

Citizens With Guns Guard Military Recruitment Centers

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Larry Fitzpatrick, 50, of the 3% Irregulars Militia open-carries a .22 semiautomatic rifle and a .380 Smith & Wesson “Bodyguard” semi-automatic pistol outside the Armed Forces Recruiting station at 4834 West Broad St., July 20, 2015.

[This article comes from the Columbus Dispatch.](#)

By Holly Zachariah

Larry Fitzpatrick, wearing an Old Navy T-shirt with an American flag on the front, sat in a metal folding chair in the parking lot of a W. Broad Street strip mall today and cradled his loaded .22-caliber rifle.

He had a .380-caliber Smith & Wesson pistol strapped to his calf.

Sitting there all day, practically baking in the unrelenting heat and humidity, outside the Armed Forces Career Center recruiting center was simply his civic duty, he said. The men and women from each branch of service who work in any military recruitment center — this one is west of I-270 in Prairie Township — aren’t allowed under government rules to be armed, so Fitzpatrick has decided to protect them himself.

“I can’t see why any red-blooded American wouldn’t want to be out here,” said Fitzpatrick, a member of the 3% Irregulars Ohio Militia who lives near the recruitment center. “Our troops go overseas and fight to protect us and then they can come home and get butchered on our U.S. soil? That’s unacceptable. So until these places get their own protection, I’ll be it for them.”

Since a gunman that police identified as Mohammad Youssuf Abdulazeez shot and killed four Marines at a strip-mall recruitment center and a Navy sailor at an operations center in attacks in Chattanooga, Tenn., on Thursday, armed citizens have taken it upon themselves to stand at post at some centers across the country.

A man also stood guard outside the recruitment center on River Valley Circle in Lancaster today, and since Thursday there has, at various times, been someone voluntarily guarding recruitment offices in Westerville. On Friday, there were a handful of reports of a couple of others in central Ohio.

Congress and military officials have debated arming military personnel in such roles for years, but nothing has ever come of any proposals. Military Times reported that after last week's attacks, Defense Secretary Ash Carter approved a series of steps to improve immediate security. The branches raised their threat levels in some instances, the Marines instructed their recruiters to not wear uniforms for now, and the Navy increased random security checks in some areas, the Times said.

Carter told the branches of service to have additional suggestions for increased security to him by the end of this week.

Fitzpatrick said he isn't going to wait for someone in Washington, D.C., to come up with an answer.

"I'll be here tomorrow. And the day after that and the day after that and every day I need to be," he said. "I can't imagine what would stop me."

Personnel from the W. Broad Street center weren't authorized to make public statements, but one man brought Fitzpatrick cold water this afternoon, and Fitzpatrick said others in uniform have brought him food and said they appreciate what he's doing.

A few passersby offered their thanks, and one woman delivered some snacks and a gallon of iced tea in an insulated cooler.

Not everyone is amused. Randall Bush is the business manager at Advanced Medical Supply, the store next door to the recruitment center. Bush said he understands what Fitzpatrick is trying to do and he agrees that the men and women in the center should be kept safe.

But a man with a gun in a parking lot is making his employees and his customers uneasy, Bush said. And he wonders if could even prove dangerous.

"Is he going to decide by himself who looks suspicious and who he is going to shoot at?" Bush said of Fitzpatrick. "And if he decides to shoot, is he going to tell us to duck? If there should be protection here for that center, it should be left to the professionals."

Franklin County deputy sheriff did roll through the parking lot and talk to Fitzpatrick this morning, just as Lancaster police went to that recruitment center and chatted with the man standing guard there. But officials said the men are within their rights to do what they're doing.

"Ohio is an open-carry state, and these men can have their guns," Franklin County Sheriff Zach Scott said. In the case of the strip-mall, the property owner could ask Fitzpatrick to leave but hasn't done so.

"You have to use some discretion, sure, so that you don't cause a panic, but it sounds to me like the neighborhood doesn't have a problem with what this gentleman is doing by standing guard," Scott said.

Frank Karshner, a customer inside Advanced Medical Supply, agreed with the sheriff. Karshner had his three young granddaughters with him today and walked right past Fitzpatrick in the parking lot without a worry.

"A lot of people don't get too concerned about seeing a gun," said Karshner, an Army veteran. "People can tell that he isn't there to cause trouble, and people surely want our troops to be protected at home."

Lancaster police said the man on watch there identified himself as a member of Oath Keepers, a national organization that, according to its website is "an association of current and formerly serving military, police and first responders who pledge to fulfill the oath all military and police take to 'defend the Constitution against all enemies, foreign and domestic.'"

Stewart Rhodes, found of Oath Keepers, said in an email that the organization has been guarding some recruitment stations since Friday but that today he sent out a nationwide call-to-arms to put someone at post at every one.

He called recruiters “sitting ducks,” working unarmed in uniform in clearly-marked offices that anyone can easily enter.

“They may as well order the service members to walk unarmed down the streets of Baghdad,” Rhodes said. “In fact, it may be worse to be a recruiting station. ... if they were walking down the streets of Baghdad, at least they would be moving.”

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