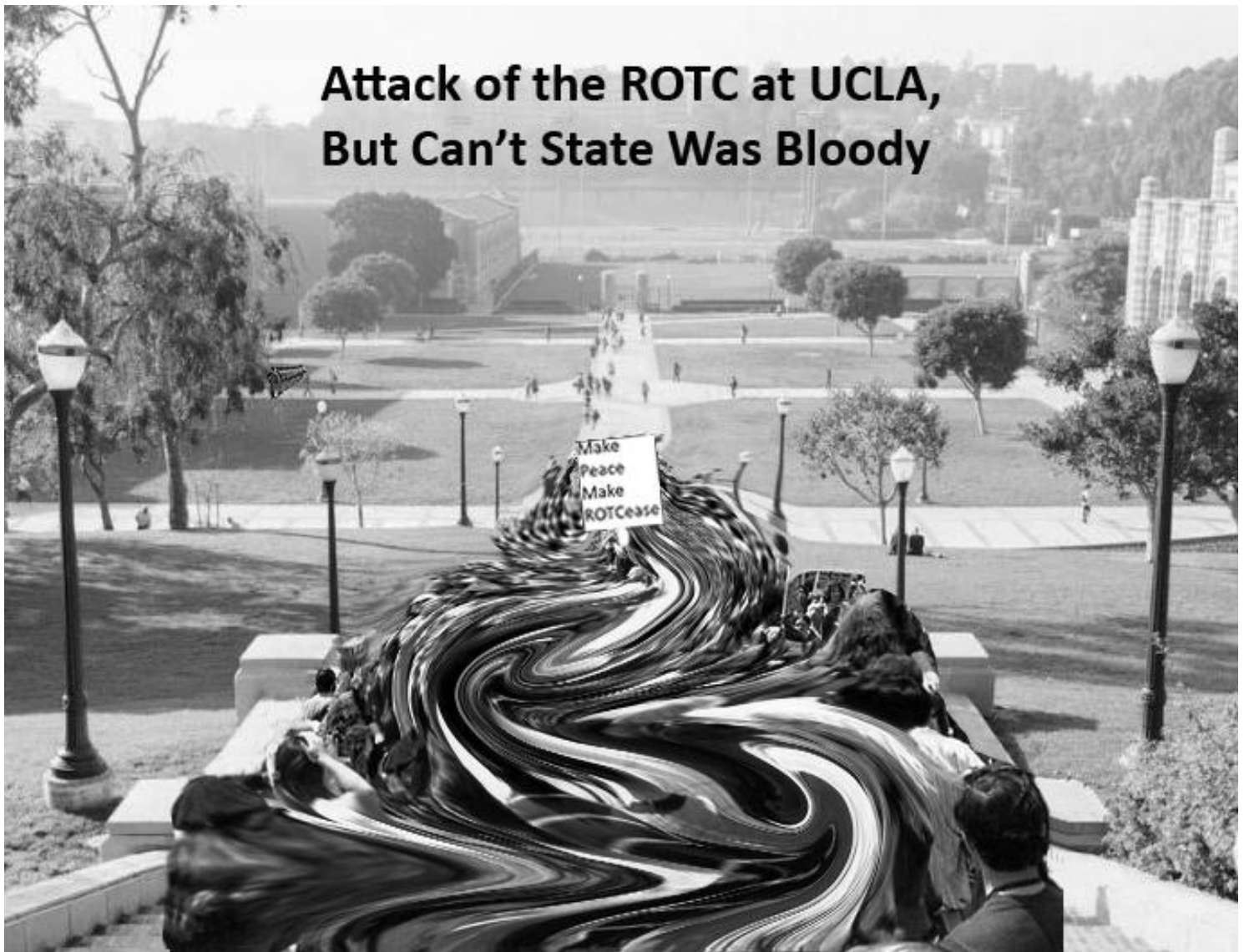


Attack of the ROTC at UCLA, But Can't State Was Bloody



Patrick King

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But Can't State Was Bloody

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*Winters glow,
Summers glare,
Autunms slow,
Springs repair.
Gramps says always so,
The natural order doesn't care.*

Carol Rose Koff, voted 'Most Intelligent' in her class of '70 at Hamilton High in Los Angeles, had been accepted to attend the University of California at Los Angeles, so here she was standing in the sun and the cool September breeze atop the Janss Steps, listening intently to Peter Scruggs, tour guide and senior in Theater Arts, with a minor in Pre-law, tell her group as much as he was able to share about the University.

