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The Disarming of the Kearney State College Police Force During the Era of Civil Rights and Vietnam

Cannon Marchand

Today, the University of Nebraska at Kearney Police Department is one of few unarmed campus police departments in the country.¹ Even so, UNK PD is a certified police department with full police powers. Officers derive their authority from the State of Nebraska as Special Deputy Sheriffs, but only after graduating the State of Nebraska Law Enforcement Training Center. Officers must also receive continual training each year to maintain certification. With that training and certification, UNK PD officers are obligated to maintain safety and security for all people and property at the university. Members of UNK PD are expected to enforce laws and respond to incidents--all while being unarmed. This raises the question: why are they unarmed when most other police departments have firearms, including those of other universities in Nebraska?²

At the creation of the department, officers did carry firearms, but a series of complex events transpired that would lead campus administrators to decide that it was best if campus police did not carry firearms. The most widely reported reason is a 1969 shooting involving Kearney State College officers. During the shooting, an officer killed a nineteen-year-old man. A court later determined the shooting to be justified. However, what was not justifiable to college leaders was a lack of formal training of their officers, as well as the potential violence at KSC

¹ United States Department of Justice, “*Special Report Campus Law Enforcement, 2011-12*,” 2015. Bureau of Justice Statistics. Accessed November 12, 2017. <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cle1112.pdf>

² University of Nebraska at Kearney, *Annual Campus Security and Fire Report*, 2017.

from civil unrest during the Vietnam war era. Unarming the campus police was a decision made in both the fact and feelings of the 1970s, but this decision continues to impact the safety of both officers and those at UNK to this day.

Prior to February 5, 1968 security at Kearney State College, now the University of Nebraska at Kearney, was handled by the Samardick Special Police Force.³ Policing on the campus had become an increasing issue in the late 1950s and early 1960s over traffic accidents on campus. Accidents resulted in the death of one student in 1956, and KSC averaged over two automobile collisions a month in 1966. The Samardick police force had no actual police powers, such as the ability to enforce laws and make arrests. Samardick was nothing more than a private company contracted by the university.⁴ Campus officials decided in 1968 that employing a campus police force with actual police powers would be a better system for safety. The department would gain its policing authority and power from its officers being sworn in as both members of the Kearney Police Department and as special state deputies but with jurisdiction limited to campus. As KSC director of business affairs Marvin R. Stovall stated: “The new security force is now on a more professional basis.” What this meant was that armed police officers on the campus had all the powers of a normal city police department, and the college had security more prestigious than hired security guards. The new department was called Kearney State College Campus Security and was directed by Fred Barth, a twenty-three-year veteran of

³ Kearney State College transitioned to be called the University of Nebraska at Kearney on July 1st, 1991.

⁴ Samardick Special Police was a large company based out of Omaha. It provided police and investigative services across the state. The owner Robert Samardick was a controversial figure, and built his company to be a Nebraska version of the Pinkerton Detective Agency.

the Kearney Police Department. He was joined by five additional officers.⁵

Almost two years after the department's creation, the events of an early Sunday morning on November 23, 1969, would help shape the young department into its unarmed status of today. The events started with the actions of a nineteen-year-old Clatonia, Nebraska-native named Randall Sagehorn, and the incident finished with bullets fired from a KSC officer's gun. Sagehorn had just graduated from Wilbur High School that May, and was working for an implement company. He was not a KSC student but was on campus on a date with Gail McFall. McFall was a KSC student and had attended high school with Sagehorn.⁶

Sagehorn dropped McFall off at her dorm, Centennial Towers East, around 1:05 a.m. Together they bought a six-pack of beer, and went on a movie date. A later toxicology report showed Sagehorn to have no drugs in his system and a blood alcohol content of .02. McFall later described Sagehorn dropping her off that night "in a good frame of mind."⁷ Sagehorn then moved his car a block and half away from campus and parked it on Ninth Avenue. Then, for unknown reasons, Sagehorn returned to campus to a parking lot around the Nebraska Food Center building, or the current Nebraskan Student Union, with a .22-caliber semi-automatic rifle he purchased the day prior. He also had a shotgun but left it in his car on Ninth Avenue.⁸

⁵ "Tragic Traffic Death Could Be Repeated Here," *Antelope*, October 21, 1966; "Campus Security Force Is headed by Fred Barth," *Antelope*, February 29, 1968; "Samardick's Critic Flayed," *Omaha World Herald*, August 27, 1957.

