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Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

March 31, 1981

BRIEFING FOR REPORTERS
BY MR. BAKER AND MR. GERGEN

Mr. Baker's Office

12:30 P.M. EST

MR. BAKER: I have a couple matters that I want to cover. We are on the record. First of all, there was some report that the President had not inquired about the health of others who were with him. Last night, and I can't pinpoint the exact time for you, he inquired about the one person that he saw on the ground before the car pulled out, that he thought was a Secret Service agent. And he was given an answer that I cannot -- that I do not have. I mean I don't know what the answer was but he did make the inquiry.

Perhaps more importantly, he was told this morning at 12:16 -- I mean this afternoon at 12:16 by Dr. Ruge about Jim Brady and about the extent and nature of the injuries to the other two people. Dr. Ruge told him that the reason he didn't tell him last night or early this morning was because of the tube that would have prevented --

Q What was that?

MR. BAKER: The tubes in his nose and mouth that would have prevented him from talking about it. He has slept a fair bit since we were there this morning.

Q What was his reaction when he was told?

MR. BAKER: Yes, I'll get back to that. Since we were there this morning. His reaction when told by Dr. Ruge was, I think he said, "Oh, damn. Oh, damn," and his eyes welled up with tears. He then asked, "Did it go into the brain?" And was told that it did. He said, "Oh, dear. What is the prognosis?" He was told that there might be some weakness on the left side. Mrs. Reagan, who was in the room, then told him that last night that many people didn't think that Jim was going to make it at all, and his response to that was, "Oh, dear, we must pray," or something like that.

He then asked about the agent, once again about the agent. He was told that he was fine, recovering. He then was told by Dr. Ruge about the policeman and he said, "That means four bullets hit. Good Lord."

Now, turning to the activities of yesterday, I'd like to suggest that the activities that took place in the hospital, here in the Situation Room, and on the Vice President's plane, reflected a spirit of cooperation and dedication toward one goal, the goal of keeping our government running smoothly during a time of distress.

A point that I think has been made but that I would like to reiterate is that we at all times had full communication between the hospital, the Situation Room here at the White House, where the Cabinet or at least a majority of the Cabinet were, and

MORE

the Bush airplane. Within about the first 30 minutes after arrival at the hospital -- it may have been 45 -- but there were White House phones and communications in place --

Q At the hospital?

MR. BAKER: At the hospital. Excuse me, let me go through all this, Mike, and then you can come back and ask me whatever questions you want.

Q How many minutes?

MR. BAKER: Thirty to 45 minutes, I would think, on the outside. We were using commercial phones for the first 45 minutes.

When news of this first broke here it was probably 2:30 in the afternoon, around that. At that time I conferred twice with Secretary Haig by telephone.

Q You called him?

MR. BAKER: He called me the first time, and I told him that I would keep him advised. You see, our first report here was that the President had not been hit.

Q Where did you get that report?

MR. BAKER: I got that report from Mike Deaver at the hospital.

Q Mike didn't get to the hospital -- he didn't ride with the President, did he? He went in a separate car?

MR. BAKER: No, I don't believe he did. But when he first called me he was of the view that the President had not been hit. He quickly called me back. At that time almost immediately the call came in from Al. We agreed that it was very important how we handled this in terms of foreign perception.

Q This was before Haig knew that he was hit and before you knew?

MR. BAKER: No. This was after I had gotten the second call from the hospital telling me that the President had received a wound. They weren't sure of the extent of it.

Q Who called?

MR. BAKER: That was Mike again. But he had walked into the hospital on his own, under his own power, and fallen, sort of passed out there in the emergency room.

Q He passed out?

MR. BAKER: Well, he collapsed.

Q Collapsed?

MR. BAKER: He was then given transfusions and his condition was restored, stable.

Back to the telephone calls.

Q He collapsed from a standing position?

MR. BAKER: I can't answer that for you. I was just simply told that he collapsed when he got to the emergency room. No one knew that he had actually been hit until he was examined.

Q Why was he taken to the hospital?

MR. BAKER: Because he was complaining of a soreness in his ribcage. It was thought at first, Sam, that he had been injured when the agents pushed him in the car and agent Jerry Carr at first ordered that the limo. proceed to the White House. It's my understanding that he changed that order and directed that they go, after the President complained of -- and I think he may even have complained of a difficulty in breathing -- ordered that they go to George Washington.

Q One point, Jim. His jacket was off when he got out of the car and walked into the hospital. They couldn't see the blood on his shirt?

Q No, it wasn't.

Q Are you sure?

Q Yes.

Q The eyewitness said it was on but that he saw a little bit of blood.

MR. BAKER: I cannot answer that for you.

Q He was holding his left side, some blood.

Q A little bit of blood.

Q Coming down.

Q Okay. All right.

MR. BAKER: I shouldn't really be speculating on this, but I believe -- and I don't know this of my own personal knowledge -- but I'm not sure that they recovered a whole bullet in there. I mean there's a question of whether it was a ricochet or whether it was a fragment of a bullet as opposed to a whole bullet.

Q They said it was mangled.

MR. BAKER: Yes.

Q Is there some theory that it might have hit the car first and then hit him?

MR. BAKER: That is -- there was -- obviously, you can see on the car window right there, the door that was open, you can see where one bullet hit. I suppose it could have hit and gone -- I don't think they have a -- you'd have to go to the Secret Service and to the FBI for that.

When I told Al that the President had in fact been hit he left to come over here. I told him that I would be in touch with him and left to go to the hospital.

Q He volunteered that he'd come here or you asked him to?

MR. BAKER: Yes. (He volunteered.)

But this was done by agreement. I want to make that very plain. This was an agreed upon thing. It wasn't something that was debated or with respect to which there was any disagreement. We wanted to get all the Cabinet, as many of the Cabinet over here as we could.

Q But you made the second call?

MR. BAKER: From the hospital.

Q Oh, from the hospital you called him and said he had been hit?

MR. BAKER: I don't know whether I made the call or whether he made the call but I did say that we would be in touch as soon as I got to the hospital. We talked almost as soon as I got to the hospital and agreed that he, as the senior Cabinet officer present, would serve as the chief contact point between Ed Meese and me at the hospital and the Situation Room and he did so, and this arrangement -- this arrangement existed in numerous conversations after that. I can't tell you how many but we had a number of conversations during the course of the surgery.

Q You agreed. Who proposed the arrangement?

MORE

(Pages previously issued as pages A through M pick up here.)
(Pages will be renumbered as pages 5 through 17 in later complete transcript.)

(In progress.)

MR. BAKER: I think it was probably just mutually understood. I don't recall anybody specifically proposing it. I mean, it was an understanding that we readily arrived at.

Q Where were you when he called you the first time knowing that the President had been hit?

MR. BAKER: Had been hit. That's correct.

Q He knew it as quickly as you did?

MR. BAKER: That's correct.

Q Did he know it before you?

MR. BAKER: No, he didn't. No, he learned it from me. I'm sorry, Judy. I misunderstood your question. He learned it from me.

Q Oh, then he called you to find out --

MR. BAKER: Yes.

Q -- what was going on?

MR. BAKER: What was going on. And he called right after I got the second call.

Q Did you also call Weinberger at that time?

MR. BAKER: No. Others did, though. We put out word to notify the Cabinet to come to the Situation Room. I clearly agreed with Al that he should be the point of contact and he was. He was the senior Cabinet officer present in the Situation Room.

Q "Point of contact". Would you define that phrase further as you understood it yesterday?

MR. BAKER: Well, my understanding of it was he was the senior person, senior Cabinet officer aboard here in the Situation Room with whom those of us at the hospital would coordinate actions. After all, the President was alert and conscious until he actually had anesthesia.

Now, moving to the briefing that the Secretary conducted, and I was not here so I don't speak from personal knowledge on this, but it's my understanding that at some point during the afternoon -- I believe it was right after Larry left the hospital to come back over here -- a question arose about the alert status of American forces and our overall security. Secretary Haig at that point felt that it was important to reassure our allies that there was continuity of government here in the United States.

He did so. Certainly we support his doing so.

Q He felt it was important?

MR. BAKER: That's correct. I think we all believed it was important.

Q You say you support his doing so.

MR. BAKER: Absolutely.

Q You suggest that he made the statement and you support his making of it.

MR. BAKER: That's correct.

Q But he did not consult with you prior to making it?

MR. BAKER: No. That's correct.

Q Speakes took the question to him?

MR. BAKER: But you have to remember, Sam, that we had the press room here and we had a large contingent of press at the hospital to whom we were speaking with respect to immediate developments there, the President's condition and that sort of thing.

Q I think that some people look at the phraseology that he used. Do you have any problem with it?

MR. BAKER: Let me just finish and then I'll get into that. I just want to point out that at all times, I think it's fair to say that officials of the administration were prepared to deal with any contingency. We had the appropriate Cabinet officers in place in the Situation Room. We had instant and direct communication between them and the President and the Vice President's airplane. Had any decision been required we were in a position to take such action. If the President had not been able to make it, we were in a position to immediately take the action which might have been required.

Q You mean the 25th Amendment?

MR. BAKER: To take a decision. Either the 25th Amendment or the national command authority, either one. We were in -- remember now, we're in constant communication not only with the Situation Room but with the Vice President's airplane.

Q When he was going into surgery, was he there beforehand?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

Q Did he say anything about, "I'm going into surgery. Call the Vice President and tell him to take over..."

MR. BAKER: No, it was never -- he said, "Honey...", he said to Nancy, "Honey, I forgot to duck," winked at -- he winked at me as he went in there, and he --

Q But there was no question? He didn't have any feeling of transferring authority?

MR. BAKER: He did not say -- no.

Q Mr. Baker, when that confusion arose, or uncertainty, in the minds of reporters who, after all, are citizens, residents, as I am --

MR. BAKER: Sure.

Q -- was Mr. Haig's remark, "I am in control here."

Q The phraseology.

MR. BAKER: Well, I don't think that there's any dispute over there. He was in control in the Situation Room. And this was by agreement. I mean this was an understanding that we had. As the senior Cabinet officer present it would be normal that he would be the control person in the Situation Room until the Vice President arrived.

Q That's an agreement of the Cabinet?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

Q And the command authority would not have taken effect?

MR. BAKER: Command authority only applies under very -- it's unfortunate that we -- not unfortunate but it's -- that's confusing to people. The command authority only applies in a narrow set of circumstances, range of circumstances. It's classified. It is -- I don't want to discuss it any further. But it's basically as it was outlined.

Q Before we get into all that, do you have one more point or two that you want to make with us?

MR. BAKER: No, that's basically it.

Q That's basically it.

MR. BAKER: Yes, more or less.

Q Okay.

Q If it's classified, did somebody let --

MR. BAKER: Well, I would only say this: We feel here and we took pains at the senior staff meetings this morning to congratulate the Cabinet and the staff for what we think was pretty good teamwork during this thing. It went, under the circumstances, about as smoothly as I think any reasonable person could have expected that it would. There were no hitches. I think even if a presidential decision had been required the proper procedures and processes could have been followed so that it could have been attained.

Q Well, going back to the command authority, which you say is classified, but can it be said that whatever it is, it was established prior to yesterday?

