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Aftermath of Campus Violence

NATIONAL Guardsmen were appalled by the barrage of angry, emotional, frequently unfactual condemnation that was unleashed on them by public figures and some of the news media following the tragic sequence of events at Kent State University.

This verbal assault was aimed not only at the Ohio Guardsmen directly involved but at *all* National Guardsmen, questioning their competence, restraint, discipline and good judgment in civil disturbance operations. Familiar phrases from the past were heard again: trigger-happy, poorly-trained, immature, etc., etc.

Two features of this sometimes-hysterical attack were distressing to the Guard. First, Guardsmen actually involved in the Kent State incident were charged, tried, convicted and condemned in some of the Nation's news media on nothing more substantial than distraught, often-prejudiced accounts from some of the eyewitnesses. Second, on the same flimsy evidence, the entire National Guard was characterized as ineffective and unskilled.

It would be easy, under such circumstances, for Guardsmen to lose heart, and worse, to lose faith in the good sense and fairness of their fellow Americans. But such a feeling must not be permitted to develop.

Only a relatively small percentage of the individuals and news media who spoke out after Kent State took a harsh, distorted stand against the Guard. Their irresponsibility was more than countered by the majority, who said "Wait—let's not lose our perspective—let's examine this carefully before we condemn." The latter point of view, we can hope, represents that of the majority among most Americans, political leaders, newsmen, educators and ordinary citizens.

We all are disturbed by what happened at Kent State—Guardsmen as much as anyone else. The violent taking of life is never anything but saddening to good men. But it should be almost equally distressing that men who heavily influence the making of public opinion should find it so easy to dismiss the burning of buildings, the destructive and violent acts of rampaging students, the hurling of fist-sized chunks of concrete and pieces of steel at law enforcement personnel, and the intense physical and verbal abuse poured on both Guardsmen and police, as inconsequential and not very serious.

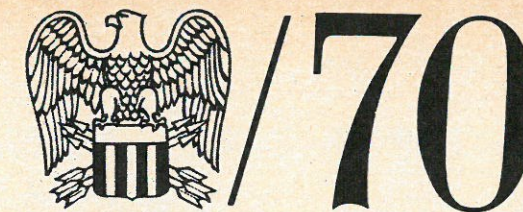
We cannot help wondering if our critics would have reacted as harshly had four Guardsmen been killed by thrown missiles, as they easily might have been. We believe the answer, as expressed editorially in a number of newspapers, is "clearly not."

It was depressing, too, to recognize the lack of both knowledge and objectivity in accusations that the Guard is "trigger-happy" and "poorly-trained."

National Guardsmen in every State have spent many long, exhausting days learning how to halt disorders and restore calm to American streets and campuses. Some bear the scars, on their souls as well as their bodies, of hundreds of encounters with the lawless, violent elements of our society. Between 1 January 1968 and 30 April 1970, they were summoned on 191 occasions to help civil authorities control civil disturbances. Approximately 224,400 Guardsmen were involved. On occasion after occasion, they were commended highly by Federal, State and local officials and some of the news media for the professional caliber of their performance. Yet in that entire period, to the best of our knowledge, no more than one or two fatalities were attributed to the enforcement actions of Guardsmen.

That is an almost-phenomenal record when one considers the tense and explosive atmosphere in which they were performing their difficult and distasteful duty. It is a record that neither trained civil police nor Active Army troops can surpass.

It is a record that irresponsible public utterance and prejudiced editorial comment cannot destroy. ♦



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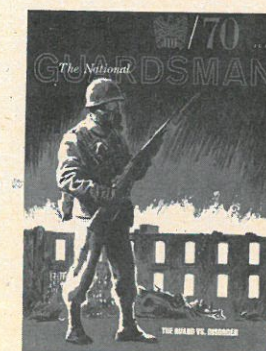
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If the front cover seems familiar, it is. Representative of scenes in many cities in the Spring of 1968 when it was used originally on the May issue, it again fits the situation in which Guardsmen were serving in the Spring of 1970.

Official monthly publication of the National Guard Association of the United States. Publication office 1 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001. Second class postage paid at Washington, D.C., and at additional mailing offices. All correspondence and address changes should be addressed to 1 Massachusetts Ave. N. W., Washington, D.C. 20001. "THE NATIONAL GUARDSMAN" welcomes original articles bearing on National defense, with emphasis on the Army and Air National Guard. Manuscripts must be accompanied by return postage, and no responsibility is assumed for their safe handling. Domestic subscriptions for home delivery: \$2 per year. A year's subscription is included within NGAUS members' annual dues. Subscriptions to foreign addresses, \$2.50 per year. Single copies, 25¢. Copyright, 1970, National Guard Assn. of the U.S. All rights reserved.

JUNE, 1970