Guest Played Dead To Outwit Gunman

By PATSY SIMS

A 43-year-old broadcasting executive laid up in a hospital bed watching the developments at the Downtown Howard Johnson's today said he played dead in the hotel swimming pool because he felt the sniper "w o u l d n 't waste another shot on a dead man."

Robert Beamish, an engineer for the Starr Broadcasting Company, had come to New Orleans Thursday (the day it had been predicted his home town of San Francisco would be destroyed by an earthquake.)

Staying in the Howard Johnson until his wife and 3-year-old child came in today, he suddenly smelled smoke and went out into the hallway to see what was happening. The smoke and fire was so bad that he retreated into his room and finally came out onto the patio near the swimming pool.

"I saw a man standing there, about 50 feet away, and suddenly he shot me and knocked me into the pool," Beamish said from his Baptist Hospital bed. "I got out once and tried to warn some people standing on the balcony but got back in the pool because I thought it was a good place to stay."

He played dead for nearly two hours before being rescued.

"When I jumped back in, my coat picked up some air and it acted as sort of a life preserver. I had no idea it was so serious. Strangely enough, I wasn't scared. I figured he wouldn't waste another shot on a dead man."

Asked if he were afraid, he said the thought crossed his mind but mainly he was concerned about being cold.

"I thought I might drown if I passed out, but all I could think about was that it was cold. I was trying to keep my head above water," he said.

Beamish described the sniper as a black man in his early 20s wearing a light tan jacket or sweater and dark trousers, probably brown, but it was hard to be sure because the man mostly stayed behind some bushes.

Today, as he watched the further developments on television he is recovering from a bullet wound in the stomach, but he is described as being in good condition.