The Sun Was Terribly Hot That Day...

Our destination was the home of a geologist who works with the Smithsonian Institution. His family had donated their recreation room for people to stay in, and we rolled out our sleeping bags.

President Nixon was holding a televised news conference a few minutes after we arrived. Everyone watched intently, and although Nixon said that he wanted every-thing to be cleared up, the public found out about the incident too late. He told us that expanding the war would help get us there, and that more deaths could bring an end to the killing. He said that the rhetoric was over, but defended his use of the word "bums." He held a moment of silence for all the dead, but no silence for all the dead black or dead students.

The next morning we slept late. When we got up, we learned that Dr. Newman and his wife would also attend the rally on the Ellipse. Their daughter, Marty, would also be there. Mrs. Newman thought that it would be a good idea if we all carried a wet handkerchief in a plastic bag in case we were tear-gassed.

We parked our car in a faculty lot at George Washington, and walked the few blocks toward the White House. The "Newshounds" from the New Mobilization Committee were posted to keep the students in order. Their number seemed small to some of us, but we could see neither the beginning nor the end of it.

The D.C. Police had brought in buses to block off Pennsylvania Avenue so that there was no possibility of a head-on confrontation with the White House. When we got to the Ellipse behind the White House, there was nothing to see. There was no way to see the White House short of standing on the speakers' stand. We were in the Courtyard Monument (which was closed) or flying in an airplane. Those were the only ways of seeing the whole crowd.

The list of speakers was impressive, although they seemed so far away that none of them were visible. Mrs. Coretta Scott King spoke briefly, then Senator Spark, David Dellinger, Phil Ochs, Judy Collins, Janis Fondin, someone from Wesley Albee, and another also spoke. They were hard to hear, and the heat, in the 90's, was just too much. The police were in the reflection pool in front of the Lincoln Memorial, which had gathered around the fountain, where many students were seducing and splashing the water to avoid the heat. Most of the students of both sexes were completely or partially naked, and everyone accepted it as the normal thing. I stripped down to my shorts and joined the fully dressed and fully nude in the reflecting pool.

Some of the students at the Washington rally sought relief from the hot sun by taking a dip in the Reflecting Pool at the foot of the Lincoln Memorial, shown in the background.

The rally lasted about three hours. As it broke up we were told by the speakers that there would be a march some time later. Someone of us were able to hear them, but were too busy.

At the end of the rally, three army trucks and a jeep pulled up for a short distance from us. They were stopped for quite a while, and the soldiers were talking to the people in the crowd. The soldiers, too, were sick of Vietnam. The next thing we knew, all the students were climbing into the trucks—some of them waving Viet Cong flags. My wife and I jumped on the first truck.

We were all packed in like sardines, and had no idea where the soldiers might take us. "Maybe we're all going to the gas chambers, I joked one of the students. We weren't going to be gassed, we found out. We were only going for a few blocks, waving and shouting for the week of the war, before being stopped by other soldiers. The troops ordered us out, and we all got off the "liberated" Army trucks.

As we left, many of us shook hands with the friendly soldiers in the trucks. "Those guys will probably end up in the stockade," someone said.

The trucks had left us only a short distance from a fountain and the reflection pool in front of the Lincoln Memorial. We were too hot, and water fountains were mobbed.

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