

INTERVIEW OF ROBERT PYLE  
BY  
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I'm Robert Pyle, an accountant in Ames, Iowa. I own the building and was the landlord for the draft board.

Interviewer: How long has the draft board been here?

Pyle: This was the sixth year for the draft board. Prior to this time we had some gatherings in front of the building on two or three different occasions. Marches into the building and back out, all peaceful. The series of events that started this occasion started on May 4th, 1970. I was out of town and had left one of my employees in charge of the office building and also of my business. On May 4th, my business was closed because of the demonstrations and at the request of the police department for the safety of employees, at three o'clock in the afternoon. I returned on May 5th and everything was peaceful during that day. I had assumed that events had ended, that there would be no additional demonstrations. I went to Des Moines on Wednesday, May 6th. I found that on my return from Des Moines that my office had again been closed at three o'clock in the afternoon.

Interviewer: What time did you get back from Des Moines

Pyle: I got back from Des Moines around six or six-thirty.

Interviewer: Did you come out to your office at that time?

Pyle: I came to my office at that time.

Interviewer: And what did you find?

Pyle: At my office, there were four demonstrators sitting in my front entryway. The building was locked and they were sitting in the front entryway. Where upon I told them to leave the property as it was private property and was closed. And they argued with me on this at this time. At this time I called the police as I did

not want them in-the entryway over night. This was when they started to camp out on the city parking. They were off my property and were on the city parking, and proceeded to spend the night.

Interviewer: Did you spend any time in your office that night?

Pyle: Yes, I was in my office for about an hour or hour and a half. It was probably seven-thirty or so before I left.

Interviewer: Did you come back again that night?

Pyle: No, I did not come back that night.

Interviewer: What time did you show up the next morning?

Pyle: I showed up the next morning about seven-thirty.

Interviewer: Did you have any idea that when you left that night that they were going to do anything the following day?

Pyle: No, they gave no indication that they were going to do anything. Although at that point I somewhat suspicioned that they were going to do something. Because of the number that had gathered and especially when I came back in the morning I assumed that there was going to be some problem because there was quite a number gathered.

Interviewer: You got back around seven-thirty? Then what happened?

Pyle: I went to enter my building and found out that my key would not work in the door, that the lock had been jimmed during the night.

Interviewer: Did any one try to prevent you from using the door?

Pyle: No, they did not.

Interviewer: Were there policemen already outside?

Pyle: There were no policemen there at that time. I proceeded to come in the building and the lock was jimmed. So I went over to the lumber yard and called the locksmith. The locksmith would not

come down and open the door for me unless he had police protection as he was afraid of the demonstrators. I then called the police department and presented my problem, the fact that I had to have policemen there before the locksmith would come down and undo the door. Whereupon they did arrive. This was probably getting around 8:30 by the time they arrived. The locksmith arrived and drilled the lock and removed it and got the door open. At that time they poured into the basement.

Interviewer: Did the police try to stop them from going into the building?

Pyle: No, they did not.

Interviewer: How many policemen were around at that time?

Pyle: I think there were two, no more than three, at that time. They did not-try to prevent them. I had assumed that they would let them open up the draft board and this was where they had wanted to go anyway. I had no arguments with that. However, they blocked the hallway going downstairs. At this point, I should probably describe the fact that the draft board is not the only one than is located in the lower area.. Also the Lions State Office Headquarters are in the lower part of the building. So this was a stairway blocked all the way up and prevented them from entering their place of business.

Interviewer: Do they usually open at about eight-thirty?

Pyle: Yes, eight-thirty or nine o'clock. They, of course, could not get in. Then the personnel that operate the draft board, the employees of the draft board came at about eight-thirty and tried to get downstairs. They wouldn't move to let them get downstairs to unlock the door.

Interviewer: Were you in the building at the time?

Pyle: Yes, I was in the building at this time. They would not let them gain entrance to the Selective Service and so by this time more policemen had arrived.

