

# Family Says Essex Was Seeking Justice

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EMPORIA, Kan., Jan. 11—The parents of Mark Essex, identified as the New Orleans sniper who shot and killed six persons there before being killed himself, today pictured their son as a black youth embittered by racial discrimination in the Navy and who lashed out at society in a frustrated fury.

In their first news conference since the 23-year-old Essex died Sunday night, they said that their son had been searching for an elusive justice in a white society.

Asked by newsmen if the six other persons killed in New Orleans had received justice, Mrs. Essex replied, "There was no justice in the whole situation. Jimmy was trying to tell white America you've been sitting too long on your bottoms, and you'd better take notice of us."

She spoke as her son's body was returned to this snow-covered east Kansas town of 23,000 for a burial service Saturday morning.

The service will be held in the St. James Baptist Church four years to the day after Essex enlisted in the Navy. He was trained in San Diego and stationed at Imperial Beach, Calif., as a dental technician.

## Parents Tell of Slurs

In letters and conversations, his parents said today, Essex told of racial slights, slurs and snide remarks directed at the few black sailors there by white enlisted men.

These alleged incidents, the parents said, included frequent searches by white naval guards who did not search white sailors, higher-ranking whites calling black sailors "boy" and the barring of allegedly better-qualified black athletes from certain sports on base for no apparent reason.

Once Essex and three other black sailors felt that they had been unjustly accused of playing music too loud by a sailor known for his hostile attitude to blacks.

"The Navy became Jimmy's own private hell," Mrs. Essex said. "He couldn't take it any more. He had to get away."

In October, 1970, Essex was absent without leave. But after 28 days, his parents said, they persuaded him to return voluntarily.

He did and asked for a court-



The New York Times  
Mrs. Mark H. Essex, at meeting in Emporia, holds her son's discharge from service in the Navy.

martial. There, superior officers testified to his "outstanding work," his parents said, but Essex pleaded guilty, was fined and discharged after having served 25 months of a four-year enlistment. Family members said that he had come home a different person.

His sister, 22-year-old Mrs. Penny Fox, said, "My brother was a normal guy. But in the Navy, he learned how black people have been harassed in the world.

"After that, if he saw a starving black child on TV, he identified with it. If he saw a black being harassed, he identified with him. His main goal was to change society, to give all people an equal chance."

At one point in the news conference, which was held in the family church, Mrs. Fox said that her brother's actions in

New Orleans were not "extreme."

Later, she said, "I don't agree with the killings. But Jimmy wanted change. And talking hasn't done any good. He was pushed to this. I knew something was going to happen."

Mrs. Essex, who said that she believed her son had not been alone on the roof of the Downtown Howard Johnson's Motor Lodge in New Orleans, asserted that her son's action carried a message.

"I his own way," she said, "he was trying to tell whites that American blacks are not going to take it any more."

She said that she had not known her son purchased a high powered rifle here last April. It was found by his body. And she said that there had been no indication of what he intended to do in New Orleans.

"He called us Christmas, and he talked to everyone in the house," she said. "He was the same old Jimmy."

Essex's association with this town was the biggest news here since March 31, 1931, when Knute Rockne, the Notre Dame football coach, was killed in an airplane crash in a pasture not far from here.

In an editorial yesterday, The Emporia Gazette, long operated by the late William Allen White, cited the family's "terribly painful emotional experience." It said that the Essexes were bearing up "like the fine, gracious people they are. Hopefully, the sympathy and solace pouring from friends and neighbors in Emporia will help heal the wound."

Then, late today, KVOE, the local radio station, announced that it would not cover the funeral Saturday because it was a private family affair as distinct from a newsworthy event like the shootings. To send reporters to the funeral, the station said, would be to create news, not cover it.