THE STATES-ITEM

Monday, January 8, 1973 New Orleans, La. 10 Cents

Snipers On Rooftop

The Hotel Tragedy:

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Elude Trap of Hotel

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Police took over the roof of the Downtown Howard Johnson's hotel early this afternoon, but found no sign of the sniper or snipers they were seeking.

Only the body of the sniper killed last night by police gunfire was found on the roof.

Either the other sniper or snipers escaped, or there was only one gunman in the first place. The latter appeared impossible, since police have taken return fire several times since the first gunman was slain. Three policemen were injured by gunfire this morning.

Escape also seemed unlikely, since police have had the 18th floor secured and guarded since early today.

Moving cautiously but steadily, police came up to the roof through passages from the 18th floor and took possession of the two cubicles at either end of the roof and one side of the blockhouse at the center.

They fired a volley of shots into the side of the blockhouse where the snipers appear to be holed up, and three policemen were wounded, two in the leg and one in the arm, apparently by ricocheting bullets.

They were stalking a killer or killers responsible for the deaths of at least six persons, including Deputy Superintendent of Police Louis Sirgo.

The assault on the roof followed a tear gas bombardment of the blockhouse from a Marine helicopter that hovered alongside and fired gas at the building.

SOME OF THE canisters bounded off the copter's side and fell, tear-gassing some police and newsmen in the hotel lobby on the ground floor.

Before the assault, there had been a long lull in the proceedings. The last real battle came early today, when a helicopter took some return fire, but a small exchange of gunfire had been reported around noon.

About midday, police began to be plagued by a rash of reports of shootings, new snipers and bomb scares in various parts of the city.

A sniper was reported atop the Charity Hospital home for student nurses, but none was found; a woman was taken to Charity after reportedly being shot at Julia and O'Keefe, but was found to have been injured slightly, apparently by falling glass.

THERE WERE bomb scares at City Hall, the International Trade Mart, Isadore Newman school and elsewhere. No bombs were found.

More than 24 hours had passed since the incident began yesterday, leaving six dead and at least 16 wounded in and around the modernistic 18-story hotel across the street from Duncan Plaza.

A LARGE segment of the business district was paralyzed as police cordoned off a wide area from Canal Street to St. Joseph and from Claiborne Avenue to Camp Street.

POLICE INFORMATION officer Carol Goman said before the assault police had the 18th floor sealed off from

