

May 4, 1970

Kent State University was placed in an international spotlight after a tragic end to a student demonstration against the Vietnam War and the National Guard on May 4, 1970. Shortly after noon on that Monday, thirteen seconds of rifle fire by a contingent of twenty-eight Ohio National Guardsmen left four students dead, one permanently paralyzed, and eight others wounded. Not every student was a demonstration participant or an observer. Some students were walking to and from classes. The closest wounded student was 30 yards away from the Guard, while the farthest was nearly 250 yards away.

The divisive effect of the Vietnam War on American society was especially evident on campuses throughout the country. At Kent, the day after the announcement to send U.S. troops into Cambodia marked the start of a weekend of antiwar protests that began on campus and spilled into the city of Kent's downtown. Broken windows and other damage to a number of downtown businesses prompted fear, rumors, and eventually a call by the city's mayor to the governor for assistance.

The National Guard arrived Saturday night. That day some students assisted with the downtown cleanup. That night the campus headquarters of the Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) was burned. Sunday morning the governor came to Kent and in the city's firehouse held a press conference saying the University would remain open. After a Sunday of relative calm, an antiwar rally at noon on Monday brought 2,000 to 3,000 people to the University Commons area. When the Guard gave the order to disperse, some in the crowd responded with verbal epithets and stones. The Guard answered first with tear gas, but when spring winds altered its effect, the Guard attempted to enforce the Ohio Riot Act with raised bayonets, forcing demonstrators to retreat. The Guard then changed line formation. As the Guard approached the crest of Blanket Hill, some Guardsmen turned toward the Taylor Hall parking lot, and between sixty-one and sixty-seven shots were fired. Four students were killed and nine wounded. That afternoon University President Robert I. White ordered the University closed.

History, sorrow, and healing remain a part of Kent State University. The University Library has dedicated a Memorial Room containing books, papers, studies, and other materials relating to the events. In addition, the University has established an academic program designed to help students and others employ peaceful conflict resolution to resolve disputes. On May 4, 1990, the University community dedicated a permanent memorial. Each year, an annual vigil, candlelight service, and commemoration enable the University, the Kent community, and others to privately and publicly express their feelings.

The University will continue to remember the four students who died -- Allison Krause, Jeffrey Miller, Sandra Scheuer, and William Schroeder -- through scholarships in their names and in the words inscribed on the May 4 Memorial: "Inquire, Learn, Reflect."

Reviewed and revised (1995) by:

Provost
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May 4 Planning Committee

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