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Essex Pals Blame Navy Bullies

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SAN DIEGO — Two years in the Navy, where he experienced racial bullying and harassment such as he had never known back home in Emporia, Kan., produced in Mark Jimmy

Essex a deep and festering hatred of white society.

That, at least, is the recollection of several blacks who were his friends at the Imperial Beach naval air station here.

They believe resentment over his treatment by white enlisted men and petty officers became such an obsession it finally drove him to seemingly senseless murder and death at the age of 23 on the roof of a New Orleans motor hotel two weeks ago.

During the last six or eight months of his enlistment, before the Navy court-martialed him and dropped him from the service as a chronic trouble-maker in February, 1971, Essex became "an entirely different person, sullen and bitter," acquaintances said.

ONE BLACK who was his boatmate quoted Essex as saying:

"There is no place in this white man's Navy for a self-respecting black man."

"He was a kid from Kansas and it was his first time away from home when he came to the Navy boot camp here," said Fred Allen, a 23-year-old black who was a bunk mate and buddy of Essex after their assignment to the Imperial Beach station 13 miles south of San Diego. Both had gone through basic training at the naval training station here early in 1969.

Allen became an airman, Essex a dental technician and the only black on

the 11-man staff of the Imperial Beach Navy dental clinic.

"Essex came into the Navy expecting to be treated in the same decent way he had always been treated back in Emporia, and he found it wasn't like that at all," said Allen, who left the Navy a year after Essex. "It wasn't long before he wanted out of the Navy, as most of us blacks did."

At the Imperial Beach station, close by the Mexican border, officials acknowledged that "something went wrong" with the slight, good-looking youth.

He received an involuntary special discharge, not an honorable one, after a court-martial on Jan. 15 for 28 days of unauthorized absence. During that time, according to Allen, he went back home to Emporia to "talk things over with friends" about his treatment in the Navy.

LAST WEEK the Navy produced two white persons who described a personality change that came over Essex soon after he became 21 on Aug. 12, 1970. About this time he was recommended for promotion to third-class petty officer.

During a Navy-run press conference, Mrs. Alma Montana, a civilian recep-

tionist at the dental clinic, said that from a happy-go-lucky youth "who was laughing most of the time" he became withdrawn and she found it difficult to talk with him.

But neither she nor Paul Valdez, 21, dentalman third class, who worked with Essex at the clinic for about three months, mentioned anything about Navy racism or the youth's resentment of the Navy's treatment of him. He was friendly, they said, with both blacks and whites.

FURTHER inquiry, independent of Navy public information officials, produced a somewhat different version of the change that came over Jimmy Essex. This different version was offered by both blacks and whites.

C. B. Wilson is a black third class petty officer assigned to helicopter engine overhaul at the Imperial Beach station. He works off-duty as a bartender in the enlisted men's club, the Jolly Rotor. Mark Essex spent many of his evenings at the club, at a table with other blacks.

"I used to spend quite a bit of time with Essex, I liked him," Wilson said. "He was intelligent, jolly and good fun

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to be around. We often went to the movies together."

Wilson said that when he became acquainted with Essex, soon after he returned from a six-month Vietnam tour of duty in January, 1969, the young man did not appear to have any real "hang-ups" about whites or anything else.

"**BUT THE** racism, the discrimination and the hassling finally got to him and before he left here after his court-martial, he was a really torn-up young guy," he added.

Told that Mrs. Montano and others

had speculated that Essex, after the summer of 1970 and before he had gone on unauthorized leave, had fallen in with some bad companions on the base, Wilson said:

"That's a damned lie, the usual Navy cop-out. All the young blacks around the base were being hassled, and Essex felt that he was getting a particularly rough deal and that he wasn't going to take it lying down."

Both Wilson and Allen said Essex had seemed to be a favorite target of gibes by white sailors in the enlisted men's club, some of whom regarded him as a "cocky nigger" because he was always

laughing and telling jokes.

"**THEY WOULD** sit, a group of Negroes at one table, Filipinos or Chicanos at another and the whites by themselves," Wilson said. "Then before you knew it, some white boy would call a black a 'spade' and like a firecracker it would touch off an explosion."

"But what really burned Essex up was the riding he got from petty officers and other officers," Wilson said. "They would write him up for the smallest infraction and usually he would get a captain's mast while the white got off scot free. We all had that sort of experience."