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TURMOIL IN CHINA; Student Tells the Tiananmen Story: And Then, 'Machine Guns Erupted'

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When the Chinese Army began its crackdown in Beijing early on June 4, student demonstrators in Tiananmen Square were the focal point. A Hong Kong newspaper, Wen Wei Po, later published what it described as a firsthand account of the assault, given by a 20-year-old student at Qinghua University, whose identity the paper withheld. A translation was published by The San Francisco Examiner yesterday and is reprinted here with The Examiner's permission.

BEIJING - In the predawn hours of June 3, I was sitting on the steps of the Monument to the People's Heroes. I saw with my own eyes what happened when the army opened fire on the students and citizens quietly sitting in the square.

By the afternoon of that Saturday, we had already heard that the army would carry out the order to crack down. An anonymous phone call - to a public phone in a nearby alley - had come around 4 P.M. to tell us that the army was about to clear Tiananmen by force. Alerted by the news, we had an emergency meeting, at which we decided what measures we would take to defuse the confrontation and avoid a blood bath.

We had in our possession 23 assault rifles and some explosives, taken from soldiers a couple of days before. The University Students' Autonomous Association

decided that to demonstrate our intention to promote democracy through nonviolence, we would surrender these weapons to the martial law troops. We made contact with the army under the portrait of Chairman Mao at the main gate of Tiananmen. An officer told us that the troops were under orders from superiors not to receive the weapons. Weapons Are Destroyed

The negotiations having been fruitless, and with the situation extremely volatile, we destroyed the guns on the steps of the monument, and dismantled the bombs by pouring out the gasoline. We wanted to avoid any chance that they would be used by criminals, or be treated as "evidence" that the students had committed violent acts against the troops.

Afterward, the Student Association made a broadcast notifying everyone that the situation was extremely dangerous and that bloodshed seemed inevitable, telling students and citizens in the vicinity of the square to leave. However, 40,000 to 50,000 students and 100,000 citizens insisted on staying. I was one of them.

The atmosphere was incredibly tense. For most of the students, this was the greatest danger they had ever faced. It would be a lie to say that we were not afraid, but we were mentally prepared and determined. Some students could not believe that the army really would use deadly force. But most of all, we were motivated by a powerful sense of purpose.

We believed that it would be worth sacrificing our lives for the sake of progress and democracy in China. Prelude to Violence: Orders to 'Clear Out'

At midnight, after two armored vehicles sped down the side of the square from the front gate, the tension mounted even higher. Shrill loudspeakers barked out repeated "notifications." Thick formations of soldiers in steel helmets were moving into the square from all sides. In the dark, we could make out machine gun placements on the roof of the History Museum. The students crowded back around the Heroes Monument.

At 4 A.M. Sunday the lights on the square were suddenly extinguished. Through the loudspeakers, we again heard orders to "clear out." A sudden wave of anxiety passed through me, and a voice in my head said over and over, "The moment has come."

Then, Hou Dejian [a Taiwanese pop singer] and other hunger strikers negotiated with the army for a peaceful retreat of the students. But just as we were about to move, at 4:40 A.M., a barrage of red flares shot into the sky. Immediately, the square was brightly illuminated. I saw that the front of the square was full of

soldiers. From the Great Hall of the People, a squadron of soldiers rushed out, dressed in camouflage, carrying assault rifles, and wearing helmets and gas masks.

The first thing that the charging soldiers did was to erect a row of 10 or more machine guns right in front of the Heroes Monument. The machine gunners took a prone position, with their backs to the Gate of Heavenly Peace. As soon as the placements were established, a huge number of soldiers and police appeared.

They were all holding electric cattle prods and rubber truncheons, and some special-purpose weapons that we did not recognize. They charged at us, breaking apart the formation in which we were sitting, beating us with all their might. Our ranks were broken into two groups, and they forced their way through the middle to the third tier of the monument. I saw about 50 students who were so badly beaten that blood completely covered their faces.

