District Court on February 1 of this year. In 1994, Feld was convicted in Pierce County of residential burglary and intimidation with a firearm. Court records show a long criminal history along with multiple recent threats to local government and law-enforcement officials.

Praise for the volunteers

Chief Molitor of the sheriff's office says the fire department "did a tremendous job in the face of a high-risk, dangerous situation. They showed real courage. This is as big an event as we've had for years. It went from a small event to a big event very quickly."

Fire Chief Mike Stamper commented, "Our people did a remarkable job under the circumstances in staying calm and handling things as they came at them. The incident commander did a really great job and worked well with the sheriff's department." ☾



Feld in April 2008