MR. BAKER: That's correct. It was established at the inception of the administration, as it always is.

Q So whatever line of command authority exists under those set of circumstances was not a reaction to any events of the last several days --

MR. BAKER: No.

Q -- or the crisis management flap.

MR. BAKER: No.

Q I want to ask you about the classified. Now that this is out that there is a command authority and what the line is, have you told us a military secret? No? That there is one?

MR. BAKER: I think the fact that there is one is not a secret.

Q What about the order?

MR. BAKER: The order is but we haven't really gone -- we're not going to go into that any more.

Q But you've already told us it goes Vice President to Secretary of Defense.

MR. BAKER: I haven't told you where. We haven't told you everywhere it goes. And it can be changed at any time.

Q Are we right to assume that this is a dire -- this would be implemented in a dire military situation?

MR. BAKER: That's correct.

Q An emergency of real import?

MR. BAKER: That's correct.

Q Every administration sets a new one, is that what you're saying, and they do it at the beginning and it can be -- you can change it today?

MR. BAKER: That's correct. It's the President's decision, though.

Q Even though Mr. Haig, as you pointed out, was the senior Cabinet minister -- officer -- here and took control by agreement with you, Larry said last night that under the command authority Mr. Weinberger would be in line after the Vice President. Is that also part of this classified --

MR. BAKER: That's correct. That was a correct statement. But that applies only in a very narrow, narrow, limited range of circumstances, none of which were even approached in this --

Q Why did, then, why did Weinberger have a big fight with Haig?

MR. BAKER: I can't discuss that with you because I was not over here.

Q You didn't witness it?

MR. BAKER: No. I didn't get back here until about an hour --

Q Hasn't anybody told you about it?

MR. BAKER: -- about an hour or so -- yes, but whatever was told, whatever was said to me.

MR. GERGEN: I was there and there was no big fight between Weinberger and Haig.

Q There was not a big fight?

Q A small fight?

MR. GERGEN: No, there was not.

Q How would you describe it, then?

MR. GERGEN: I think that there were discussions all during the afternoon as to this -- there were discussions both before and after the Secretary's statement about what steps ought to be taken. There was no row. There was no shouting, as some people are alleging. And I think if you -- I received word, I think both the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State are both saying that today.

Q There was a disagreement, there was a difference of opinion of some sort.

MR. GERGEN: I would say that there were discussions during the day. There was no disagreement over who was in command or who was in charge.

Q What about what the Secretary of State had said in that statement?

MR. GERGEN: No, there was -- it's been our view during and after that, those meetings down there, that they did deal with delicate subjects. Some of the matters were matters of national security, and that it's inappropriate to discuss what was actually said or not said, but that I can just assure you there was no row down there.

MR. BAKER: Let me say this. I -- after it became apparent that the operation was successful and that the President was in absolutely no danger and perhaps -- this was perhaps 45 minutes to an hour before the statement over at the hospital because the doctors were unwilling to make any statement until they'd actually completed the operation -- I came back over here in the Situation Room and I can assure you that there did not appear to me to be -- to have been any row.

Q Why did you talk to Weinberger today?

Q Did you talk to Ed Meese about this? Has either one of you? Do you know what his view is?

MR. BAKER: Well, Ed stayed at the hospital longer than I did, so he wasn't here. When I left to come back to the Situation Room Ed left to go meet the Vice President.

Q Why are some State Department people saying that their impression is after talking to people at the White House that there was unhappiness over the way Haig handled this?

MR. BAKER: I don't know. I do not know and we saw that in the -- we saw that, Diane Sawyer's report today. That's one reason I wanted to get all of these facts before you, because I can't speak for the State Department but there's no unhappiness on the part of White House Staff.

Q There was not?

MR. BAKER: There is not. There is not unhappiness.

Q On any facet of how Haig conducted himself last evening?

MR. BAKER: With respect to any of the events that I have outlined for you.

Q Have you carefully --

MR. BAKER: I cannot speak for the Secretary of Defense. I am not carefully omitting anything, no. We think, as I just said before, that all elements of the government pulled together on the same oar at a difficult time and that the performance was good.

Q May I ask you something on a different subject? There appeared to many of us to be a huge time lag between when you were notifying other people in the government, on the Hill, and past presidents, and other people like that, before you were telling the American public, through us. Why did you decide to have that lag and go through that huge notification process before you addressed the public on the President's condition and other --

MR. BAKER: We thought it important to notify former presidents. We thought it important to notify the Hill. But the real reason, Lesley, was because the doctors were appropriately unwilling to come out and make a statement, notwithstanding the fact that they would tell us, "Things are --", "He's doing extremely well. The operation is successful. There will be absolutely no complications." They were, nevertheless, unwilling to go out before the cameras and before the entire press and take the questions that they took, in great degree and for a long period of time, yesterday afternoon, until the operation had actually been completed.

Q But if you were notifying these other people, couldn't you have notified us of the end of the operation?

MR. BAKER: We thought it was important that you hear it from the horse's mouth. We thought it was important that the American people hear it from the horse's mouth and that we think that the briefing that Dr. O'Leary did over there went a long way to calm all the fears that might have existed out there about the President's well-being.

Q I think we're getting to the point, what you would call a discussion someone else might call a little bit of a tiff. Okay?

MR. GERGEN: Yes, I think that could be in the eyes of the beholder.

MR. BAKER: I agree.

Q Well, what was the nature of the discussion?

MR. GERGEN: Well, that's what I defer.

Q So there was a little dispute?

MR. GERGEN: There were discussions and there were different points of view at various times in the day, as one would expect in a group of 10 to 15 people in the room.

Q Right. But was it, without getting into anything that's Top Secret, was it on a modus operandi or was it in terms of how the U.S. would deal --

MR. GERGEN: It was not over who was in charge or who was in command. That's very clear. It was not over who was in charge or who was in command. It was not over that kind of issue. The discussions that took place -- I think that people are arguing or suggesting that there was some sort of argument over who was in charge, and I think that's basically incorrect.

MR. BAKER: I don't think I've even heard that as a

rumor, that there was any argument over --

Q Did that come before or after Haig's appearance in the press room?

MR. GERGEN: There were different points of view both before and after, but I would --

Q On substance?

MR. GERGEN: On some substantive issues. But let me just say this: I think that you have to see it in the context of what I thought was a remarkably harmonious meeting to last for six hours down there. The overall context of that meeting and the view that, if I can only echo what Jim said there, the view of people I talked to, certainly from the White House point of view, after it was over, was that Al Haig did one hell of a job down there and we really thoroughly appreciate what he did.

It's been a great surprise to us, frankly, to have this question arise.

MR. BAKER: And to have it come out of the State Department.

Q Well, they say it's coming from here.

MR. BAKER: I know but all I can tell you is that there is absolutely no dissatisfaction on the part of certainly senior staff over here and they were the only ones, for the most part, involved with the conduct of the Secretary of State yesterday and what he did he did, in terms of being the senior officer present in the Situation Room, he did by agreement.

Q But you've made it plain that he suggested the agreement.

MR. BAKER: I suppose that we could have said no, we don't like that agreement. The fact of the matter is we liked the agreement. It was a good agreement. It was one that we, had he not suggested it, we probably would have.

Q But you didn't because he suggested it first.

MR. BAKER: Well, that just happens to be the fact of the matter, yes.

Q When do you think we'll be able to see the President in front of cameras?

MR. BAKER: But, Sam, it was an appropriate agreement and we promptly agreed to it and were happy with it.

Q When do you think we'll be able to get in and see the President on camera?

MR. BAKER: I can't answer that for you. I would not think it would be for a few days, a number of days.

Q Are you going to show us his operation? Scar?

Q How long before he gets out of there?

MR. BAKER: His scar? (Laughter.) You had a president once that used to do that.

Q He was from Texas.

Q Do you know why he did it? He actually did it on the first picture taking. So we're really --

MR. BAKER: I can't tell you when that'll be yet.

Q Senators Laxalt and Baker both said that they think this president will go out in public again, will not be a prisoner on the White House, will not change his method of mingling with the general public. Is that your view? Is that the view of the staff here?

MR. BAKER: That would be my view today.

Q Meaning -- what do you mean? You might rethink it?

MR. BAKER: Well, obviously there will be other -- we will have, I'm sure, recommendations from the Service and it may be that those could be convincing. We'd just have to take a look at them and see.

Q How soon do you think the --

MR. BAKER: The President, obviously, didn't have on a bullet-proof vest.

Q Has he ever worn one since he's been President?

MR. BAKER: Yes, he -- since he's been President? Not to my knowledge.

Q But during the campaign?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

Q Can you tell us, do you know when?

MR. BAKER: Several times. Usually large rallies where you -- where it's very difficult to see the crowd, see the people that make up the crowd. I remember him, on a number of occasions, putting it on in the airplane.

Q Has the Service ever suggested it since he's been President and he said no?

MR. BAKER: No.

Q There's a report that we know something about, or the authorities know something about, the motive of the suspect. What was the motive of the suspect?

MR. BAKER: You'd have to talk to the Justice Department.

Q Are they going to brief today on this, do you know?

MR. BAKER: I don't know.

Q Has the President been briefed --

MR. BAKER: They're going to be very cautious about what they say in order not to prejudice the case. I know that.

Q How soon do you think you'll be able to get out of the hospital and do some work in the office?

MR. BAKER: I think you'll have to ask the doctors. Did they give you a timeframe on the --

Q They said two or three weeks in the hospital and they didn't know --

Q He's fully able to make decisions today, carry on the duties of the presidency.

MR. BAKER: He made one today. He signed the Dairy Bill. Some people -- some people -- questioned whether the signature was genuine. But I want to tell you, here's the pen he signed it with.

Q Ah, the very pen.

Q The very pen.

MR. BAKER: And it was genuine. And he could make decisions. He's not -- I don't think he's heavily sedated. He's still drowsy because he's been up off and on all night.

Q Are you all going to try to go see him every morning and talk about the day's events?

MR. BAKER: We really haven't gotten into that yet but I assume we will, maybe more than just in the morning.

Q Did you all sit around yesterday at any time and talk about the 25th Amendment, whether --

MR. BAKER: That was discussed here in the Situation Room. It was discussed -- Ed and I talked about it at the hospital. And I think it was the view of all concerned that if the President were in a position to make decisions and if the period -- if we were looking only at the period of time during which he was under anesthesia or recuperating from anesthesia, that there would not be any even preliminary steps taken toward the 25th Amendment, that the best approach as far as the country and the American people were concerned would be business as usual, to the extent that that could happen.

Q Is that why you gathered the Cabinet here?

MR. BAKER: We had the Cabinet here in the event we needed them for the purpose of the 25th Amendment. Absolutely.

Q Right.

MR. BAKER: That, by the way, was George Bush's view too and that's what he announced when he arrived in the Situation Room.

Q Who was that?

MR. BAKER: George Bush. That based on the medical reports we'd received at that time, that there did not appear to be any cause to consider invoking the 25th Amendment. This was the

unanimous view, I believe, of all concerned. I had personally spoken to Al Haig to that effect from the hospital before I left to come back over here.

Q That there was no need to invoke it? This was after the report on the surgery?

