New Orleans Police Hunt 2d Sniper in Hotel Ducts

1/9/73

By MARTIN WALDRON
Special to The New York Times

NEW ORLEANS, Jan. 8—The police stormed a sniper stronghold on the roof of the Downtown Howard Johnson's Motor Lodge today. But they found only the body of a sniper who was shot to death last night and not the second gunman they had said they thought was holed up there.

The police then announced that the will-o'-the-wisp sniper who eluded them was apparently hidden somewhere in the building.

"He is very much alive and capable of shooting," Superintendent of Police Clarence Giarusso said after the assault on the roof, which was televised nationally.

Weary policemen, chilled by near-freezing temperatures and a 20-mile-an-hour wind, began tearing open the hotel's air-conditioning ducts searching for the elusive gunman, who with his partner had killed six persons—including three policemen—and wounded 15 others.

Earlier, the police had reported 10 persons dead, but this morning they discovered they had been counting several bodies twice.

One of the snipers was killed last night by policemen in a Marine helicopter. Using tracer bullets, they riddled the man with heavy caliber bulle as he stood on the hotel roof and fired back at the aircraft. Witnesses said that he shouted "Power to the people" before the shooting started.

As of early tonight the body of the dead sniper had not been identified and was still atop the hotel.

William Guste, Louisiana Attorney General, outraged by the latest in a long series of attacks on New Orleans police, demanded an investigation by the Justice Department. Mr. Guste said he was convinced that the snipers were part of

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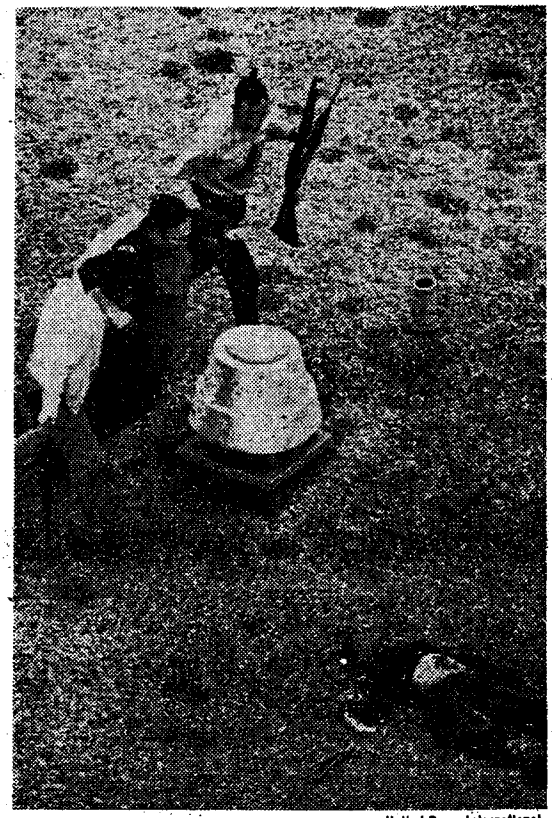

United Press International

Two policemen help officer, wounded in afternoon assault, past air vent riddled with holes. Sniper shot Sunday lies between parts of his rifle, destroyed in assault.

