

# The Never-ending Saga of Robert Arnold

## Parts I-IV

### Part I "A History of Sheriff Robert Arnold" – 4/21/15

<http://www.murfreesbororeview.com/2015/04/a-history-of-sheriff-robert-arnold.html>



2014 Re-election Campaign Logo and photo.

Sheriff Arnold was elected in 2010 and re-elected in 2014. Even before being elected, scandal and controversy has followed the Sheriff, but ever since 2013, the spotlight on Sheriff Arnold's department has been growing in intensity, especially after the county received national attention from the July 4th [DUI checkpoint video](#). Recently, we have come to see just how deep the problems go.

His 2014 campaign slogan was "*Fair, Open, Honest, and Accountable*". With that, he won re-election with a slim majority of voters. As we are now learning even more, "honest and accountable" is sounding a lot like Obama's "most transparent administration in history."

I (Jacob Bogle), along with many other concerned citizens, would like to ask Sheriff Arnold to resign from office and spare the 280,000 citizens of Rutherford County any more embarrassment. I would also urge the County Commission to do their duty by taking the ethics complaint against Sheriff Arnold seriously and take appropriate action.

What follows are years' worth of evidence that calls strongly into question his capacity to represent us. The sheriff is the highest law enforcement officer in the county. If he doesn't uphold the law and act with utmost integrity, how can we trust him to keep us safe? What example has Sheriff Arnold set?

In 2009, prior to being elected, Sheriff Arnold (then a School Resource Officer) was [disciplined](#) for the way he handled a student's possession of a firearm at LaVergne High School. Arnold failed to investigate the matter, leaving the school and those there at great risk. At the time, Sheriff Truman Jones, demoted Arnold and transferred him to the detention center. As a result, Arnold lost \$22,000-\$25,000/yr in salary and other compensation. Sheriff Jones said, "*it was the least that could have been done to him.*" In November of 2009, the [depositions relating to the case were sealed](#) thanks to murky reasoning, in part, because they could be "embarrassing."



As sheriff in 2011, Sheriff Arnold [wrote a character letter](#) on behalf of family member Chris Rowland. The catch? Rowland was a convicted felon. Rowland was sentenced to two years in prison for five counts of money laundering (a reduced sentence after a plea bargain). According to the [Murfreesboro Post](#):

*"Rowland was arrested and charged with possession of a machine gun and possession of an unregistered firearm, a Rock River Arms .223-caliber machine gun and failing to register it.*

*Federal agents raided Rowland's home and brother-in-law Jeremy Chad Smotherman's home in September 2007 on Warrior Drive across from Riverdale High School as part of an investigation stemming from a \$6 million illegal narcotics operation.*

*In court documents filed in 2008, Internal Revenue Service Agent William Desantis accused Rowland and Smotherman of money laundering as "sham owners" of real estate and engaging in large money transactions with defendants indicted in a \$6 million narcotics operation."*

Even though Rowland apologized for his wrong doing, Assistant U.S. Attorney Harold McDonough of Nashville said, **"I can't reconcile why the chief law enforcement official would write a letter on behalf of a convicted felon"**. It's also curious that Rowland's family donated \$1,000 to Arnold's campaign.

In Feb. 2012, Deputy [James Vanderveer](#) resigned from office after being arrested for driving under the influence. Vanderveer, Arnold's nephew, was later re-hired by Sheriff Arnold. A year later, [two additional](#) Sheriff's deputies resigned after being arrested for DUIs. Vanderveer was also arrested and charged with [minor possession](#) in Georgia in March 2010. Much more on Vanderveer to come.

On July 4, 2013, local resident Chris Kalbaugh went through a routine [DUI checkpoint](#). These checkpoints are governed by very specific laws and drivers are only required to roll their windows down far enough so that the officer can both see and smell any signs of alcohol. Sheriff's deputy, A. J. Ross, became incredibly angry that Kalbaugh didn't roll his window all the way down (despite not being required to), and Ross later forcibly searched Kalbaugh's car

without consent. Ross then sent for a police drug dog to come and search the vehicle (something that can only be done with probable cause, for which there was none). According to the officer, the dog gave a sign that it found drugs in Kalbaugh's car and Officer Ross said he indeed found bits of marijuana. Yet, upon this, he let Kalbaugh drive away without any charges or arrest.