He had led the group from where they started in Union Hall along the path that resembled a carnival midway for all the various booths and stations that advocated or promoted one cause and another or some organization or student-oriented society. He smiled in a way like the Cheshire cat as he plied them with tidbits of this aspect of campus culture and suggested, as any good tour guide would, that they consider the plethora—his word—of activities available to round out any proper education.

He took his time climbing with them up the brick Steps, for there are 87 of them, enticing them with even more trivia, which included a tongue-in-cheek exhortation that they tread lightly. "The Steps," he informed his group, "are named after Harold and Edwin Janss, so named because of the beneficence these two men had shown in the promotion, construction, and continued development of UCLA. More to the point, the land on which the University sits came from them. And, while only a rumor," Peter continued, "there is some story going round that Harold and Edwin are actually buried under these Steps."

At this bit of information, Carol winced and let go a very palpable "Oooowh!" as if she'd stepped in a squishy lump of an unwholesome discharge best left untouched by foot or any part of the body. She was petit and curious and slightly angelic in her thick, soft, wavy, long blond hair, purposely and, with much attention on her part, perfectly parted in the middle. She was suitably cool she hoped and sported red leather clogs, denim bell bottoms and a bright yellow button-down blouse. She stood out. Looking around as the group climbed, she noticed a few of her companions shared in her aspect and were fast scouring the ground with eyes wide and frozen in ways akin to horror while also checking the souls of their shoes and slowing their gait. Carol pointed her clogs to the left in order to follow a course of ascent closer to the edge of the Steps, supposing the supposed remains would logically be buried somewhere in the middle. Peter Scruggs shook his head in a self-congratulatory manner that also served to stifle a laugh.

Peter's manner belied the ease with which he appealed to Carol and, she imagined, the other young co-eds in the group. He had, after all, Michelangelo good looks: a classically chiseled jaw, a confidently bold smile significantly dressing carefully straight teeth, an unfurrowed brow and symmetrical dark eyebrows to complement his smooth tan cheeks and forehead, not to mention

sincerely light blue eyes decorously shaded by long, thick lashes. The hair atop his head was likewise dark and thick and coiffed in a bushy style resembling perhaps Lord Byron or some other such Romantic of bygone days. In all other words, he was simply bitchin'; well, in Carol's words.

Once at the top and pointing in a sweeping motion to the quad that stretched out before them, he emphasized the importance of the spot where they stood. "This is Dickson Plaza," he said, beaming with a well-rehearsed pride. "Just to my left you can see Royce Hall, a grand venue modeled on the architecture of Milan, Italy, where concerts and other prestigious ceremonies and events abound. Here, as well as in Milan," he laughed, quite pleased with his grammatical ploy. "To my right," he continued, "Powell Library, a place, as undergraduates, you'll spend, I'm sure, many fruitful, hopefully, not fitful, hours of study. And straight, uh. . ." Peter's words trailed off as his attention was suddenly drawn to a crush of bodies determined to push through his group and down the Steps.

Marching in scattered and desultory patterns, and at times coming to a complete stop as it squeezed itself through the bottleneck developing at the top of the Stairs, the crowd chanted, as near as Carol could make out, "Yes to peace! R-O-T-Cease!" Some carried signs consistent with slogans such as "Hell NO! We Won't GO!" or "Make Love! Not War!" A few young women in the mix carried what she interpreted as tongue-in-cheek promises of "I only put out for draft dodgers!"

"Yes, we have protests and demonstrations here, too," Peter at last bellowed above the din of marchers. The marchers ignored his observation, intent it appeared only to get onto the Steps and onto their destination, undeterred by what they obviously considered the indifferent prattle of bystanders.

"Let's take about a 10-minute break!" Peter was shouting as he turned and set off running across the quad.

While a few in the tour group, like Peter, had managed to extricate themselves from the crowd, most had become enveloped by the body of marchers and, like being caught up in a slow, but potent push of flood waters, found themselves drifting, even swirling their way to, they hoped, salvation back down the Steps. Carol, too, was struggling unsuccessfully against the current, and finding no time or much point to worry about stepping on the Janss brothers.

Paul Praesul, Captain US Army, Special Forces, just back from Viet Nam, was the assistant to the PMS (professor of military science) Colonel Robert S. "Bob" Hardiman and had as many as 200 ROTC cadets under his command. Standing at 5'10", 5'11" in boots, brawny in the shoulders and chest, and impeccably expressed in fatigues of brown earth-tones, the Captain could instantly merit respect and inspire loyalty. It didn't hurt that he had those Paul Newman good looks and a wry smile when he wanted to be taken seriously, in a friendly sort of way.

