



A Terrible Thunder: The Story of the New Orleans Sniper

By Peter Hernon

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

On December 31, 1972, revelers gathering in downtown New Orleans for the New Year's celebration found themselves running for cover as a sniper opened fire. The shooter targeted police officers, killing several over the following week before a final showdown on the roof of a hotel, where he was killed. Journalist Hernon's 1978 title unfurls the story of sniper Mark James Essex, a U.S. Navy veteran who declared war on white society. A solid title for true-crime collections.

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Review

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A Terrible Thunder is more than just another fashionable journalistic rehashing of a crime. In its depiction of Essex's abrupt transfiguration it raises questions about the accumulated effect of petty but persistent injustices and about the individual's capacity to endure aggrievement. (Mel Watkins, New York Times)

From the Author

It's been nearly 30 years since the book, A Terrible Thunder, was published. I went on to write other books, to get married and have children, to join the Chicago Tribune as an editor. But I've never forgotten Mark Essex and what he did in New Orleans-why he chose to kill people and die on that rooftop with bullets raining down from a Marine Corps helicopter.

The story washed over me again as I watched those horrific images of desperate African-Americans in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina struck, after I saw film clips of police officers beating an elderly black teacher in the French Quarter and still other officers fatally shooting a black in the city's Uptown District.

After Mark Essex was killed, many blacks in New Orleans thought the other sniper, the one who allegedly got away, was going to come back and continue the battle. That never happened. But it's painfully clear to me that a tragic lesson has been forgotten, an opportunity missed.

Back in 1973, there weren't all that many honest discussions of what happened to Mark Essex, why he did what he did. Maybe as a country-as a people-we weren't prepared for that much pain and honesty. Maybe we are now-after Katrina. With two daughters in high school, I fervently hope so.

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