

President Reagan Shot During Assassination Attempt

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NBC's John Chancellor and Roger Mudd report on the details of the chaotic shooting scene outside the Washington Hilton hotel, where an assassination attempt was made on President Ronald Reagan. This is 19 minute excerpt from the live broadcast of the report.

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CHICAGO MANUAL OF STYLE

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Transcript

President Reagan Shot During Assassination Attempt

JOHN CHANCELLOR, Anchor:

Two-thirty this afternoon in Washington, D.C., President Reagan and staff members escorted by the Secret Service leave the Washington Hilton Hotel. A fusillade of shots fired at close range. The President is hit, then thrown into his car by an agent. His press secretary wounded in the head. A Secret Service man and a policeman wounded. A gunman captured.

Announcer: This is NBC Nightly News, with John Chancellor in New York and Chief Washington correspondent Roger Mudd.

CHANCELLOR: Good evening. Here's the latest. The president is still in surgery, his condition is described as good, and the doctors are optimistic. He was able to walk into the hospital under his own power, even though a single assassin's bullet had entered his left side and penetrated his left lung. The presidential press secretary, James Brady, was shot in the head and is in extremely critical condition. The outlook is not good. Chris Wallace reports from the George Washington University Hospital.

CHRIS WALLACE: The latest official word came at 6:06 PM Eastern Time from Presidential spokesman

Lynn Nossinger. He said the President's condition is good and that he will be out of surgery, quote, shortly and that he has not undergone open-heart surgery. The White House has provided almost no medical information this afternoon, but a radio reporter who sneaked into the hospital at around 3 o'clock talked with a staff doctor. He reported that according to this doctor the bullet entered Mr. Reagan's left side and missed his heart by one inch; that 30 units of blood were rushed to the President's operating suite, and that tubes were inserted into the President's chest to drain off blood. The doctor told the radio reporter the situation appears, quote, "serious but not insurmountable." As for press secretary Jim Brady, Nassinger called reports that he had died, quote, absolutely untrue; but he said that Brady has sustained a serious head wound. The radio reporter quoted an intern as telling him, quote, "The prognosis on Brady is not good; few people survive such a wound." There is one hopeful note about the President. Nassinger said that as Mr. Reagan was being wheeled into surgery he turned to his wife--he was fully conscious --turned to his wife, Mrs. Reagan, and said, Honey, I forgot to duck. And that as he entered the operating room he said to the doctors there, "Please tell me you're Republicans." Chris Wallace, NBC News, at the George Washington Medical Center.

CHANCELLOR: The attempt on Mr. Reagan's life today took place in the street in front of the hotel when the cameras were rolling, so there's a visual record of what happened. Here's Roger Mudd:

ROGER MUDD, reporting:

Very few presidential movements take place beyond the range of the press and the cameras, these days, so this afternoon, when the President emerged from the Washington Hilton Hotel, virtually the entire event was recorded by television cameras. The pictures are chilling. It begins with the deputy chief of staff, Mike Beaver, and a few agents coming out of the hotel smiling, ready to go. And then, suddenly, there is a gun fired. The assailant is accosted by half a dozen lawmen. Mike Beaver ducks. And down on the pavement is the Presidential press secretary, James Brady, the Secret Service agent, Terrence McCarthy, and metropolitan policeman John Delahanty. Suddenly, there is Rick Nahern, the chief advance man, calling for a handkerchief --frantic, out of breath, cotton-mouthed, not really knowing where the next gunshot will come from. This is the Secret Service agent --collar being loosened. Cameras recording every moment of it. Sirens filling the air around the hotel. This is James Brady, hit in the head --one shot. Six shots fired in two seconds. Four of them found their mark. The assailant, by this time, is under a mountain of Secret Servicemen, who have pulled their burp guns, grease guns out. Nervous, looking at the sky, looking at the walls of surrounding buildings. There goes the assailant, coat up over his head, arms shackled. They try one police car, can't get into it, move on to a second one. Finally, he is hustled out of the area --slammed into the back of the police car and driven off for interrogation.

