

Sniper's Foray Traced

Gunman Identified, Linked to Earlier Shootings

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NEW ORLEANS, Jan. 9—Police today identified the sniper who paralyzed the city with a .44 cal. magnum rifle Sunday and said that his gun was the same weapon that felled two New Orleans policemen on New Year's Eve.

The slain terrorist, his body riddled with police bullets, was named as Mark James Robert Essex, 23, a black native of Emporia, Kansas. He was said to have been living in a New Orleans suburb for the past six months.

"The other information we have is nebulous," police superintendent Clarence Giarrusso said in a lengthy press conference. "There are many loose ends."

Apparently bent on self-destruction after a murderous spree at a downtown hotel here, Essex was cut down on the roof Sunday night after holding hundreds of officers at bay for almost 12 hours.

Police recovered his body from atop the Downtown Howard Johnson's Monday afternoon after they finally stormed the

roof and found, to their amazement, that his presumed companions had vanished.

Today Giarrusso summed up the dilemma by declaring that there is "strong evidence" to suggest that there were other snipers, who somehow escaped, and equally "strong evidence" to suggest that Essex acted alone.

The police superintendent hinted that his officers had turned up some indications that the dead man was tied to some black militant organization, but he said they were insufficient to warrant disclosure at this point.

Despite repeated prodding, Giarrusso would say only that there was "some evidence" of a conspiracy involving Essex and perhaps one to three others.

Aside from Essex, six persons were killed and some 20 others wounded in the hail of police and sniper bullets that bounced crazily around the 18-story hotel over the weekend. Three of the policemen hurt Monday were injured by ricocheting chunks of concrete sent flying

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by police bullets. But Giarrusso found it hard to believe that al of those hurt after Essex was killed were the victims of police gunfire. "Policemen," he protested, "aren't going to shoot at fellow policemen."

Ballistics tests are far from complete, but officials said those conducted so far indicate that two of the victims of the Sunday shooting—Deputy Police Superintendent Louis Sirgo and Dr. Robert V. Steagall Jr., a hotel guest—were both killed by bullets from the .44 magnum carbine found lying by Essex's side.

Giarrusso added that tests on the same rifle, shattered by police gunfire and then pieced together again, matched the bullets taken from the bodies of two New Orleans policemen shot on New Year's Eve.

One of those officers, a black police cadet, Alfred E. Harrell Jr., was killed standing outside police headquarters. The other, patrolman Edwin C. Hosli Sr., was severely injured about 15 minutes later while investigating a reported burglary two blocks from headquarters.

Still confined to Charity Hospital across the square from Howard Johnson's, Hosli was reportedly put on the critical list this afternoon. Many of those hurt in this weekend's shootings were also taken there.

According to police, the shootings started at the hotel Sunday morning about half an hour after the reported theft of a 1968 Chevrolet

about two miles away by a man with a rifle.

The owner of the car, Marvin Alberts, told police he had left it outside his home with the engine running for a brief stop and returned to see the gun-toting thief drive it off.

Maj. Henry Morris, chief of New Orleans detectives, said the stolen car hit a parked auto some two blocks from Alberts' home, but then eluded police notice until officers found it Sunday night—on the fourth floor of the Howard Johnson's built-in garage.

The shootings started at 11 a.m. Sunday, about half an hour, Morris said, after the accident involving the stolen Chevy. By then, police and firemen were responding to a series of fires that had just erupted at the hotel, apparently set by Essex and perhaps some companions.

Several witness have said they saw a black man with a rifle wandering the hallways of the hotel before the shootings. Some reportedly stated that the man had a goatee.

A check of Essex' corpse at the New Orleans morgue this afternoon showed no goatee.

Essex was described by his hometown minister in Emporia as having returned from a hitch in the Navy "hating white folks."

The Rev. W. A. Chambers, pastor of St. James Baptist Church, said he and Essex' mother tried to talk to him but "he wouldn't listen."

Essex enlisted in the Navy at Emporia Jan. 13, 1969, and was discharged Feb. 10, 1971. A Navy spokesman said he

was given "a general discharge for unsuitable character and behavior disorders."

The spokesman said the Navy initiated the discharge. A general discharge is less than a full honorable discharge but still under honorable conditions, he said.

While in the Navy, Essex attended dental school for three months and then was assigned to the Naval Air Station at Imperial Beach, Calif.

Police in Emporia said Essex had only two minor traffic violations on his record there.

Emporia police said they became involved in the investigation of the New Orleans shootout when the Treasury Department asked local officers to check purchase of a rifle recovered from the scene at New Orleans.

Officers said the rifle apparently was traced to an Emporia retailer but declined to say where the weapon had been purchased.

Police have by now confirmed reports of the shooting of a 33-year-old man Sunday morning at a grocery store a few doors from the warehouse where patrolman Hosli was shot on New Year's Eve. According to some accounts, the victim, shot in the shoulder, had witnessed the attack on Hosli. Officers were called to investigate the grocery store shooting at 10:32 a.m. Sunday.

At this afternoon's press conference, Giarrusso disclosed that two blacks with shotguns were stopped by police Sunday afternoon as they attempted to enter Charity Hospital while other officers were coping with

the sniper fire at the nearby hotel.

"One was arrested. One got away," the superintendent reported. He said the suspect who was apprehended, Robert G. Peters, 18, "said he wanted to help the police. But the first question that comes to mind," Giarrusso continued, "is why did the other fella run."

Giarrusso said his department's felony action squad had staked out the hospital in the anticipation that an attempt at forced entry would be made. He claimed that police had been expecting that since Hosli and Harrell were shot.

In any event, the superintendent said that Peters and his companion showed up at the hospital "almost simultaneously" with the explosion of a series of firecrackers in the nearby tunnel used by ambulances for emergency cases.

Peters, identified as a laborer who lives in the city's Desire housing project, was charged with carrying a dangerous weapon, disturbing the peace, criminal mischief and taking a loaded shotgun into a hospital. Other police spokesmen said the youth had also been arrested last month on a charge of simple burglary.



New Orleans police stand guard as firemen reclaim their truck, abandoned during a shootout with snipers Sunday.

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