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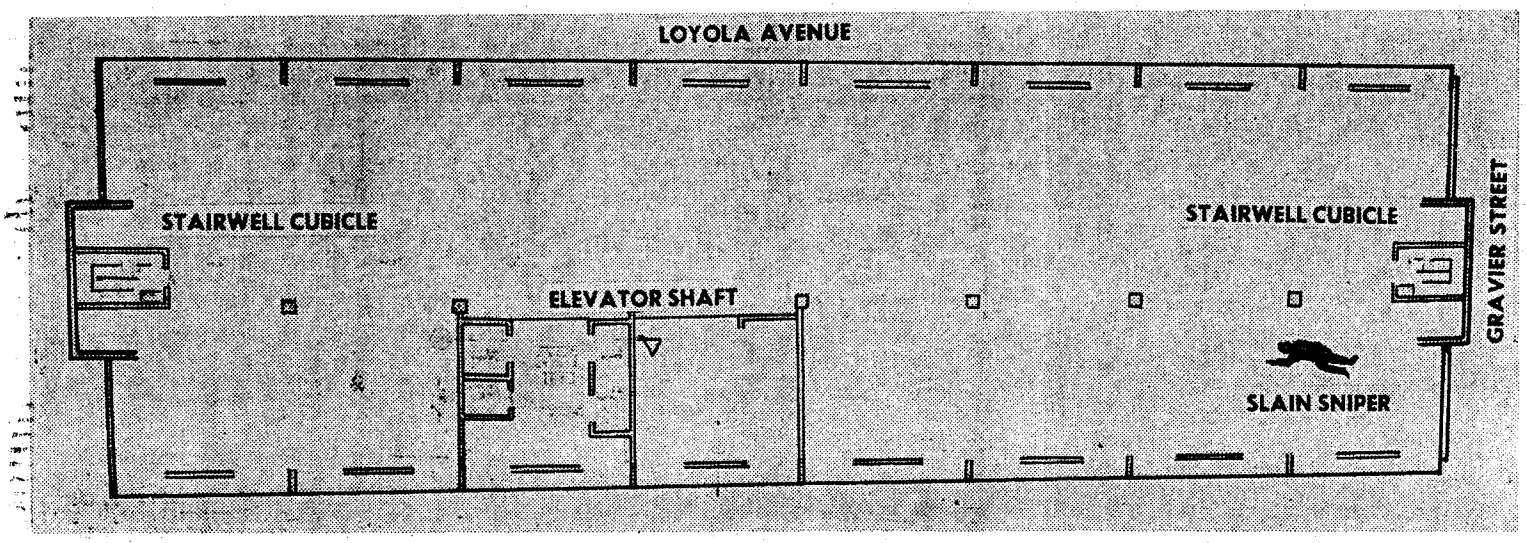
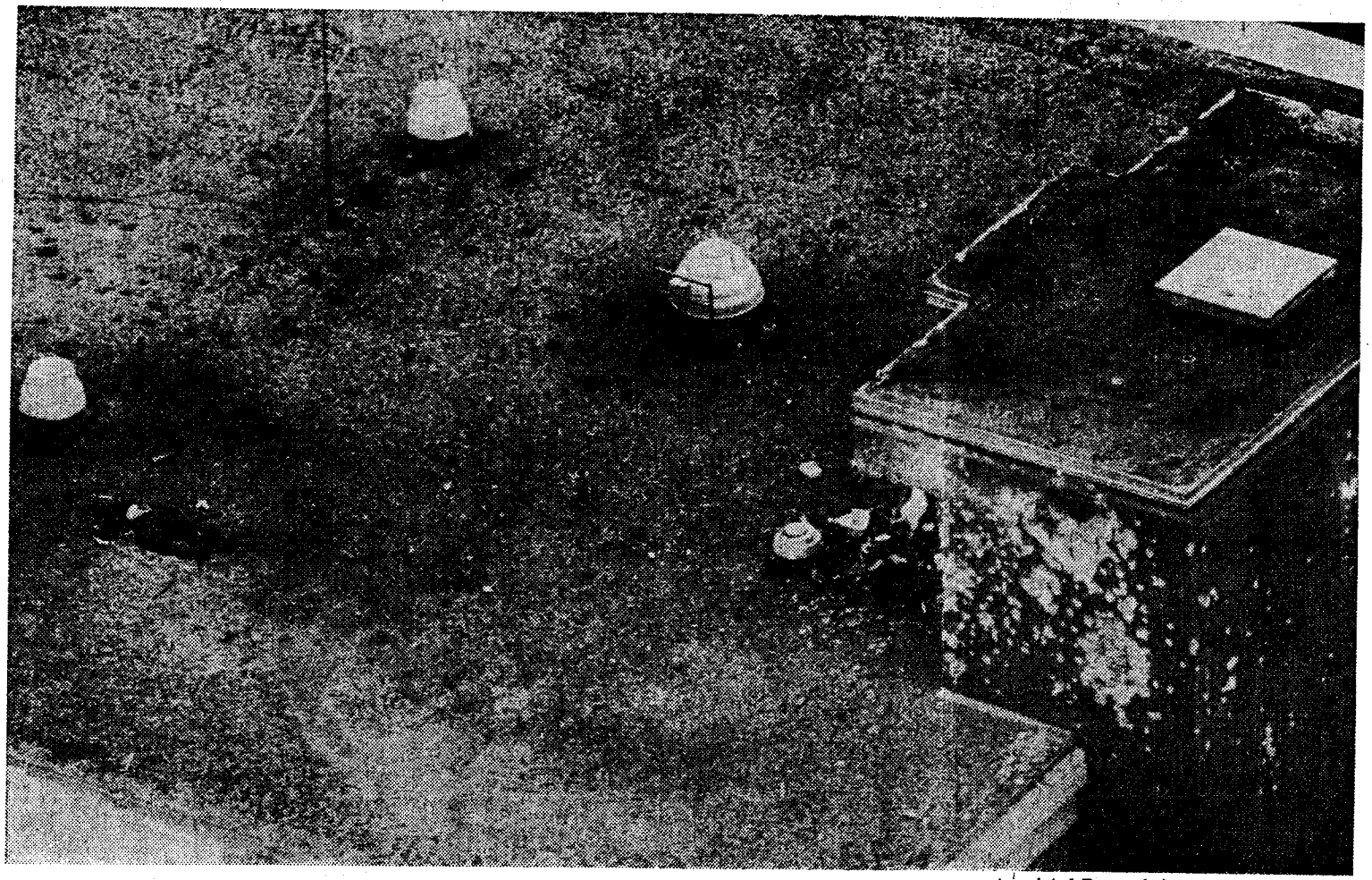
(States-Item staffers who contributed to the coverage of the Howard Johnson's story were Bruce Eggler, Tom Frazer, Jack Dempsey, Allan Katz, Ray Lincoln, Angus Lind, Bill Rainey, Patsy Sims, Kermit Tarleton, Lanny Thomas and Jack Wardlaw.)