Now, in slow motion, we'll show you virtually the same sequence. Mike Deaver, with the bald head, suddenly flinches. The Secret Service agent takes a hit in the stomach. The metropolitan policeman --hat flies off. James Brady down just in front of him. Arms go out to the right. And down they go on the assailant. By this time, President Reagan has been hustled into the car. In a series of still pictures, you will see in even slower motion what has happened. The President and James Brady now waving at the crowd, in the middle of your picture. Suddenly, there's the gunshot. The President is looking this way. He hears the noise. The Secret Service agent in the middle is about to go down. There is the President beginning to

flinch a bit. Then the Secret Service agent begins to fall. The President is now in a half crouch, being shoved into the Presidential limousine by his agents. The agent is about to fall, he's down now, the policeman is down, and there, on the right side of your picture, you can see a .22 caliber handgun in the left hand of the assailant. There's the only picture we have so far of John Hinckley, Jr., aged 22, a native of Highland Park, Texas, whose family now lives in Evergreen, Colorado. And there's Hinckley, coat over his head, being hustled off by the police, by the agents, or interrogation. It is a chilling set of photographs, John

.
CHANCELLOR: One of the interesting things, Roger, to me is that the Secret Service man standing behind the President actually did two things very, very swiftly. He put his arm around the President's waist and shoved him be--from behind, doubling him up and making the President a kind of pro---projectile to get him into that armored limousine as fast as he could. Roger, I wonder if I could put a question to you about the --the first reports we had that the President was not hit. That was being reported for some time this afternoon. Do you know how that all worked, that --that --did the President not realize that he was hit?

MUDD: It appeared from looking at the videotape again and again that the President simply had a startled look on his, face. There was no external evidence that he'd been hit. In any situation like this, as you remarked, the Secret Service's first duty is to get him out of there. They got him out of there, and we did not know for the first 30 minutes where they took him. We assumed, and the White House was telling us, that he was all right. He looked all right when he left. He looked nervous and startled, but there was no evidence that he was not moving on his own power. So for about 30 --now, 35 minutes we were being told that he was all right. And we told --were told that he was going to the hospital to pay his condolences and respects to -and to say hello to Jim Brady. And lo and behold, he was hit, and there as a patient.

CHANCELLOR: Well, there are so many rumors that fill up Washington when there is something like this that goes on. I suppose, Roger that we've had fewer of those today than we have had in some occasions in the past. Today's attempt on the president's life was the first in Washington in 100 years. President Garfield was killed by a man with a pistol in 1881. And all of this as we've seen took place just outside on of the capitol's best known hotels, The Washington Hilton, where the president had gone to make a speech. Judy Woodruff was in the press party, which accompanied Mr. Reagan and she was there when the shots were fired.

JUDY WOODRUFF, reporting: The President had gone to the Washington Hilton Hotel to make the first speech of his presidency to a major labor group, the AFL/CIO's Building and Construction Trades Department. He talked for about 20 minutes, making a pitch for his economic renewal package.

PRES. RONALD REAGAN: And if we do nothing else in this administration, we're going to convince this city that the power, the money, and the responsibility in this country begins and ends with the people, and not with some cinder-block building in Washington, D.C.

WOODRUFF: Afterwards, Mr. Reagan shook some hands and headed to the same door he had come in about half an hour earlier. I was standing about 15 or 20 feet away on the other side of his limousine when the President came out the door. It was just a matter of seconds before we heard shots fired and almost

instantly he was pushed into the car and driven away. The other three people who had been shot were left lying on the sidewalk, and the gunman was surrounded by police and security agents. A cameraman for ABC Television who was standing next to the gunman said he had noticed the man earlier.

MAN: He was about 10 feet from the president; he was in the press line. He penetrated the press line.

MAN #2: Anyone could have been in the press line, credentials or not. The police did not come over and ask us if we were press. There were people who were not press standing alongside of us and behind us. And I thought that was a little unusual because in the past they had come over and cleared the area of everybody except press.