⁶ KSC Police Report, Fred Barth interview of Gail McFall, November 23, 1969, University of Nebraska at Kearney Police Department Records, Kearney Nebraska; "Motive Sought in Sunday Shooting," *Kearney Daily Hub*, November 24, 1969; "Jury Finds Shooting is 'Justifiable Homicide'," *Kearney Daily Hub*, December 2, 1969.

⁷ Gail McFall, "Another side to the shooting incident", *Antelope*, December 18, 1969.

At 1:15 a.m. he pointed the rifle at the head of Mary Gray as she sat in the passenger seat of a car with her date Karl Kollmorgen. According to a signed statement that Kollmorgen gave to KSC Security that night, Sagehorn then told Gray: “Get out and come with me.” At this point Kollmorgen started to get out of the car. Sagehorn commanded him: “Get back into the car, and let her come along.” He then told Gray again to exit the car.⁹ At this point Kollmorgen fully exited his car and confronted Sagehorn. Sagehorn then told him: “This is just a joke – this is just a BB gun,” and then started to walk away.¹⁰ Kollmorgen continued to approach Sagehorn and yelled, “Don’t ever try that again. What are you trying to do - kill me? Sagehorn then fired at Kollmorgen’s feet as he approached him and said, “I might.” Then Kollmorgen said, “that would be real cool - a murder charge.” Sagehorn finished the conversation with “I don’t care.”¹¹ Hearing the gunshot, two KSC officers drove into the parking lot from Eleventh Avenue to investigate. The officers were Sergeant Richard Gibbons and Officer Timothy Austin. Austin was a 21-year-old, also attending classes at KSC as a sophomore. Both officers exited the car. Gibbons then yelled at Sagehorn to stop. Sagehorn, according to Gibbons, looked at the officers and hesitated but then ran away. Gibbons returned to the patrol car, hoping to block Sagehorn’s escape. Officer Austin pursued Sagehorn on foot.¹²

⁸ KSC Police Report, Fred Barth interview of Gail McFall, November 23, 1969, University of Nebraska at Kearney Police Department Records, Kearney Nebraska; “Jury Finds Shooting is ‘Justifiable Homicide’,” *Kearney Daily Hub*, December 2, 1969.

⁹ “Coroner’s Jury to Meet Dec. 2,” *Kearney Daily Hub*, November 25, 1969.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ KSC Police Report, Statement of Karl Kollmorgen, November 23, 1969, University of Nebraska at Kearney Police Department Records, Kearney Nebraska; “Coroner’s Jury to Meet Dec. 2,” *Kearney Daily Hub*, November 25, 1969.

Sagehorn jumped over a nearby woven iron fence that was forty-two inches tall, then stumbled on a second fence as he attempted to get over it. At this point Austin was apparently extremely close to Sagehorn in the chase and almost captured him, except that he too stumbled on the fence. After stumbling, Austin lost sight of Sagehorn. Austin then crossed Ninth Avenue



Figure 1.1. 1968 Aerial image of where the shooting occurred. Nebraska Food Center building is under the football field. Newman Center is at bottom left of the photo. “Taken by Robert S. Ayres University of Nebraska at Kearney Archives.”

and proceeded down an alleyway between Twenty-eighth and Twenty-seventh Streets. Austin

¹² KSC Police Report, Statement of Richard Gibbons, November 23, 1969, University of Nebraska at Kearney Police Department Records, Kearney Nebraska; “Austin in serious condition Following recent relapse,” *Antelope*, December 4, 1969.

pulled out his flashlight and began searching for Sagehorn in the darkness.¹³

A house off Ninth Avenue by the alleyway, at 817 West Twenty-Seventh Street, was a residence for multiple people and was affiliated with the Newman Center. To this day the Catholic Church owns the building. Adjacent to the house was a garage in the backyard. Next to the garage was a picnic bench which hid Sagehorn as he still gripped his .22-caliber rifle. As Austin proceeded down the alleyway, he shined his flashlight under the table and saw the .22 semi-automatic's barrel aimed at him.¹⁴

Austin claims he then grabbed the barrel of the rifle to try to take the firearm from Sagehorn. The *Hub* reports that Sagehorn began to fire. Austin was struck once in his left arm, and once in his lower left groin. Bullets also went through his right uniform sleeve, and one hit part of his revolver's holster. The newspaper does not make it clear whether the groin bullet, or a separate round penetrated the mace container on his belt.¹⁵

Austin then reported that he "was beginning to get sick after being struck."¹⁶ He then drew his .38-caliber service revolver and fired. At least two shots hit the .22 rifle, breaking it into pieces. The other shots were "undetermined" in their location according to the *Hub*.¹⁷ Gibbons in

¹³ "Austin took only action possible," *Antelope*, December 11, 1969; "Jury Finds Shooting is 'Justifiable Homicide'," *Kearney Daily Hub*, December 2, 1969.