Rooftop diagram shows where body of sniper lies between stairwell and elevator shaft of Downtown Howard Johnson's Motor Lodge. Police today battled other snipers in stairwell cubicle at opposite end of building. (States-Item sketch.)



—Associated Press photo.

Body of sniper lies near bullet battered concrete cubicle atop hotel

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the roof and the snipers were in one of the three clubicles on the roof.

"There's no way that this person or persons could get down," she said. "They are virtually closeted in between the fire doors."

She explained the two cubicles at either end of the roof area contain two sets of fire doors each between the roof and the 18th floor.

Police, she said, have decided against using hand grenades or flamethrowers because they would endanger the policemen occupying the 18th floor. She said police will not abandon the 18th floor.

IT HAS NOT been determined whether the snipers were registered as guests in the hotel. There were 247 persons registered yesterday, she said. Identity of the three is a mystery.

Meanwhile, Louisiana Atty. Gen. William J. Guste Jr. said he will ask for a federal investigation because "I am now convinced that there is an underground national suicidal group bent on creating terror in America."

Deputy Fire Supt. William McCrossen said damage to the hotel's eighth and 17th floors in yesterday's fire was total. The seventh floor also suffered heavy fire damage. The snipers also set several fires on the 18th floor after capturing room keys from a maid, he said.

Funeral services for Sirgo will be held Wednesday morning at the Jacob Schoen funeral home on Canal Street.

The other dead were listed as:

Robert Steagall, 27, and his wife Elisabeth, 26, found in an embrace in a hallway on the 18th floor. He was shot in the head and left arm, she in the right eye.

Frank Schneider, 62, of 8126 Fig, New Orleans, assistant manager of the hotel. He was found on the seventh floor with a gunshot wound of the face.

Patrolman Paul Persigo, 33, who died in Charity Hospital of massive destruction of the head and mouth after being shot at the scene.

Patrolman Phil Coleman of New Orleans. A bullet which passed through his head caused multiple skull fracture and extensive cerebral destruction.

After a night of intermittent gunfire, the remaining two snipers apparently separated, taking up positions at either end of the hotel rooftop. One appeared to have been forced down a stairwell onto a ledge above the 18th floor but they still had enough firepower to wound three policemen aboard a helicopter as it made an early-morning pass over the rooftop.

When the gunman appeared on the ledge, police sharpshooters opened fire from several angles but apparently did not hit him. Police Superintendent Clarence B. Giarrusso ordered all firing stopped except by marksmen 600 yards off atop the federal building.

His order came when policemen on the 17th floor of the hotel said they were being fired on, apparently by their own men.

A policeman who survived the incident in which Sirgo was killed said the deputy chief was accompanying a group of officers searching for the snipers.

THEY WERE walking down a 15th floor corridor when one of the gunmen stepped out behind them, shot Sirgo in the back and raced up the stairs to the roof.

