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COLUMN

Here's more proof that 'disarmed' and 'victim' are synonymous

When violence looms and every second counts, recall that the police are only minutes away.

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Has anyone ever wondered why people with guns who have kissed sanity good-bye never take out their uncontrollable rage on the nearest police station?

Nor do they drive off to the nearest Army base, shooting range or hunting club to vent their murderous frustration.

It should only take a moment's thought to understand why: Those places have people who have relatively easy access to weapons themselves.

It's one thing to be homicidal and suicidal, but it's quite another to consider that one's murderous intent could be brought to an untimely halt through the immediate application of superior firepower.

However, there are places that draw these people like magnets, and they, too, are easy to locate: They are the places where the possession of firearms is forbidden, and that fact is widely advertised.

Some of these places even go so far as to publicly display their vulnerability to mass murder through the posting of signs that say "No Guns Permitted" or "Gun-Free Zone."

Virginia Tech was proud of its "gun-free" status, and boasted about how safe a place it was once it posted signs forbidding firearms on campus.

Thirty-two people died there last April as the cost of that exercise in hubris and futility.

Other places where firearms are typically banned are stores, including shopping malls, government buildings, including schools, and places of worship.

We saw in the Columbine shootings how effective gun bans are for schools.

And in Omaha last week, eight people died in a shopping mall before the shooter, cornered by police, killed himself.

In Ogden, Utah, last February, a man killed five people in a mall before an armed off-duty police officer pinned him down until help could arrive.

And just this past weekend, a disturbed youth who had posted violent diatribes against Christians on an Internet site killed two students at a Colorado missionary center.

He later showed up at a church that had an association with the missionary group carrying multiple weapons and 1,000 rounds of ammunition.

But because of the earlier shootings, the church had activated its voluntary security force, composed of members who had licenses to carry concealed weapons and the training to use them.

The gunman killed two teenage girls in the church parking lot and wounded their father before he entered the church.

But once he got inside, he was confronted by one of the church's volunteer guards, Jeanne Assam, a former police officer armed with a pistol.

As witnesses described it, she advanced on the shooter yelling "Surrender," and when he raised his weapon, fired several shots, bringing him to the ground. Police reported that the badly wounded gunman then shot himself to death.

Assam, dubbed "Dirty Harriet" by one writer, was credited by the church's pastor with having saved 50 to 100 lives.

It's almost enough to make a fair-minded, thoughtful person conclude that armed, law-abiding citizens might have saved countless more lives at places like those listed above.

But not in the view of the confiscation crowd. They point at the weapons the gunmen used and say that banning them would halt such shootings.

Problem is, there's precious little evidence to support that view, and much to disprove it.

Different parts of this country display disparities in rates of serious crimes. But that crime rate has been falling steadily for almost 20 years. While many factors undoubtedly contribute to that trend, including tougher sentencing laws, the ability of people to defend themselves also counts.

The 40 states (including Maine) where concealed-carry permits are readily available to law-abiding people report on average a 22 percent lower violent crime rate, a 30 percent lower murder rate, a 46 percent lower robbery rate and a 12 percent lower aggravated assault rate than the 10 states where the possession of firearms by honest citizens is greatly restricted.

As University of Tennessee law professor Glenn Reynolds (who blogs as "Instapundit") noted after the VT murders last spring, "People don't stop killers. People with guns do."

He wrote, "Though press accounts downplayed it, the 2002 shooting at Appalachian Law School was stopped when a student retrieved a gun from his car and confronted the shooter. Likewise, Pearl, Miss., school shooter Luke Woodham was stopped when the school's vice principal took a .45 from his truck and ran to the scene."

Police, he notes, can't be everywhere, and when they do arrive, it's usually too late for at least some victims.

However, "one group of people is, by definition, always on the scene: the victims. (But) if they're armed, they may wind up not being victims at all."

As the U.S. Supreme Court ponders whether the Second Amendment protects our right of self-defense with firearms, the actual case is being proved by people like Jeanne Assam.

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