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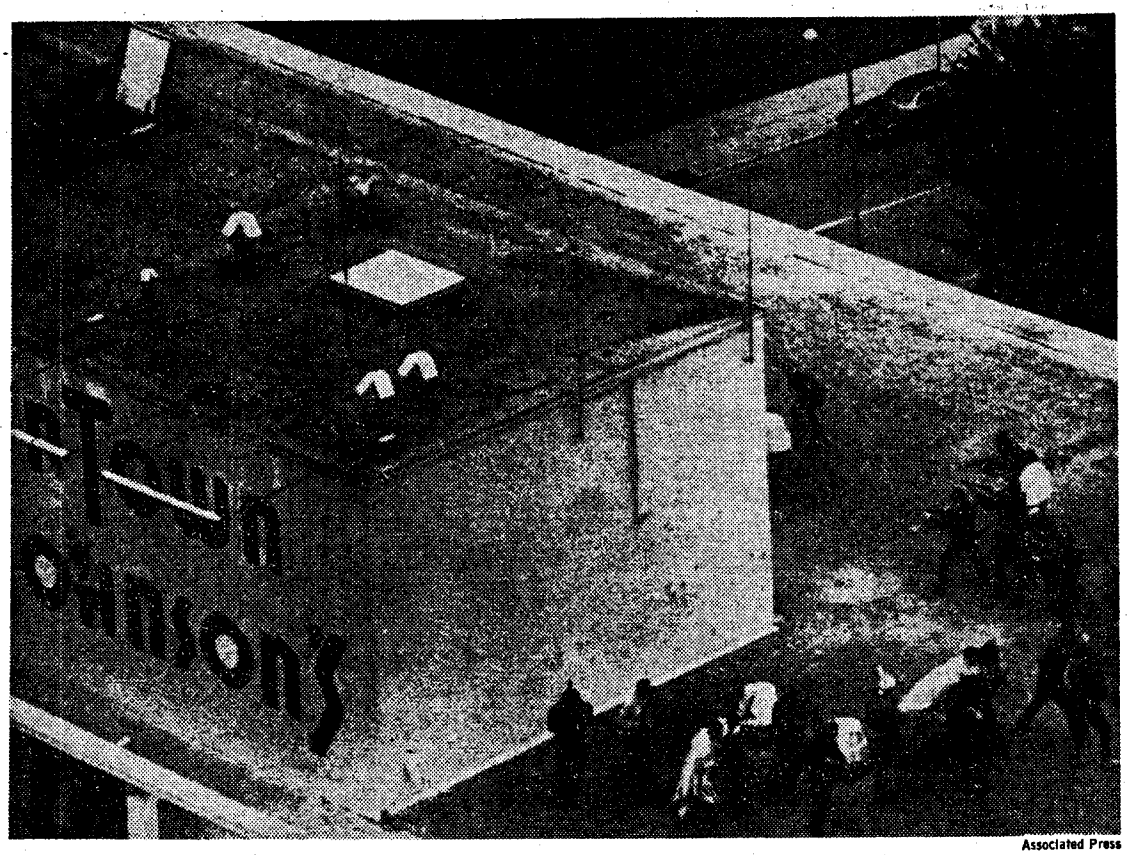

Associated Press

New Orleans policemen firing at a cubicle on the roof of the motor lodge where they thought a sniper was hiding. On top of the cubicle, top left, an officer opens a cover to check inside air conditioning equipment.

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a "nationwide conspiracy" to murder policemen.

In addition to the three dead policemen, 10 others were wounded by gunfire or were injured during the first 36 hours of the gun battle, which began shortly after 10 A.M. yesterday.

The authorities believe that fires set in the hotel yesterday were set deliberately to bring policemen within rifle range of the waiting gunmen.

The dramatic attack that unfolded on the hotel roof this afternoon was all day in the planning.

The police had decided to storm the roof at dawn but delayed making the assault when a Marine helicopter was fired on as it circled the building in the rain and darkness at 5 A.M.

Hit by Bullets

One policeman in the aircraft was said to have been wounded by gunfire from the roof. The police said that two others were hit by bullets as they made their way to the roof up a stairwell.

The police refused to believe that there was only one gunman, the man shot down from the helicopter last night.

"There is a second sniper," said Superintendent Giarusso. "He is now holed up in an air-conditioning unit between the swimming pool sundeck level and the roof level on the south rampart side of the building."

But a search of the major air-conditioning ducts failed to turn up the sniper.

The planned dawn attack was postponed until noon to allow the police more time to get in position inside the building. They worked their way up, foot by foot, inside the stairwells to seal off possible escape routes.

In preparation for moving onto the roof, the police, using rifles, shot a hole through the side of the rooftop boiler room, which has a painted sign on it reading: "Downtown Howard Johnson's Motor Lodge."

Tore Into Concrete

The riflemen aimed their fire at the top of the "H" and the heavy slugs tore a footwide hole through the six-inch concrete wall.

A policeman in one of the Marine helicopters the shot tear-gas canisters at the hole. One canister went into the boiler room, and wisps of tear gas could be seen coming out of the vents. A half-dozen other canisters missed and fell into the swimming pool area on the eighth floor where the tear gas was caught up by a brisk wind and whipped away.

The police said that they had not used their biggest fire power—20-mm. cannon to attack the concrete stairwell bunkers for fear that a shell would miss and hit another building or land in a nearby residential section.

A proposal that a mortar be used also was decided against for the same reason.

The advance on the roof began with a policeman climbing into the boiler rom through a hole cut in the floor.

Inside the 60-foot-long concrete structure, he examined the roof by holding a mirror for a small view. When he saw no movement, other policemen began to slip onto the roof from a concrete block stairwell bunker on the southern edge of the hotel.

Wearing flak jackets and bulletproof vests, they scurried to the side of the structure housing the boiler room.

As they hurried into position, they passed the sprawled body of the Negro man shot to death last night. The body had holes in the torso and legs and was lying face upward.

The first wave of policemen started on a stairwell bunker on the northern side of the roof. They had thought that a sniper was hidden in an alcove there. He was not.