¹⁴ "Coroner's Jury to Meet Dec. 2," *Kearney Daily Hub*, November 25, 1969; "Austin in serious condition Following recent relapse," *Antelope*, December 4, 1969.

¹⁵ "Motive Sought in Sunday Shooting," *Kearney Daily Hub*, November 24, 1969; "Coroner's Jury to Meet Dec. 2," *Kearney Daily Hub*, November 25, 1969; Gail McFall, "Another side to the shooting incident," *Antelope*, December 18, 1969.

¹⁶ "Coroner's Jury to Meet Dec. 2," *Kearney Daily Hub*, November 25, 1969.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

his later statement on the shooting indicated Austin fired all six rounds in his revolver striking Sagehorn before passing out.¹⁸ Austin then reported that he “was beginning to get sick after being struck.”¹⁹

The quick bursts of gunfire were heard by Gibbons as he pulled around the corner of Eighth Avenue in his patrol car. When he arrived at the house, he found the two bleeding on the ground behind the home. The *Hub* on December 2 also reports that at least three neighbors were on the scene and were later used as witnesses. Father John F. Scott, of the Newman Center, also claimed he was there. Scott would become important later on as he became the most outspoken critic of the shooting and the most articulate conveyer of distrust of authority in the community. He later wrote in both the *Hub* and *Antelope*, “I looked at those two persons, lying on the ground, one dying, the other in excruciating pain. I felt overwhelming disgust.”²⁰ Evidently the gunfire was loud enough to alert multiple people to come investigate that early Sunday morning.²¹

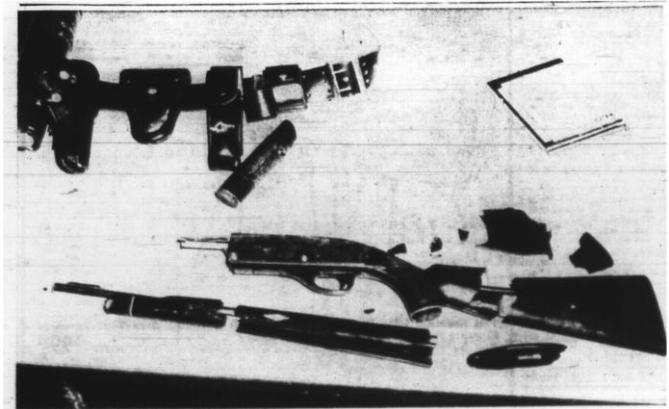


Figure 1.2. Image of Austin’s duty belt, and Sagehorn’s gun. “Appeared in November 24, 1969 issue of *Kearney Daily Hub*.”

¹⁸ KSC Police Report, Statement of Richard Gibbons, November 23, 1969, University of Nebraska at Kearney Police Department Records, Kearney Nebraska.

¹⁹ “Coroner’s Jury to Meet Dec. 2,” *Kearney Daily Hub*, November 25, 1969.

²⁰ Father John Scott, “Scott shares views,” *Antelope*, December 4, 1969; “Jury Finds Shooting is ‘Justifiable Homicide’,” *Kearney Daily Hub*, December 2, 1969.

Upon arriving at the scene, Gibbons radioed the Kearney Police Department and medical services. On the way to the hospital an ambulance crewmember heard Sagehorn mutter, “Martin (or Mason) blames me for it.” The later investigation found no meaning to the statement.²² McFall in her letter to the *Antelope* would claim that on his deathbed at the hospital Sagehorn said, “They are going to blame me for it,” or “think I done it [sic].” Sagehorn died that night at the hospital at 3:38 a.m. - two hours and thirty-three minutes after he dropped his date McFall off at her dormitory.²³ Austin was critically wounded, requiring sixteen pints of blood during surgery according to an *Antelope* report. He eventually recovered and returned to KSC at the end of February 1970.²⁴