Best of all, he thought, everyone in his command would fondly remember him as Bunny Killer after leading a group of ROTC cadets into the desert outside Los Angeles for survival training. His only props for the training were his teeth, bare hands and a soon-to-be dead bunny whose fatal role, alas, was to suffer a broken neck and a rather crude and impromptu field dressing that involved biting into the soft underbelly of the now-dead bunny and fiercely ripping it open in order to peel off the hide. The

disembowelment was not unnecessary, the blood trickling down Bunny Killer's chin not wasted. These visual aids proved his point. Survival could get ugly.

On this fateful date that found Carol Rose Koff wide-eyed and amazingly still afloat, still flowing along with what only in her reflection on the events of the day appeared to be an amorphous, unstoppable wave of student anti-war protestors, Captain Praesul had assembled 15 of his charges in the Day Room of the B.O. Barn, a tongue-in-cheek name affectionately assigned to the Men's Gymnasium by the many over the years who played, practiced, and studied in a building frequented not only by athletic military types, but also by the festering stench commonly associated with strenuous physical activity in close, naturally unvented quarters.

The cadets had instructions, for orders were only for the enforcement of formal undertakings, to join their commander for preparations to embark on a day's journey into the hinterlands of Los Angeles. We could call it a march, but that would only confuse an already confusing contrast between what the ROTC cadets and anti-ROTCers were doing.

They, the ROTC cadets, sported rifles and other tactical gear, such as flashlights and canteens, necessary for the forthcoming hike. They also donned jackboots camouflaged to match the brown and greens of their clothes. It would be a training, testing the mettle, endurance, and combat-readiness of these chosen few.

"Hey, dog lovers, there's a big crowd coming for a visit!" came a shout from a figure at the main entrance to the building. He was bent over, hands on his knees, and panting in an effort to catch his breath. Peter Scruggs had taken off running toward Powell Library only to circle around down the mall between the Student Union and the Gym. "You better get ready!" he managed to add with a "Hump, two, three!" just for effect and maybe a laugh.

Captain Praesul had heard him shouting and went to investigate. Peter, by this time, was standing upright.

"Is Cynthia Jart hiking today?" he asked the Captain, who was also by this time at the entrance.

Captain Praesul was standing alone with not quite a scowl, more like a grimace or a surprised and baffled look one gets as the result of absentmindedly spitting against the wind. He slowly walked past Peter and said nothing, directing his gaze from the pathway he now stood on toward the commotion developing at the bottom of the Janss Steps.

In an instant, prey or predator alike, he sprung into action and hurriedly brushed past Peter on the way back inside.

"Cynthia?" He at last bellowed, as if to no one, before disappearing through the entrance and hastily adding. "No, she's not here!"

Peter had caught his breath by then and now appeared curious and confused as he checked the urge to follow the Captain. Although he had been playful at first, the sparkle in his eyes soon faded as

disappointment set in. Had the Captain phrased it slightly differently, Peter could have at least brilliantly exclaimed to Cynthia upon finding her how Captain Praesul informed him of her absence with a highly clever allusion to the Zombie's rendition of "She's Not There"—the cleverness, of course, being Peter's for his grasp of the trivial. But, alas—Peter's word—the Captain didn't really see the point in striking up a conversation on such an esoteric topic that was in no way going to help a situation perhaps more dire than ascertaining the whereabouts of one Cynthia Jart.

Cynthia Jart, as with lots of her comrades in arms, had joined the ROTC to help pay her way through college. She was pretty in uniform and Peter Scruggs knew it and liked it and liked her. They had been on some dates. He took her to Bruins basketball games. She attended a couple of the shows he had auditioned for, one even staged at Royce Hall. And, as Captain Praesul, hastily noted, she was indeed not there. Now, Peter wasn't playing the concerned hero, just an onlooker eager to see his pretty Cynthia in action. That he had been so readily dismissed by the leader of the ROTC, stung a bit, but also persuaded him to hurry back to see whether any of his tour group was still there. Quickly, he, too, was on the move, retracing his circuitous route back to Dickson Plaza.

