

# Conclusion of the Commission's Report on Kent State

Special to The New York Times  
WASHINGTON, Oct. 4 — Following is the text of the conclusion of "The Kent State Tragedy," a special investigative report released today by the President's Commission on Campus Unrest:

Guardsmen's presence on the campus cannot justify the violent and irresponsible actions of many students during the long weekend.

### Watershed in Attitude

The Cambodian invasion defined a watershed in the attitude of Kent students toward American policy in the Indochina war.

Kent State had experienced no major turmoil during the preceding year, and no disturbances comparable in scope to the events of May had ever occurred on the campus. Some students thought the Cambodian action was an unacceptable continuation of the announced policy of gradual withdrawal from Vietnam, or that the action constituted invasion of a neutral country, or that it would prolong rather than shorten the war. Opposition to the war appears to have been the principal issue around which students rallied during the first two days of May.

Thereafter, the presence of the National Guard on campus was the focus of discontent. The Guard's presence appears to have been the main attraction and the main issue for most students who came to the May 4 rally. For students deeply opposed to the war, the Guard was a living symbol of the military system they dis-

trusted. For other students, the Guard was an outsider on their campus prohibiting all their rallies, even peaceful ones, ordering them about and tear gassing them when they refused to obey.

The May 4 rally began as

a peaceful assembly on the Commons — the traditional site of student assemblies. Even if the Guard had authority to prohibit a peaceful gathering — a question which is at least debatable — the decision to disperse the noon rally was a serious error. The timing and manner of the dispersal were disastrous. Many students were legitimately in the area as they went to and from class. The rally was held during the crowded noon-time luncheon period. The rally was peaceful, and there was no apparent impending violence. Only when the Guard attempted to disperse the rally did some students react violently.

### Questionable Decision

Under these circumstances the Guard's decision to march through the crowd for hundreds of yards up and down a hill was highly questionable. In fact, the Guard never did disperse the crowd. The crowd simply swarmed around them and re-formed again after they had passed. The Guard found itself on a practice football field far removed from its supply base and running out of tear gas. Guardsmen had been subjected to harassment and assaults, were hot and tired, and felt dangerously vulnerable by the time they returned to the top of Blanket Hill.

When they confronted the students, it was only too easy for a single shot to trigger a general fusillade. Many students consid-

ered the Guard's march from the R.O.T.C. ruins across the Commons up Blanket Hill, down to the practice football field, and back to Blanket Hill as a kind of charade. Fear gas canisters were tossed back and forth to the cheers of the crowd, many of whom acted as if they were watching a game. Lieut. Alexander D. Stevenson, a platoon leader of Troop G, described the crowd in these words:

At the time of the firing, the crowd was acting like this whole thing was a circus. The crowd must have thought that the National Guard was harmless. They were having fun with the Guard. The circus was in town. The actions of some students were violent and criminal and those of some others were dangerous, reckless and irresponsible. The indiscriminate firing of rifles into a crowd of students and the deaths that followed were unnecessary, unwarranted and inexcusable.

The National Guardsmen on the Kent State campus were armed with loaded M-1 rifles, high velocity weapons with a horizontal range of almost two miles. As they confronted the students, all that stood between a guardsman and firing was the flick of a thumb on the safety mechanism, and the pull of an index finger on the trigger. When firing began, the toll taken by these lethal weapons was disastrous.

The Guard fired amidst

great turmoil and confusion, engendered in part by their own activities. But the guardsmen should not have been able to kill so easily in the first place. The general issuance of loaded weapons to law enforcement officers engaged in controlling disorders is never justified except in the case of armed resistance that trained snip-er teams are unable to handle. This was not the case at Kent State, yet each guardsman carried a loaded M-1 rifle.

This lesson is not new. The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders and the guidelines of the Department of the Army set it out explicitly.

No one would have died at Kent State, if this lesson had been learned by the Ohio National Guard. Even if the guardsmen faced danger, it was not a danger which called for lethal force. The 61 shots by 28 guardsmen certainly cannot be justified. Apparently no order to fire was given, and there was inadequate fire control discipline on Blanket Hill. The Kent State tragedy must surely mark the last time that loaded rifles are issued as a matter of course to guardsmen confronting student demonstrators.

Our entire report attempts to define the lessons of Kent State, lessons that the Guard, police, students, faculty, university administrators, government at all levels, and the American people must learn—and begin, at once, to act upon. We commend it to their attention.