WOODRUFF: After the incident was over, the police were checking for evidence on the scene. But the question many are asking now is how did the gunman gain access to an area that was supposed to be reserved for the press and only the press --an area where he was just a dozen feet from the President and could aim easily in his direction? Judy Woodruff, NBC News, the White House.

CHANCELLOR: And as we've heard this evening, the man who fired the shots today has been identified by the Secret Service as John Warnock Hinckley, of Evergreen, Colorado --22 years old. More on that aspect of the story from Roger Mudd.

MUDD: The Secret Service says the suspected gunman grew up in Highland Park, Texas, a suburb of Dallas, and that his family then moved to Evergreen, Colorado, which is near Denver. Carl Stern reports on what else the authorities know about him.

CARL STERN, reporting: The suspect Hinckley should be brought to this courthouse, probably some time this evening, to be brought before a U.S. Magistrate. The question will be whether there is enough evidence to hold Hinckley. So far, it's apparent he does not have a criminal record in F.B.I. files, or a record at the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office, in Colorado. Nor does he seem to have a military record. Authorities indicated only that there is no evidence so far of a conspiracy, no information on a possible motive, and no information where he got the gun --apparently, a .38 caliber revolver. It's believed that Hinckley's father is president and board chairman of an energy company in Denver, where Hinckley lived as a child. He reportedly attended Highland Park High School in Dallas, where he graduated in 1973. His age is varyingly described as 22, 25, or 26. The family later moved back to Denver. Evergreen is about 10 miles away. Hinckley may have taken some courses at Yale. He is described as coming from a conservative Republican family, with which he occasionally had political differences. That's all we know at this point. More may come out at the preliminary hearing. Carl Stern, NBC News, at the Federal District Courthouse.

CHANCELIOR: One reporter who had his pocket tape recorder running during the shooting this afternoon said the gunman got off six shots in about two seconds and apparently four of them hit targets -- the President and his press secretary, of course, but also a Secret Service agent and a local police officer. Ken Bode reports on them.

KEN BODE, reporting: The other two men injured in today's shooting were Washington police officer Thomas K. Delahanty, here in the foreground, and Secret Service officer Timothy J. McCarthy, in the background center of the picture. McCarthy was wounded in the chest. He's 31 years old, and reportedly still in surgery. Thomas Delahanty is 45, a 17-year veteran of the Washington police force and a canine

officer --a dog handler. On today's presidential detail, Delahanty's dog was either a bomb dog or assigned to crowd control. D.C. police officials refused to say which. They do say, however, that his duty was more or less routine for police officers in the nation's capital. Delahanty was shot in the neck, and after he was shot, according to D.C. Mayor Marion Berry, officer Delahanty tackled the assailant. He is now in very serious condition. Ken Bode, NBC News, at the George Washington University Hospital.

MUDD: Just a week after the power struggle between Vice President Bush and Secretary of State Haig over control of the administration's crisis management team, it was Secretary of State Haig, not Mr. Bush, who declared this afternoon, "As of now, I am in control, pending the return of the Vice President." Mr. Bush, of course, was in Texas. The Secretary took control today because the Secretary of State is, next to the Vice President, the senior official of the government. That is, the Department of State was the first executive office established by George Washington.

CHANCELLOR: And the Vice President did arrive today in Washington, having flown back from Texas, where he addressed the Southwestern Cattle Raisers convention in Fort Worth, talking about the administration's policies. And there you see the plane at Andrews Air Force Base, bringing the Vice President and his party straight back to Washington D.C. Late this afternoon, the arrived. And the plane went into the hangar. The --there is a security aspect to this. The --no press coverage is encouraged of the movements of the Vice President on a day when there has been an assassination attempt on the life of the president. And there are perfectly understandable reasons for that. So we were kept at some distance. Mr. Bush has made no statement and is presumably now in the White House, or just on his way there, to join the other officials who were waiting -- who spent the late afternoon in the situation room at the White House. There were expressions of shock about this shooting, the shooting of the president, from all over the country and all over the world, this afternoon--messages from the Queen of England, the president of France, the Israeli prime minister --from Canada, from the U.N. the Academy awards were canceled in Hollywood. Mr. Reagan was to have--was scheduled to talk to the audience there by videotape. They have postponed those ceremonies until tomorrow. In New York, the stock markets closed early, and even before the trading was stopped prices had begun to drop. And the White House was rearranging itself to deal with a president in the hospital. Here is John Palmer.

