

# ESSAY ON MAY FOURTH, NINETEEN-SEVENTY

## MY THOUGHTS FIFTY YEARS LATER

May 5, 2020, I am sequestered in Curitiba, Parana', Brazil with my current wife Nuria. We live in Brazil for six months and then in Parma, Ohio for six months, each year. This enables us to enjoy the warm weather of each country. We had planned on being home at the end of April, as this year I wanted to be at the Fiftieth Anniversary of May Fourth. The COVID -19 has changed those plans. I am writing my thoughts and remembrances from here in Brazil.

I am a Vietnam Veteran. I returned to the USA in July of 1969. My return was like the other soldiers, all alone, in uniform, shunned by others who were traveling, no warm greetings by other people, just scorn and name calling. "Baby Killer", "Traitor", "Murderer" and many other less than the current "Welcome Home". My family gave a welcome home party, not a good job party, but a glad you are alive party. Then it was back to civilian life just like nothing had happened, like two years were non-existent. I went from 1967 to 1969 skipping all the in between years. I reenrolled in Kent State University's School of Architecture for the 1969 Fall Quarter. I was now trying to put my life back together with my wife Susan Holobinko who was also a senior at KSU.

I will start with a little history of protests, against aggression, aggressors, and the military answer to the protestors. March 5, 1770, a group of civilians in Boston were protesting the British occupying force. The occupying forces were being harassed by the protestors. The British soldiers opened fire on the unarmed citizens killing five people in the group of protestors. This event captured the attention of the newspapers and spread across the Thirteen Colonies; just as the May 4<sup>th</sup> events spread across the United States on front pages of the newspapers.

Two-hundred years later in the City of Kent, Ohio at Kent State University students at the university were protesting United States aggression into Cambodia and the expansion of the Vietnam War. The Ohio National Guard was on campus at the request of the Mayor of Kent, authorized by the governor of Ohio, James Rhodes, to restore order.

It was a sunny, warm, Spring day and a noon rally had been called at the Victory Bell. I was on the fourth-floor Design Studio of Taylor Hall preparing for the class that would start at 1:00. The noise of the rally was conjoined with the noise of students crossing the Prentice Hall parking lot going to and from lunch or classes. While I was sitting at my desk working on my design for the class, I noticed that the noise from outside was getting louder.

The National Guard had begun charging the 300 or so students who were assembled for the noon rally. The guard pushed the students up Blanket Hill towards the front of Taylor Hall. Students kept the retreat up the hill as the guard fired tear gas into the crowd. As the guard pushed the students up the hill past the front of Taylor Hall, and into the Prentice Hall parking lot where there were other students going to class or lunch. The guard for whatever reason suddenly opened fire with their weapons on the crowd of mixed students and protestors.

In a matter of thirteen seconds and sixty-seven shots, four young people's lives ended, nine other people were wounded their lives changed forever. I heard the war come back; I saw the war come back before my eyes. The sounds, the smoke, the screams, the panic of people running,

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flash backs of a faraway jungle, people I did not even know were dying. In thirteen seconds, my life changed too.

I was a US Army Combat Engineer. I did not purposely kill people, I built things, but here I was watching American Army Soldiers killing young American children for protesting aggression. Protesting and free speech was one of the things that I was sent to Vietnam for, according to my United States government.

I gathered my important things and ran down the stairs to the outside. I ran to avoid the soldiers with guns. I ran to escape the movie running in my head. The movie had a terrible ending that kept playing. The trees and bushes full bloom flowers along the hill down to the victory bell looked like a far-off jungle in the movie. I kept running all the way to the apartment on Franklin Avenue. My wife Susan Holobinko was still on campus. (Susan had passed away in 2008) I anxiously waited for her at our apartment. I tried to call our parents, but the phones were not working. I waited and waited.

Two-hundred years later, fifty years later, we still deal with protests, difference of opinion, difference of race, religion, and unpopular wars, the same way we have in the past. The lessons and all the editorials about these tragedies of human life make headlines. Promises are made by the politicians to get votes. "How sad these events are" they say, "We will fix the situation". The fix never comes. We blame the protestor for the violence and the situation. We blamed the students at Kent State University for having an opinion and then having the National Guard shoot them. The Students caused it. The civilians in Boston caused the British soldiers to shoot.

Americans are aggressive, not only to other countries, but to other Americans. Protests are controlled by armed police, or National Guard. This is a one-sided approach; power goes to he who has the weapon. The protest loses its point as the media reports, "that four protestors were killed and nine wounded, several were arrested". The protest or the point to be made is lost. The power is in who has the weapon. Now protestors are carrying and using the weapons. Protests are now against churches, lifestyles, races, not by groups, but by individuals.

I maintain that when you introduce armed people into the protest it will be a recipe for disaster, it will escalate the protest. We saw this in Boston, and Kent State, and Jackson State University. I saw death and dismemberment firsthand in Vietnam. It was not pleasant. People who are dead all look pretty much the same. They do not look human any longer. Life goes out like the blood flowing from the wound, the soul has risen to its place in the universe. This is the same condition for those who have died for their opinion or cause. I feel that it is terribly sad that an opinion is worth a human life. An opinion expressed is a Constitutional Right, as is Peaceful Assembly. Peaceful is not possible when armed police or soldiers are present. Peaceful is no longer possible under the threat of retribution or violence.

When you are in the military you form a bond with others in uniform. You are supposed to protect and as they say, "have their Back". They will have your back too. Now I am watching from a window as the US Army, a military that I was a member of shooting young Americans.

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The same way as if they were North Vietnamese. Americans, being shot dead by other Americans doing the political bidding of the other politicians. I still cannot understand how this can happen. Under the US Constitution the four branches of the military do not have police powers. How can they justify peace keeping and crowd control with weapons? Truly in my opinion this is wrong. Freedom of Assembly, Freedom of Speech is at the risk of death. This is what I learned that day fifty years ago. I am truly pleased that with the passage of time that the nine wounded have found a purpose in their lives. I am disheartened that the time passed has not changed the way we express our opinions about the things that we wish to have changed.

I am now retired, living in two countries with my wife Nuria. Since 1995 I visit the site of the May Fourth Site and Memorials every year. I walk the terrace of Taylor Hall; I look out over the hill at the daffodils in the spring. I have taken my oldest son Jeremy with me at least once in hopes he can understand the horror of facing soldiers with rifles pointed at you. I still cannot believe that it happened on such a warm beautiful Spring day. I touch the sculpture in front of Taylor Hall, put my finger in the bullet hole, and say to myself, "this one didn't hurt anyone".

I walk the Prentice Hall Parking lot and pause at each of the four memorials. I pray that some where their spirits are influencing someone to make a change for all of mankind. The site at Blanket Hill has been desecrated by the University to erase the memory of a tragic historical event. Building a gym annex on the hill served no purpose for the site. I as an architect am saddened and enraged by the decision to do this. My education at KSU has been colored by the tragedy. I am almost always asked if I was there that day. Sadly, I have to say yes, I was there on May 4, 1970, waiting for my class to start in Taylor Hall. The class never started but life there changed for me, my wife, Susan, and all of America, in thirteen seconds.

The event has affected my wife Nuria, as I have visited the site with her. As we walk around the site I try to explain the events, only to have her say "how do these things happen in the United States?". Americans have freedom to speak and talk about opinions, how does this happen? I tell her, "I do not know other than they do".

Lawrence L. Hersey, PhD, RA