MR. BAKER: Well, there was on need because no presidential decision was called for during that period of time.

Q He would have had to decide his own disability, wouldn't he?

MR. BAKER: No. There's another -- if the President cannot decide his own disability and, of course, you cannot when you're under anesthesia, then the Vice President and a majority of the Cabinet make that determination. But there was never any question in the Vice President's mind.

Q Is that why it was important to mention that there was a majority of the Cabinet present in the Situation Room?

MR. BAKER: Yes. Yes. Frankly, we were positioned to take whatever action we needed, whether it was under the 25th Amendment, whether it was under the normal chain of command responsibilities of Cabinet officers, or whether it was under the national command authority, to deal with whatever contingency happened. And there was complete and instant communication between those three places.

Q Was there any effort made or were any assurances sought from the Soviets that they would not seek to take advantage of the situation?

MR. BAKER: I don't want to get into that. You'd have to ask other -- somebody else that.

Q You trailed off. What'd you say?

MR. BAKER: That's not a question for me to answer.

Q Because you don't know or because you --

Q Did you suggest someone else would be better for it?

Q Was there any warning given to them not to make a move?

MR. BAKER: I don't want to get into that.

Q Was the hotline used?

MR. BAKER: You should ask the Secretary of State that.

Q Was the state of U.S. forces, the readiness state, ever changed? Was the state of readiness --

MR. BAKER: I don't want to get into that either, Sam.

Q Tell us about the President's curiosity about the shooting.

MR. BAKER: You can ask the Secretary of Defense that and you can ask the Secretary of State that.

Q The President's curiosity about the shooting?

Q Of the Cabinet government?

MR. BAKER: The Cabinet government, that's right.

Q The President's curiosity about the shooting, himself? It seems he was very interested in who the young man was and --

MR. BAKER: Yes.

Q Did he ask you what the motive was and --

MR. BAKER: I'm told that he did. I was not there when -- he asked who it was and I don't remember specifically what he was told other than that he was an unlikely gunman, that he came from a fairly well-to-do family in Denver, Colorado -- originally Lubbock, Texas.

Q Was it Evergreen or Denver?

MR. BAKER: I'm sorry, Evergreen, Colorado. Recently from Lubbock, Texas. I don't know. What else was he told, Larry?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't know.

Q You don't know what specific questions he asked about it, what the President's questions were?

MR. BAKER: No, I was not there. I was not there when he was carrying on.

Q Do you think he saw the man? Do you think he saw him?

MR. BAKER: I don't know.

Q He only saw one agent fall, saw one agent fall. But he didn't see Brady fall, did he?

MR. BAKER: I don't know. He saw one person on the ground as he left and that's why his inquiry last night -- he assumed it was an agent and he inquired last night at some point about the welfare of that agent. And I believe it was the agent, not Jim, that he --

Q He was aware that the firing was going on when he was being pushed in the limousine?

MR. BAKER: Yes. Yes.

Q By that time he heard the fire?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

MR. SPEAKES: May I prevail on you for a loan of your tape so that we can pick up the first part?

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Q Do you think he'll have to wipe out the border trip, San Diego?

MR. BAKER: I don't know.

Q You know; I wish you would reconsider telling us what this discussion, this discussion between Weinberger and Haig was 'because it simply now will be part of the rumor. I mean we will think of all kinds of things which will be worse, probably, than the fact.

MR. GERGEN: Well, I know the rumor.

Q Can you give a hazy idea?

MR. GERGEN: No, I think we've talked with the principals involved and they really do not believe there was any row.

Q Was it over invoking the 25th Amendment?

MR. GERGEN: Oh, no, no.

Q See, by not telling us we're now going to have to think of all sorts of things.

Q Wasn't it over the suggestion that Haig had opened the bag on this national command authority?

MR. GERGEN: I think it's really better that -- I think the critical thing from our point of view was that there was -- from our perspective and from the perspective of the individuals that there was no row. I can't tell you how other people will characterize any conversation.

Q I wonder why it got out like that.

MR. GERGEN: Well, you never know what other people do.

Q They're known in recent days not to have great -- there's a problem, you see.

MR. GERGEN: That's what we would suggest to you that there is not.

Q A week ago Monday we had a little problem here involving Haig and the White House Staff. If it weren't for that --

MR. BAKER: That's the point I'm trying to get across to you, that the White House Staff is not displeased at all with the Secretary's performance yesterday. We think the entire government functioned well yesterday. We particularly think he functioned well yesterday here as the contact in the Situation Room. Now, just because there was some difference of opinion between Secretary Haig and Secretary Weinberger, we now have a story out there that the White House Staff and Secretary Haig are feuding once again. We are not. We agree on this procedure.

Q Which he suggested?

MR. BAKER: Which he suggested, which, as I told you, we probably would have suggested had he not suggested it. And to which we readily agreed. Readily.

MR. GERGEN: It's the natural order of things, after all, given his senior status.

Q Forgive me if I missed one of the comments. Just because there was a difference of opinion, I think, just because there was a difference of opinion between Secretary Haig and Secretary Weinberger, we now have stories that they have been feuding again.

MR. BAKER: No, that Secretary Haig and the White House Staff is feuding.

Q I beg your pardon.

MR. BAKER: I'm really hopeful that I can lay that one to rest. We are not. This arrangement was agreed to. It was originally his suggestion but if it hadn't been, Sam, I think it would have been ours. It just happened like that. And before I even left this -- left the premises to go to the hospital, I said, absolutely, "I will be in touch with you the minute I get to the hospital," and he was the point of contact during the entire situation.

Q Medical update? Are we going to get another one?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

Q No late word on Brady?

MR. BAKER: Brady's doing a little better.

Q Has he shown any conscious signs?

MR. BAKER: Yes. His pupils are good. They say, "Wiggle your toes." He wiggles his toes. His arm.

Q But he has not spoken?

MR. BAKER: No, but they think he might speak this afternoon.

Q He doesn't speak?

MR. BAKER: He can't speak until they take out the endotrachial tube.

Q Oh, I see. So they really don't know whether he can speak?

MR. BAKER: Haven't you ever had an endotrachial tube? You can't even breath. It does your breathing for you.

Q Are they telling you that they think he's going to be able to function and --

MR. BAKER: Well, they're cautiously optimistic that he'll be able to regain a lot of it. They're certainly now saying, as they were not yesterday afternoon, that he's going to live. A, he's going to live. B, they think that the mental capacity will be there and that there may be some weakness on the left side of the body. Whether that's a total paralysis or just weakness -- mostly it's the arm, they think. But, I mean, it's incredible because they told us when he first came -- when they first brought him in there that people just normally don't recover from this kind of a wound. That was the first thing they said when he walked in. They said, "We hold out very little hope." So maybe some of those prayers are doing some good.

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

March 30, 1981

PRESS BRIEFING BY
LYN NOFZIGER

The Briefing Room

9:37 P.M. EST

MR. NOFZIGER: May I have your attention? My name is Lyn Nofziger.

They are passing out a little hand-out, but I came from the hospital just a few moments ago and I talked to the doctor who operated on Jim Brady and the prognosis is certainly better at this moment than it was earlier this afternoon. The doctor is Dr. Arthur Kobrine. K-o-b-r-i-n-e. Usual spelling on Arthur. He is the Professor of Neurosurgery at the George Washington University Medical School. Jim came out of surgery at about 8:15. His vital signs are stable. His pupillary reflexes -- that's the reflexes of his pupils in his eyes -- are normal. Dr. Kobrine feels that there may be some impairment, but he doesn't know how much at this time nor will he be able to know for quite some time.

Now, there will be, tomorrow morning at 8:30, a complete briefing on the status of the President and Jim and of the Secret Service Agent and I really have nothing further to say at this time. I think it's better for you to wait for the briefing in the morning and really the only reason I'm here is because there have been many questions about Mr. Brady and a lot of bad rumors going around.

Q Lyn, did Kobrine indicate to you what the impairment might be?

MR. NOFZIGER: He's not sure at this time and I, not being a doctor, would much rather wait until we have a doctor here at 8:30 in the morning to get into that.

Q Here in this room?

MR. NOFZIGER: No. It will be in 450 across the way.

Q Well, surgeons who've worked on both cases or all of the injuries --

MR. NOFZIGER: No. My understanding is that Dr. Dennis O'Leary who did the briefing on President Reagan will do the briefing in the morning.

Q Lyn, this statement says something about tubes in the President's mouth. What is the function of those tubes and how many are there?

MR. NOFZIGER: I'm not a doctor. I cannot answer that.

Q Lyn, when did the operation on Jim begin?

MR. NOFZIGER: I asked the doctor that and he couldn't tell me. He said he didn't look at a watch and so -- sometime in mid-afternoon.

Q Where is he now? In intensive care or --

MR. NOFZIGER: Yes.

Q About how long was the operation?

MORE

MR. NOFZIGER: I can't talk of that because I don't know when it began.

Q Then, will there be medical bulletins during the night?

MR. NOFZIGER: No. I don't expect any medical bulletins during the night barring the unforeseen. This operation will remain open and there's no lid on. So, you know you're going to have to play it by ear. We will have people at the hospital and people here in case something happens. I do not expect anything to happen.

Q Lyn, you said the prognosis for Jim was better than it was this afternoon. Why was there that kind of optimism? A result of what they found in the surgery?

MR. NOFZIGER: Because the doctor feels better about him.

Q Did the doctor say the significance of the pupils?

MR. NOFZIGER: It indicates that things are functioning --

Q The brain?

MR. NOFZIGER: The brain scan apparently is functioning, whatever that may mean. Once again, you get into this stuff, and I will not guarantee for the veracity or the authenticity or the accuracy of any of it.

Q Did the doctor use a condition word? Grave, critical, serious?

MR. NOFZIGER: Certainly is critical. And that, really, is all we've got to say at this time. Thank you all.

Q Somebody said something about a pool up at the hospital.

MR. NOFZIGER: Well, there are people pooling up there, but they're not in the hospital.

Q It's not your pool?

MR. NOFZIGER: It's not my pool.

END

9:45 P.M. EST

Q Say it again, please?

MR. NOFZIGER: Yes. As he was going down the hall on the gurney, I guess they call them, to surgery, he winked at Baker. He had earlier told Senator Laxalt, who was there, "Don't worry about me. I'll make it." He had told Mrs. Reagan, "Honey, I forgot to duck."

Q What?

MR. NOFZIGER: "I forgot to duck." And as they were wheeling him into surgery he saw Meese and Baker and Deaver there and he said, "Who's minding the store?" And then when he got into the operating room he looked at the doctors and he said, "Please tell me you're Republicans." (Laughter.)

So --

Q (Inaudible.)

MR. NOFZIGER: That, literally, is all I have and if you will excuse me we will keep you informed as quickly as we know anything.

Q Lyn, are they still in the operation?

MR. NOFZIGER: I don't know. I don't have the vaguest idea. I don't know. I'll check on that. I don't know.

END

5:25 P.M. EST

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary
(Washington, D.C.)

For Immediate Release

March 30, 1981

BRIEFING FOR THE PRESS
BY LYN NOFZIGER

Ross Hall,
George Washington University Hospital,
Washington, D.C.