JOHN PALMER, reporting: The White House has gone out of its way to get assurance that the government is operating in an orderly manner. Vice President Bush was in the air flying to Austin, Texas for a speaking engagement when he was telephoned by his press secretary and told that shots had been fired at the president. A few minutes later after the vice president had landed in Austin, he was informed that the president was wounded and immediately ordered his plane, a Boeing 707 to return to Washington. Since then, the vice president has been in constant touch with the White House from his aircraft. An hour after the shooting, presidential assistant David Gergen told reporters [that] members of the cabinet had gathered at the White House. When asked if Vice President Bush was taking over as acting president, Gergen replied "No." Twenty-five minutes later, Secretary of State Haig told reporters he was in control at the White House.

SECRETARY OF STATE ALEXANDER HAIG: Constitutionally, gentlemen, you have the president, the vice president, and the secretary of state in that order. And should the president decide he wants to

transfer the helm to the vice president, he will do so. As of now, I am in control here. In the White House. Pending return of the vice president and am in close touch with him. If something came up I will check with him of course.

PALMER: As soon as the vice president arrives here at the White House, he will go directly to the situation room, sitting in for the president as crisis manager. The Justice Department has sent documents to the White House on the question of presidential disability and succession so there will be a legal basis for who is running the government. John Palmer, NBC News, at the White House.

MUDD: The congress, just as the rest of Washington did, almost froze today when the news reached it of the assassination attempt. Democratic Senator Claiborne Pell of Rhode Island said, "John Kennedy's death in 1963 seemed like only a month ago. The general atmosphere," said Pell, "is again one of shock and horror." Tom Petit reports further from Capitol Hill.

TOM PETIT, Reporting: Roger, the news of the shooting spread very quickly. Senators began watching television sets in their cloakrooms. Comments were quick: Shocking, stunning. Frightening. Terrible. The sun had recessed this evening with a prayer for President Reagan. The House already was in recess. Talk about the budget gave way to statements about violence. Debate ended on social security and safety nets, and violence was denounced by Cranston and Jackson. Capitol police tightened security. Talk about violence was no more powerful than by Edward M. Kennedy. "Year after year," he said, "We've seen violence in this country. My brother John, my brother Robert, Martin Luther King, Medgar Evers, George Wallace, Al Lowenstein, Vernon Jordan, the attempted attack on President Ford. With our prayers," he said, "for those who have been wounded today must know our resolution to rid our society of violence, and to commit ourselves to do everything that we possibly can to eliminate hatred." After his speech, after the assassination attempt, Senator Kennedy was given special protection by Capitol Police. Tom Petit, NBC News, at the Capitol.

CHANCELLOR: The uh—when Secretary Haig implied earlier that the Constitution made him the third ranking official in all of this, I don't think he actually meant what he was saying. The fact is that the Constitution calls for, in the case of presidential disability, for the vice president should replace him. If the vice president can't replace him, it calls for the Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill. If the speaker of the house can't fill in for a disabled president, it's the president pro tem of the senate, and in this case, Senator Strom Thurmond. And if none of those can fill the seat of a disabled president, then it does go to the cabinet, and the senior cabinet member is the secretary of state, just to clear that up. In the last century and a half, there has been a dozen incidents involving guns, presidents, and presidential candidates. Presidents Lincoln, Garfield, McKinley, and Kennedy were killed. Robert F. Kennedy, a presidential candidate, was killed. George Wallace was wounded and paralyzed. During Gerald Ford's presidency, a woman fired a shot at Mr. Ford, and missed. And now in the eleventh week of his administration, President Reagan is in good condition after being shot today.