

## Sheriff's office gives full account of Thursday break-in and manhunt

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LOWER LAKE &ndash; The Lake County Sheriff's Office has issued a full report on a break-in and assault that happened in Lower Lake Thursday, and which led to a daylong manhunt in Hidden Valley that resulted in two arrests.

On Friday, Capt. James Bauman released a detailed account of the events, which started early Thursday morning.

At 7:20 a.m. Thursday sheriff's deputies responded to a reported home invasion at a residence on Noble Ranch Road in Lower Lake, Bauman said.

A 30-year-old transient identified by the victims as Charles William Burk, along with another man who was later identified as Malcolm Safa Brown, 40, had barged into the home of Burk's adopted parents and assaulted Burk's father, 52-year-old Donald Merrill, and Burk's brother, 22-year-old Donald Merrill Jr.

At one point during the assault, Burk acquired a rifle from the home and tried to shoot his father, but Merrill Sr. was able to overpower Burk and recover the weapon while Merrill Jr. fought with Brown, said Bauman.

Bauman said that, after members of the Merrill family were able to ward off the physical attack of both suspects, the suspects fled the home in a white pick-up truck.

One of the sheriff's deputies responding to the scene was traveling northbound on Spruce Grove Road when he encountered the suspects' pickup traveling southbound on Spruce Grove, said Bauman.

In an apparent act of deadly force to obstruct the deputy's response, the truck sped up, veered into the deputy's path and intentionally rammed the patrol vehicle, Bauman said. The suspects' truck continued southbound on Spruce Grove Road. The deputy's patrol car was disabled and although shaken, the deputy was uninjured.

About five minutes later, 34-year-old Brian Moynihan reported that the suspects' truck had rammed the gate leading to his property on Spruce Grove Road near Hidden Valley Lake and collided head-on with a tree in his yard, according to Bauman. Upon arrival at Moynihan's home, deputies found the suspects' truck abandoned and still running.

Moynihan reported that after hearing the truck crash into his tree, at least one of the suspects started pounding on his back door and tried to force the door open, said Bauman. Moynihan physically held the door from being opened and when the attempt to break in ceased, he opened the door and chased one of the suspects off of his property.

Additional law enforcement, including sheriff's detectives and patrol units from the Clearlake Police Department and the California Highway Patrol responded to the area to assist, Bauman said. As additional units arrived, it was determined both suspects had fled on foot either into the brush north of Hidden Valley Lake or into the Hidden Valley Lake subdivision.

As a search perimeter was established, the sheriff's SWAT team was called out and a helicopter from the Sonoma County Sheriff's Department was requested to respond. Bauman said a telephonic public safety notification also was issued to Hidden Valley Lake and Spruce Grove Road residents in a three-mile area around the scene of the abandoned truck, alerting them of the suspects at large and the search activities.

The search for the two suspects lasted throughout the morning and into the afternoon. At about 1:30 p.m., a man vaguely matching Burk's description was spotted by one of the deputies on Greenridge Road but he was wearing different clothing, said Bauman. When the man was stopped, it was discovered he was wearing multiple pairs of pants and the identity he provided could not be verified.

When another deputy arrived to assist with the detention, the man took off running and was lost behind some houses on Stonegate Road, Bauman reported. Additional deputies responded and during about a 10-minute search, several Stonegate residents reported sightings of the man.

Following up on one report, deputies were able to locate the man hiding beneath the exterior deck of a house on Stonegate. Bauman said that, despite no further means of escape, the man refused to come out and a taser was deployed to gain his compliance. He was then taken into custody and positively identified as Burk.

Telephonic public safety alerts to Hidden Valley Lake residents continued throughout the afternoon and at about 4 p.m., deputies responded to several reports of another suspicious subject walking through properties on Foothill Court and Spyglass Road in Hidden Valley Lake, Bauman said.

The Highway Patrol also responded to the area and after an approximate 20-minute search of the area, the Highway Patrol located and detained the man in a field near Highway 29 and Arabian Lane. Bauman said that, when deputies arrived, the man was identified as 40-year-old Malcolm Safa Brown of Graton and subsequently confirmed to be the second suspect at large.

Burk later divulged that after crashing his truck into the tree on Spruce Grove Road and fleeing into Hidden Valley Lake as deputies surrounded the area, he had broken into a residence on Raven Hill Road, Bauman reported.

Once inside the house, Burk shaved his head to alter his appearance and changed into clothing taken from the residence before setting out on foot again to evade capture, according to Bauman. Burk also is the one believed to be responsible for trying to break into Moynihan's home on Spruce Grove Road as it was later determined he and Brown fled in different directions after abandoning the pickup truck.

Both suspects were booked on felony charges of attempted murder, attempted robbery, burglary and assault with intent to inflict great bodily injury. Bauman said Burk faces additional felony charges of assault by use of a firearm against his father and felony assault on a peace officer for intentionally ramming the deputy's patrol car. Both suspects are being held on \$500,000 bail.

Donald Merrill Sr. and Donald Merrill Jr. both sustained minor to moderate injuries as a result of the puzzling attack, said Bauman. Both were treated and released from St. Helena Hospital Clearlake. Robbery was the apparent motive for the home invasion and both suspects appeared to be under the influence of methamphetamine at the time of their capture.

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