

Mother Insists Sniper Wasn't Ill

Continued from Page 1

motor lodge and picked off six persons as if they were rabbits in a field.

But he was.

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

IT WAS DIFFICULT because urban unrest, racial disorder and the killing are topics totally foreign to Midwestern towns such as Emporia, which has a population of 23,327, only 569 of them blacks.

The mother of Mark J. Essex says society was responsible for the death



—AP WIREPHOTO.

Mrs. Nellie Essex

of her son, identified by police as the New Orleans sniper.

The shooting in which her son was killed and six other persons died by sniper fire is a "clear signal for white America to get off the seat of its pants and do something," Mrs. Mark Essex told newsmen yesterday.

"If this terrible thing will awaken white America to the injustices that blacks suffer, then some good will come of it," she said.

Mrs. Essex and her husband have scheduled a news conference today.

ESSEX' BODY is to be returned here from New Orleans today. Funeral services are scheduled for Saturday morning, with the Rev. W.A. Chambers, a close family friend, officiating.

"We must cease provoking people to the point that they must seek revenge to get even with society," Essex' fa-

ther said yesterday as he and his wife spoke with newsmen for the first time since their son was identified as the slain sniper.

"I blame society," he said.

Mrs. Essex said her son did not hate white men. "He hated what the white man stood for, the white system. He knew whites, he went to school with whites, he dated a white girl and then he told me that he didn't know why blacks dated white girls because they're no different than black girls and they're not as beautiful."

She described her son as a good boy, a gentle man, always helpful.

Her son's troubles started in the Navy, which, she said, "brainwashed" him.

SHE SAID her son returned home last October to "think about the injustices a black man receives in the service." She said he was harassed with petty annoyances and "racist mistreatment."

She said the youth and his friends were stopped repeatedly by Navy police, forced to show identification and even searched at times. He took a part-time job in a Navy club and was forced to ask permission to do part of his job that white sailors did freely, she said.

"It was just these little things on top of one another that made Jimmy do what he did," Mrs. Essex said.

"It was prejudice. I don't know if the Navy is doing it deliberately, but they are doing it. I have talked to other young men, white men, and they confirm what Jimmy told me. Young blacks are not going to accept the white racist society."

MRS. ESSEX said she talked with her son by telephone Christmas day and that he spoke of returning to Emporia for a visit sometime this month.

"HE WAS the same old Jimmy. He was getting along well in school and enjoyed the South. He said he thought he had found himself in the South and planned to stay there. Jimmy wanted to be a man. This was his philosophy — he wanted to be a man."

Asked to comment on reports that some young blacks are now consider-

ing her son a martyr, she said:

"Jimmy wasn't doing this to be a martyr. He didn't want to be a hero. He just wanted to change things."

"When Jimmy went into the Navy he really saw what life, the world, was all about," said a sister, Penny Fox of Waterloo, Iowa.

"He saw that white people control the world, and blacks were being oppressed by the white man. He didn't like society the way it is. He wanted to change things. The Navy to Jimmy was his own private hell," Mrs. Fox said.

THE FAMILY'S comments were made in a CBS interview and later to an Associated Press newsmen.

In San Diego, two former Navy co-workers described Essex as an easygoing person, a good worker and a person who got along well with others, including whites.

"He seemed to like it here," said Alma Montano, 37, a civilian receptionist at the Imperial Beach Naval Air Station where Essex was once stationed as a dental assistant prior to his discharge.

"His friends were black, but he got along with whites very well," Mrs. Montano said.

"He was a happy type until he turned 21, and then he got in with a bad group. He was a happy-go-lucky fellow who used to sing around the dental department, but after he became 21 he didn't talk quite so much."

ANOTHER OF ESSEX'S former co-workers, Paul Valdez, a Navy dental assistant from Rocky Ford, Colo., said, "I thought he was an easygoing guy. He'd sing to himself and be real friendly to everyone.

"When I first got here, he took time out and helped me. He showed me how to work with the doctors. He used to get along with the doctors."

A Navy spokesman said Essex was found guilty by a special Navy court-martial of taking 28 days of unauthorized leave and of several unspecified minor offenses.

The spokesman said Essex had been fined and sentenced to the brig, but Navy brig records do not show he ever spent any time in confinement prior to his release from the Navy on a general discharge.