The events of the shooting prompted a large following in both the city of Kearney and on the KSC campus. The *Kearney Hub* reported on the story four times and published four opinion pieces on the shooting within a couple of months of the event. The *Antelope* wrote on the story twice and also published four opinion pieces within four months of the shooting. Radio reports and opinions were also given throughout the Kearney community at the time. A coroner’s jury was eventually convened on December 2, 1969, and found the shooting a justifiable homicide on

²¹ KSC Police Report, Statement of Richard Gibbons, November 23, 1969, University of Nebraska at Kearney Police Department Records, Kearney Nebraska; “Jury Finds Shooting is ‘Justifiable Homicide’,” *Kearney Daily Hub*, December 2, 1969.

²² “Jury Finds Shooting is ‘Justifiable Homicide’,” *Kearney Daily Hub*, December 2, 1969.

²³ Gail McFall, “Another side to the shooting incident,” *Antelope*, December 18, 1969.

²⁴ KSC Police Report, Statement of Richard Gibbons, November 23, 1969, University of Nebraska at Kearney Police Department Records, Kearney Nebraska; “Austin in serious condition Following recent relapse,” *Antelope*, December 4, 1969.; Mrs. Tim Austin, “Thank you given by Austin’s wife,” *The Kearney State College Antelope*, March 12, 1970.

Austin's part.²⁵

The shooting also prompted criticism of both Sagehorn and KSC police. Scott of the campus Newman Center was the most vocal of anyone of the time appearing on the radio, *Hub*, and *Antelope*. Scott was an active and outspoken community member. His writing on the shooting provides a bridge from the pure facts of the event to how they met with sensitive feelings of turbulence in the early 1970s. Scott had this to say on the shooting,

I have waited now for several days hoping to find some citizen of the 16,000 that live in Kearney Nebr., who would express some questions reflecting a moral concern about the "shoot-out" ... I felt an overwhelming disgust for a society that preaches and adopts violence as a solution to human problems. I felt anger at an educational system that fiddles with irrelevancies while our world and our country are being torn apart ... I saw those two "kids" not as "criminal" and "law enforcement officer", but as victims. Victims of a system that is so entrenched and so immobile that it will not change except in the face of some ghastly event such as we have just witnessed and perhaps not even then²⁶.

Later in his article Scott defends Sagehorn's actions: "be it lust, greed, prejudice, hate, ambition – our society fosters them all. What it was that moved him to do this thing, he got it from our society." Scott also had much to say about the officer with the most poignant being, "is it right to put an instrument of death on the hip of a man just twenty-one years old without also giving him

²⁵ Father John Scott, "Scott shares views," *Antelope*, December 4, 1969; Gail McFall, "Another side to the shooting incident," *Antelope*, December 18, 1969; "Jury Finds Shooting is 'Justifiable Homicide'," *Kearney Daily Hub*, December 2, 1969.

²⁶ Father John Scott, "Scott shares views," *Antelope*, December 4, 1969.

a proportionate sense of the value of human life?” These statements of Scott sparked much community backlash as people took his opinions as pro-Sagehorn and anti-police.²⁷

Scott’s thoughts prompted a number of responses in support of the police and of Austin’s actions. The editor of the *Hub*, Allen Goldsmith, spoke about how some criticism of police is necessary, but they put their lives on the line, and in doing so must have firearms. An *Antelope* editorial reported, “police today rarely receive thanks ... for their efforts to protect our lives, it is admirable that a KSC policeman was conscientious enough to perform his duty without regard for his own safety.”²⁸ Perhaps Austin’s most loyal written supporter was a fellow KSC policeman and student Roger Faar. Faar, in an article in the *Antelope*, vehemently defended Austin’s decisions as the only possible course of action, and defended the department’s sense of value of human life. From these reports, a sense of the fervor and reaction of the small community of Kearney can be felt. The community had many that willingly jumped to support a lawman officer they saw as attacked by a lunatic. Much of the community had come to the conclusion that Sagehorn was a madman killer, and that Austin justly and heroically killed him and defended both KSC and the community as a whole. Scott’s criticism of violence and questions about police training were dismissed by many.²⁹

Understandably, Sagehorn’s date Gail McFall was another vocal supporter of Sagehorn. She questioned the shooting in a letter that was published in the *Antelope*. McFall, in her letter,

²⁷ Father John Scott, “Scott shares views,” *The Antelope*, December 4, 1969.