Interviewer: Had you called for more policemen?

Pyle: No, I did not. I made that initial call because of the locksmith. Then additional policemen did arrive because they could see that they were going to have some problems. At that time, Tom Lyttle was requesting then, to move aside so the Selective Service personnel could open the office. They would not do it. They made numerous requests for them to leave the building and gave them many opportunities to. They would not leave the building and remained to sit there.

Interviewer: Did you talk to any of the demonstrators?

Pyle: I did not talk to any of the demonstrators unless I talked to, what is referred to, as one of the marshals. It was Steve Cott. I did have a conversation with him. At about this time, the City Attorney came to the building, and he or the Chief of Police, between the two of them, it was mutually agreed I assure, decided to arrest all the demonstrators that would not leave the building. They informed them of this. They told them that if they didn't leave that they would be arrested. They decided to remain, whereupon they were all placed under arrest and they still would not leave. During this period, after they were placed under arrest, I had a conversation with Steve Cott. He was trying to get them to leave, also without causing any trouble. He was not getting anywhere. He came up and talked to me and felt possibly that if I would agree to letting three individuals sit in front of the draft board entrance to keep the draft board

closed, that the rest of them would leave. We talked about this and the one demonstrator who was quite outspoken and I'm sure somewhat the leader and agitator was Bob Trembly. I think without him I don't believe we would have had near the trouble. I think it would have been more of a peaceful demonstration.

Interviewer: were you agreeable to this idea of stationing a few here in the building?

Pyle: The terms we had talked about, Steve and I, and tried to arrive at, was that if Trembly would voluntarily give himself up for arrest, I would go along.

Interviewer: How long would the three stay here?

Pyle: Three were going to stay until noon and then they would let the draft board be open.

Interviewer: Had you discussed this with the police?

Pyle: We discussed this with the City Attorney and He would not agree to this and the reason, at least the reason I could see that he would not agree to this was that they had already been placed under arrest. Therefore, he would not withdraw the fact that they were under arrest.

Interviewer: Did you discuss this with Chief Lyttle too?

Pyle: I think Lyttle was here, he did not participate.

Interviewer: So it was agreeable to you but not to City Attorney Bishop.

Pyle: I could see his reasoning to some extent, basically because of the fact it is like giving somebody a speeding ticket and then after you write it out then tear it up and say you weren't speeding. It's pretty much the same type of thing. At least it was in my mind so I could kind of understand this. Then, Mr. Bishop gave orders for them, to remove them from the building, which they proceeded to do. They bodily picked them up and carried them out of the door. After

carrying about four or five of them they were getting to the last two or three steps in the base of the stairway and they were locked in so tight that the only way you could have removed them was by doing some bodily harm, I'm sure. It was at this time that they made the decision to use tear gas. So they come up and informed us that they were going to use tear gas and asked us to leave the building which we did. They then again asked them to leave the building and told them they were going to use tear gas and they still decided to remain. With this they then threw in the tear gas. Well, they didn't throw it in, Tom Lyttle walked in and held it until it popped and then dropped it and came out. This, of course, did clear them out of the stairway. They all came out and were placed under arrest. At this point, no one could occupy the building, the tear gas was strong enough that it went through the whole building. From my standpoint then it was a matter of trying to get the building free of the tear gas so we could again go back to work. After the tear gas was used and the students were arrested, there were still a number of students that did remain. However, they were informed that the draft board was going to be closed for the remainder of the day and that it was private and that they were to remain off of the property in which they did. They sat in the parking area on the cross-stones on the other side of the street.

Interviewer: There were some university administrators there, too. Did you talk to any of them?

Pyle: I did not have too much conversation with any of the students or demonstrators or with any of the university staff or personnel

directly. I think I visited briefly with Mr. Bell mainly out of curiosity because I didn't know who he was. In my opinion, he really wasn't part of the demonstration, he was just observing for university purposes, more than anything.