Observing for himself the onslaught of protestors, Captain Praesul realized the veracity of the rumor he'd heard earlier that student activists had been planning a march on the Gym, something that had happened several times in the last two years. He'd only been assigned to the UCLA campus in June and already he'd witnessed three such marches, by and large peaceful ones, and mostly so because he made it a point to keep a low profile for him and his cadets during those events. Still, stories of a firebomb thrown into the ROTC offices came to mind. Also on his mind was the incident earlier in May at Kent State University where Ohio National Guard troops fired multiple live rounds at supposed anti-war protestors, killing four, two of whom it turned out were not protesting, just horribly misplaced.

Today would not be a good day. Sporting rifles and tactical gear and all in uniform was a problem. A noon departure had been scheduled and it was just after 11:00 a.m.

"Lock and load!" he shouted at the cadets, instantly regretting his choice of words.

The cadets were already dressed out and eager to get going. "Hoofff! Hoofff! Hoofff!" the collective howled and yipped like playful puppies slapping and punching one another on their shoulders, their backs, in the bellies or whatever part of the anatomy fit the machismo of their excitement.

"Right here, Gentlemen! And quietly, too!" their Captain added, pointing to an imaginary spot on the floor

Soon the 15 were forming a line, standing side by side and, per regulation, tacitly reaching out to the cadet on the left in order to measure as near as possible with their arms an equal distance between one another. Their rifles were slung by the strap over the shoulder of each.

Captain Praesul waited until they were in position before shouting out, "Tent-HUT!"

The cadets snapped to attention.

“H-hour has been moved up to obviate a potential and needless confrontation,” he began. “Some in the student body here on campus are intent on rallying a crowd to protest our presence at this institution. They are right now laying siege to the building. We will not take this personal; we will extend to them their right to protest. And we will do so with discipline as we continue undeterred in exercising our right and our duty to conduct business as usual. We will exit the building, and, as we do, you will stay in formation, you will maintain a calm demeanor, and march in double time to the vehicle waiting to take us to our destination.”

He walked, as he talked, along the line they had formed, inspecting each cadet for readiness and composure. Twice he paused, merely for effect, to adjust the angle of a rifle or a cap. He made a point of tugging at the gun strap to center and better secure the weapon on the cadet’s shoulder. At last, he moved closer to the doorway leading outside to assess the status of the gauntlet of protestors that had formed in the quad and swelling to near capacity for such a small area.

He again looked back at his cadets and shouted, “Right face!”

In perfect step to one another, they turned.

Captain Praesul checked his watch: 11:15, military time.

“Ho!” he gave the command to move out.

Carol Rose Koff checked her watch, too. The crowd had at last stopped. She was now ensconced, involuntarily, among a dense and tightly packed throng of immovable, noisy people. What was going on was difficult to make out. Somebody with a blowhorn was leading chants and encouraging raised fists. The march had halted in the grass between two brick buildings, everyone’s attention apparently pointed in the general direction of one of them. She couldn’t quite make out all the words, so many around her were babbling. Conversations overlapped. Exclamations, exhortations, expletives roiled the crowd like water sloshing in a large vat of human emotion.

Rising up briefly on her tiptoes on one foot, being only 5’3”, she pirouetted slightly for a better view of what was really happening and why they were now stopped. For the mass of picket signs, backs of heads, and by the seemingly towering height and girth of those squeezing in around her and continually jostling for, she supposed, a better position in front of her, she didn’t see much in the way of unraveling the mystery. Nor was she quite sure what she could do or whether she could wriggle her way out.

She was certain the tour was at an end. But could she still make it to her appointment with an academic advisor? She checked her watch again.

“Excuse me!” she shouted to no one in particular, attempting to alert one of the giants around her, she didn’t care which, to her plight. But even she could not hear her words over the din of the crowd and, in effect, appeared only to be adding her voice to the chants and unintelligible loud turmoil. Someone’s elbow grazed the back of her head. She reflexively and defensively flung her head forward, banging into the back of the man in front of her. Looking over his shoulder, he cast a smile in her

direction and nodded in a vague affirmation of the moment. She would have smiled back; she was, after all, uninjured, but a picket sign from out of nowhere it seemed swung horribly close to her nose. She closed her eyes and gritted her teeth. The noise, along with a feeling of claustrophobia, was now becoming unbearable. She put her hands to her ears to cover them, but quickly dropped them to her side after she, too, felt her elbow, innocently she wanted to let it be known, poke the guy to her side in the shoulder. He smiled, too. Her head twisted to the left, then jerked to the right. She was indeed trapped.

“Make peace! Make ROTCease!” at last she understood something as the blowhorn squawked repeatedly a refrain that bellowed and echoed throughout the crush of people around her.

Captain Praesul held the door as his cadets filed out of the building and into a cluster of protestors.