²⁸ “Patrolman’s action Is ‘commendable’,” *Antelope*, December 4, 1969.

²⁹ “Badge and Gun-Awesome Responsibility,” *Kearney Daily Hub*, November 28, 1969; Roger Faar, “Austin took only action possible,” *Antelope*, December 11, 1969; W. B. Wise, “Letter to the Editor,” *Kearney Daily Hub*, November 28, 1969.

could not understand Sagehorn's motives for the shooting, and argued that significant questions remain about why Sagehorn acted the way he did. Essentially, she said the event does not make sense upon conclusion of all the reported facts. Sagehorn appeared normal to her and to others that knew him before the shooting. They did not know why he acted as a madman on that night. She tried to question inconsistencies in the investigation, such as how Sagehorn could have had time to park his car so far away, and why there was a wiped tape deck with no fingerprints in his car's backseat? She reported that Sagehorn had a tape recorder in his car's dash when he left her that night and it required a key to be removed. Her letter finished with how she felt, "Randy's name had been blackened," and she implored anyone that knew anything else to speak out.³⁰

Court records of the shooting have now been lost or destroyed by the Buffalo County Court, and the newspapers offer only an outline of what happened.³¹ It will most likely forever remain unclear what Sagehorn's motives were for approaching Kollmorgen's car. The only known original documents on the shooting exist in a file possessed by the UNK PD. They include original statements of Gibbons, Kollmorgen, and interviews of McFall and a close friend of Sagehorn. The friend was named Gene Steinmeyer. Steinmeyer explained, in his statement, that Sagehorn loved guns and had recently been arrested near his home in Clatonia for repeatedly getting into car chases with police. On the last occasion police obtained his license plate number to identify him. Sagehorn was forced to hire a lawyer to defend himself. Sagehorn also told Steinmeyer he hated police and would run from them in the future. Even with this background it

³⁰ Gail McFall, Another side to the shooting incident," *Antelope*, December 18, 1969.

³¹ Efforts were made to attain records from the shooting from the Buffalo County District Court, Buffalo County Attorney Office, Kearney Police Department, Buffalo County Historical Society, and Nebraska State Historical Society. None had maintained any records of the shooting; Sharon K. Mauler to Cannon Marchand, November 28, 2017, Letter, From Clerk of the District Court.

is still troubling to not understand someone's motives after they apparently commit heinous acts, such as shooting a police officer. Running from the police as a teenager is a far step from trying to kill one.³²

The events of the shooting brought up other questions about KSC police and general security. For example, Scott brought up the attestable fact that many officers of the KSC Police Department were untrained. They did not attend an academy, unless they were previously members of another police department. Chief of Police Fred Barth had served with Kearney Police Department, and was one of the few KSC officers to be reported as receiving training at the time of the shooting. Many officers, like Austin, were just college students with a badge and a gun. There is no record of Austin possessing any training. The lack of training of KSC officers is the biggest fact highlighted after the shooting which led to campus security becoming unarmed. Not the shooting itself.³³

The violence of the campus shooting and of the Vietnam War era as a whole also played a role in the unarming of campus security. Scott cited Sagehorn's death and the violence of Vietnam era America in an article in the *Antelope* where he was interviewed for his reasons for leaving the Catholic priesthood a month and a half after the shooting. What Father Scott touched on with his writings on the shooting was the general feeling of hopelessness in regard to the violence happening across the country, especially on college campuses. He was eloquent but also poignant. Through Scott, the public gained a greater understanding of dissenting views on

³² KSC Police Report, Interview of Gene Steinmeyer, November 23, 1969, University of Nebraska at Kearney Police Department Records, Kearney Nebraska.

³³ Father John Scott, "Scott shares views," *Antelope*, December 4, 1969; "Campus Security Force Is headed by Fred Barth," *Antelope*, February 29, 1968; "Campus Security regulations explained," *Kearney State College Antelope*, October 4, 1973.

authority and distrust of facts as they were reported that many had at the time of the shooting. These would be noted by college administrators.³⁴

The administrative assistant to the college president during the shooting, and dean of students beginning in September 1970, was Robert Nye. He would have most likely been aware of and read all of Scott's writings, newspapers about the November shooting, and reports about civil unrest on college campuses in America. Also, with Nye being in a leadership position on campus, it is likely he had access to even more complete accounts of the shooting and information about the campus security department. For instance, he likely read a 1972 report, ordered by the University Board of Regents, that recommended benefits of unarming police at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. His knowledge and position led him to be the campus official to propose unarming KSC police.³⁵