At that moment, the armored vehicles and additional forces that had been waiting on the square closed in on us, and we were completely surrounded by rows and rows of vehicles, leaving only a small gap in the direction of the museum.

At the same time, the soldiers and military police who had reached the third tier went about smashing all of the students' printing and broadcasting equipment and dragged the students down from the steps. Even then we remained seated, holding hands and singing the "Internationale" and shouting "The People's Army will not hurt the people!" But unable to resist the kicking and clubbing of such a large number of attackers, the students sitting on the third tier were forced down. Automatic Weapons Cut Down Students When they reached the ground, machine guns erupted. Some soldiers opened fire from a kneeling position, their bullets flying over our heads, but the gunners splayed on the ground were shooting right at the chests and heads of the students.

When this happened, we could only retreat up the back of the monument. Then the machine guns stopped. But the beating of the soldiers above forced us back down. Then the machine guns started again.

At this time, workers and citizens, putting their own lives aside, took up bottles, sticks or anything that could be used as weapons, and rushed across to fight the soldiers.

The Student Association urged everyone to get out of the square. Students Try to Flee

At that point a large number of students tried to get out through the gap in the armored vehicles. But even this exit was sealed off. Thirty armored cars came

crushing into the crowd. Some students died under the wheels, and even the flagpole in front of the monument was knocked down.

I never thought that the students could be so courageous. One group went to try to turn over the vehicles, but were repulsed by bullets. Then a second wave, stepping over the bodies of those in front, rushed at the vehicles again, managing to topple one of them. Three thousand students, myself included, rushed out amid flying bullets through this opening toward the History Museum.

Those who survived joined citizens outside the museum who were running north. Seeing flashes of gunfire from the trees ahead, we turned around and ran south. Citizens Join Fray On Side of Students Tears streamed down our faces as we ran. We could see a second group of students trying to escape under fire, many of them falling. We all wept and, weeping, we ran. Just as our group reached the front gate of the city, we were met by a large contingent of soldiers, all running from the direction of the Jewelry Market. When we met, they didn't shoot, but began beating us madly with huge wooden clubs.

At this point, a crowd of citizens came rushing up the front gate and started fighting ferociously with the soldiers, they did this to protect us as we tried to break through in the direction of the railway station. The soldiers pursued us. By 5 A.M., the gunfire in the square was dying away. Afterward I ran into a friend at the International Red Cross, and he told me that by 5 A.M. anyone who could escape had done so.

I will never be able to forget what happened when the students were shot down, and others rushed to save the wounded and carry away the bodies. Some of the women tore off their clothes to bandage wounds until they had nothing more to take off.

A Qinghua University friend of mine from Jiangsu Province was bleeding heavily but still running with us until he could keep up no longer. He fell against my shoulder, saying, "Can you help me?" I was already supporting two injured women students so I couldn't get to him right away. He fell on the ground and the crowd trampled him. I still have the stains of his blood on my back. Soldiers Block Way Back to the Square After we reached the train station, two other students and myself went back to the square. It was now 6:30 A.M. We followed a huge crowd of civilians to the Mao Zedong Mausoleum. There, armored cars and a wall of soldiers blocked the way. We climbed up the trees on the side of the road, and saw that soldiers were collecting corpses in plastic bags on the square. The bodies were piled

on top of each other and covered with canvas.

There I ran into a student from my department. He was among those who broke out [of the square] with the second group. He told me that the death toll was enormous. Soldiers had kept Red Cross ambulances from getting to the wounded.

Around 7:20 A.M., I went back to the square again to find out more. I talked to some elderly people who said that the people on the walkways around the square had died all bunched together. The soldiers had draped the area from the sight of the Beijing people with canvas sheets. They also said that many military trucks had come in and carried the wounded off to an unknown destination.

How many people died altogether? I don't really know. Am I pessimistic? No, I'm not at all pessimistic. Because I have seen the will of the people. I have seen the hope of China. Some of my friends died. Even more are now bleeding. I am a survivor, and I know how to live my life from now on. I will never forget the students who lost their lives. I also know for sure that all decent people in the world will understand and support us.

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