

*Posse Comitatus: Armed for woodland
stand*

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As infant America flowed like a runaway sea from the Ohio River Valley to the Pacific, tumbling and burping its way across the frontier, it washed across the land dropping a city here, a city there, here a boom town, there a cow town, on and on and on... That was when our country was just a baby. Back then, the land was virgin and ripe – untouched, unspoiled. But as the American pioneers tramped and trudged helter-skelter o'er wind whipped plains and purple mountain majesties, chopping down, building up, digging in, they erased those wild frontiers.

Today, as America enjoys its adolescence, there are few frontiers left. Developing technology, from the wheel to video games, has made this nation a smaller, more ravaged place – one gigantic, motley neighborhood. Davey Crocket and Daniel Boone are all but forgotten. They don't even appear on TV that much anymore.

If this bums you out, you'll be relieved to know that not only does the pioneer spirit live on, but that a whole bunch of these raw-boned woodland champions dwell right here in our humble state – Up North, of course.

When our country was laying itself out and all those people were washing helter-skelter across the face of it, very few cities got plopped in the northern part of Wisconsin (glaciers, probably). Thus, one of America's final frontiers exists right in our very back yard, in that ambiguous, brutal region generically referred to as Up North.

There, burrowed into the very soil that bears some of the world's sweetest maple forests, can still be found a group of men upholding frontier law. Men who know what it's like to battle the elements. Men who know that in order to survive, you've got to be tough. Real men. This is the Posse Comitatus – and they've never even heard of quiche.

Truly, these fellows live and breathe the struggle of the land. To look at them and see their wind-burned faces, the callouses layered on their palms, their rugged features beneath their dirty denim one would know that their lives have endured a great deal of toil. Only the sodden paunch accompanying this appearance diminishes the image of a fleet warrior; but let's face it, if Davey Crocket and Daniel Boone would have had good, cold beer to keep company when the lone wolf howls and the moon casts its eerie glow, they sure as taxes wouldn't have spent their time whittling snuff boxes. Remember, this is Wisconsin we're talking about, not Utah.

You may already have heard about the Posse Comitatus as that belligerent band of rednecks who have taken over some land and tried to start their own church community. Well, they did form the Constitution Township of Tigerton Dells (in Shawano County) though the state refuses to recognize it. But they know they have a real organization whether the state recognizes it or not. (Hell, nobody wants to recognize the PLO, but you can't say they aren't there – wherever that may be.)

Actually, it's tough to categorize the Posse Comitatus politically, for like the frontiersmen before them they care very little for and know very little about governmental goings on. Nature delivers the laws they live by, social Darwinism is their daily struggle.

Anthropologists and psychologists would describe these people as classically rugged, and the Posse would proudly agree. They enjoy it, they're good at it, it's probably all they'll ever do – just be rugged. Grrr...

But they aren't animals. They do some very human things, like define the natural order of mankind and conceive of grand plans for dealing with the adverse elements of society. That's what occupies their mental energies, that and the weather. Oh, they may get a little carried away sometimes in pursuing what they feel is their divine calling, but their earnestness is okay because they're religious, "damned good Christians" they'd say of themselves.

In fact, they have such strong religious beliefs that they started their own church and academy (for teaching the children). The Posse Comitatus is the Life Science Church, and the Life Science Church is them – they are one. Their temples are meek, but their faith is etched in stone.

If they would read, they'd undoubtedly revel in medieval history books concerning The Crusades. They could readily appreciate the intentions of holy wars, because they have that special concern for a society run by the combined forces of religion and armed strength. Historically, the combination of those two forces has not worked too well – with the exception of Israel – but the Posse Comitatus is perhaps one of the most able organizations to give it a go.

Being rural folk, they know how to handle guns. They pride themselves on their sportsmanship during deer hunting season and scorn the urban hunters from Chicago and Milwaukee who shoot cows and each other, not really knowing what a deer looks like. However, a recent federal raid on one of their buildings supposedly uncovered an arms cache of the most up to date weaponry. Men are often seen walking around their few hundred acres of "church property" with rifles in hand patrolling for trespassers. Trenches mar the forest floor about their community center. They not only understand guns, they love them.

Two summers ago, county surveyors were fired upon when Posse members found them snooping around their land. County officials contend that the Posse has annexed county property; the Posse says it belongs to the church. Shawano County Sheriff James Knope, knowing the superior firepower of the Posse, then purchased a complete new arsenal of automatic rifles for his officers (and an armored vehicle, just in case); the Posse dug their trenches a little deeper. It sounds like a Western movie, but it's real.

But what is the Posse Comitatus really? What are they trying to do? Many labels have been applied to them. They've been called rednecked racists because they hate blacks and "foreigners" and because they've held meetings with the Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan. They've been called Nazis because they think Jews and communists run the Milwaukee Journal and the rest of the civilized world. They've been described as an ignorant pack of paranoid paramilitants because they sit in foxholes with guns protecting their land from the onslaught of city-folk destined to flee their burning municipalities once the Russians drop "the Big One." But what's in mere labels? A buffalo chip by any other name would smell as sweet.

What the Posse is cannot be determined too technically, because really they're just a group of hard-living, church-going patriots who love America in its purest sense: White Anglo-Saxon Protestant. They feel the frontiers closing about them, strangling them. They see their numbers fading whenever their young ones move away and their old ones die, so they've grabbed their religion and their rifles, their canned goods and their children and set up their own settlement where they can wait for the inevitable encroachment of the civilized world.

Waiting, sleeping with their boots on – a pistol under the pillow - they're ready to put up their final stand. They'd rather not have to fight; their wish is to be left alone with their kin to die a ripe old age, but the walls are falling in around them. They are organized, huddled together and content for the moment, but they're worried – armed to the teeth but worried.

What the hell is going on?