Another patrolman chased him, kicking open a steel door to get onto the roof, only to be blown back down the stairs by a blast of gunfire. He was not killed.

Attaches at the Charity Hospital accident room said a bullet tore away Sirgo's left lung. He also suffered gunshot wounds of the liver and kidney.

He was pronounced dead at 2:15 p.m.

POLICE SAY one sniper died about 9:30 p.m. when he stepped out of a blockhouse atop a stairwell in an effort to shoot down a Marine helicopter manned by servicemen from Alvin Callender Field.

Caught in the open, the sniper was gunned down by machinegun blasts from the helicopter.

The helicopter then made a second pass to blast what police described as the big rifle the sniper had carried.

Police said it probably was the weapon used to shoot down a number of police at long range.

Later, police tried another approach. They fired .38 caliber magnum shells at the cement side of the blockhouse from nearby buildings, trying to weaken the structure.

AT THE POINT where it appeared they might be making progress, one of the snipers crawled out of the blockhouse under the cover of darkness and fired on police with what sounded like a handgun.

The sniper moved back and forth on the roof, changing his position frequently, forcing the police to reduce their volume of fire.

One policeman was shot yesterday as he tried to come through that other door.

The death toll in the disaster remains uncertain.

Giarrusso says seven dead have been confirmed. Police officers who have been in the building say there are three more bodies, making a total of 10.

However, Giarrusso seems to feel some or all of those bodies have been included in his count.

THE POLICE superintendent told reporters it may not be possible until the entire affair is concluded to determine just how many police, firemen and civilians died at the hands of the snipers.

Giarrusso said so far as can be told all of the dead were shot by the snipers and none died as the result of fires the snipers set.

According to police, the snipers went from room to room in the hotel, beginning about 11 a. m., setting fires. Then, as police and firemen responded to each new fire, the snipers shot at them.

AT THE SAME time, the snipers kept up withering fire at Duncan Plaza in the Civic Center, hitting several policemen.

There are 13 persons reported injured, including three seriously. However, Charity Hospital officials reported all the injured are out of danger.

Hotel guests, who were confronted by the snipers, said one of the assailants was a light-skinned black man of small stature.

Police also say the snipers are skillful in the use of firearms, had a good plan which did not seem to envision an escape from the motel and embarked on their mission well prepared for most eventualities.

HERE IS the sequence of events as

The first fire alarm came in at 10:52 a.m., and became a general alarm 10 minutes later.

The first shots were fired at 11 a.m., endangering firemen attempting to fight the blaze. Police surrounded the building and began drawing fire themselves.

At least one sniper atop the 18-story hotel began firing at police in Duncan Plaza across the street. Police set up a command post in the hotel coffee shop although sniping was reported from as close as the second-floor parking garage.

At 11:50 a fireman in Duncan Plaza was hit. Police marksmen were sent to the roofs of several high-rise buildings near the hotel, including the Rault Center, Warwick Hotel, Bank of New Orleans, and the State Office Building.

INTERMITTENT FIRING went on

between the snipers and police through the noon hour. Police began to climb the interior stairwells. Most of the guests made their way out. Fires on the eighth and 17th floor levels appeared to subside.

At 2:06 p.m. came the first full-scale exchange of fire, lasting a full two minutes.

At 3:30 p.m., a tactical unit reported the hotel secure from the 14th floor down. A helicopter circling over the roof drew rifle fire.

About this time, the 17th floor again burst into flames. It appeared to onlookers below that someone was moving from the downtown to the uptown side of the hotel, setting each room ablaze as he went.

Firemen tried vainly to squirt water on the fire from the ground, but could not reach it. After a while, the fire appeared to burn itself out.

AT 3:55, ANOTHER barrage of gunfire erupted. Firemen reported themselves under heavy fire, partly from ricocheting police bullets.

Dusk began closing in after 6 p.m. At 6:45, searchlights were brought in and an armor-plated Marine helicopter began making passes over the roof, drawing fire from the concrete cubicle on the Canal Street end of the roof.

About 9:30, a sniper was reported hit as he fired at the helicopter. But future passes continued to draw fire.

Throughout the night, there were sporadic exchanges of gunfire.