The first mention of unarming police is in a 1973 *Antelope* article published just short of three years after the shooting in 1969. The article does much to explain the condition of the campus police at the time and the feelings of both Nye and KSC president Dr. Brendan McDonald. In the article, Nye is indicated as the immediate supervisor of the police department, but McDonald does say, "Should a major violation occur, I would be liable to take care of it personally."³⁶ Next in the article, newly appointed chief of campus police Harlan Hendrickson

³⁴ "Father Scott to leave priesthood, KSC parish," *Kearney State College Antelope*, January 15, 1970.

³⁵ "Gade campus security needs firearms," *Daily Nebraskan*, September 22, 1972; "Administrator sets date for retirement," *Antelope*, January 15, 1980.

³⁶ "Campus security regulations explained," *Kearney State College Antelope*, October 4, 1973.

explained that his police did have the same authority as city police, but they did not have the same training. They did not attend any police academy and were only required to be a high school graduate and pass an exam. The article conversely reports that some security officers stated they never took an exam before being hired. The final part of the article reports on a new trial policy implemented that year from Nye: to have unarmed dormitory guards. Nye said, “We’re trying to get away from the idea of being a police force and get back to being a college security force as our name implies.”³⁷ At the time, the name of the department was not police, but campus security. The department was often referred to as police, but the name would not be changed from security until 1995. In response, some members of campus security said they would not be police officers if they could not carry guns.³⁸

The trial created by Nye was apparently seen as a success to campus leaders. As on June 27, 1974, patrol officers were barred from carrying firearms. The campus was placed under the jurisdiction of the Kearney City Police Department to enforce laws. Campus security were relegated to a support and report role for the security of the campus. Nye explained how the decision had been made in light of the fact KSC officers did not have training to use weapons, whereas city and county law enforcement did have training. Campus security was upset about the decision and used the events of the shooting of Sagehorn to argue why they should be allowed to carry guns. Nonetheless, the decision was finalized.³⁹

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid; “Public Safety isn’t just a duty”, *Antelope*, August 24, 1995.

³⁹ “No point in carrying guns’ says Nye of Campus Security,” *Antelope*, January 27, 1977; “Security police to lose firearms,” *Kearney State College Antelope*, September 19, 1974.

Students of KSC responded in following reports in the *Antelope* newspaper with their thoughts. The feelings of students were mixed: they wanted campus security that had firearms, but they were also uneasy about having campus security provided from the city police. They also felt like their \$3 parking fees should be going towards a well-trained police force,



Figure 1.3. Cartoon of Campus Police. “Appeared in a February 10, 1977; article of the *Antelope*.”

not the current untrained KSC security department. Their remarks in the newspaper did not change campus policy.⁴⁰

The issue of armed police would be made relevant again in 1976 after an unarmed campus security officer named Val Jean Niles was assaulted by a masked assailant at a state-run tuberculosis hospital near campus, which is now owned by UNK. The assailant left the officer bruised and escaped the scene. Again, students were active in voicing their opinions in the campus newspaper. Many felt they needed armed campus security, but that it must come with more training. The incident also prompted Nye to defend his actions saying, “There is no point in carrying guns in this type of community. It is made up of good, industrious students and there are no problems. I feel we can do our job in KSC without firearms.”⁴¹ Nye also acknowledged the

⁴⁰ John Dore, “Letter to the Editor,” *Kearney State College Antelope*, September 19, 1974. ; “KSC security warrants trained protection,” *Kearney State College Antelope*, October 10, 1974.

⁴¹ ““No point in carrying guns’ says Nye of Campus Security”, *Antelope*, January 27, 1977; “Security police to lose firearms” *Kearney State College Antelope*, September 19, 1974.

shooting of Sagehorn, but claimed it had no effect on campus policy to unarm police. Another article in the *Antelope* identified that police did have access to a single firearm in their office. The firearm was a rather unique choice for security as it was a M3 .45 caliber Grease Gun. This was a mass-produced submachine gun from World War II. The officers did not have any training with it and no policy existed to explain when to use the firearm. It was also reported that the firearm was in poor condition. It is not reported when the department disposed of the weapon, but even with it they were still effectively unarmed.⁴²

