A Chronology—Kent, Ohio—May 1-4, 1970

The May 4th Task Force has compiled this descriptive chronology of the events at Kent State University in May, 1970 for two reasons:

1) because the facts of the actual situations have been largely covered-up or distorted, and:

2) to raise the level of awareness of students at Kent State and elsewhere concerning this unnecessary and tragic event.

Thursday April 30, 1970

President Nixon announces over national television the invasion of Cambodia supposedly to drive North Vietnamese forces out of their sanctuaries and to destroy caches of military supplies thought to be there. Many people see the move as a governmental attempt to expand the war in Indochina in hopes of achieving a military victory, instead of an attempt to shorten the war.

Friday May 1, 1970

Approximately 500 students attend an anti-war protest on the Commons at noon. Highlighting the rally was the burial of a copy of the Constitution, the political significance of that action being that the Constitution had been "murdered" when the President sent troops into Cambodia without Congressional approval. At 3:30 that afternoon another rally was held on the Commons by Black United Students (B.U.S.). Some Black students from Ohio State had come up to Kent to tell the Black students not to attend any further rallies, because if the National Guard comes on campus, the Blacks would be the first targeted, as had recently occurred at OSU. The rally ended peacefully about 4:30.

What had been a typical Friday night in town with students overflowing from the bars onto Water Street, became a street party with an accompanying bonfire. Suddenly the mood of the approximately 400 persons changed from one of "spring fever" to one of anger, as a "middle aged" man attempted to drive his car through the liberated street and its occupants. Several rocks were thrown through store windows and at passing cars, including one police cruiser. Anti-war chants and scattered vandalism soon followed.

At 12:30 A.M., Mayor Satrom declared a state of civil emergency and ordered all bars closed. What had been a crowd of maybe 400, now swelled to over 1500 persons. Aided by teargas, local police (all non-campus) forced the students back towards campus, where they temporarily organized in protest at Main and Lincoln Streets before dispersing. By 2:00 A.M., all was quiet in Kent. About 14 persons had been arrested, and $7,500 worth of damage caused. At Mayor Satrom's request, the National Guard had been put on alert. Early the next morning, many KSU students helped to clean-up the broken glass and board up windows.

Saturday May 2, 1970

During the day it was all quiet. An 8 P.M. curfew was invoked on the City of Kent, and a 1 A.M. curfew on campus. Although the administration had attempted to calm tensions by providing on-campus activities, a rally was planned at 8 P.M. on the Commons. An American flag was burned during the rally, which was attended by several hundred students. Many people began to crowd around the ROTC building, and a few students attempted to set it on fire. Eventually, the unguarded wooden frame building did catch fire, but put itself out. Firemen were originally prevented from watering the building down by students who siezed, and cut water hoses. The firemen returned
a second time, with police protection, and proceeded to extinguish the small fire which had been reset. The ROTC building did finally burn down that night, but confusion exists about this activity as it is not certain whether it was set aflame by students, provocateurs, or the firemen and police at the scene. The National Guard, which had been waiting outside of town, immediately moved into the city and onto campus and assumed control. Although on campus without the consent of the KSU administration, the National Guard proceeded to use teargas and bayonets to disperse the crowd of about 500 students and by midnight, the campus is said to be "under control" by Major General Del Corso. Kent State University was now occupied and controlled by the Ohio National Guard.

Sunday May 3, 1970

During the clear, sunny afternoon, students mingled with the guardsmen. Armored personal carriers, jeeps, trucks, and armed troops were stationed on every street corner in town and patrolled the entire campus as well.

After touring the campus, Governor Rhodes held a press conference at the fire station in the City of Kent. During the press conference, Governor Rhodes called the students, "Worse than the Brownshirts and Communist element and also the nighthawks and vigilantes. They're the worst type of people that we harbour in America...we're going to eradicate the problem...". Local authorities and university officials wanted to close the university, but the Governor told them, "keep out of this." Rhodes also threatened to "put two guardsmen in every classroom," in order to keep the university open, if necessary. The Governor also threatened to declare "martial law" but he did not do this.

Another demonstration was held in the front campus area that night. Several hundred students staged a peaceful sit-in at the intersection of East Main and Lincoln Streets. After being told that university, city, and National Guard officials would meet with them to discuss student demands, the students were betrayed when they agreed to move out of the street and back onto campus. They were tear-gassed and chased by National Guardsmen, who bayoneted several students. By 1:00 A.M., the campus was quiet again. Fifty-one people were arrested that night.

Monday May 4, 1970

A school day; classes were held as usual. Many students who were gone over the weekend were unaware of what had occurred. At noon, there were approximately 2,000 students gathered near the "victory bell" on the Commons for the rally to protest, not only the Cambodian invasion, but the National Guard "invasion". Several thousand other students were spectators as the rally was about to begin. However the National Guard ordered the students to disperse. Guardsmen and police told students that this was an "illegal assembly," and that they were to "disperse immediately." However, this rally, in broad daylight, was perfectly legal, and peaceful. Students became outraged that their Constitutional right to assemble was ignored on their own campus. The students did not disperse, and responded with anti-war chants, slogans and obscenities.

Assistant Adjutant General Canturbury decided to march on the students, and stated, "These students are going to have to find out what law and order is all about."
Using tear gas liberally, the masked and armed guardsmen proceeded to disperse the rally. Rocks and canisters were thrown by both factions. One group of guardsmen pushed students back between Taylor and Johnson Halls, continuing their march onto the practice football field; while another guard group took up a stance between Taylor and Prentice Halls.

Most of the students were now on Taylor Hill, not in the Prentice Hall parking lot. During this period, members of G-troop, located on the football field, knelt and aimed their weapons at students. One shot was fired by a guardsman at this time; no one was hit.

The guard assembled and began to march back toward Blanket Hill and their original position: away from the protesting students. The students mill about behind them, sensing a victorious showdown.

At the top of the hill, near the pagoda, members of G-troop simultaneously turned and fired into the distant crowd of student protesters. The nearly unison action began with a single shot, then two more quick shots, followed shortly by a volley totaling 76 shots in 13 seconds. The barrage cut down 15 students, killing four and wounding nine others.

The guardsmen then returned to their compound on campus by the burned-out ROTC building where their weapons are confiscated. The incensed students are without direction, chaos but not anarchy prevails. After some tense non-violent confrontations between students and guardsmen, plus pleading speeches by both students and professors, the crowd disperses.

The Aftermath

After the shootings at Kent, 760 universities shut down across the U.S. The massive student strikes resulted in the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Cambodia within 60 days. Kent State University closed down for the remainder of that Spring quarter.

Although various commissions and investigations have determined that the shootings were completely unjustified, unwarranted and inexcusable, no guardsmen, administrators or politicians have ever been held responsible for any of their actions on that Monday in May 1970, when four Kent State students were shot to death.

Any further questions dealing with the May 4th case or the Task Force, call 672-3207 or come by room 250 in the Student Center.

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