Other policemen then began to attack the air-conditioning room, which adjoins the boiler room. A metal door leading into it from the top was locked from the inside and resisted efforts to pry it open.

An attempt to blast open a side door with gunfire also failed. Four of the attacking officers were wounded when struck by flying pieces of concrete knocked from the structure by the bullets.

Ax Opens Door

The door on top was finally opened by a policeman who sprung it by slashing at it with an ax. Like the boiler room and the stairwell bunkers, there was no sniper in the air-conditioning room.

The search of the air-conditioning ducts then began.

An employe of the hotel said there were scores of places inside the several-hundred-room hotel in which a man could hide. Every bathroom has a trapdoor in it, the employe said.

Much of the normal commerce of New Orleans, a busy post city of about one million population, was shut down for the day because of the sniper. The police closed off a 50-block area, including 1 Shell Square, a high rise in which 17,050 people worked. One school and several hospital clinics were closed.

Several banks and financial houses near the hotel did not open today after the police discovered that some of the shots they were firing into the hotel were ricocheting long distances.

Today, the police pieced together some of yesterday's chain of events. hey gave the following account:

One gunman stationed himself on the top floor of the motel and one was on the eighth floor. A sundeck and a swimming pool are on the eighth-floor level.

The two men began setting fires in vacant rooms at about 10:15 A.M

One of them forced a couple from Roanoke, Va., Mr. and Mrs. Robert Speagall, to lie on the floor in their room and then shot them in their right eyes, killing them.

A hotel maid reported to an assistant manager that a light-complexioned Negro with a rifle was setting fires in the hotel. The assistant manager, Frank Schneider, went to investigate. He was later found dead on the 11th floor.

Another hotel guest, Robert Beamish, 43, was shot in the stomach as he fled from the gunmen and hid in the swimming pool on the eighth floor. Mr. Beamish was forced to tread water for more than three hours before the police were able to rescue him. He was rported to be in critical condition today.

Fireman on Ladder Shot

Firemen responded to alarms at the motel shortly after 10:30 A.M. The first indication outside the hotel that there were snipers in the building came when a fireman was shot as he climbed up a ladder.

As the police responded to a call for help, the snipers opened fire from the eighth floor and the top floor. A dozen or so persons, most of them firemen or policemen, were wounded in the first few minutes, the ploice reported.

Gerry Arnold, a photographer for The New Orleans Times-Picayune, said he was in a small park in front of the hotel when the shooting started. A police sergeant fell seriously wounded at his feet.

"I'm going to die, I'm going to die," the sergeant moaned as Mr. Arnold went to his aid.

The photographer said that he cradled the wounded man in his arms, saying to him, "No baby, you're not going to die. Don't worry about it. They're going to get you out."

An ambulance driver was wounded by the sniping as he came to help carry out the sergeant.

As the day wore on, hundreds of policemen, including state troopers and county deputies as well as city patrolmen, surrounded the motor lodge and periodically exchanged gunfire with the hidden snipers.

Police riflemen crouched atop nearby buildings and sent a rain of bullets into the motel as terrified guests huddled in hallways and in the lobby. It was late in the day before most of the guests could be moved from the building.

Believing that the snipers had holed themselves up in concrete bunkers on the northern and southern ends of the roof, the police borrowed helicopters from the Naval Air Station at suburban Belle Chase and, using the craft as mobile platforms, fired hundreds, perhaps thousands, of rounds into the bunkers, blasting large holes in them.

The police inside the building attempted to work their way to the roof, using stairs alongside the elevator shaft. One patrolman, Michael Burl, got to the top floor where the gunmen began to shoot at him, according to the police account.

Patrolman Burl leaped into an elevator shaft and slid down the elevator cable for 16 floors, almost 180 feet, before losing his grip. He suffered back injuries when he fell.

Floodlights in Rain

As darkness descended yesterday, the police shined portable floodlights on the hotel. A cold, misting rain and low-flying clouds lent a ghostly hue to the scene.

Policemen reported that they could hear the two gunmen in the hotel talking to each other. It sounded at times that there might be three persons, one of them possibly a woman, they said.

About 10 o'clock last night, the police made a second full-scale assault on the roof from one of the Marine helicopters. As they concentrated their fire on the bunker on the southern end of the roof, a sniper began firing back, they said.

Apparently driven from the bunker by red tracer bullets, the sniper ran out onto the roof. He was cut down by the heavy-caliber bullets, sprawled on his back about 30 feet from the bunker. Observers estimated that after he fell, he was shot 100 times.

The police inside the building said that they heard the man shout "power to the people" before the clatter of the helicopter's machine guns drowned out his voice.