Events were occurring outside of KSC as well that contributed to the debate to unarm KSC police. These were the feelings Scott touched on that erupted after National Guard soldiers killed protesting students in 1970 at Kent State University. America during the time of Vietnam War was deeply divided. Activism, disputes, and demonstrations led to high tensions across the country. Anti-war feelings combined with tensions of the Civil Rights Movement to expose violent divisions in American society. Kent State became the high-water mark of campus violence. Over 700 college campuses were forced to cancel classes after Kent State. Many young college students developed a distrust of their government leaders and facts as they were reported. In Nebraska, the most famous response to distrust of the time was a student protest following Kent State where students at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln protested at a draft office and then stormed and seized the Military and Naval Science building, which housed the campus Reserve Officer Training Corps programs. The students were eventually peacefully dispersed,

⁴² “Masked Assailant Jumps Officer In TB Hospital,” *Kearney Daily Hub*, November 29, 1976; Linda Johnson, “Letter to the Editor,” *Antelope*, January 13, 1977; “‘No point in carrying guns’ says Nye of Campus Security,” *Antelope*, January 27, 1977; “Security police to lose firearms” *Kearney State College Antelope*, September 19, 1974; “Campus Security policy threatens safety,” *Antelope*, February 10, 1977.

but they did later make demands to unarm UNL police. UNL police at the time was around the fifth largest police department in the state, and unlike KSC police officers, UNL police attended the state police academy to receive certification. UNL Police remained armed amid continual attempts to unarm them in the 1970s.⁴³

The decisions of Dean Nye and President McDonald about KSC security were not made with the facts isolated to the Kearney Campus. They were college leaders making decisions trying to avoid the violence on other campuses. A week following Kent State a large protest of more than a 100 students congregated at KSC. The student newspaper described it as being an emotional and disorganized event. The *Kearney Hub* and campus newspapers were also reporting on the draft lottery alongside information about the Sagehorn shooting. KSC administrators did not want to bear any responsibility for an armed police department on their campus being involved in a shooting, which must have seemed possible after the Sagehorn shooting and other examples of violence on campuses. They also would have been well aware that their police department did not have training nor were as large as UNL's police. The decision to unarm KSC police absolved them of potential future responsibility of actions of any armed KSC officer and, in their minds, actually made the campus safer in a turbulent time.⁴⁴

While it would be easy to say that one event caused the current campus police at UNK to be unarmed, no such definitive incident exists. The shooting of Randall Sagehorn has often been

⁴³ Sandra Girvis, *Where Have All the Flower Children Gone*, (Jackson Mississippi: University of Mississippi, 2006), 3; Stephen Witte, "UNL Reaction to the Cambodian Incursion and the Kent State Shootings," *Nebraska History* 75 (1994): 261-271, May 1970; ⁴³"Gade campus security needs firearms," *Daily Nebraskan*, September 22, 1972; "Campus police budget includes parking fines," *Dailey Nebraskan*, May 1, 1975.

⁴⁴ "Draft Proposal Signed into Law," *Antelope*, November 26, 1969; "Lottery questions answered," *Antelope*, December 2, 1969.

cited as a leading cause, but it alone did not unarm the campus police. The 1969 shooting brought increased scrutiny to the department that would leave them unarmed, but perhaps even if the shooting did not occur, KSC security may have been barred from carrying firearms anyways. The increased media attention highlighted the fact that most of the college security officers had no training and were merely students at KSC. Campus administrators at the time were also making decisions in the flurry of Vietnam-era protests and unrests. The tragedy at Kent State, the violence at other college campuses, and the possibility for personal responsibility of anything happening at KSC made it a good choice for them to unarm campus security. With the inadequate level of training of the police unarming them was a reasonable and justifiable decision. In 1981, however, campus police began attending the same police academy as other Nebraska law enforcement officers and became certified as a police department. This certification and professionalization continues to the present day. As of 2016, the department changed their name to simply UNK Police and has had officers with full police powers backed up with standardized training. They are far different from the department of 1969, and the climate of tension stemming from Vietnam has lessened. Officers today face new threats such as mass shootings and increased scrutiny from always being recorded. The question of why they are not armed is still, and possibly more, relevant today.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Kevin Rose, *University of Nebraska at Kearney Department of Public Safety: Department History*, manuscript, 2006; “New name, new location for UNK Police Department,” *UNK News*, August 9, 2016, <http://unknews.unk.edu/2016/09/16/new-name-new-location-for-UNK-Police-Department> (accessed November 13, 2017).