

IN MY OPINION

Caroline Porter

A shoot-em up at the old courthouse

This Saturday has all the promise of a usual Saturday in June, sun shining, tourism flourishing and the Great Race (101 cars on their way from Boston to Sacramento) stopping in Galesburg in the morning for a festive visit at the town square.

But this year we will have another attraction at the Public Safety Building and Knox County courthouse. It may look like a movie set — a guy in fatigues guarding the statue of Mother Bickerdyke with a rifle slung over his shoulder, with maybe a few hangeron marching with him, all with guns.

This could be fun, visitors might think, because there will be cameras there, and if one doesn't look closely, they may look like movie cameras. But they will be television cameras. And this isn't a movie in the making. This is for real.

Our law enforcement officers and the rest of us actually have to put up with an unstable man who has challenged someone to shoot him. I've seen him on television. He's so enjoying the prospect of someone getting killed, hopefully himself, that he can hardly keep a straight face.

One remark he made stood out for me, "I had a life-changing experience in November of 1999. I really don't care what happens." He reminds me of the poor souls who have shot people, been killed by police officers or killed themselves at schools and places of businesses, who actually believe they will die as martyrs and will be remembered, even if the memory is a tragedy. That's certainly my idea of hell.

It's clear that the people who make up the country's militia outfits are mostly misfits in society. Not that society always offers the best standards but one does have to learn to somehow exist within some accepted

parameters. In the process of trying to civilize ourselves and get away from the wild west mentality, the mainstream of our society has decided that the second amendment to the United States Constitution refers to our Federal, State and local governments being able to create levels of law enforcement, and on the Federal level, armed forces.

Does any reasonable person really interpret that amendment to allow neighborhoods and social groups to pack heat — as a group? That's what's happening in Rwanda, Bosnia, Nigeria, and countries in South America and it's chaos — and it's anarchy.

Governments do need to be overthrown occasionally but the price of human devastation caused by civil war and rebel activity is rarely, if ever, worth the results. But this is really what this militia man is all about: taking the law into his own hands, intentionally creating a dangerous situation to law enforcement, himself, his friends and innocent bystanders. Things are not perfect in this country but they are better than any other in the world.

If we are to preserve the freedom we have to speak out as the militiamen and women have had the freedom to do, we can't cross that line and take advantage of it.

The area militiamen and their leader have gone too far. I fear for the lives of our law enforcement officials who will be faced with someone armed who is intentionally breaking the law, doesn't care if he gets killed and apparently is prepared to shoot to kill.

It's nuts.

I'll be glad when the day is over.