Interviewer: So, in effect, the whole building was closed down.

Pyle: The whole building was closed down. My office was closed, the Lions was closed, the Selective Service was closed and the demonstrators still sat and remained. At this point I was trying to figure out what we had to do to get rid of the tear gas and I did call Airtemp out of Des Moines and they came up and arrived about five o'clock that evening and I worked until about eleven o'clock that night and the demonstrators remained. They remained over right. They were still here Friday morning and Airtemp was back again Friday morning and the demonstrators remained all day.

Interviewer: And they still couldn't get the tear gas out on Friday?

Pyle: They still couldn't get the tear gas out on Friday so the whole building was closed again on Friday. Then on Saturday we still had tear gas in the building and Airtemp came to the conclusion that they could not remove it. At this point, we did remove some windows because in the building there are no windows that will open therefore you could get no air through. We had removed the windows previously but they had been put back every night. At this time I decided we were going to have to have air movement so we removed two of the windows and put up the play board installation by cutting holes through it. By keeping an intake exhaust fan running you could remain in the building. We operated this way. I was open on Saturday then.

Interviewer: The draft board was closed?

Pyle: The draft board was closed on Saturday. Then I felt surely that this would pretty much end the series of events because it was very obvious that the building was going to be closed, especially in their case downstairs because they had not installed fans, intake and exhaust. I was really quite surprised when I came to work Monday and found that we had a great group of demonstrators yet on Monday. So it was at this time when they showed up again on Monday, I did contact the GSA whom my lease is arranged with, General Service Administration. The lease was just renewed last fall for a five year term and I asked them what the penalties were for canceling the lease. I felt I was going to leave to cancel the lease. I couldn't continue to have my office closed and be under continuous threats to my employees. They called me back Monday afternoon and said that if I would waive the 60 day notice requirement that they would move from the building.

Interviewer: Now on Monday, the draft board was still closed. When did they move the draft board?

Pyle: They moved then about five o'clock Monday night.

Interviewer: Then on Tuesday May 12th, there was a bus loading where, here?

Pyle: Right, on Monday evening they moved out and moved to the Post Office. It was Monday evening also that I stayed in the building that night, the whole night. Because we had demonstrators around here and I was getting quite concerned with the whole situation.

Interviewer: Did the demonstrators know the draft board had been moved?

Pyle: To my knowledge, I'm sure they were aware of it, yes.

Interviewer: Did you know why they were here again?

Pyle: Yes, I knew why they were here. They were here to try to stop the

bus from going to Des Moines on Tuesday morning.

Interviewer: How did you find out about it?

Pyle: The way I found out about it was through the draft board personnel. They had been told that this was going to happen and they had informed me.

Interviewer: In other words, someone had told the draft board they were going to stop the bus and -the draft board had told you. The bus was then loaded up in front of the building here.

Pyle: It loaded up in front of the building.

Interviewer: Why was it here if the draft board had been moved to the Post Office?

Pyle: The reason it was here was that they had notified, of course they didn't know they were going to move, and they sent out notices to all the individuals that were to go down that day for their physicals, to show up at this address. This is where the bus would be and it was too late to change it. It was impossible to let a hold of them all to reroute it over to the Post Office.

Interviewer: So you spent the night here. You were here when the bus arrived. About what time in the morning was that?

Pyle: The bus, I would assume, probably arrived at about 5:30. That's usually the time it arrives and I'd assume it was about the same time. I was asleep and was woke up after the commotion started. It was probably getting 6:00 when I really came to and saw what was going on.

Interviewer: Did you observe from the building?

Pyle: I observed from the building. When I woke up the bus was parked out front and the demonstrators were sitting at the front of the bus and the back of the bus.

Interviewer: The bus was already loaded?

