

# Empty holsters on campus

## P.C. leaves innocents defenseless

By W. Scott Lewis

Should you ever find yourself perusing the newspaper archives at your local library, take a few minutes to track down and compare the August 2, 1966, and April 17, 2007, editions of any American newspaper. You'll undoubtedly find that, for two papers written more than four decades apart, they tell strikingly similar stories.

In both editions you'll likely see that coverage of American soldiers fighting a publicly unpopular war overseas is pushed to the back pages by news of a mass shooting on the campus of a major university. But although the headlines suggest a classic case of "history repeats itself," the facts lurking beyond the newsprint actually tell a very different story.

On the morning of Aug. 1, 1966, few people had ever considered the possibility that they might die in an indiscriminate shooting spree. But shortly before noon on that fateful day, a 25-year-old former Marine climbed to the top of the University of Texas bell tower and created a worldwide reference point for such fears.

As police rushed to the scene, officers already on the UT campus struggled to formulate a plan. At that time, the Austin Po-

lice Department had no SWAT team. Officers were armed only with service revolvers and shotguns, both useless against a sniper firing from a fortified position high above the ground.

Seeing that something had to be done, students quickly retrieved hunting rifles from dorm rooms and fraternity houses, took up defensive positions throughout the campus and returned fire. In the August 2006 edition of *Texas Monthly* magazine, Bill Helmer, a graduate student at UT during the shooting, recalled the experience to journalist Pamela Colloff: He said he remembered thinking, "All we need is a bunch of idiots running around with rifles." But what they did turned out to be brilliant. Once the shooter could no longer lean over the edge and fire, he was much more limited in what he could do. That's why he did most of his damage in the first 20 minutes.

Flash forward 40 years, eight months and 15 days to the campus of Virginia Tech. Once again students and faculty on a college campus find themselves under fire from a madman. But this time there are no armed citizens to fend off the attack. Students and faculty are left with little recourse but to hide under their desks, as surviving victim Emily Haas told CNN, "waiting and hoping [the shooter] wouldn't

come in." Sadly, the shooter did come into Emily's room. She survived with only superficial wounds, but her professor and 10 of her classmates lost their lives to a killer whose only advantage over his victims was a complete disregard for Virginia Tech's "gun-free" policy.

Though the notion of an indiscriminate shooting spree was a foreign concept in 1966, it's now very much a part of the national consciousness. Terms like "going postal" now populate the American vernacular. Students at elementary schools now practice what to do in the event of such an attack, much the same way their grandparents practiced "duck and cover." And yet, despite this awareness of and apparent desire to prepare for such threats, any suggestion that future shooting sprees might be mitigated by armed citizens — as was the UT sniper attack — is met with scorn and ridicule.

In the decades between these two college massacres, a pervasive idea took hold in America. Many individuals, particularly those in academic circles, began to view firearms as barbaric tools of violence symbols of machismo and false bravado only carried by men with small egos and smaller anatomies. Today, anyone who advocates carrying a handgun for self-defense is called a "cow-

boy" and accused of having a "John Wayne complex."

Whenever anyone suggests that concealed handgun license holders be allowed to carry concealed handguns on college campuses, the same way they're allowed to at movie theaters, office buildings, shopping malls and most other places, laughter, not intelligent rebuttal, is the response. Whenever proponents of "concealed carry" point to the success of concealed-carry laws throughout the nation, as well as studies showing that concealed handgun license holders are significantly less likely than non-license holders to commit violent crimes, they are answered with mockery, rather than intelligent discourse. In the world of academia and intellectual free expression, some issues are apparently not open for discussion.

This week students on more than 100 college campuses throughout the United States are wearing empty holsters as they go about their daily routines, as a reminder to everyone who sees them that they are defenseless against anyone not concerned with following the rules. These students understand something that students at the University of Texas were able to take for granted in the summer of 1966. All people have an innate right to defend themselves.

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