That fact alone tells me Officer Ross was either lying to help cover up his horrible management of the situation, or was actually abandoning his duties by not following the law and arresting someone with illegal drugs. Sheriff Arnold was a stalwart supporter of Deputy Ross. When I questioned Ross' behavior (specifically why Ross didn't apprehend Kalbaugh after allegedly finding drugs) during a public Q & A with Sheriff Arnold, Arnold tried to dodged the question and then, in essence, said it was busy night and since it wasn't a large amount of drugs, Ross did the right thing by letting Kalbaugh go.

You can find the original six minute YouTube [video here](#). It has been seen over 5 million times.

Deputy Ross also has an [incredibly complicated](#) past, from leaving the department in 2004 to lying about having insurance when he crashed into someone. Yet, he is still supported by Sheriff Arnold.



In December 2014, James Vanderveer made his way back into the news. After restraining inmate Demario N. Harris to a chair in what's called a "4-point restraint," Officer Vanderveer proceeded to [pepper spray Harris](#). Harris, who, again, was fully restrained, was not being combative. Yet, Vanderveer pepper sprayed him for an extended period of time and did not offer Harris the chance to wash out his eyes. Harris is now seeking [\\$300,000](#) in damages. Sheriff Arnold "reprimanded" Vanderveer, but he is still an employee of the RCSO. Once again, Sheriff Arnold seems to be looking out for his family and buddies, despite their continual appalling behavior.

You can find the [video of that incident here](#).

During Arnold's re-election run, two members of the department filed papers to run against him. Both men, Ralph Mayercik and Jim Tramel, were then the subject of "coincidental" [investigations](#) and had to resign from their jobs. Jim Tramel filed suit against the Sheriff's Office and eventually won the case, [receiving \\$250,000](#).

**Under Sheriff Arnold's policy of "good ole boy" administrating, Rutherford County tax payers have already had to pay \$250,000 and are on the hook for additional thousands.**

Additionally, during the election, Arnold's campaign manager and Sheriff's Office Chief Administrator, Joe Russell, proceeded to buy various Internet domain names to prevent Arnold's competitors (namely Maj. Bill Kennedy and Capt. Mike Fitzhugh) from being able to use them. Russell also happens to be the husband of Nicole Lester, who was the Rutherford County Administrator of Elections at the time.

Republican candidate Fitzhugh said of the matter, *"My take on it was the type of people they are, it was typical. It didn't surprise me."*

In March 2015, Sheriff Arnold decided to [ignore procedure and bypass](#) the County Commission by going straight to the state in an attempt to take full control over the county workhouse. Sen Bill Ketron was asked to carry the bill and refused saying, *"I have the utmost respect for the county commission, having served there for eight years, and I think it was a cheap shot that we introduced it without talking to them first. We blindsided them."* The County Commission's Steering Committee later voted 7-0 against merging the workhouse with the jail. Commissioner Petus Read said, *"this is somewhat of a power play, when you try to step beyond the mayor without going to the County Commission, I can't see where it's anything but a power play."*

All of this brings us to the latest in a long line of bad choices made by Sheriff Arnold.

Arnold's wife and the RCSO chief administrator has [connections to a company called "JailCigs"](#) which provides electronic cigarettes to jails. His wife, Megan, holds stock in the company and Arnold has listed it as a source of income. The Georgia-based company is owned by family, uncle and aunt John and Judy Vanderveer. RCSO Chief Administrator, Joe Russell, is also listed as a founding owner of JailCigs LLC, as well as Jail Snacks LLC (another Georgia-based company).

Lisa Nolan, County Finance Director, has said that she hasn't seen any invoices relating to JailCigs; meaning that any income the jail gets from selling them isn't being properly reported. **Arnold has said he sees no conflict of interest in the matter.**



On April 16, 2015, the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation [announced](#) it was looking into the issue after receiving a request from District Attorney Jennings Jones. On April 17, the County Commission Ethics Committee received an [official ethics complaint](#) against Sheriff Arnold as well. The Ethics Committee has scheduled a meeting to discuss the matter for April 23 at 4 pm. The meeting will be at the Rutherford County Courthouse.