(5:10 P.M. EST)

MR. NOFZIGER: I have two bits of information here. The first concerns the President. He went into surgery roughly an hour ago. He is still there and will be there for a while longer. However, the doctors have come out and given a preliminary report to Mrs. Reagan and their word is that his condition is good and it is stable.

Beyond that, I have no further comments.

Regarding Jim Brady, the Press Secretary, he is still in surgery. He has a head wound and beyond that I have no further knowledge.

Q What kind of operation are you performing -- or is the doctor performing on the President/

MR. NOFZIGER: I think that we'll just let it go that he is in surgery and it is -- well, I think we'll just let it go at that.

Q Can you confirm it or not that Brady has suffered a serious head wound?

MR. NOFZIGER: I can confirm that Mr. Brady suffered a serious head wound, yes.

Q Where is Vice President Bush?

MR. NOFZIGER: Last I heard, he was on an airplane headed this way.

Q Are you going to arrange a medical briefing for us later today?

MR. NOFZIGER: We will try to arrange one after the President is out of surgery and after we've talked to them. Yes, we will try to do that.

Now, one further thing. We will continue to keep you posted here this afternoon and tonight. Tomorrow we expect to move the briefings back down to the White House and do them in their regular -- in the regular setting there.

Q How about the other men who were shot?

MR. NOFZIGER: I have no information on them.

One at a time.

MORE

Q Was the bullet inside the President? Is that why they went in and was there more than one bullet?

MR. NOFZIGER: There was only one bullet and I just cannot comment on the operation. I haven't had a chance to talk to the doctors.

Q Who is the President's doctor?

MR. NOFZIGER: I do not have a name.

Q (Inaudible.)

MR. NOFZIGER: The only thing that I want to say is that he will be in there for a while yet.

Q Do you know whether or not the lung collapsed because of the wound?

MR. NOFZIGER: I have not heard. As I say, the doctors say his condition is good.

Q Lyn, did you get to see him before the operation began?

MR. NOFZIGER: Did she?

Q Yes.

MR. NOFZIGER: Yes.

Q Is there any thought of transferring the President to any other hospital?

MR. NOFZIGER: We'll just wait and see. You're a little premature.

Q Can you confirm that it's open chest surgery?

MR. NOFZIGER: No, I can't.

Q Lyn, did they give you a specific location on the bullet? How close to the heart did it come?

MR. NOFZIGER: My preliminary reports were that it entered the left chest and clearly it did not -- no, I can't. It did not, obviously -- there is no indication that it nicked the heart or anything like that.

Q (Inaudible.)

MR. NOFZIGER: I can't tell you.

Q Was the President conscious before the surgery or did he lose consciousness?

MR. NOFZIGER: He was conscious as he went into surgery.

Q Did he say anything?

MR. NOFZIGER: Oh, yes. I have some stuff here. I'm glad you reminded me of that because I took some notes. As he was going down the hall into surgery he winked at Baker, James Baker.

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

March 30, 1981

BRIEFING FOR THE PRESS

BY

SECRETARY HAIG

The Briefing Room

4:14 P.M. EST

SECRETARY HAIG: I just wanted to touch upon a few matters associated with today's tragedy. First, as you know, we are in close touch with the Vice President who is returning to Washington. We have in the Situation Room all of the officials of the Cabinet who should be here and ready at this time.

We have informed our friends abroad of the situation, the President's condition as we know it, stable, now undergoing surgery. And there are absolutely no alert measures that are necessary at this time we're contemplating.

Now, if you have some questions, I'll be happy to take them.

Q The Crisis Management, is that going to be put into effect when Bush arrives?

SECRETARY HAIG: The Crisis Management is in effect.

Q Who is making the decisions for the government right now? Who's making the decisions?

SECRETARY HAIG: Constitutionally, gentlemen, you have the President, the Vice President, and the Secretary of State in that order and should the President decided he wants to transfer the helm to the Vice President, he will do so. He has not done that. As of now, I am in control here, in the White House, pending return of the Vice President and in close touch with him. If something came up, I would check with him, of course.

Q What is the extent of the President's injury?

SECRETARY HAIG: Well, as best we know, he's had one round enter his body, in the left side, into the left lung and there is surgery underway to remove the round now. When the President entered surgery, he was conscious. His signs were stable. And the situation is very clear.

Q Did you talk with him by phone before surgery?

SECRETARY HAIG: No, I did not nor was it necessary. I was in close touch with both Mr. Maese and Mr. Baker throughout and have been from --

Q Mr. Secretary, approximately when did you arrive at the White House after following --

SECRETARY HAIG: Very few moments after the incident, very few moments after the incident

Q And do you know what is the condition of Mr. Brady?

SECRETARY HAIG: We understand that -- I just saw on

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television what you saw and it sounds serious.

Q What's the reaction of the Soviets on this?
Any reaction?

SECRETARY HAIG: I don't anticipate any reaction.
I think you've gotten all that you need for the moment. In fact --

Q Will you remain in charge here until the Vice
President returns?

SECRETARY HAIG: We will stay right where we are until
the situation clarifies.

Q How long has the President been in surgery, sir?

Q When is the Vice President expected here?

Q 8:00.

SECRETARY HAIG: Later this afternoon.

Q Do you know when the operation began on the President,
about what time?

Q Will he go to the hospital?

SECRETARY HAIG: Was I here? Yes.

Q What time?

SECRETARY HAIG: What time was the -- I don't know. Just
it was shortly after that announcement that you heard on the --

Q What time will the Vice President be back, sir?

Q Early evening.

SECRETARY HAIG: I'm not going to make it a habit of
saying what I --

Q Will you come back and talk to us soon?

Q Mr. Secretary, any additional measures being taken --
was this a conspiracy or was this a --

SECRETARY HAIG: We have no indications of anything like
that now, and we are not going to say a word on that subject until the
situation clarifies itself.

Q Do you anticipate from what you know of the President's
condition that the Vice President will have to for a period of time
take the role of acting President?

Q That's a fundamentally premature question,

END

(4:22 P.M. EST)

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

March 30, 1981

BRIEFING FOR THE PRESS

The Briefing Room

(3:37 P.M. EST)

MR. GERGEN: Good afternoon. This is to confirm the statements made at George Washington hospital that the President was shot once in the left side, this afternoon, as he left the hotel.

His condition is stable.

A decision is now being made whether or not to operate to remove the bullet. The White House and the Vice President are in communication. And the Vice President is now en route to Washington. He is expected to arrive in the city this afternoon.

Mrs. Reagan is currently with the President at the hospital. For your background, we anticipate that press statements, additional press statements, will be forthcoming from the hospital site.

I'd like to add two notes. We have been informed by Jim Baker that the President walked into the hospital.

I would also like to inform you that in the building as of the moment are the Secretary of State, the Secretary of the Treasury, the Secretary of Defense, and the Attorney General as well as other assistants to the President.

Q What building, the hospital?

MR. GERGEN: No, in this building.

Q Do you have any condition on Brady, on Jim Brady?

MR. GERGEN: I'm sorry, we do not. We would like to get that for you as rapidly as possible.

Q Will the Vice President act as President under these conditions?

MR. GERGEN: No. Because of the delicacy of the situation we wanted to inform you that the Vice President is on his way back to Washington.

I would emphasize once again that the President's condition is stable and that we were informed by Jim Baker that he did walk into the hospital.

Q Could he have been hit by a ricochet? Is there any chance that he was hit by a ricochet?

MR. GERGEN: I'm sorry, we simply don't have enough information that is hard at this moment.

MORE

Q Is the President conscious now? Is the Presider conscious?

MR. GERGEN: I'm sorry, I do not know the information on that so I'm really not able to respond.

Let me say this, let me just emphasize this for your background: the folks at the hospital are obviously closer to this

MORE

situation from a moment-to-moment basis and we are here. We are obviously in very close communication with them and we will try to keep you informed here. But that the primary statement, we expect, will be coming from the hospital because we feel that they are closer to the facts.

Q Who is there, David, at the hospital?

MR. GERGEN: Well, as of the moment, in addition to Mrs. Reagan as I've informed you and others -- Mike Deaver, as you know, and Dave Fisher were with the President at the time. Four people went up together, Ed Meese, Jim Baker, Larry Speakes and Lyn Nofziger went together to the hospital -- oh, I'm not sure of the time. Frankly, the time of these events have run together somewhat.

But we will try to keep you posted here as well as we can. I think you all understand the delicacy of the situation. I simply don't want to report facts that we're uncertain of as of the moment.

This is really to confirm what has been said from the hospital already.

Q David, do you know whether there's any plans to move the President to Bethesda, or Walter Reed, or is he going to stay at George Washington?

MR. GERGEN: I cannot answer either of those questions. We will, as soon as we get additional information, we will obviously try to help you.

I think if you'll be patient, as the situation demands, we will try to get as much information for you as possible.

Q Dave, is the President under any sedation?

MR. GERGEN: I cannot answer that. I really would like -- we basically wanted to let you know where we were as of the moment. We will try to let you have further information as we can. Thank you very much.

Q What time with the Vice President arrive?

MR. GERGEN: Later this afternoon.

END

3:42 P.M. EST

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

March 30, 1981

PRESS BRIEFING BY
VICE PRESIDENT BUSH, LARRY SPEAKES, DAVID GERGEN

Press Briefing Room

8:20 P.M. EST

MR. SPEAKES: The Vice President will be in the Briefing Room shortly. For your information, the Vice President landed at Andrews at 6:30. He came to the Situation Room at 7:00 which he presided over a meeting of some members of the Cabinet. He will make a brief statement and will not take questions, but I will follow and take some questions.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, I have a very brief statement that I'd like to read. I am deeply heartened by Dr. O'Leary's report on the President's condition, that he has emerged from this experience with flying colors and with the most optimistic prospects for a complete recovery. I can reinsure this nation and the watching world that the American government is functioning fully and effectively. We've had full and complete communication throughout the day and the officers of the federal government have been fulfilling their obligations with skill and with care. I know I speak on behalf of the President and his family when I say that we are very grateful to all -- the many people from across this country who've expressed their concern at this act of violence and finally, let me add our profound concern on behalf of two brave law enforcement officers who served to protect the President and then, of course, for a friend of everybody here, dedicated public servant, Jim Brady. We're going to watch their progress with all our prayers and with all our hopes.

Now, I'm going to walk over and speak briefly to Mrs. Reagan who's returned to the residence. Thank you all very much.

Q Larry, who was in the Situation Room?

MR. SPEAKES: Let me go over what I know to be the situation as I saw it here. As I said, the Vice President arrived in the Situation -- at Andrews at 6:30. He came to the Situation Room at 7:00, was present in that meeting and this does not necessarily mean the order, but it's more or less the way they were sitting at the table. The Vice President, of course, Ed Meese, Richard Allen, Secretary Lewis, Attorney General Smith, Secretary Weinberg, Secretary Regan, Admiral Murphy of the Vice President's staff, Jim Baker, the White House Chief of Staff, and Secretary Haig. Also Secretary Block, Secretary Baldrige, Secretary Watt and CIA Director Casey. In addition, there were other staff members present such as Martin Allin, David Gergen, and Max Friedersdorf and Fred Fielding.