After the helicopter pass was ended, a silence, deepened by the rain and gloom, fell on the bullet-scarred hotel. Then the police said they could hear a second sniper calling them to "come and get me" and shouting "power to the people."

A review of television coverage of the police search appears on television page.

Debris and Broken Glass Mark Scene In Street Below Hotel Rooftop Battle

NEW ORLEANS, Jan. 8 (UPI)—At dawn today, the only movement on the top floor of the 17-story Downtown Howard Johnson's Motor Lodge was torn, dirty curtains flapping in the breeze from the shattered windows.

Gunfire between policemen and the snipers periodically chewed up the building.

On the street, bits of concrete lay scattered amid the broken glass, chipped by high-powered rifle bullets from the blockhouses where two snipers held off the police yesterday and this morning.

No one dared walk on the streets near the hotel, which is about five blocks from the city's famous French Quarter.

Hundreds of police cars, fire trucks and ambulances were parked at nearby intersections, serving as cordons for crowds, refuges for victims and cover for policemen.

250 Policemen Watch

This morning, 250 policemen and dozens of newsmen watched the top of the hotel where the snipers hid.

The hotel roof, a block long, was studded with television antennas and vents. The roof has three predominant structures — concrete cubicles that cover stairway exits onto the roof, one on the north end, one in the middle and one on the south end.

The two end cubicles are about 5 feet wide, 20 feet long and 8 feet high. The center cubicle is twice as big as the others.

Most of yesterday and early today, the snipers were thought to have been holed up in the north cubicle. Shots were fired at that cubicle throughout the night by marksmen on adjoining buildings, who used armor-piercing bullets, and by policemen armed with machine guns aboard a helicopter gunship.

The north cubicle was pitted and shattered, with chunks of concrete the size of a baseball torn loose to fall to the street below. A large hole was blasted in the hollow metal door. Another hole was shot through one wall of the blockhouse.

Below the cubicle, windows were blown from three rooms, and it was there that the curtains, turned a charcoal gray by bullets and fire, were tossed back and forth by the breeze.

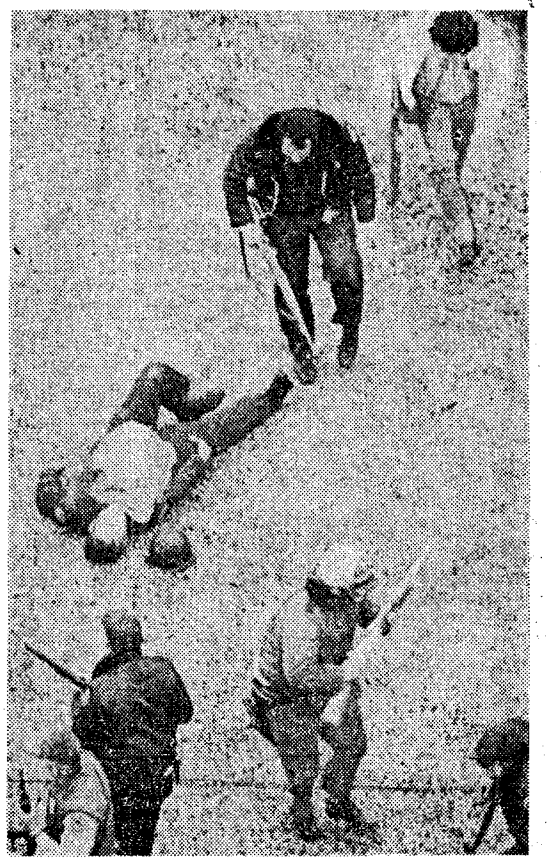
When one of the snipers opened fire from the south cubicle early today, the police responded with thousands of rounds. Windows were broken below the south cubicle, and more curtains began to blow in the breeze.

The body of the slain sniper was lying face down between the north and the middle cubicles. The sniper was running toward the middle cubicle when he was struck by a stream of machine gun bullets last night. His rifle lay beside him, beaten into pieces by bullets.

Nine stories below, the hotel's outdoor swimming pool was sprinkled with bits of concrete and glass. Bedding and clothing thrown from upper floors during the early fires yesterday were strewn around the swimming pool. A deck chair had been kicked into the pool.

Traffic and pedestrians moved normally outside the 50-square-block area blocked off by the police.

Across Loyola Boulevard from the main hotel entrance stands the Louisiana Supreme Court Building, and next door to its is the City Hall. Both buildings were virtually empty because of the seal around the hotel.



United Press International

Policemen, who had fired during their search for sniper on the motel roof, passing a fellow officer who was wounded by a ricochetting bullet.