Additionally, it was revealed on April 21, that Arnold received campaign contributions from many of the same companies the RCSO has contracted with. Some of these groups are, the Keefe Group, City Tele Coin Company, and a political action committee which happens to be controlled by none other than Joe Russell, Arnold's long time acolyte. The Keefe Group donated \$500 in 2012 and Keefe Commissary donated \$500 in 2013. Two months after receiving the donation from the Keefe Group, Arnold amended a contract with Keefe Commissary, which, according to the [Daily News Journal](#):

*"The contract amendment gives Keefe permission to maintain and supply the Sheriff's Office with computer equipment and software to expand the Detention Center's video-visitation system. The amendment is worth "a prorated amount" of \$215,106 and is good through Jan. 1, 2018.*

*According to the contract, the Sheriff's Office is paid a service fee associated with sales of noncommissioned and commissary items. It also establishes an agreement with Keefe to create a website through which families and friends of inmates can order commissary items.*

*The contract also states the Sheriff's Office's cut of sales are deposited in a technology fund for the video-visitation expansion that allows visitors to interact with inmates from a closed-circuit television."*

Rutherford County Mayor, Ernest Burgess, said he was unaware of the amendment or technology fund.

In 2012, Arnold [signed a contract](#) with City Tele to provide jail pay-phone services. The owner of City Tele donated \$1,500 to Arnold's re-election campaign in 2013.

Joe Russell, RCSO Chief Administrator and Arnold's former campaign manager, was hired by Arnold in 2010. Russell is also the head of the Rutherford County Tea Party PAC, which [received](#) \$500 in donations from Arnold's campaign in July 2012. In 2013, the PAC donated \$400 to Arnold. Russell further donated \$3,000 personally to Arnold's campaign.

The Sherriff's Office is also the center of several other issues. There's a JailCig-like computer tablet contract that was [not approved](#) by the County Commission. He also [allowed a private company](#) to run their own training business out of the Sheriff's Office. There are questions surrounding [ammunition purchases](#) by deputies. And, remaining questions over Arnold admitting he [watched a man burn](#) to death because, according to Arnold, the uniform might have been flammable (which seems dubious at best), or the silly [confiscation of kids' wrestling equipment](#) in 2010.



Again, I implore Sheriff Arnold to do the right thing and resign. He has protected family members after they broke the law and tortured inmates. He sees no conflict of interest over the JailCigs situation. His campaign engaged in unethical tactics and used his office to bully opponents. If he will not uphold the law, he does not deserve to be sheriff.

For continual updates, please take the time to visit: <https://www.facebook.com/OustSheriffArnold>

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## Part II “The Questionable Hires of Sheriff Robert Arnold” – 4/29/15

<http://www.murfreesbororeview.com/2015/04/the-questionable-hires-of-sheriff.html>



The Rutherford County Sheriff's Office has 343 full and part-time employees with another 154 or so working at the jail. No one is perfect. No doubt, if you looked at everyone you'd find something negative, a parking ticket perhaps or they were late paying taxes 10 years ago. However, under Sheriff Robert's administration, there seems to be a pattern of hiring and re-hiring people with severely compromised pasts.

Giving someone a second chance is reasonable under normal circumstances, but working in law enforcement is not a normal job. Law enforcement officers (LEOs) are the ones we as a society have granted permission to actually kill another person. They have the power to not only take a life, but to lock up another person and take their rights away, and they have the power to confiscate their property (*without* necessarily [having to return](#) it once the accused is declared innocent). If a mistake is made, they have the capability to completely ruin the lives of other people and their families. To whom we delegate this awesome authority, the bar must be set very high. Nothing short will suffice; after all, there's no second chances when it comes to killing or otherwise destroying the life of another person. The people we give this power to need impeccable moral fiber, integrity, and demonstrable sound judgement.