The meeting continued for about 30 minutes. At which time the medical press conference from the hospital came on the television and we watched that basically to its conclusion and the Vice President then went to his office, drafted the statement and came here. Mrs. Reagan has returned from the hospital as the Vice President said and he's now going over to visit with her.

As far as tomorrow, we will basically continue with the schedule as the President had planned. There is a plan for a brief meeting of the Cabinet. A plan for a brief meeting with the Congressional Leadership and then a continue with the schedule which includes a meeting and a working luncheon with the Prime Minister of the Netherlands.

MORE

Q -- working luncheon?

MR. SPEAKES: The Vice President.

Q During the meeting in the Situation Room, what subjects were discussed?

MR. SPEAKES: I really don't want to go into that, except to say that the general situation was discussed. The Vice President received the very latest information on the President. Jim Baker and Ed Meese had been at the hospital and they returned some time earlier. So, they were up to the minute.

Q Larry, was the question of Poland discussed?

MR. SPEAKES: I'm just not going into the subject matter --

Q Larry, has the President turned over control or authority to the Vice President?

Q What was the question?

MR. SPEAKES: Has the President turned over control or authority to the Vice President? There has been no cause for that to take place.

Q The President will be under sedation until tomorrow morning. Can't we assume that the Vice President would have to be able to take charge in that case, Larry?

MR. SPEAKES: Well, there is, for your information, an automatic assumption of command authority that requires no steps be taken. It goes first on the Vice President and second on the Secretary of Defense.

Q Why did the Vice President wait six hours to reassure the country that things were under control?

Q Doesn't it go to the Speaker?

MR. SPEAKES: Question about --

Q Larry, please answer this. How come it goes to the Secretary of Defense?

MR. SPEAKES: Let me get started here so you can understand it. There is a succession. That goes from the President to the Vice President, to the Speaker, to the President Pro Tem. There is another one called the command authority which is an automatic assumption and that's the only thing that happened at this time.

Q What is the line up in the automatic assumption, then? What is that?

MR. SPEAKES: I just gave it to you. The Vice President and the Secretary of Defense.

Q Larry, what triggers that?

Q Not the Secretary of State? Secretary of Defense?

MR. SPEAKES: It is an automatic assumption.

Q Larry, where will the Vice President have his working headquarters while the President is in the hospital?

MR. SPEAKES: I would assume the Vice President would remain in his office in the West Wing as he operates --

Q Larry, who is the Commander in Chief tonight at this hour?

MR. SPEAKES: Certainly the President is the Commander in Chief. If any actions are required, I'm sure that it will be taken by the appropriate official in the government.

Q Larry, why did the Vice President wait six hours to reassure the country that everything was under control?

MR. SPEAKES: The Vice President came directly back to Washington, as I understand it. There was a 30-minute meeting and then it's been followed by less than an hour after the conclusion of that meeting that the Vice President made the statement. I think we were constantly reassuring the nation through Secretary Haig and through the statement that we could make here at the time. We were all awaiting the outcome of the surgery and we were confident throughout it and the reports, as the Vice President said, have been excellent and that's --

Q Then why reassure us with Haig rather than the Vice President?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes?

Q Larry, then what you just said about the succession of command authority, Haig was completely wrong when he thought he was in command here when Weinberger was in the building?

MR. SPEAKES: The Vice President was in the Situation Room, the President's Chief of Staff and the Counsel of Mr. Meese and Mr. Baker were at the hospital. They were conferring with Secretary Haig. Secretary Haig talked to them and offered to be helpful. He was in charge of the situation in the Situation Room and that's basically it.

Q Larry, when you talk about command authority, are you talking about what specifically? Military command? Specifically what?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes.

Q But can you say that Vice President Bush is now the Acting President of the United States?

MR. SPEAKES: No. There is no move --

Q Larry, what triggers the command authority?

MR. SPEAKES: It's automatic.

Q I mean, upon what conditions?

Q How is Jim Brady?

Q Does Haig still make any foreign policy?

Q How's the condition of Jim Brady, now?

Q Could it be set off by anesthesia, for example?

MR. SPEAKES: It was my understanding from the legal people that it's an automatic situation.

Q Larry, where does Secretary Haig --

MR. SPEAKES: You aren't letting me finish my answers. It's an automatic situation and if there's a need to act, there is a capacity to act here. And I don't think it needs any further explanation.

Q Larry, how is Jim Brady?

MR. SPEAKES: You saw the television reports and that's the latest we've heard.

Q What about foreign policy? Is Haig still handling that?

MR. SPEAKES: The situation is the same as it has been before the incident and after the incident.

Q Larry, may I follow up on my question? What conditions however set off the automatic assumption of authority that you're speaking of?

MR. SPEAKES: I can't address that specifically.

Q Does it have to be a declaration of incapacity?

MR. SPEAKES: No. There does not have to be a declaration.

Q Has it been assumed, is this trigger -- are we in that process now with the Vice President?

MR. SPEAKES: It isn't. If need be, it could be. But there's been no need for that.

Q Could you explain --

Q To respond to a military threat, Larry?

MR. SPEAKES: You're putting words into my mouth and I'm not going to accept it. If there's a need for the Vice President to assume command authority, he will.

Q Larry, -- this interval -- Secretary Haig was here. Secretary Weinberger was in the White House in the Situation Room at that time. Now, under this automatic assumption, goes from the Vice President to the Secretary of Defense. How did it happen that Secretary Haig said he would be charged until --

MR. SPEAKES: Let me make a statement and hopefully I'll cut off this line of questioning. The President's staff was at the hospital. They were talking to the President. Secretary Haig was in the Situation Room and they were talking to Secretary Haig and Secretary Weinberger who were there. We have just come through a very serious situation as far as the President's concern. We have come through with a very optimistic outcome. It think that's the important thing to dwell on. I can assure you that there were no problems with succession and there were not problems with command authority. And, frankly, that's all I'm going to say on it.

Q Larry, could you tell us --

Q Who asked Haig to come down here, Larry? Larry, who asked Haig to come down to brief us?

MR. SPEAKES: I'm just not going to discuss it any more. I think everything is obvious.

Q Did he mispeak himself when he said he was in command of the White House?

MR. SPEAKES: I'm just not going to discuss it any more. I've made a statement. I think you're looking here when you should be looking here.

Q Larry, can you tell us why it took -- the President came out of surgery at 6:20. The briefing at the hospital wasn't until 7:30. Can you tell us why no where in the White House command structure could assure the nation that the President had survived surgery and that he was all right?

MR. SPEAKES: Not having been there, I don't know the situation at the hospital. I know that once the Vice President was here that he moved very expeditiously.

Q What's the crisis management system that's been so talked about. Was that invoked today?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't know in a formal sense, but there was no problem with what was going on --

Q So, what assembled in that room was not his crisis management team? Is was just the Cabinet --

MR. SPEAKES: It's my judgement that it was most of the Cabinet who happened -- who was in town at this time.

Q Larry, on the automatic assumption -- after you get through with the Vice President and Weinberger, then what happens? Does anybody else --

MR. SPEAKES: Sarah, I don't know the specifics on that. I'm sure a legal person can tell you that.

Q Larry, did the Attorney General either provide or was he asked to give an oral opinion during that 30-minute meeting on the formal constitutional succession particularly the incapacitation provision?

MR. SPEAKES: I just don't want to go into the details of the meeting.

Q Haig says the crisis management is in effect and you say not? So, there is a contradiction there.

MR. SPEAKES: No, there's not a contradiction.

Q Larry, how long does -- how long does the Vice President have this -- holds much of this command authority?

Q Until tomorrow morning?

MR. SPEAKES: It is not a thing that is -- it's an assumption.

Q I understand.

MR. SPEAKES: It's not a thing that requires an act. It is just if the need arises -- there is an authority that moves automatically.

Q For how long if the need arises? Tomorrow morning when the President will presumably be free of the effects of --

MR. SPEAKES: We'll just have to cross that bridge when we get to it.

Q Where is the man with the black bag? Is he with the President or is he with the Vice President?

MR. SPEAKES: Well, I can assure that -- I don't want to discuss that. Because, of course, we don't discuss security matters of this type, but I can assure you there were certainly no problems in that direct capacity.

Q Larry, is the Vice President going to spend the night at the White House? Or at his own residence?

MR. SPEAKES: I trust he'll go to his residence.

Q Are they stuffing up security protection on everyone more?

MR. SPEAKES: I won't comment on security.

Q Larry, was there any consideration of invoking the disability provisions of the 25th Amendment?

MR. SPEAKES: There has been no need for it nor any cause for it because the information we're receiving was optimistic almost from the first, so there has been no need for it.

Q --Bush was advised of the --

Q I wonder, if there has been made a check of the background of the assailant of the President to see where that --

MR. SPEAKES: Can I have the question again?

Q This is an act of terrorism against the President of the United States. I wonder if there has been a check of the background of this gentleman to see where that kind --

MR. SPEAKES: I have your question. I think anything, you know, discussing the background of the individual who is in custody should come from the Justice Department.

Q Is there any reason to think anybody else was involved, Larry?

MR. SPEAKES: That kind of information, law enforcement information, should come from the Justice Department.

Q Could you tell us when Bush was advised of the shooting? Where he was and what he did immediately thereafter?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't have the timetable, but the White House staff and the Situation Room were in full contact with the Vice President during the entire period and Mr. Meese and Mr. Baker talked with him in route to Washington while he was airborne.

Q When didn't Meese and Baker become aware that the President had, indeed, been shot? Was that Deaver's call over here?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes. I presume -- yes. They -- I went to the hospital with both of them and with Lyn and --

Q What? About 2:40 roughly?

Q Larry, could you describe what you saw when you got there at the hospital?

MR. SPEAKES: Well, I think you've had -- Lyn and I were side-by-side through that and I think you've had it from Lyn except the note that the President was in the emergency room.

He was transported to the operating room, and that is about the extent of it.

Q Why was he not carried inside, Larry?

MR. SPEAKES: Carried inside of --

Q Why did he walk into the hospital? Wasn't that rather dangerous when he was shot?

MR. SPEAKES: I think he was --

Q Was he being offered the stretcher?

MR. SPEAKES: Well, I was not there, so I really do not want to go into it.

Q Larry, has anyone spoken to the President since the operation or is he able to talk?

MR. SPEAKES: Mrs. Reagan has visited with him. I don't know whether she has spoken with him.

Q Larry, was there a decision made to delay for maybe ten or fifteen minutes the announcement that the President had been shot to give time to inform either Mrs. Reagan or the Vice President? There seems to be a time gap there between the time that you people heard that he had been shot and the time that the rest of the world heard about it.

MR. SPEAKES: Well, I think that we moved as quickly as we could with accurate information.

Q But did you say, "Well, let's first tell the Vice President and then we will make the announcement"?

MR. SPEAKES: I am not privileged to know what was going on because I was in one place and things were going in another place. I don't know of any purpose of delaying for notification. Let me clear up -- to be absolutely certain that you understand this command of authority. Early in the afternoon Haig was informally helping to coordinate activities in the Situation Room through regular communications with the Baker, Meese, and the Vice President. The command authority is simply an agreement whereby if the President is temporarily unavailable, then the Vice President has command authority. It is not a constitutional delegation and no formal declaration is required.

