

Most weekends I left campus on Friday night headed home to Willowick, Ohio, toting my laundry bag. The weekend beginning Friday night, May 1, however, I 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 radical, or actively anti-war. I had actually considered joining ROTC at one time. As a history major, I suppose I was drawn to what was going on right outside my door, so to speak.

At the time I resided in Johnson Hall. The old red brick building perched on the slope of Blanket Hill, overlooking ROTC quarters, The Commons, and the Victory Bell, on one side. While on the other side of the building sat Taylor Hall, The Pagoda, and the Practice Field. I couldn't help but have a ringside seat for what transpired on campus that weekend.

Friends and I were outdoors as much as possible, 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 up to the Pagoda to view the proceedings from high ground. From there we watched as the marchers filed into the Tri-Towers dormitory complex, then they exited with an even larger number of folks in tow. The growing column moved slowly past the construction site of the new library as it wound its way back toward the Commons. Some marchers appeared to pick up objects from the ground. They finally halted at the ROTC offices, forming 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 on 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 some in the crowd; water hoses appeared to be hacked. By night's 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. As daylight waned a phalanx of Ohio State Highway Patrol Troopers marching in cadence helped return order on the Commons after someone had torched a small shed nearby.

That night we peered from open windows of Johnson Hall as a Huey helicopter hovered a few hundred feet overhead directing a powerful spotlight at the building. Below on the ground several dozen well armed National Guardsmen directed their attention, and occasionally their weapons, toward our dormitory. I recall the 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, and into a cul de sac at the Practice Field. 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 look on from my room, #315.

From where I stood at an open window 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. It didn't occur to me 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.

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

While employed at the Ohio Bell Telephone Company in the graphics department, for instance, 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 who defended the National Guardsmen during subsequent trials.

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

“...antiwar protestors deserve to die.”

Suddenly, my face filled the television screen. I'm unsure of it's original source, but the footage of me was taken soon after KSU was shut down and students 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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