

Hodges recalled. "I was about five miles from the school. I called the office, and the sports editor answered the phone. I told him what was going on, and I said, 'Rally everybody you can get.'"

Within 10 minutes Hodges was at the school. He and a local television reporter were the first journalists on the scene. "I could hear kids back there crying. I could hear people hollering," Hodges said.

There are no news photos of the shooting victims lying outside the school. Hodges had a camera with him, and did take a widely distributed photo of one of the victims being rushed from the scene on a gurney. But as he was about to round the corner of the school to where the shootings had taken place, he encountered a police officer who said, "You don't need to be around there."

Hodges said he told the officer he wasn't going to take photographs. "I know it," the officer said, "but it's really bad, and I would really appreciate it if you wouldn't go back there." Hodges obeyed. Did he consider disregarding the officer so he could see, and maybe photograph, the victims and the blood? "No, I didn't. I might have if I worked different, but I never have worked that way."

"We don't work that way," echoed John Troutt Jr., the editor and owner of *The Jonesboro Sun*, in whose office the interview with Hodges was taking place. "Never have," the reporter and the editor said in unison.

"We don't write policies down, but we have a policy of consideration for the people we cover. That doesn't mean we have consideration for shooters or mass murderers or anything like that, but (we do for) the victims," said Troutt, whose family has owned the newspaper since 1903. "We live here. All of us have been here all of our lives. We have a certain amount of sensitivity as a staff, and that's the way we want to do it. That's the posture of the newspaper."

"Anybody who works here would do the same thing," Hodges said. "Because they know we wouldn't use it (a gory photo)," Troutt said, continuing his reporter's thoughts. "If we had had (a photo of) all of the kids and people spread out and dead, we would not have used it."

Nor did Hodges get the name of the shooting victim on the gurney whom he did photograph. "It didn't occur to me to ask who it was because they were busy (saving) a life, and I'm not going to interfere with that," he said.

"We don't pull off of anything, and obviously, we're tough on a lot of things, but we're not tough on victims," Troutt said. "You don't have to have total blood and guts to tell a story."

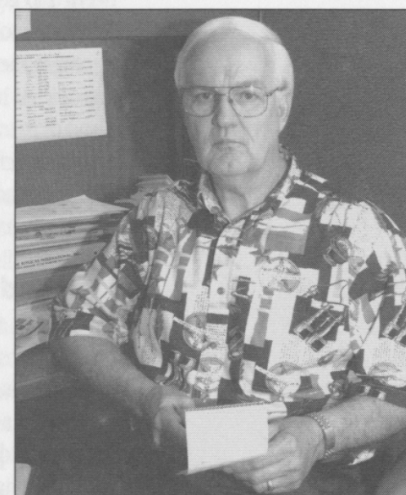
Troutt was on vacation in Santa Fe, N.M., and his two sons, who serve as assistant publishers of the newspaper, were in Fayetteville, Ark., when the shootings occurred. Ed and Bob Troutt had a private plane, so they headed back immediately and took over all the calls coming into the newspaper; John Troutt returned the following day. Thus the first day's coverage was planned and executed by the news staff of 16 reporters and editors, three photographers, four sports staffers, some part-time students and two society editors.

"Of course I was in touch with them by telephone, but about the only thing I did is that we discussed identifying the [suspects] and of course, I made an immediate decision, as [the staff] had, too, that we would identify them when we were certain, and we got certain very quickly," Troutt said.

"I had no trouble with it," Troutt said of the decision to run names and photos of the boys who were taken into custody in the woods shortly after the ambush. Although Arkansas law does not allow news coverage of juvenile court proceedings unless the judge permits it (and has in this case), it is open on the question of identifying juvenile offenders.

"We confirmed the identity with all kinds of sources, six or seven of them, so we were sure, we were certain. That was the only thing that I said — be right, be certain. You don't want to be wrong on something like that," Troutt said.

Although the authorities did not release the suspects' names, their identities quickly became common knowledge throughout the community and among the media. By the next



**Curt Hodges, Jonesboro Sun staffer, said he didn't try to photograph victims: "I never have worked that way."**

**12:45 PM** Police alert the St. Bernards Regional Medical Center, where doctors and officials quickly pull out a disaster plan that includes dealing with a "media crush."

**12:50 PM** Hodges and Huddleston arrive at Westside school within a minute or two of each other. Hodges has a camera and takes some of the first photos that will appear in newspapers worldwide.

Initial photos from the scene are of students on stretchers being rushed to ambulances, tearful and terrorized students, dazed and stricken bystanders and teachers and police walking across bloodstained concrete sidewalks.

Huddleston later calculates that during the 10 minutes it took him to drive to the school, sheriff's deputies — guided by the construction workers, who point to the woods where they saw movement and smoke from gunfire — already have captured the two boys who will be charged with the shootings.

In the state capital of Little Rock, state police media spokesman Bill Sadler gets his first calls from reporters, "a local TV station and a few minutes later from The Associated Press. ... I was just getting up to speed myself ... all we knew ... was we had a shooting at a school west of Jonesboro."

**1:00 PM** Other staffers from the *Sun* and KAIT are arriving at Westside, along with scores of frantic parents. Police have moved Hodges and Huddleston (who now is supported by the "live truck" driven by chief engineer Gerald Ericson) behind a police line. Huddleston decides not to force interviews with survivors.

KAIT news director Harvey Cox, who had been home having lunch, arrived at the school five minutes behind Huddleston after following ambulances that were passing his home. He recalled later feeling the same emotion: "I said to Bryant 'I want you to remember one thing. We don't go up and stick our camera in people's faces. ... If they want to talk to us, they'll come up to us.' And sure enough, they did."

After a quick conference with his supervisor, Sadler is headed toward the Little Rock airport to catch a plane to Jonesboro. As he boarded the airplane, "I began making preparations over a cell phone."