Pyle: When I woke up the bus was already loaded and they were trying to leave. They wouldn't leave so finally the police evidently proceeded to arrest them and so they started to carry them away and put them in the police cars. They finally got enough of them cleared out that they could move the bus, could back up the bus and it started on its way to Des Moines. The remaining demonstrators that did not get arrested milled around outside for probably another hour and finally did break up.

Interviewer: Have you had any demonstrators since then?

Pyle: No, as soon as the draft board left, the demonstrators went with them.

Of course, it's pretty well known that they did show up over at the Post Office to some extent, although not to the degree they did here. There were usually one or two of them sitting on the outside of the building, but that was about it. The one thing I did leave out that should be inserted back where I started with the events of May 4th and May 6th, which is the Monday and the Wednesday that they closed down the office. Dave Metzler, who is a professor at the University was also at the building and as far as I could tell without being here, was participating in some degree with the demonstrators. They had driven some stakes on the grass out in front of the building. As I stated, I leave an individual in charge of my business and the building when I am gone and she went out to ask them to remove the stakes. The demonstrators informed her that she would have to call the police department in order to remove them. They would have to tell them to remove them so she, of course, knew that this would be what I would desire, that I don't like signs or anything of that

nature placed around my property. So she did call the police department. The police department came down and told them that they would have to remove them and that the owner of the building had requested it. It was at this time that Mr. Metzler came into the building and wanted to talk to the owner of the building. He found out that the owner of the building was in Minnesota. Therefore he tried to take issue that how could the owner of the building give orders to remove the signs when he wasn't even in the building, wasn't even in the state. This upset me quite a bit from the standpoint that he could not recognize that someone left in charge has the same authority as the owner of the building. She followed out exactly the same thing I would have done, had I been here.

Interviewer: Did you have any other contact with Professor Metzler?

Pyle: No, I know that he was here on the day that the tear gas was used and he was quite vocal. But, I myself had never had any direct conversation with him. One other thing that should be inserted somewhere in here is that on May 6th, Bob Trembly, who was one of the very active demonstrators came into the building and wanted to talk to the person in charge, which was the girl I had left in charge. He represented himself to be a press reporter for the Iowa State Daily. Whereupon she asked him for his credentials and when he couldn't produce them she would not talk to him. This I feel should be put in the early part of this tape somewhere.

Interviewer: At this point, I would like some observations if you would care to make any, on the basis of what you observed and participated in.

Pyle: I think it's pretty much a matter of public record from the standpoint of the action of the police department. I felt they did what they

are hired to do. I felt that they controlled themselves very well, not only the day the tear gas was used but also on the bus situation when they were sitting in front of the bus. I think that there are very few people that could control themselves when they are being called some of the things they were being called by the demonstrators, especially when they are in the seat of authority. To me it would be almost impossible. I'm not sure I could control myself to the extent that the police department did. I felt they held the situation as well as it could be handled. The people had to be removed and this is what they did. I think they did it with as little harm to anybody as they could and tried to carry on law and order.

Interviewer: Did you lose much money as a result of these activities?

Pyle: As far as actual money, I don't know as I lost any money. I think I probably lost time more than anything from the standpoint that it did throw all the work behind. All this work has been made up or is almost made up. There are still a few things that aren't done because of this but it wasn't only being closed down a couple of days, it was the process of trying to get the building back in shape that was costly. From my standpoint anyway for loss of time and also from the standpoint of getting the personnel settled back down to the point where they could do a good days work.

Interviewer: Have you rented the area where the draft board occupied?

Pyle: The area is not rented as yet so from this standpoint I am losing money from loss of rent. How much this is going to be is hard to say. In addition to this, the insurance company, it was covered by insurance, I just compiled the bill and got it together yesterday and it was costly. It ran just about four thousand dollars.

Interviewer: Will your insurance go up as a result of this"

Pyle: Whether they will directly increase my premiums I don't know. I would rather doubt that they will directly increase it. I'm sure that if the Selective Service was still in the building that they would probably cancel the policy, because this is one thing that they are doing.