Q Was this operative under the Carter and before that administrations or is this something new?

MR. SPEAKES: I do not know.

Q Where did this exist?

MR. GERGEN: This is not an agreement.

Q Well, when did it originate?

MR. SPEAKES: We will get the legals.

Q How long do you expect the President to be unavailable?
A week or --

MORE

Q Is that what happens? The Vice President decides that he needs command authority and he takes it?

MR. SPEAKES: As I say, we will get the legal end of it for you.

MR. GERGEN: It is clearly not statutory.

Q If it is not statutory then how did it get to be in effect?

Q Shh. Let him finish.

MR. GERGEN: There are arrangements which I think that are-- conferring with the attorneys on this matter, I think that the -- frankly we have not been spending the whole afternoon researching the law and the Constitution.

Q Well, you should have been.

MR. GERGEN: Well, our concerns were with the President's health and we thought that the arrangements were working rather smoothly in here, frankly, and I think that there will come a time that we can give you more information on this. It is my understanding, in conferring with the President's counsel, that this command authority is nonstatutory. There is an arrangement whereby in the event that the President is not available, say under sedation as he has been this afternoon, that the command authority resides with the Vice President.

But I think the thing to be -- aside from the fact that all of us take heart from the President's progress and prognosis -- I think the thing that I would raise and press upon you is the fact that this administration pulled together and there was a very smooth operation. Frankly, it was fairly informal.

Q We are a nation of laws, are we not?

MR. GERGEN: That is correct. But I wouldn't -- I cannot describe for you because I am not exactly sure how these arrangements work. The more important thing was that people gathered here spontaneously. They came because of the situation that we were in. And the Vice President was in contact and the Chief of Staff and Mr. Meese and others were in complete contact and we, frankly, did not spend a great deal of time sorting through the statutory book and that sort of thing. Fred Fielding, the lawyer, was there constantly and the Attorney General was there. But as to describing these arrangements in great detail --

Q The Justice Department was supposed to have sent things over. Why didn't they --

MR. GERGEN: The Justice Department was here. I don't think that we are equipped tonight to describe this for you. We really didn't come out here to talk about the law and the Constitution, frankly, and I think that that is a subject --

Q Well, sir, if it is there, you ought to be able to find it in a few seconds.

MR. GERGEN: This is a subject that we can address in greater detail at an appropriate time, if you don't mind. We are really out here to let the Vice President make a statement.

Q Would you just give us an idea of what "command" encompasses? What is command?

MR. GERGEN: Well, I think that you have asked that question as to whether it had military aspects in it, and I think that you got an answer on that.

Q Could you tell us who gave Haig the authority to come and talk to the administration?

MR. GERGEN: Frankly, we were all very appreciative that he was here.

Q Was it Meese and Baker?

MR. GERGEN: He was here before Jim and I went over. He was here in the building.

Q Did they ask him to come and show that there was someone in charge?

MR. GERGEN: No, he came here. I am not sure what the information flow was, but frankly, a lot of people came here spontaneously and some may have been called. But frankly most people showed up spontaneously.

Q Did Haig talk to Bush on the plane?

MR. GERGEN: I do not know the answer to that.

Q What precautions are being taken that Haig is not going to try a coup d'tat?

MR. GERGEN: I think that we have exhausted --

Q Will there be further briefings?

Q Are there any plans yet for the recuperation? Anything said about --

MR. SPEAKES: WE are just not that far along. The house-keeping situation -- I think, if it suits you, we will remain open through the night. We will staff here. I would anticipate a regular briefing at some time during the day tomorrow as soon as we see how we are cleared to do it. Hopefully we can do it around noon. Lyn has made an announcement, I understand, about an 8:30 briefing --

Q 8:30?

Q 8:30 in Room 450. Will that be cancelled?

MR. SPEAKES: I don't know. Was that a medical briefing?

MR. GERGEN: Yes, he said that he would bring doctors over. We are going to work on that tonight and we will try to get an advisory out tonight on that.

Q Larry, will be photo coverage tomorrow on the Vice President's schedule?

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MR. SPEAKES: I don't know. We'll put the schedule out --

Q Will there be another briefing tonight?

MR. SPEAKES: We will be available tonight but I don't anticipate the need for another formal briefing.

Q What will Mrs. Reagan do, Larry?

END

8:45 P.M.

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
(Washington, D.C.)

For Immediate Release

March 30, 1981

BRIEFING FOR THE PRESS
BY LYNN NOFZIGER,
DR. O'LEARY,
AND SHEILA PATTON

Ross Hall,
George Washington University Hospital,
Washington, D.C.

(7:30 P.M. EST)

MR. NOFZIGER: Ladies and gentlemen, can I have your attention. Everybody happy? The President is out of surgery and is in good condition and I have brought with me here this evening Dr. Dennis O'Leary, who is the Dean for Clinical Affairs at George Washington University Hospital. Have I got that?

DR. O'LEARY: Yes, sir.

MR. NOFZIGER: Dr. O'Leary will brief you on the President's operation and on his condition as well as that of the Secret Service agent.

Following that, Sheila Patton, who is Mrs. Reagan's press secretary, will have a word to say about Mrs. Reagan. So now let me introduce to you Dr. Dennis O'Leary. Doctor?

DR. O'LEARY: Thank you. Should I use the podium?

Mr. Nofziger has told you the President is in the recovery room. He is in stable condition and he is awake. He was at no time in any serious danger. He was alert and awake with stable vital signs up until the time he underwent anesthesia. He was in the operating room for approximately two hours. Part of that time was spent ascertaining that he did not have any blood in his abdominal cavity. Indeed, he did not. It was a single bullet wound that entered slightly underneath the left armpit. It traversed about three inches of the chest wall and then ricocheted off the seventh rib into the left lower lobe of the lung and moved about three inches into the lung substance itself.

The operative incision was about six inches in width, a relatively simple procedure. The bullet was removed and then the incision was closed. As I say, he is stable and in good condition.

Q What is the prognosis for his recovery?

DR. O'LEARY: The prognosis is excellent.

Q You are saying that he will no doubt recover? How long a time, Doctor?

DR. O'LEARY: That is always difficult to say. The President, however, is an excellent physical specimen and we do not anticipate any problems. It is always hard to be precise as to how long he'll be hospitalized, but he is clear of head and should be able to make decisions by tomorrow, certainly.

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Q Did the bullet fragment when it hit the lung?

DR. O'LEARY: The bullet was distorted and we believe that it probably was distorted by virtue of impacting against the seventh rib as it redirected its path into the lung tissue.

Q Any permanent damage done to the heart?

DR. O'LEARY: We do not believe there is any permanent injury. The heart area was explored. The heart was not involved at all. There were no major bleeding points in the lung and there was no involvement of the aorta, the major vessel running through the chest.

Q Has the lung been reinflated?

DR. O'LEARY: The lung has been reinflated. He has a couple of chest tubes in.

Q What about the Secret Service agent?

DR. O'LEARY: Okay. Mr. McCarthy had a single bullet wound also. It entered the posterior right chest and passed through the lung tissue causing virtually no damage at all except for the passage tract. It passed through the diaphragm into the dome of the liver and passed through the liver into the lateral side of the chest where it lodged against the end of the eleventh rib. Mr. McCarthy had -- did have blood in his abdominal cavity. The same test that was performed on the President was also performed on him and it was positive. The abdominal cavity was carefully explored and the only damage was the bullet through the liver itself and a drain was placed in this area and he is doing extremely well, has been in the intensive care unit now for about 45 minutes.

Q James Brady?

DR. O'LEARY: Okay. Mr. Brady is still in surgery. His condition is critical. We don't have any further information at this time.

Q Dr. O'Leary, how long would you anticipate that the President would remain hospitalized?

DR. O'LEARY: That is difficult to say. It might be as long as two weeks but that is just a guesstimate at this point in time.

Q Will the President remain here?

DR. O'LEARY: A couple questions. That's not for me to answer. The question was the amount of blood. The President required transfusion of approximately five units of blood before surgery but none during the course of surgery. Mr. McCarthy required no transfusions at all.

Q Can you tell us about the D.C. policeman?

DR. O'LEARY: The D.C. Policeman was taken to the Washington Hospital Center. We have no firsthand information on him.

Q Can you tell us about the Brady surgery?

MORE

DR. O'LEARY: Very doubtful. The President is physiologically very helpful. The caliber of the bullet is going to be very hard to tell in the President because it was a really mangled bullet.

Q Is there a possibility of any other complications?

DR. O'LEARY: It's really doubtful. Again, I would emphasize that he is physiologically very young and in good shape.

Q Can you tell us where the bullet entered, at what angle, from the front, from the rear? Can you get into that?

DR. O'LEARY: Well, one would assume that it probably seemed to come from a little bit top down, entering approximately here (gesturing), traversed down.

Q Could you move over here?

DR. O'LEARY: Yes. Traversed down approximately three inches, striking the top of the seventh rib, laterally, and then going about three inches into the tissue of the lung itself.

Q It deflected downward further from the seventh rib?

DR. O'LEARY: No. It's like coming down, hitting the rib and then deflecting in to take a new path.

Q Where was it actually found?

DR. O'LEARY: It was in the parenchyma of the -- in the tissue of the lung itself, contained within the lung itself.

Q You said that the President was conscious for much of the time. What, if anything, did he say?

DR. O'LEARY: Well, the surgeons said that his last remark before he underwent anesthesia was he wanted to make sure that all of them were Republicans.

Q Were they?

DR. O'LEARY: They said that today everyone is a Republican.

Q Doctor, how narrowly did the President escape mortal injury?

DR. O'LEARY: That's a hard question to answer. As I stated, he was never in any serious danger. The bullet was really not very close to any vital structure.

Q How far is not so close? How far from the heart?

DR. O'LEARY: Probably several inches.

Q Is that because it struck the rib?

DR. O'LEARY: If it had not struck the rib it might not have even entered the lung cavity. It could have passed right through the chest wall if it had not struck the rib.

MORE

DR. O'LEARY: He was shot in the forehead.

Q Which side?

DR. O'LEARY: I'm not certain, sir. The bullet did pass through his brain and came out the other side. He obviously has significant brain injury and he is in critical condition but I'm sorry, we have no further information at this time.

Q Dr. O'Leary, who performed the operation on the President?

DR. O'LEARY: The operation on the President was performed by Dr. Ben Aaron, who's on our fulltime faculty here as a cardiovascular thoracic surgeon.

Q How do you spell that?

DR. O'LEARY: The last name is spelled capital A, small A, r-o-n. First name, Benjamin.

Q His title?

DR. O'LEARY: I'm trying to think. I think he's an associate professor of surgery.

Q Who else?

DR. O'LEARY: Okay. The other surgeon was Dr. Joseph Giordano, G-i-o-r-d-a-n-o, who is head of our trauma team and was in the emergency room almost simultaneously with the arrival of the President.

Q Why did the operation take so long?

DR. O'LEARY: The length of the operation really had a lot to do with the testing to make sure that there was no bleeding into the abdominal cavity. That took about 45 minutes.