Attorney General Plans to Consider Terrorist Charge

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Jan. 8—Attornney General Richard G. Kleindienst has agreed to meet with William V. Guste, the Louisiana Attorney General, to discuss Mr. Guste's belief that there is a national terrorist group involved in the New Orleans gunbattle.

A spokesman for the Justice Department said the two men had talked by telephone in San Clemente, Calif., where Mr. Kleindienst had been attending a conference on drugs. The spokesman said he believed the call was made last night.

He said no time or date was set for the meeting, but that it would presumably be held here.

Mr. Guste said in New Orleans that he was convinced there was an "underground national suicidal group bent on creating terror in America."

The spokesman said it appeared that no Federal laws had been broken in the New Orleans battle and that any investigation would take a formal request from Louisiana. No such request has yet been made, he added.

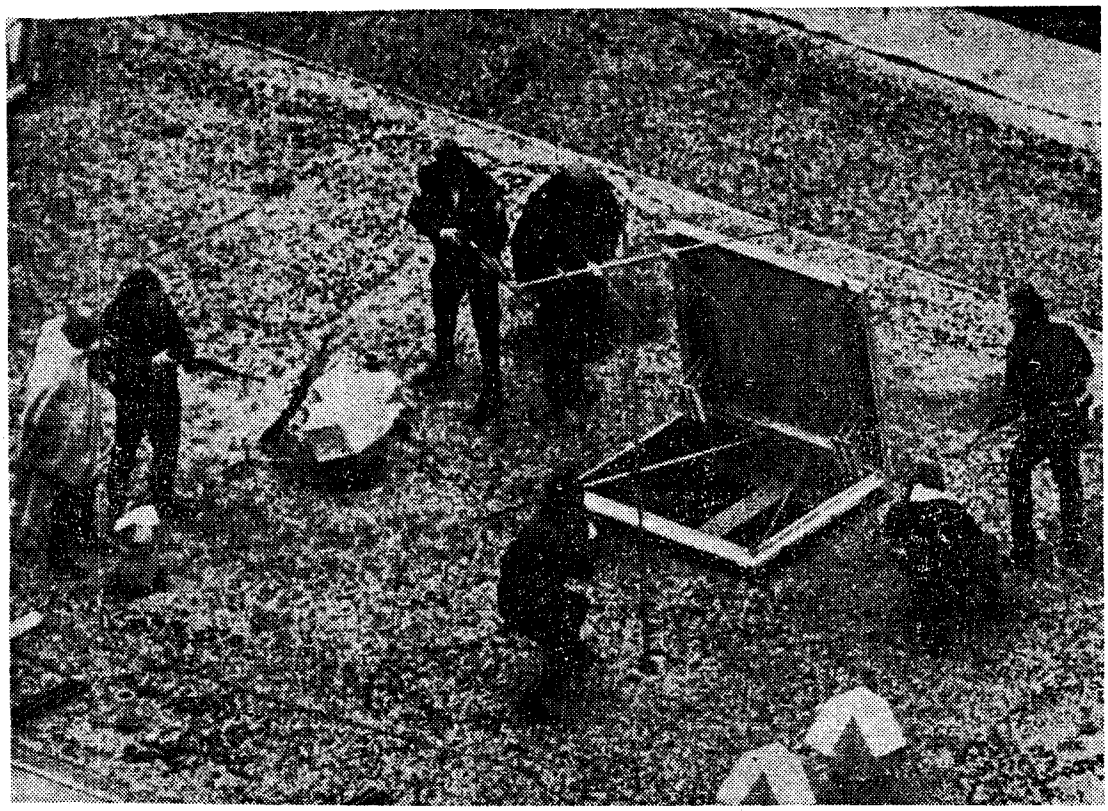
Federal Legislation Urged

WASHINGTON, Jan. 8 (AP) — The New Orleans sniper shooting prompted new Congressional calls today for making it a Federal crime to kill or assault policemen or firemen while they are on duty.

"The tragic situation in New Orleans, which finds policemen and firemen under deadly attack from sniper fire, illustrates the compelling need" for such legislation, said the chairman of the House Internal Security Committee, Representative Richard H. Ichord, Democrat of Missouri.

Senator Richard S. Schweiker, Republican of Pennsylvania, said that he would press anew for his bill, which passed the Senate but died in efforts to reach a compromise with the House last year, making "cold-blooded assassination attempts on policemen, firemen or judicial officers a Federal crime."

This legislation, he added, would also make it a Federal crime for someone to cross a state line and kill or assault policemen or firefighters while they are performing official duties.



Associated Press

Police sharpshooters firing into an opening of a shaft on the roof of the New Orleans motor lodge

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