

# Ravenna impacted by May 4 events, too

By Ron Swank

Much has been written about the Kent State University shootings of May 4, 1970 and how the university and the city of Kent were forever changed by what happened. However, little or nothing has been told about the neighboring community of Ravenna and how the events in Kent left lingering memories there of a Monday like no other.

I was the manager of the Kroger grocery store on North Chestnut Street in Ravenna, one block north of the heart of town and government.

May 4, 1970 was a warm, spring day and it was just business as usual except for a lot of conversation about the happenings in Kent over the weekend.

It was early afternoon and I was late making my trip to First National Bank for routine banking. As I waited to cross Main Street, I could hear the faint sound of sirens in the direction of Kent. The pedestrians held their place as the flashing lights came into view. It soon became obvious that there was more than one emergency vehicle moving our way.

The next minutes were like moments frozen in time because they just kept coming ... blaring sirens and flashing lights, one after another. As they passed they quickly turned toward Robinson Memorial Hospital, which was on South Meridian Street. After what seemed like an eternity, I quickly made my way to the bank and then back to the store.

As word of the shootings spread, so did the anxiety about how violence could possibly move into Ravenna. The victims had been

Ravenna. The victims had been transported to Robinson Memorial and others followed with their concerns. Any incarcerations could be in the local facility, and basically, the town did not know what to expect. Local businesses began to shut down.

I was on the phone to my marketing area office in Solon, seeking guidance about the situation. A decision was quickly made based on the suggested possibility of local violence. A team of carpenters was dispatched with instructions to board up all of the plate-glass windows that faced North Chestnut Street.

Later in the afternoon, with plywood in place, we closed for business. By late afternoon, Ravenna was like a ghost town with nothing moving, neither on foot nor on wheels.

Briefly stepping outside, and looking up on top of one of the neighboring buildings, I saw National Guard troops with rifles in hand, scanning the surrounding streets. The scene was the same on top of the courthouse. A peaceful town had quickly turned into a visual war zone.

A mobile food unit was moved into place between the courthouse and the police station to service the needs of troops and police. Additional food supplies were needed.

Local police officers helped with communications, and I received a "safe conduct pass" that allowed me access to the sidewalks between my store and the waiting mobile food unit. To be alone on the street under those circumstances, and in a previously busy downtown area, was more than humbling.

I don't recall how many trips I made that evening, but when it was appropriate, I announced my exit and headed home.

A normal Monday turned into a once in a lifetime experience. Many lives were changed that day. Some were tragically ended. Some were physically or emotionally scarred.

Some were just left with penetrating memories that still live on ... even after 40 years.

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