

# Kansas Hometown Baffled by Violent End

By **ANDREW H. MALCOLM**  
Special to The New York Times

EMPORIA, Kan., Jan. 10—The 1967 edition of The Echo, the student yearbook of Emporia Senior High School, was just about the most prized piece of property in town today.

Copies of the book were passed from student to student, teacher to teacher and parent to parent. And each shook his head as he thumbed through the shiny pages.

They all stopped at Page 38. It bore senior portraits of Stephen Floyd, Larry Fields, Margaret Flynn and Joyce Goodell. And there at the top of the page, looking out at the world as jovial as ever, was a photo of Mark Essex.

No one could believe that that fellow who was always smiling, who was so respectful and who never got into any major trouble here had died violently.

No one could believe that that little guy who had had difficulty carrying a saxophone in the school band had been identified by the New Orleans police as the sniper who carried a .44-caliber Magnum deer rifle to the roof of the Downtown Howard Johnson's Motor Lodge and picked off six persons as if they were rabbits in a field out by the turnpike here.

But he was.

## Seek to Understand Why

And today his friends, teachers and neighbors tried to understand why.

It was most difficult because urban unrest, racial disorder and the killing are topics totally foreign to Middle Western towns such as Emporia, which has a population of 23,327, only 569 of them blacks.

Seemingly more relevant is the winter weather, which came two months early in November and coated most streets here with several inches of ice.

These included Cottonwood Street, where at No. 902 Mr. and Mrs. Mark H. Essex, their two daughters and two surviving sons gathered to mourn.

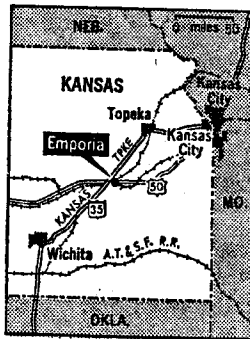
It is a simple, single-story white frame house where giant icicles hang from the gutter, where a large dog sleeps on the porch and where a neighbor politely answers the door to say the Essexes are not receiving company.

But late today the family did admit Randy Daniel, a black reporter for the Colum-



The New York Times/Gary Settle

Outside home of Mark Essex in Emporia, Kan., yesterday bicycle lays covered with snow



Essex distastefully dissected frogs a few years ago, his teacher, Frank Nelson, remembered him as someone "who didn't make an A and didn't make a D. He was average."

"Some of these faces that go through here you figure will wind up dead in some alley," Mr. Nelson continued, "but I figured Jimmy would probably start college, then fade, but get a job and go back to night school to finish up."

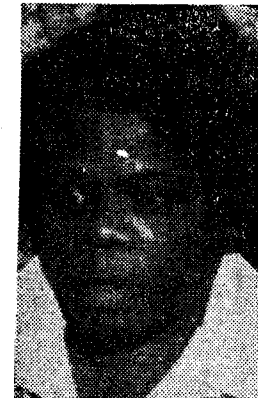
## Attended 3 Colleges

Mr. Nelson was right in part. Essex, who was known as Jimmy, did start college several times. He variously attended Labette Community Junior College here, Kansas State College in Pittsburg, Kan., and Kansas State Teachers College here. He withdrew in the fall of 1968.

A few months later the changes began.

On Jan. 13, 1969, Essex, once a Cub Scout, enlisted in the Navy, as many boys do here. He trained in San Diego and began work nearby as an apprentice dental technician.

But, according to police records here, he was reported absent without leave in 1970. And then on Feb. 10, 1971, halfway through his four-year enlistment, Essex received a general discharge "for character and behavior



C.B.S. News

Mrs. Mark H. Essex, the mother of Mark Essex, the sniper slain in New Orleans, on C.B.S.-TV.

disorders." He returned to this east Kansas town an embittered man. His friends noticed.

Renee Green, a high school classmate, said he was not jovial any more. "At parties he'd always sit in the corner," she said.

"He was a changed boy," recalls the family pastor, Rev. William A. Chambers.

When Mr. Chambers met Essex on Sylvan Street one day, he asked him why he hadn't been in church recently.

Essex shocked the pastor

bia Broadcasting System. And Mrs. Essex traced her son's problems to alleged discrimination in the Navy, "Young blacks nowadays," she said "are not going to accept what people in my generation accepted."

## Hard-Working Family

A family respected for their hard work, the Essexes learned yesterday of their 23-year-old son's death from the local police. Mr. Essex was at work as a foreman at the Fanestil Meat Packing Company. His wife, Nellie, was counseling preschoolers at a Head Start center.

"It is difficult for me to believe that this baby-faced kid with that good family background could conjure up all this killing," said Robert Lodle, a high school guidance counselor who was acting principal in 1967. "He was never any problem here."

Upstairs at the school in Room 301, the biology room where an impressionable

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## to Life of Mark Essex



Robert Lodle, a high school guidance counselor, with the 1967 school yearbook containing sniper's photo.

by bluntly saying he did not believe in Christianity any more because "it is a white man's religion."

"He wouldn't talk openly with me like before," Mr. Chambers said.

Mrs. Essex told CBS that a series of incidents in the Navy had influenced her son. She said these included white guards stopping her son more often than they did whites, white policemen, presumably in San Diego, frisking her son more often than whites and complaints by white sailors about soul music being played too loud in her son's barracks.

"You know," she said, "you just keep on putting a little snow up on top of snow and pretty soon it's going to break. Jimmy wanted to be a man."

Then, last April 11 Essex

specially ordered the high-powered rifle and ammunition at Emporia's Montgomery Ward store. Later, he visited Louisiana, where he stayed.

Christmas Day he called his mother to say he had "found himself." A week later, the New Orleans police say, Essex's rifle was used to kill a police cadet.

Then last Sunday, Jimmy Essex climbed to the top of the downtown Howard Johnson's Motor Lodge and opened fire.

At almost that precise moment, Mrs. Essex rose here and asked the congregation of St. James Baptist Church to pray for her son who "doesn't want to go along with the Lord and the church."