

Ohio Guardsmen Defend Shooting of Kent Students

By JERRY M. FLINT

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KENT, Ohio, May 6—"If they wouldn't have shot, they would have been killed—killed with their own weapons," said the sergeant of the Ohio National Guard.

Two days earlier, a line of guardsmen had turned on Kent State students at the spot and opened fire, killing four and wounding nine. Today the tourists on the battleground are National Guardsmen. Like any other tourists, they are trying to understand what happened.

The guardsmen on the Kent State campus have been ordered not to talk to newsmen. Some will, but the men from the neighboring Akron-Canton area

do not want to be identified.

To most of the guardsmen, the firing was justified.

Couldn't soldiers have dispersed the mob without firing?

"I'm not a soldier, I'm a milkman," the sergeant replied. "Maybe if we had a thousand men with ax handles and busted some heads, but we didn't."

The guardsmen stared at the rusty metal sculpture nearby and pointed at a hole through a quarter-inch steel plate that some believe came from a sniper shot, although this has not been proved. And they tried to sight through the hole to the rooftops in the distance.

Some guardsmen gathered the rocks in the area and left them in little piles. Later, others came up and fondled the

rocks. "If these were the rocks they were throwing, no wonder," said one private.

A specialist fifth class said the students had a baseball bat and that some had wrapped coat hangers around their fists, hooked out, to use as weapons.

"These guys were surrounded, and there were kids all over the hill, yelling and throwing rocks," the specialist said. "What would you do?" And that is a common question among the National Guardsmen here: What would you do, facing a mob of rock-throwing students?

For two weeks policemen and Ohio National Guardsmen have talked and acted as if they were surrounded by the enemy on a battlefield.

Last week, at Ohio State University in Columbus, for example, guardsmen put tape over their name tags to prevent "retaliation," the commanding general said.

The guard and the police opened tear gas attacks, generally without provocation, saying that the strategy was to keep the students off balance before they could form mobs and attack.

At both schools, guardsmen have carried loaded guns, contending that everyone knew the guns were loaded, which made violence less likely, and that the loaded guns were needed for self-protection. In fact, it was not widely known that the guardsmen were carrying loaded guns.

"I'm sorry about those kids getting killed," said a guardsman on the Kent State campus. But "agitators" had stirred things up, he said. "That business of us being untrained troops," he continued. "We get the same training as the guys going over to Vietnam get." But he conceded that "we do get jumpy."

Brig. Gen. Robert Canterbury, who was with the soldiers that fired on the students, said that, considering the size of the rocks being thrown and the nearness of the students, the guardsmen's lives "were in danger" and that "they could have been overrun."

Most of the guardsmen seemed to be convinced that there was no other way for their companions to save themselves.

"My friends and I don't think it was justified," one private said. "But most of the fellows say if they are attacked like that, it's O.K."

Their opinions were apparently supported by residents of Kent.

"Anyone came in and tried to protect us, they called 'pigs,'" said a waitress at the Kent Motor Inn near the campus.

"I feel terrible about those children getting killed, but they must have provoked the Guard," said an elderly house mother to a Kent State fraternity.