

If you read the 1/3 page Metropolitan View signed piece by Allan Katz, S-I 1/12, before sending, you can see one of the reasons I've said that you need a special scorecard to understand N.O...I also found ~~ixx~~ it interesting that he reports the unreported, the lack of legal authority for the use of the military helicopter and of the deputies from the two touching parishes, who just rushed in without authorization asked or given. The spirit of vigilantism he likes. Be interesting to see if either figures in any of the possible litigation. HW 1/20/73

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Sights, Sounds, Metropolitan View Afterthoughts on Sniping

By ALLAN KATZ

Some sights, sounds and afterthoughts on the Battle of the Downtown Howard Johnson's Motor Lodge:

—There is no way to measure or properly describe the courage and willingness of New Orleans police and firemen to expose themselves to danger during the tragic affair. Time and time again, the word would go out that three or four policemen and firemen were needed to carry out some assignment that would place them in the line of fire.

Invariably, 20 men would step forward and the commanding officers would wind up having to say, "Alright, you, you and you." It wasn't phony movie heroism. This was the real thing—brave men wanting to go out and do a job that had to be done.

—The most grisly aspect of the entire battle, at least for me, was the hundreds of "spectators" who came downtown on Sunday afternoon to watch the gun battle. They blundered into the line of fire, getting in the way of policemen trying to get a clear shot at the sniper or snipers who were moving around in the building during the first two hours or so of the ordeal.

I saw fathers dragging children by the hand, ducking from car to car, so they could get a better view. Some people brought their own refreshments—usually a wine bottle—and made



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themselves comfortable behind some shelter where they could view what they apparently regarded as entertainment.

Gangs of youths, both white and black, cheered the sniper fire and booed when the police fired.

It should be said that only a few hundred came out while most of the million plus people who live in the New Orleans area stayed away. Those who came reminded me of vultures.

—Perhaps the worst thing about the entire affair was that it was just about impossible to accept that it was really happening. In the early going, Bob Kreeger of WVUE-TV and I shared a car as our cover. "This isn't really happening, is it?" I asked him. "No," he assured me, "it's just our imagination," as guns went off all around us.

—Were there one, two or three snipers? The people who are having the most trouble making up their minds and are most eager to wait until all the evidence is sorted out tend to be those who were there. All the signs pointed to more than one gunman until the final assault on the rooftop that came up empty-handed. People who have been in combat tell me that one sniper who was very cool and very good at his business, could have done everything—set the fires, moved from area to area of the hotel quickly, fired with great accuracy on police and firemen, battled with the helicopter.

But, how then do we explain the voices heard on the rooftop after Mark Essex was killed? Or, the gunshots that seemed to come from the rooftop?

The theory about the sniper slipping through the police sounds okay until you examine it. It would take a very cool operator indeed to walk past police—which he would have had to do—after having been in a combat situation for at least 10 hours or more.

The instant experts who never got within 30 blocks of the Howard Johnson's are getting on my nerves a little bit. These are the people who have figured out what the police should have done, how many snipers there were, whether or not anyone got away

and how they did it, and whether some kind of conspiracy is involved. It's amazing how much simpler the entire affair seems to become as the distance between the self-appointed expert and the actual battle grows wider.

—It was inevitable that in the aftermath of the Howard Johnson battle that much drivel would be written or spoken over the airwaves by people who were far from the scene. An editorial writer at the Tampa (Fla.) Tribune so far leads the league. He deplores the "incompetent handling" of the sniper on the roof and tells us that "what New Orleans gave us was close to being a classic example in how not to do the job."

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NEW ORLEANS

THIRTY-ONE

How cozy it must be to sit in an ivory tower hundreds of miles from the shooting and dying and announce to the world how things should have been handled. A friend of mine who read the Tampa editorial said simply, "Pride proceedeth a downfall." I hope not. Having seen one in action, I wouldn't wish an urban terrorist on any city, and certainly not for anything as trivial as showing up a pompous Colonel Blimp editorial writer. His tone is smug and condescending but I suspect that his police chief is a good

deal less smug about the problems of handling a rifleman or riflemen who have the advantage of surprise, pick their own terrain and don't mind dying while the other side is trying to save lives.

The Tampa editorial writer is shocked that far more people were killed, wounded and inconvenienced by a sniper "than is the case with the average airline skyjacking, our most spectacular current crime." Let us all hope that the writer in Tampa never finds out at first-hand that a sniper and an airline hijacker are different breeds of cat with different goals in mind.

—Like most urban police depart-

ments, the New Orleans police have often been accused of racial bigotry and have been slow to integrate. For that reason, it was interesting to watch white and black officers work together during the gunbattle. They covered for each other, risked their lives for each other and fought side by side. It is no secret that there have been differences between white and black within the police department but when it came down to the nitty-gritty, everybody was together.

—Watching the police trying to cope with the sniper, it was difficult to escape the thought that the urban terrorist is far closer to being a military problem than a police problem. It is not surprising that a military helicopter, skillfully piloted by a Vietnam veteran, provided the platform from which Essex was finally killed. As I understand it, the helicopter flew its first pass over Howard Johnson's while officers were still trying to get authorization from Washington to allow military participation in the operation. If that is so, it simply points up the fact that in matters such as these, the military and the police need to shorten their lines of communication so that help can be quickly available when it is needed.

—The word "metropolitanism" was recently coined by a civic leader here to signify the spirit of cooperation that ought to exist between the adjoining parishes in the New Orleans area. There was never a better example of "metropolitanism" than the speed with which Jefferson and St. Bernard Par-

ish deputies raced to the scene to help New Orleans police in any way they could. When they were needed, they didn't wait to see if their respective parish councils would pass a resolution okaying cooperation. They just came.

The New Orleans Police Department is badly in need of more radios. There weren't enough to go around during the Howard Johnson's ordeal and that made the problems of coordination even tougher. In addition, the radios were set up so that only one channel could be used. If the sniper or snipers had a radio, it would have been easy to monitor the police radio band. In some instances, they could have learned a lot about police plans by monitoring the commercial radio and television stations.

—Isn't it interesting that despite hysterical rumors of snipers elsewhere in the city, there were no other maniacs climbing to rooftops with gun in hand. That is at least one hopeful sign out of one of the most depressing chapters in this city's history.

—As far as I know, only two reputable, trustworthy memorial funds have been set up for police victims of sniper fire. One is a Police Department fund for Cadet Alfred Harrell being coordinated by Mrs. Yvonne Bechet of the Community Relations Division.

The other is the Sirgo-Coleman-Persigo fund set up by lawyer Frank S. Normann. Contributions can be sent in care of any New Orleans bank, all of which have agreed to forward contributions to Normann.