Q What was that test?

DR. O'LEARY: It's called a peritoneal lavage.

Q How do you spell that?

DR. O'LEARY: P-e-r-i-t-o-n-e-a-l. Lavage, L-a-v-a-g-e.

Q Why was that important?

DR. O'LEARY: Okay. That test is important -- is very simple, a small incision is made beneath the umbilicus and several liters of fluid are placed into the abdomen and then the fluid is brought back outside and looked at to determine whether there's any blood in it. That fluid can move anywhere throughout the whole abdominal cavity and if any organ has been damaged and there's any bleeding, one will find blood in the fluid that comes out. That test was negative and the President, as I said, positive in Mr. McCarthy.

Q Doctor, in view of the President's age, is there any danger that the lung might collapse again?

MORE

Q Doctor, would you say that, clinically speaking, the President is fully able to discharge the duties of his office as of now?

DR. O'LEARY: I would say probably not now. One has to let the effects of the anesthesia wear off but I think all of us feel that by tomorrow that he would be fully capable of doing that.

Q If there were a basic decision he had to make tomorrow, a decision of state, would he be able to do it?

DR. O'LEARY: We believe that he would be able to do it.

Q Who's operating on Jim Brady?

DR. O'LEARY: Okay. Dr. Arthur Koblitz, K-o-b-r-i-t-z. He is operating on Mr. Brady. He is an associate professor of neurosurgery.

Q Is it possible to give us any prognosis on James Brady?

DR. O'LEARY: It's really not possible right now. As I said, he's in critical condition. Anything I would say would be highly speculative.

Q Is Brady being kept alive artificially?

MORE

DR. O'LEARY:

Not at the present time although in the operating room, remember that you've got respirators and monitors and, you know, what have you.

Q Is he on a respirator now?

DR. O' LEARY: Well, almost anyone undergoing brain surgery would be on a respirator.

Q Dr. O'Leary, aside from the obvious gunshot wound, did the President suffer any other injuries? Were there any abrasions, contusions surrounding the --

DR. O' LEARY: Well, not as we're able to ascertain. It's possible that we missed a small contusion here or there. But he was gone over quite carefully.

Q Why was the Preident -- forth to this hospital and when did the hospital receive word from the ambulance that he would be on the way?

DR. O'LEARY: I can't tell you for certain but I believe we were probably the closest hospital which would have been the prudent thing to do. I received information at about twenty of three that he was in the emergency room and I think he probably got there around 2:30.

Q Who got there first, Brady or the President?

DR. O'LEARY: Okay, I'm not sure who got there precisely first. They all came very fast.

Q -- how about Brady? (Inaudible.)

DR. O'LEARY: Well, we maintain a stock of blood. Please remember the Washington -- we do not run our own blood bank. The Red Cross has a regional center that is very near by and we have all the blood we need within minutes.

Q Did you have enough immediately or --

DR. O' LEARY: Yes.

Q (Inaudible.)

DR. O'LEARY: I can't answer that question. I don't know.

Q Doctor, do you know if the -- President required -- (inaudible) -- of the lung?

DR. O'LEARY: Okay, it appears as if the major reason for bleeding within the chest was as a consequence of the hole made when the bullet actually entered the lung substance itself. -- the only bleeding signs that really could be determined and although he bled down about five units of blood, it was never very brisk. It was kind of steady bleeding. It was very easy to transfuse him and keep up with his blood loss.

Q What is five units of blood? How do you --

DR. O'LEARY: Well, each, let's see, how can I make that simple, it's about two and a half quarts, total of two and a half quarts.

Q -- lungs collapsed?

DR. O 'LEARY: What?

Question about collapsed over here.

Q Is his lung still collapsed?

DR. O'LEARY: No, he has a chest tube. And all one has to do is, usually through a chest tube, is to get it in and get the air out of the space between the lung and the chest wall and the lung expands.

He had a chest tube placed in the chest in the emergency room within minutes after he was in the emergency room.

Q So, he's again breathing normally?

DR. O'LEARY: Yes.

Q Did Mrs. Reagan suffer any emotional medical trauma --

DR. O'LEARY: No, I think we'll let someone else deal with that question.

Q Have you got any -- (inaudible) -- the President not being moved from this hospital for the next few days?

DR. O'LEARY: I would say for the next few days it would probably be reasonable not to move him, but I would expect that he will do well and that will be a judgment of someone else at that time.

Q (Inaudible.)

DR. O'LEARY: We have no reason for believing that significant post-operative problems will develop.

Q -- the President might have to undergo as a result of this operation?

DR. O'LEARY: I would really doubt it. He had a simple procedure. There was very little necessity to cut a lot of tissue and he -- we have every expectation that he'll have a normal post-operative course.

Q (Inaudible.)

DR. O'LEARY: I don't know the answer to that question.

Q -- the first few moments when he came into your emergency room and he walked in, what was the first thing that was done?

DR. O'LEARY: Okay, I was not personally there. But my understanding is that he got out of the car and stood up and walked in on his own. As I say, he was alert and awake all the time.

Q (Inaudible.)

DR. O'LEARY: No.

Q (Inaudible.)

DR. O'LEARY: Not to the best of our knowledge.

Q -- carrying the President at that time?

DR. O'LEARY: Well, I think, as soon as he appeared, he may not have wanted to be on a stretcher, but that is our usual procedure for someone who's had a gunshot wound.

Q How far inside the chest did the bullet go --

DR. O'LEARY: About three inches. Okay, I'll give you maybe four inches. We'll give you an inch for the thickness of the chest wall.

Q Dr. O'Leary, can you explain why it was that there was no immediate announcement -- (inaudible) --

DR. O'LEARY: I really can't answer that question. I wish I could.

Q -- know that he'd been injured?

DR. O'LEARY: Yes, I think he knew that he had been shot.

Q (Inaudible.)

DR. O'LEARY: No, I think, again, I'm giving this to you secondhand. I gather he seemed a little bit light headed but he was cracking jokes and in very good spirits even at that time.

Q -- immediately in the emergency room -- (inaudible) -- any incisions, you have to put --

DR. O'LEARY: No, usually, the smallest incision is made between the ribs and the tube is placed in and then attached to suction.

Q And that was the first emergency procedure?

DR. O'LEARY: Yes, I'd say that was the emergency procedure.

Q Would that be taking the blood off that was coming from the wound in the lung?

DR. O'LEARY: There is probably two basic purposes. One is if there has been any deflation of the lung, the major purpose is to reexpand the lung, remove the air and the other is to provide drainage for any blood in the lung space.

Q -- will Mr. Brady suffer any permanent brain damage?

DR. O'LEARY: I'd have to say that probably is likely but I really can't give you any more information since he is still in surgery.

Q Doctor, how long elapsed between when the President -- (inaudible) -- to the hospital, went into surgery, and can you account for that time?

DR. O'LEARY: I would say from the time he hit the hospital to the time he went into surgery probably was no more than about 40 minutes. There were a variety of things being done. He had to have blood tests performed to find out how much blood he had lost. We had to check his blood gases to determine how much oxygen was getting into his circulation. I think the thing that probably took

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... so much time before surgery was probably for the most part the x-rays. He had to have both a chest x-ray and an abdominal x-ray.

Q Was there surgery on the lung without actually removing the bullet? There was an earlier report that that might be the case.

DR. O'LEARY: I saw those reports but at the time those reports were out the surgeons had not even entered the chest as yet.

Q (Inaudible.)

DR. O'LEARY: I think every effort would be made to remove the bullet but if it took a lot of additional extensive surgery that might have caused a different decision.

Q Can you give us a timetable? He arrived at 2:30 and we were told the surgery began about 4:00.

DR. O'LEARY: No, no. He got to the operating room maybe 3:15, 3:20. Okay? It takes -- he has to get into the operating room, on the table, get under anesthesia, in order for surgery to start. So surgery started roughly between 3:30 and quarter of four and it lasted until about 5:30.

Q How about the surgical procedure on Mr. Brady?

DR. O'LEARY: Very simply, he is having a craniotomy which simply means an exploration of the inside of the head. Craniotomy, C-r-a-n-i-o-t-o-m-y.

Q Doctor, do you find it extraordinary that a 70-year old man could be shot in the lung and then brought to the hospital and walk in under his own power?

DR. O'LEARY: I think it speaks well for the physiologic health of the President. We do have elderly people, much more elderly than the President is, who do undergo chest surgery but he certainly sailed through it.

Q Do you find that medically extraordinary?

DR. O'LEARY: Maybe not medically extraordinary but just short of that. Okay?

Q Doctor, you said the bullet was mangled. Is there any possibility that the bullet fragments might remain inside the President's body?

DR. O'LEARY: That is a finite possibility but the bullet did, although mangled, seem to be intact. You're never sure that you have ever tiny little fragment out.

Q Has the President been told about Mr. Brady's condition?

DR. O'LEARY: I don't think that he is alert enough, really, to assimilate that information. I don't know really what we would tell him at this juncture, since we're not sure yet what the story is.

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Q That's a pretty rugged place to cut, isn't it?

DR. O'LEARY: About an average muscle.

Q You've told us what the surgeons did to the President. What are they doing or trying to do for James Brady? Exactly what happened there?

DR. O'LEARY: I can't, again -- anything I'm telling you is rather speculative. Normally they would have to remove the tissue that seemed irreparably damaged. Any time you're operating inside the head, for very obvious reasons, you try and salvage as much tissue as you think has a remote chance of recovering. This is not a good injury. It causes a lot of damage.

Q Is there a finite possibility that with the damage sustained by the President, would there ever be in the near future a need to go back and reopen?

DR. O'LEARY: I said that was extremely remote.

Q Doctor, would you say that Mr. Brady's fighting for his life?

DR. O'LEARY: I think any time a patient is in critical condition, in a sense he's fighting for his life.

Q Did the President get any first aid in the car on the way over?

DR. O'LEARY: I really can't answer that question. I don't know.

Q Doctor, what type of medication is the President on or will he be on while he's in the hospital? Is he on any IVs or anything else?

DR. O'LEARY: He's on intravenous solution right now. As I said, he required no blood intraoperatively and, as with any patient, the medications, really, depend upon what the patient's needs are. I would expect the President is probably not going to need very many medications except perhaps some modest painkillers for a day or so.

Q (Inaudible.)

DR. O'LEARY: It depends. In a totally normal routine I would guess probably a couple of months after his hospitalization so maybe 2-1/2 to three months might be a good guess, but it is a guess.

Q Would you recommend that he leave Washington for, say, his ranch?

DR. O'LEARY: Well, that's really up to him and his staff. I'm sure that he will be adequately protected.

Q What was Mr. Brady's brain waves? Were they flat? What can you tell us?

DR. O'LEARY: I don't know the answer to that question.

Q As a doctor would you advise him to take off

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Q Can you talk a little bit about what the body goes through, how much of a shock to the body it is to go through an operation like this? (Inaudible.)

DR. O'LEARY: Well, yes, I'd say anytime anyone undergoes major surgery, a thoracotomy is major surgery. It is not extraordinary surgery but it's major surgery. It's got to be a stress for any one of us. It'd be a stress for me. But the critical element is the physiological health of the person and your ability to maintain their vital signs and their blood volume satisfactorily.