The following are several currently employed officers who were either fired or forced to resign under previous sheriffs or from other law enforcement departments (such as Murfreesboro Police) for criminal or other serious reasons, and then were later re-hired by Sheriff Arnold. It's important to remind everyone that the information below comes from publicly available sources (such as news reports and personnel files) and are about current government employees. This has nothing to really do with the people below (unless they're directly involved in the current situation), rather, this has *everything* to do with Sheriff Arnold and his apparent habit of [hiring criminals](#) to be the ones tasked with upholding the law and protecting us.

Given his connections to the current [ethics complaint](#) against Sheriff Arnold and the fact that he is in the middle of the ongoing [inmate pepper spray incident](#), I will begin with **Deputy James Vanderveer**, whose parents own JailCigs.



James Vanderveer

On March 7, 2010, Vanderveer (who is Arnold's nephew) was [arrested](#) in Cobb County, Georgia for possession of marijuana. He later plead guilty to disorderly conduct and was sentenced to community service. He became a full-time officer on Oct. 13, 2014, though he had been with the RCSO for several years prior. A [waiver](#) was filed, in connection with the Georgia arrest, with the Police Officer Standards and Training Commission (POST) so that he could remain in compliance with their regulations.

On Feb 7, 2012, Vanderveer [resigned](#) from the Sheriff's Office and then was arrested for DUI. He was then re-hired by Sheriff Arnold. So now, this officer has a history of both drug possession and DUI.

Then, in December 2013, Vanderveer placed inmate Demario Harris in a 4-point restraint (basically tying him to a chair so that he could not use his arms or legs), because, according to Vanderveer, Harris had been combative. However, after having Harris fully restrained and no longer a threat, Vanderveer proceeded to [pepper spray](#) Harris in the face. Harris is now seeking [\\$300,000](#) in damages.

Despite all of this, Vanderveer is still employed by Arnold.

**Deputy A. J . Ross**



Deputy A. J. Ross on July 4, 2013.

Deputy Ross (a "[drug recognition expert](#)") is perhaps most known for his role in the July 4th, 2013 DUI checkpoint incident during which he [became enraged](#) at local resident Chris Kalbaugh for asserting his legal rights. Deputy Ross then called a drug dog over to search Kalbaugh's car and [allegedly found marijuana](#). However, Ross failed to arrest Kalbaugh and let him drive home. In other words, if we are to believe Ross' story, he let a drug offender drive home with no consequences.

After that affair, he was awarded "[Deputy of the Year](#)" by Sheriff Arnold in December 2013.

Prior to that, Ross was [forced to resign](#) from the RCSO in 2004 (under Sheriff Truman Jones) after [failing to appear](#) in court to testify when there were dozens of cases on the docket. His personnel file also shows that he lied about having insurance (when he in fact did not have it) after rear-ending another vehicle. Ross was rehired by Sheriff Arnold. Once again, we have someone who was forced to leave law enforcement for illegal activities being rehired by our current sheriff.

### **Andrew Messick**



Andrew Messick was an officer with the Murfreesboro Police Department from 2010 to 2013. In July 2013, he and his wife were [arrested for drug possession](#) after a TBI investigation. They attempted to trade their TV to get hydrocodone pills (which the DEA has recently [re-classified](#) as a [Schedule II](#) narcotic, the highest level of prescription drug). He was initially decommissioned, though later, the MPD Chief of Police recommended that his employment be terminated.

According to those working at the Sheriff's Office, Messick, a drug offender, now works at the detention center.

### **Kenneth Zook**



Finally, there's Kenneth Zook. In early 2010, under former Sheriff Truman Jones, Deputy Kenneth Zook was forced to resign after pictures came to light about a party he attended and his refusal to comply with the investigation (which included a drug test). Sheriff Robert Arnold rehired him and he still works for the RCSO.

The issue at hand wasn't that Zook was out partying and drinking, but that at the party were drugs of an unknown type, possibly marijuana, and that all of this was being done in a room with a young child (it was revealed that other children were at the party, but the photos only show one girl). This shows that Zook has very poor judgement in that, being a law enforcement officer at the time, he didn't seem to see any problem with a room full of adults drinking and

drugging while a young girl was mingling in the mix. The [World Health Organization](#) has found strong links between young children being exposed to such situations and later growing up with behavioral and substance abuse problems themselves.

