Sniper Slays 6 In La.

Wounds 11, Burns Hotel In New Orleans

By Ed Tunstall

NEW ORLEANS, Jan. 7 (AP)—A sniper, who astonished police with his deadly accuracy, killed at least six persons and wounded 11 others in a wild, marathon shooting spree that moved into the cover of night today, police said.

The victims included three policemen — including a deputy superintendent—a member of the hotel staff, and a man and a woman who were found dead on a top floor of a hotel nine hours after the shooting started.

A thick fog hung just above the building, the Downtown Howard Johnson Hotel, and a floodlight-equipped Marine helicopter swooped in and out of the fog, making passes over the roof so six police marksmen could pepper the area.

For about five hours after the firing started, police thought there were two snipers, but at mid-afternoon they said there appeared to be only one.

Police riflemen, however, reported seeing a rifle in an upper story window after the gunman was cornered on the roof. Police nonetheless concentrated their efforts on the rooftop.

An estimated 500 law officers surrounded the area and worked up through the building as evening approached. Orders went out for officers at ground level to hold their fire for fear of hitting tactical units inching their way toward the roof.

Smoke from fires set in the hotel's upper floors—and respect for the accuracy of the gunman's aim—apparently prevented police from using a helicopter to rout him from the roof, encircled by a concrete wall.

Occasionally a rifle could be seen sticking above the wall, which was pockmarked with bullet holes from police barrages. Below, police declared the first 14 stories of the hotel secure but proceeded with caution on the remaining three.

Police Superintendent Clarence Giarrusso said the man was sighted by officers who made their way to the roof. "He ran for a stairwell," Giarrusso said. "Our units fired several shots and believe they heard him scream."

Police earlier said it appeared there were at least two snipers inside the hotel because of the rapid-fire gunshots that blazed from widely separated parts of the building. "It now appears there's only one sniper," a police spokesman said later.

Officers also had said that hostages apparently were being held, a possibility that seemed less likely with the report that only one gunman apparently was involved.

Firemen continued to fight the blaze while police covered them with gunfire from neighboring buildings.

Hotel manager Dennis Lacey said many of the guests had been evacuated from the building but an undetermined

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number still remained on upper floors. Several guests could be seen leaning out balconies to escape smoke and firemen with bullhorns told them not to jump.

A police spokesman said earlier that the gunfire appeared to be from a high-power rifle and reported that several fires had been set in various locations in the hotel.

Police sharpshooters on the ground and in neighboring tall buildings pelted the building with rifle shots. The officers were armed with submachine guns, telescope-equipped rifles, carbines and teargas weapons.

The first fire broke out shortly after 10 a.m. and the first person wounded was a fireman, hit as he hurried up an aerial ladder with a hose, police said.

The building was the scene of a fire in 1971 in which six persons died. How far the flames had reached today was not immediately known.

Police reports said three of the wounded policemen were struck at street level, one of them while running along the ground. Another officer, tentatively identified as Charles Arnold, was hit as he peered from the 10th floor of an adjoining building.

Police called for emergency donations of blood.

The hotel, near the New Orleans city hall, is across the street from the Rault Center, where fire killed five persons last November, four of them women who jumped from the 16th floor.

"Get out of the way!" one policeman screamed as onlookers reaced across a boulevard. You only need to get hit once."

The aim of police sharpshooters on upper floors of an adjoining building was hindered by a morning mist blended with the black smoke pouring from the hotel.

Police radios constantly blared out:

"Use all caution with your weapons. There are officers and other people below. Use extreme caution with your weapons."

One man, apparently a motel guest, shivered as he sought refuge in a corner of a swimming pool atop a third floor roof.

The incident followed eight days of periodic sniping at New Orleans policemen. A cadet was shot to death outside police headquarters New Year's Eve UPI reported.

The Rev. Peter Rogers, chaplain of the New Orleans police force, said: "It's unbelievable, diabolocal, manaical. One man was killed trying to rescue his buddy. It looks like he [the sniper] was shooting at anybody in uniform."

[One guest of the hotel said she had just come down in an elevator when a maid ran through the lobby shouting, "There's a man up there with a gun who's trying to start a fire!"

["She was so confused, though," said the woman, who declined to give her name. "People didn't pay much attention to her at first."]