

Kent Witness Thought: 'It Can't Be Happening'

By JOHN KIFNER AUG 21 1970

Special to The New York Times

KENT, Ohio, Aug. 20—"I just can't convey the feeling I had seeing those men come over the hill with their helmets and gas masks and guns," Barbara Knapp told the President's Commission on Campus Unrest today. "I thought, 'we're civilized, this is Ohio. This can't be happening here.'"

The soft voice of the blonde coed in the neat striped dress broke occasionally as she described what she had seen to the panel, which is holding its second day of hearings into the death of four Kent State University students in a volley of National Guard rifle fire last May 4.

Miss Knapp said she had planned to go to class that Monday but had been blocked from crossing the campus and had then gone to the rally on the commons. The sight of the armed guardsmen filled her with "outrage, disgust and fear," she said.

"They were telling us to leave," she said, but she thought, "'this is our campus, we belong here.'" "I had this feeling I was not going to leave. This was my area," she continued.

Miss Knapp said, however, that the tear gas came and the troops advanced and she found herself driven over the hill and standing in a parking lot when the guardsmen marched back up the hill and suddenly turned at the crest.

Reports Were Conflicting

"Somebody said, 'Here it comes again,' and I looked up in the sky to see which way the gas canisters were coming and then I heard the shots," she said. "Somebody was yelling, 'They're blanks, blanks' and then 'No, they're live, they're smashing the car windows.'"

"When the shooting stopped, I just wanted to get out of there," Miss Knapp continued. "But a boy was shouting that a girl had been shot and he was olding this girl — she was wearing a tan, Army-type shirt — and blood was on her chest and blood was coming out of her mouth."

The girl, who was about three feet from Miss Knapp, was Alison Krause, one of the four students who were killed. "I panicked. I just ran," Miss Knapp said, "I saw two guardsmen and two policemen on the corner and I told them what had happened and one of the guardsmen said, 'Good, it's about time. Maybe this is going to stop it.'"

What, she was asked, was the effect of all this on her?

"Well, shattering, really," she said. "Before I was pretty apathetic."

She said she was "very worried" about the future and told the commission members "I just hope what you say will be acted on. It's good that you are listening but some action should be done."

Her eyes were blinking and her face drawn when she finished and she sat back down in the audience for a few minutes. Then she left the room.

Two Subpoenas Withdrawn

The commission withdrew subpoenas for two guard officers who had been with the unit on the hill after they filed suit in Federal Court in Cleveland to block their appearance. The officers, Capt. Raymond Srp and First Lieut. Alexander Stevenson, both of Troop G, said they feared their rights might be prejudiced in a pending state grand jury investigation.

The panel heard nine witnesses today and a great deal of contradictory testimony about who made crucial decisions, how dangerous the situation on the hill was and whether the whole affair was instigated by "outsiders."

Mayor Cites Outsiders

Mayor LeRoy Satrom of Kent said that his "intelligence indicated that there were outside individuals from militant groups" who had stirred up the trouble. Several student witnesses said they had found no such indications.

Brig. Gen. Robert H. Canterbury, the guard officer in command, said that the university president, Robert I. White, had "asked that we not permit" the noon rally. It was during the process of breaking up the rally that the students were killed.

In yesterday's testimony, Dr. White said that "by and large the National Guard was in charge" and implied that decisions such as that forbidding the rally had been made by the military.

General Canterbury said the situation on the hill had been "critical" and so dangerous that "many members of this commission would have fired."

"The mob started closing in on the troops," he said. "There were several hundred on the Taylor Hall side charging and yelling 'Kill the pigs, stick the pigs.'"

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