Here are some of the pictures in question. These pictures had been placed on MySpace at the time and were brought to the attention of Sheriff Jones. I have obscured the faces of everyone except that of Kenneth Zook. I have also tried to hide any unique markings on the clothing of the other attendees in an attempt to further shield their identity. (Click the pictures for a larger view.)





It was also reported to me, from a source (I'll call "Q") who wishes to remain anonymous, that in 2013, after having been **re-hired by Arnold** earlier, the Zook family was using his position in the RSCO to harass Q and intimidate Q into dropping a legal case. All of this (and more) was reported to multiple people in authority at the time, but as of yet, nothing has been done. As stated earlier, Zook is still employed with the department.

I called the RSCO about further questionable deputies, but at the time of publication I have not received a reply.

For continual updates, please take the time to visit: <https://www.facebook.com/OustSheriffArnold>

To review the beginnings of the Sheriff Robert Arnold controversy, please see [this article](#).

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### Part III "Sheriff Robert Arnold Update" – 9/29/15

<http://www.murfreesbororeview.com/2015/09/sheriff-robert-arnold-update.html>



Since the initial story broke in April 2015 and Murfreesboro Review's first post detailing [Sheriff Robert Arnold's history](#) and the events surrounding the investigation a number of things have happened.

One of the biggest was the [joint TBI-FBI raids](#) that happened on May 21. They raided the Rutherford County Sheriff's Office, Sheriff Arnold's home, his Chief Administrator Joe Russell's home and a second home of Russell's, and a location in Marietta, Georgia where JailCigs is based.

According to FBI Special Agent in Charge Jeff Peterson, *"The search warrants were for documents and digital evidence that was collected by forensic experts by both the TBI and FBI. That information will be analyzed for any evidentiary value"*.

Soon after the ethics complaint was filed by Joe Liggett, Steve Lane, and Jacob Bogle, Arnold placed [three officers on paid leave](#): Chief Administrator Joe Russell and Detective Bill Sharp were placed on paid leave a week or so after the complaint and Capt. John Frost was placed on paid leave on May 12, 2015.

Also in May, [Arnold hired](#) one of the nation's top attorneys, Tom Dundon. Dundon, of Nashville's Neal & Harwell, has a history of representing corporations and government officials including, former Gov. Don Sundquist's associate Al Ganer who awarded an illegal contract, and aviation manufacturers involved in plane crashes.

A June 22 [audit report](#) of the Detention Center discovered several problems including: six non-functional security cameras, inadequate fire drills, problems with toxic waste and weapons logs, among other issues. This report came after Sheriff Arnold presented his budget to the County which has [grown 31% since](#) 2011. And at a time with officers on paid leave pending investigation, overtime was \$900,000 more than last year.

On July 1, after becoming connected with the ethics complaint, Arnold terminated a controversial [arrangement with Telmate](#) which provided inmates with computer tablets. According to an inmate's family member, the inmate is required to pay by the minute for use and the family member or friend is also required to pay \$0.25 per text, in addition to the inmate's fees. There are a number of [additional fees](#) required of both inmates and those wishing to help them, ranging from a nearly \$5 charge every single time a family member wants to deposit money into the inmate's commissary account, to outrageous fees for making phone calls.

After being fired in 2012 by Joe Russell, Joy Nelson won a [\\$307,500 settlement](#) in an age discrimination suit on July 6, 2015. This means that tax payers have now had to pay over a combined \$500,000 in settlements thanks to Sheriff Arnold and Joe Russell.

On July 11, the Editor's Board of the [Daily News Journal contended](#) that the Rutherford County Sheriff's Office under Arnold has suffered and that the citizens of Rutherford County deserve better. The DNJ cited the above mentioned settlement, an unfavorable audit result, and the ongoing investigations.

It was [announced](#) on July 23, that Detective Bill Sharp would receive a 5 day suspension for operating a private business out of the Sheriff's Office and Capt. John Frost received a 10 day suspension for developing a computer code while at work that was then sold to a private company.

