

Most weekends I left campus on Friday night headed home to Willowick, Ohio, toting my laundry bag. The weekend beginning Friday May 1, I had decided to remain at KSU. I don't recall why... I still had a pile of laundry.

As events rolled across campus that weekend I became a very interested spectator. By no means was I a radical or actively anti-war. I had actually considered joining ROTC at one time. Being a history major I suppose I was drawn to what was going on right outside my door, so to speak.

I resided in Johnson Hall at the time. The old red brick building was perched on the slope of Blanket Hill, overlooking the ROTC quarters. The Commons, and the Victory Bell were nearby. Taylor Hall, The Pagoda, and the Practice Field were close by, too. I couldn't help but have a ringside seat to significant events on campus May 1st through 4th.

Friends and I spent much of our time outdoors that weekend, remaining on the fringe of crowds. Whenever things turned ugly, we retreated to our rooms on the third floor of Johnson Hall.

From there we watched and listened throughout the night of May 1, as students filtered back to campus from downtown Kent with stories of brawls and broken windows.

Early Saturday evening May 2, we joined an orderly demonstration on the Commons where some professors and fellow students served as 'marshals' to maintain the peace. Gradually things got out of hand when a large group separated from the Commons and marched away.

I walked with friends to the crest of Blanket Hill near the Pagoda to view the proceedings from high ground. From there we watched as the marchers filed into the Tri-Towers dormitory complex, then exited with an even larger number of folks. This growing column marched slowly past the construction site at the new library where some marchers appeared to pick up objects from the ground. The crowd wound its way back toward the Commons and finally halted at the ROTC offices where they formed a semi circle around the building as daylight faded.

From my vantage point in Johnson Hall, individuals could be seen/heard breaking glass window panes in the ROTC building. An individual or two appeared to toss lighted flares through the openings. Flames erupted inside the structure, then spread. Responding firefighters were forced to retreat after being harassed by the crowd. At least one or more individuals from the crowd hacked at the hoses with what appeared to be machetes. By night end the ROTC office building was reduced to smoldering embers behind a cordon of Ohio National Guardsmen and armored personnel carriers.

On warm, sunny, Sunday, May 3, we had an up-close and personal look at military jeeps, trucks and more armored personnel carriers parked in long lines on campus and along Kent city streets. Late that afternoon someone set fire to a small shed near the Commons, and a phalanx of Ohio State Highway Patrol Troopers marched in to help restore order.

That night we peered from open windows of Johnson Hall at a Huey helicopter hovering a few hundred feet overhead and directing a powerful spotlight at our building. On the ground below us several dozen well armed National Guardsmen directed their attention, and occasionally their weapons, toward our dormitory. I recall the strong aroma of tear gas wafting through the open windows.

By all appearances, there was nothing unusual about the start of classes on Monday, May 4. But when my first seminar in Bowman Hall ended around 11 a.m., I started back to my dorm and saw the large group of demonstrators confronting a long line of Guardsmen on the Commons. Crowds of spectators ringed the area.

I remained outside among the spectators, watching events and roaming the grounds, keeping well away from the path of advancing Guardsmen as they slogged up and over Blanket Hill. The Guardsmen marched into a fenced-in cul de sac at the Practice Field. While the soldiers lingered there some leveled their weapons at the crowd. Before the soldiers resumed their march back to the Commons,

I returned to Johnson Hall to watch from my window in room #315.

From where I stood The Pagoda on Blanket Hill was just a few hundred feet away, about eye-level. I saw and heard the shooting, though the results were hidden from my view. I couldn't fathom that live ammunition had been used. So I went to a buddy's room overlooking the Commons to watch the formation of guardsmen descend Blanket Hill and return to where they had started from. It wasn't until an ambulance swept over the grass and up the hill that it dawned on me what had really occurred. A short time later my roommate and I strolled over Blanket Hill near The Pagoda and easily spotted several spent cartridges scatter in the grass.

Memories of what I witnessed on May 4th at Kent State haven't dimmed much. Every so often during the past 50+ years I've had 'reminders' of the events.

While employed at the Ohio Bell Telephone Company in the graphics department, for example, I became acquainted with a staff photographer named Howard Ruffner. A photograph Howard had taken of a wounded student immediately after the shootings later appeared on the cover of LIFE Magazine.

Another acquaintance at OBT - one of the company's attorney's - had been on the legal team in Portage County who defended the National Guardsmen during subsequent trials.

On May 4, 2015, while I watched a PBS television documentary entitled, The Day the 60s Died: The Kent State Shootings - about mid-way through the broadcast the narrator spoke a line that ended with:

“...antiwar protestors deserve to die.”

Suddenly, my face filled the television screen. I'm unsure who took the footage, but the film of me and two of my friends was taken soon after KSU was shut down and students were ordered off campus. For several seconds the camera followed as I walked across Blanket Hill toward the Prentice Hall parking lot...with a bag of laundry slung over my shoulder.

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