“Eyes focused! Do not stop until you get into the vehicle!” he shouted while brandishing his arm and hand as he would a saber pointing the direction for a charge. The cadets ran as best they could in close formation, grasping tightly the straps of their rifles and holding them taut against their chests to keep them from slipping off their shoulders.

“They’ve got guns!” the blowhorn blasted across the quad. “They’ve got guns!” it repeated with strains of urgency and panic.

“They’ve got guns!” some in the crowd echoed.

The chants and defiance of raised fists quickly morphed into screams and wild turbulence. An unanticipated commotion of flight took hold of some. They bolted. They knocked into each other. They grabbed onto one another and ducked and crouched and ran. Some crawled, scampered like crazed cats. Some froze and watched as the cadets and their leader scurried past them. Others dropped to the ground.

“Get down! They’re shooting at us!” someone screeched.

Captain Praesul waited for the last cadet to exit, then followed closely behind. He could see there was a parting in the assembly of protestors and knew instinctively that their course to the departing vehicle would be painless and easy so long as no one closed in around them.

“Keep on moving! Don’t let up! On the double now!” he shouted commands to the line of cadets in front of him.

Carol had been dragged to the ground by the protestor she had bumped into earlier. It seemed he was the one screeching. Clenched teeth had replaced the smile he had shown her. He called for everyone to get down, which, of course, meant just Carol.

“What’s going on?” Carol wanted to screech, too.

“Stay down!” he insisted. “They’re shooting!”

“What?” she struggled to look up, but he forced her face down into the grass, then covered her body with his as though to shield her from any bullets that came their way.

“You’re pu—” she tried to complain, to insist he let her up, which she immediately regretted. Her resistance seemed to encourage him to press her face harder into the ground, as though to keep her from making a sound, to fool the guard filing by into thinking they were already dead. With mouth open in midsentence, she managed only to gag on a clump of grass, the stiffer blades of which shot into her nostrils, over her tongue and nearly into the throat. She thought at that same moment that her protector wasn’t going to fool anyone with his ploy; she was indeed going to be dead.

Once at the vehicle, Captain Praesul paused, then reflexively, eyes steeled and fixed, peered anxiously back along the course they had run. Everything seemed normal. The protest had remained largely contained within the quad just outside the men’s gymnasium. No one had followed them around the corner of the building and to the parking lot.

“Who’s missing?” he inquired without turning away.

“All accounted for, sir.” One of the cadets sitting behind him offered.

“Okay, men,” he smiled, leaning back and settling into his seat in front. “Smoke ‘em if you got ‘em.”

Still pressed to the ground, Carol was beginning to sense that she was barefooted, that her clogs had fallen off. Her rescuer had relaxed his hold and she could finally raise her head and speak without fearing the lawn, the weeds, that she had inhaled crawly things.

“Can I have my shoes?” she asked.

Releasing his hold altogether, he rolled over onto his back, gazing upward at the sky.

“Man, that was brutal,” he laughed, then sternly noted, “Those bastards were ready to kill us. Anybody hurt?” he shouted to no one in particular.

“Can I have my shoes?” Carol again asked, also to no one in particular. She was now sitting up, spitting out pieces of lawn that had settled in her mouth, occasionally shuddering in near panic as she picked with the fingers of one hand other questionable detritus that had settled on her tongue. At the same time, she was desperately scanning the ground for her clogs and running her other hand through the grass around her in search for anything else that may have fallen off of her.

Her rescuer was soon on his feet, extending a hand to help her to hers and smiling that smile he had given Carol earlier.

“I haven’t got any shoes,” she continued to press ignoring his outstretched hand. “Where are my shoes?”

“I found this,” a voice in the crowd that was beginning to close in around her said.

Cynthia Jart, clasping upside down in her one hand a picket sign and dragging it through the grass as she came nearer, handed Carol, who was still sitting, one of the missing clogs.

"Thanks," Carol said, not entirely grateful. "Has anyone seen the other?"

Cynthia shrugged and slunk away. Carol noticed that the sign the young woman was still dragging sported the message "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?"

"I hate this war!" Carol blurted out. Tears were welling up and she was desperate to suppress any bit of sobbing while clutching close to her breast her one shoe.

The Captain puffed a sigh of relief, then nodded to the driver to drive. They were soon budging along in traffic on the 405 freeway. Situation normal. Mission under control.

A week later, this headline appeared on page 9 of the *Bruin*:

Student Unrest Targeted by ROTC Phalanx: One Possible Injury