On Aug. 25, 2015, it was revealed that the Sheriff's Office was [being sued](#) for wrongful termination, again. McKayla Black, who was hired in 2008, has alleged that she was fired based on her support for Arnold's political opponent. She also claims that she was demoted from booking officer to jailer once it became known she was pregnant. There have been several additional allegations by multiple people that they were either demoted or fired by Arnold after taking medical leave.

On Sept. 18, [Arnold fired 38-year RCSO veteran](#), and third-in-command, Deputy Chief Virgil Gammon. Gammon is considering legal action against the Sheriff's Office as no reason was given for his termination and it is widely believed he has information of interest to the TBI/FBI investigation and may have done his sworn duty by giving assistance.

The group [Tennesseans Against Corruption](#), which is behind the "Oust Sheriff Arnold" campaign, is continuing to follow the investigations and pursue an ouster suit against Sheriff Arnold. TAC asks that those who know of illegal activity and corruption at the Sheriff's Office or who have been wrongfully fired, to please publicly tell their story. If you would like to help TAC raise the needed funds for the ouster suit, please visit [www.OustSheriffArnold.com](http://www.OustSheriffArnold.com)

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Part IV “Death, Shots, and Beyoncé: the Sheriff Arnold Saga Continues” – 2/16/16

<http://www.murfreesbororeview.com/2016/02/death-shots-and-beyonce-sheriff-arnold.html>



First I would sincerely like to say that I'm glad no one was hurt and Rutherford County Sheriff Robert Arnold's family is fine.

On Monday night, Feb. 15, 2016, [shots rang out](#) near Sheriff Arnold's home. The perpetrator is still unknown, but when asked about possible motives, the Sheriff pointed to Beyoncé's 2016 Super Bowl [halftime show](#), claiming “*Well, you have Beyoncé’s video and how that’s kind of led over into other things, it seems like, about law enforcement.*”

The idea here is that this video was so violent in intent and has been so persuasive that it has led people to go and kill cops makes little sense. It puts me in mind of another video that was blamed after the deaths of four Americans in Libya.

Sheriff Arnold was no doubt contemplating the so-called "war on cops". However, [The Washington Post](#) has shown that police deaths have been falling for decades, with 2015 being one of the safest years ever.

The fact that no bullets even hit his large house, shows that whoever did this was trying to send a message, not kill (if Sheriff Arnold was even the target, it's unknown what exactly was being shot at or where exactly the bullets came from). That said, there's never a good reason to send a message with a gun, nor to try and take vigilante justice. But what could have been the motivation? After years of abuse and corruption, could there be even more reasons for people to be upset with the Sheriff and the Sheriff's Department?

On January 30, 2016, inmate Jonathan Maxwell was [found dead](#) while in the Rutherford County jail. He didn't just die though, he hung himself with a phone cord. One has to ask, where exactly were the officers? And what steps did Sheriff Arnold take to prevent this from happening

again? Whatever the RCSO might have done, it wasn't enough. A week later, Michael J. Murray also [killed himself](#) while in police custody.

Those are just the latest horrible events to occur at the jail. In 2014 Robert Lee Johnson was arrested. Two months later he was found [unconscious](#) in his cell after being badly beaten. His family is suing the Rutherford County Sheriff's Department for \$20 million. Sheriff Arnold has already lost several lawsuits and cost taxpayers [hundreds of thousands of dollars](#) as a result.

On top of deaths and beatings, there is growing concern over the health and safety of inmates. Staph infections are very common, leaving some with half of their body covered in sores. There are also problems relating to [mental illness](#) and the ongoing overcrowding situation.

The idea that a music video could be the only reason for someone to be angry at Sheriff Arnold is absurd.



The group *Tennesseans Against Corruption*, founded by Steve Lane, Joe Liggett and Jacob Bogle, demand Sheriff Arnold's resignation. Not only has he lost the confidence of the citizens of Rutherford County. Not only has his administration overseen immense suffering. Not only is Sheriff Arnold under multiple investigations for corruption. He has now shown that he has lost touch with reality, subjecting our county and the many wonderful employees of the Sheriff's Department to national ridicule.

Please voice your support by "liking" our [Oust Sheriff Arnold](#) Facebook page and please sign our [petition demanding](#) his resignation.

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