

JAN 10 1973

Sniper-Type Weapon Is Easy to Purchase

By LANNY THOMAS

The type of high-powered rifle used by the sniper in the Downtown Howard Johnson Motor Lodge is ideal for ambush and can be easily purchased from almost any gun shop, a police ballistics expert says.

Alex Vega, the New Orleans Police Department's firearms identification officer, said the weapon is deadly because "it has a hell of an impact."

He said the rifle could be purchased for about \$98.

The weapon, a Ruger .44-magnum carbine, was shown to reporters for the first time yesterday during Police Supt. Clarence B. Giarrusso's news conference. It has been shattered into four pieces by police gunfire.

Vega said the rifle was found under the hand of Mark Essex, the man identified by police as the sniper. He also said there were several hundred shell cases on the roof of the building.

Vega said the type of weapon used by Essex would likely be used by deer hunters in Louisiana. "It's a short-range, powerful weapon," he said.

While the weapon is accurate at 200 to 250 yards, it is still deadly up to 1,000 yards, according to Vega. The weapon was equipped with a standard sight—no telescopic sight.

The weapon, he said, will hold five

cartridges in its magazine and another one in the chamber. He said the rifle could be reloaded very quickly.

Police said they are still checking to find where the weapon was bought.

It already has been identified through ballistics tests as the weapon used in the killing Sunday of Deputy Police Supt. Louis Sirgo and hotel guest Dr. Robert V. Steagall Jr. and in the New Year's Eve sniper killing of Police Cadet Alfred Harrel and wounding of Patrolman Edwin S. Hosif Jr.

Additional ballistics tests are being made to determine if the same weapon was used in the killing and wounding of other persons in the Howard Johnson's shooting.

Community Calm Urged

By PATSY SIMS

Black and white community leaders today urged the public not to jump to any hasty conclusions that the Downtown Howard Johnson Motor Lodge sniper incident has racial overtones until the facts have been analyzed.

Dr. Guy Gibson, director of the local branch of the NAACP and one of several blacks who have received threats on their lives since the incident, said: "The general black community was as shocked by this senseless act as the whites . . . we do not believe this incident should be construed as indicative of the mood of the black community."

He cautioned administrators and other individuals not to make false and premature statements concerning a na-

tional conspiracy. Such statements only cause mass hysteria "as has been experienced by our office, with threats upon our lives," he said.

GIBSON SAID HIS office had received bomb threats and that he, as well as Harvey Britton, NAACP field representative, had received threats on their lives.

"We feel these threats are just as deplorable as any act that the sniper performed," Gibson said.

Dr. J. D. Grey, pastor emeritus of First Baptist Church, also agreed that the sniper incident did not reflect the racial mood in New Orleans and expressed appreciation of the efforts by police and firemen, noting "there were black officers as well as white among the police."

He attributed the incident to "some determined radicals, maybe motivated — not only motivated, but planned and executed — by some national group."

"It may have involved some local citizens, but only a very minute number," he said. "I cannot feel it represents masses of our black citizens. I think they are as appalled as the rest of the community. I hope this will not cause us to condemn blacks wholesale just because this man was black."

ROBERT MANARD, president of the Chamber of Commerce of the New Orleans Area, however, said he is not qualified at this point to say whether the Howard Johnson incident is part of a nationwide conspiracy or if it was the work of one or two snipers.

"I don't think it indicates that any revolution is at hand," he said. "I don't think you could stir up a revolution in our community or in our country at this time. If that were the case, this would have been the ideal time for a

so-called revolution to break out. I think the fact that both the black and white community kept their cool is an indication it is an isolated case."

Clarence Barney, director of the Urban League, urged the community "to exercise restraint and to rededicate itself to the goals of justice, brotherhood and community unity"

"We think it's premature for anyone without all the evidence to associate this outrageous action with any racial group or organization at this time," he said.

"Black people are as outraged and hurt over the actions that paralyzed the city

as the whites.

"WE STRONGLY condemn this senseless violence which took the lives of our police officers as well as private citizens. And we feel this tragedy is neither black nor white. It is human."

Dr. Norman Francis, president of Xavier University, also emphasized the importance of not passing judgement until all the facts are in.

"I would hope we would not be moved by rumors or make such (racial) implications until the law enforcement officers and the mayor sift through the facts . . . at that time, then the community can weigh them."

"I WOULD THINK that the greatest tragedy would be to draw a racial implication when none may exist and then cause further damage and harm to individuals in the community, black or white," he said.

Mrs. Fred Landis, who is on the state board of the League of Women Voters and president of the Greater New Orleans Federation of Churches, expressed concern that people of the community "think violence is inevitable and despair of trying to improve our

world.

"I guess I am bothered too that people might think this one person is typical of all black people when obviously he is not. Certainly I can't explain his psychological motivations, but he is no more typical of all blacks than a very bigoted person is of all white people."

CRIMINAL COURT Judge Israel Augustine Jr., said he doubts the incident will hurt black-white relations in New Orleans.

"One: The sniper isn't a local resident; and two; no group has been able to be tied in with him as far as we know. And because of his background, I think he was just someone who was mentally deranged . . . the young man was just sick."

Augustine said he sees no evidence of a conspiracy. "I pray to God there is none," he added.

State Rep. Johnny Jackson, in Baton Rouge during the shootings, described the incident as "unfortunate" and said, "I think there is a lot of information that is missing that the general public needs to know. I think the incident and numerous other incidents, starting back with the assassination of Kennedy, are reflective of the kind of society we live in."

Sounded Warning

JAN 10 1973

Status of Negro Worried Sirgo

Dep. Police Supt. Louis Sirgo once told members of his profession that if they didn't begin coping with "the problems of our fellow men ... then the problems, like a contagious malady, will destroy us."

One of the biggest problems, he said, was "the greatest sin of American society, and that is the status of the American Negro."

The 48-year-old veteran lawman was one of three police officers killed by a sniper at the Howard Johnson Hotel here Sunday.

A speech he once delivered before the Blue Key National Honor Fraternity, gives a good idea of what kind of man he was:

"I say that our attitude towards the problems of our fellow men goes beyond being impersonal. I say that we might want to call it neglect. We have allowed our central city areas to deteriorate into slum housing for members of our national community, who are at the bottom of our socio-economic totem pole.

"...No, we can no longer hide our problems in prison cages, or federally subsidized low rent housing developments, or in ghetto housing. I suggest that we begin to think about doing something about the responsibilities of the office which we hold, and if we don't, then the problem, like a contagious malady, will destroy us.

"How successful would a Black Panthers breakfast program be in the ...exclusive suburbs of New Orleans. What I am trying to say is that if there were no 'Desires,' (a black housing project) there would be no Panthers.

"We must face up to our responsibility, and in facing up to this responsibility, we must also be prepared to deal with the greatest sin of American society, and that is the status of the American Negro.

"Poverty and criminality are definitely related...the problems of society with which the police must deal are your problems...The problems of the city and its police force are the problems of all of us."