The President's vital signs were absolutely rock stable through this whole thing.

Q (Inaudible.)

DR. O'LEARY: Well, that is a decision really made by the ambulances but I think that we do have several trauma centers in the District of Columbia and to the extent that one center does not get many very seriously injured patients, all of our ability to care for the patients is increased.

Obviously, in the heat of a situation people do the best they can. If you track back where that decision was made it is sometimes hard to find out who really made that decision.

Q (Inaudible) -- who made the incision and how large was it?

DR. O'LEARY: The incision is about six months -- excuse me -- six inches long and it extends basically from about here (gesturing) into the posterior part underneath the armpit.

Q Could you show that again?

DR. O'LEARY: Okay. (Gesturing). About from here to here. Can you see it? Here to here. Just underneath the nipple.

Q Just underneath the nipple?

Q (Inaudible.) -- about the pain?

DR. O'LEARY: Again, hard to tell. He's a healthy guy and I'm sure this is a painful surgery but he withstood it very, very well.

Q Is this a fairly common procedure that hospitals in urban areas have to do frequently, gunshot wound to the chest?

DR. O'LEARY: Yes. No question.

Q Will he have pain for days or weeks or months?

DR. O'LEARY: His surgeons believe that he will probably be in moderate pain. That will probably not be for more than a day or two.

Q Well, you have to cut through muscle, don't you?

DR. O'LEARY: Yes, you have to cut through chest wall muscle.

further time beyond the time that he's hospitalized?

DR. O'LEARY: Well, taking off time depends on what you're talking about.

Q I'm saying away from the pressures of the Presidency.

DR. O'LEARY: That's really not my judgment to make for him. I think that I would urge him to limit his physical activity within reason. There is no reason to believe that he has any impairment of his ability to make decisions or what have you. Making decisions is stressful business but I think he's going to be fully up to it.

Q Doctor, earlier there was a report that the bullet missed the heart by an inch. You said it missed by several inches. Several inches is a relatively large amount of distance within the chest. Was the heart much closer than that? Do you have an actual measurement rather than an estimate of how close it came?

DR. O'LEARY: I wasn't specifically there in the operating room. I think I know where those reports came because, remember, when we're in an operating room the only xray that we can really get that's going to be valid is one that is taken from front to back. Okay? And when you held that up it looked as if the bullet was close to the heart. But you are missing that third dimension and that third dimension it turned out that the bullet was significantly removed from the heart by several inches, as I said. It was not close.

Q Could you tell us at what stage Mr. Brady is in surgery now and about when he will be completed?

DR. O'LEARY: Well, having seen some of these patients, it may go on for hours.

Q (Inaudible.)

DR. O'LEARY: I honestly don't know that. I suspect so but I don't know.

Q There were reports that the President wasn't aware of what happened to him. When he first was shot, that he didn't know what happened.

DR. O'LEARY: Sometimes there's some shock as a consequence of being hit. You hear people described afterwards, "My goodness, I've been shot." So it's hard to know at what point that realization hit him. I would think by the time he hit our emergency room that he knew that he had been shot.

Q Were you notified that the President was coming?

DR. O'LEARY: Yes. Yes.

Q Who took the call?

DR. O'LEARY: Okay. I don't know where the call came in from but we were notified in advance and he was here almost immediately after that and was literally met by the trauma team at the door.

Q There were reports that the bullet was a low caliber bullet. Can you speculate as to what would have happened with a higher caliber bullet?

DR. O'LEARY: I really can't speculate on that. I'm not a ballistics expert.

Q (Inaudible.)

DR. O'LEARY: Yes, he was.

Q Are you seeking outside medical care?

DR. O'LEARY: Not at this time.

Q Were there no complications in surgery of any kind?

DR. O'LEARY: No. He had a simple, penetrating bullet wound into his left lung and that was basically it.

MORE

actually performing surgery, probably four or five, between Mr. McCarthy and the President, neuro-surgical teams working separately.

MR. NOFZIGER: Is that it ladies and gentlemen?

Q Thank you.

Q Thank you, Doctor.

Q Could you spell the Doctor's name, please?

MR. NOFZIGER: O'Leary. O-'-L-e-a-r-y. Dennis with two Ns and one S.

Q Middle initial?

MR. NOFZIGER: Got a middle initial?

DR. O'LEARY: S.

MR. NOFZIGER: S as in Sam.

Q Specialty?

DR. O'LEARY: Internal medicine and hematology.

MR. NOFZIGER: Let me thank you -- thank Dr. O'Leary first of all, and then take upon the White House the blame for you not getting detailed information earlier. We had specifically asked the team at the hospital to let the White House handle this and to wait until the surgery was over before there was any briefing. So if any of you have any complaints about lack of information, don't blame them, blame me -- which you've done in the past anyway.

Q If the operation was completed at 5:30, was there any reason why you waited so long to brief?

MR. NOFZIGER: No, I n don't think the operation was completed at 5:30. I think that by the time that it had been closed up -- he had been closed up and was out of there, it was considerably later than that. I think it was near 6:30, Sam.

Q Can the Doctor verify that?

DR. O'LEARY: The basic surgery was finished at 5:30. He was then closed, which is basically routine for a procedure of this type, and I believe that they finished closing very carefully at about 6:20.

Q (Inaudible.)

MR. NOFZIGER: Yes, he was

Q Would you say that while the President was incapacitated here during the operation that the Vice President was in charge? There was a report from the White House, I believe that General Haig said that he was in charge? (Laughter.)

MR. NOFZIGER: I don't think I want to comment on that. The President will be fully capable of making decisions tomorrow, according to the doctors. In the meantime, the business of government is going on normally and we expect it to continue to. And Vice President Bush is here and the rest of the government is functioning normally, and we expect that it will continue to do so.

Q When you say Bush is here -- where?

MR. NOFZIGER: He should be at the White House.

Q Lyn, n one more question. Since you're taking the blame, can you explain why --

MR. NOFZIGER: I would blame you, but --

Q (Inaudible.)

MR. NOFZIGER: I'm sorry. Because the initial reports to us were that he had not been hit and by the time I got to the hospital, we knew that he had been. But you're going to ask me why -- so many bad rumors run around these things. Some of them come from us. Some of them come from you all.

Q Who arrived first -- the President or Brady?

MR. NOFZIGER: I cannot tell you that. I just don't know.

Q The initial report came from whom?

MR. NOFZIGER: Probably the wire services. That was the first I heard.

Q Have you heard anything about the motive of this thing?

MR. NOFZIGER: No, I have not. You'll have to talk to the Secret Service and to the police about that. That's outside of my area right now.

Q Will you establish now a schedule for regular medical bulletins?

MR. NOFZIGER: My plan is to meet with the doctors here shortly after 7:00 tomorrow morning. We will then have a briefing in the White House Press Room as soon thereafter as possible. We will notify you. My suspicion is it will probably be maybe as early as 8:30 and we will bring Dr. O'Leary or one of the doctors with us at that time.

Q (Inaudible.)

MR. NOFZIGER: Yes, this was to keep you out of the rain.

Q Have you considered invoking the 25th Amendment that the President be disabled and rejected?

MR. NOFZIGER: No. We have not considered it. We have not considered invoking it, no.

Q Did the Secret Service agent save the President's life by stepping in front?

MR. NOFZIGER: I do not know. I was not there.

Q What is Bush's status now? Technically --

MR. NOFZIGER: He is the Vice President. (Laughter.)

Q He is the acting President now, is he not?

MR. NOFZIGER: No, he is not.

Q Will he spend the night at the White House?

MR. NOFZIGER: I don't know. You'd have to ask him.

Q Did the Presidential limousine go to any other place or did it make a direct route from the scene of the shooting to the hospital?

MR. NOFZIGER: To the best of my knowledge, it came directly to the hospital.

Q Can you put to rest all fears, all rumors, that more than one gunman was involved in this?

MR. NOFZIGER: To the best of my knowledge, there was only one

MORE

gunman. That's all we've heard of and the people who were on the scene don't indicate there was anything more.

Q Is there evidence of a conspiracy behind the scenes?

MR. NOFZIGER: I'm not going to get into that, for goodness's sake. We've been -- You know, we'll wait and let the Secret Service and the police do their investigation and then we'll look at it there. But I don't think that that's even for me to speculate on -- no matter how farfetched it may be.

Q (Inaudible.)

MR. NOFZIGER: I think that the President can speak for himself on that when the time comes.

Q Who has physical possession of the bullet at this moment?

MR. NOFZIGER: To my knowledge, the Secret Service does.

Now, if you all would hold it for just a moment, I would like to re-introduce Sheila Patton to you who is the First Lady's Press Secretary, and she can tell you about Mrs. Reagan.

MORE

MS. PATTON: Mrs. Reagan was calm and composed throughout this ordeal. She is grateful for the outpouring of support and prayers from all over the world. She's also grateful for the fine medical attention that her husband is receiving. And, lastly, she's praying for Jim Brady, for agent McCarthy, and Officer Delahante and she hopes everyone else is too.

Q (Inaudible.)

MS. PATTON: Mrs. Reagan heard there was a shooting from her Secret Service agent. We had just returned to the White House from a luncheon. She immediately left for the hospital and learned that the President had been shot here at the hospital.

Q She didn't know --

MS. PATTON: She learned it after she arrived here.

Q -- she'll be staying here all night?

MS. PATTON: That has not been determined yet.

Q How many minutes elapsed when the President arrived -- (inaudible) --

MS. PATTON: To the best of my recollection, we left about 25 of three.

Q -- that where. From the --

MS. PATTON: From the White House in five minutes.

Q Did Mrs. Reagan have any contact with Mrs. Brady at all during the --

MS. PATTON: Yes, she has seen both Mrs. Brady and Mrs. McCarthy.

Q Can you tell us anything about --

MS. PATTON: No, it was a private meeting.

Q Where --

MS. PATTON: In an office near the emergency room.

Q -- visit the chaplain?

MS. PATTON: Yes, she did. She visited the chaplain.

Q When was that?

MS. PATTON: Shortly thereafter.

Q Shortly after she arrived?

MS. PATTON: After the President went up for surgery.

Q What did she say to him?

MS. PATTON: I do not know.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

MR. NOFZIGER: Let me make a couple of quick announcements. Vice President Bush is spending the night at the Vice President's Residence. So, that clears that up. Secondly, I've been asked do I want to move the A.M. briefing to Room 450 in the EOB because it's larger and so let's move it to Room 450 in EOB because it's larger. We will see you there in the morning. Thank you.

MORE

Q Is that going to be it for tonight? Should we anticipate any announcements regarding Jim Brady?

MR. NOFZIGER: My feeling is that depending on the situation, I would not rule it out. But that will come out of the White House briefing room. I think we can wind up this place here after this briefing. I think that will be more convenient for all of us.

Q Have our allies abroad been contacted about the President's stable condition?

MR. NOFZIGER: I cannot tell you if our allies have been contacted. But I would be willing to bet that they had been.

Q (Inaudible.)

MR. NOFZIGER: I cannot answer that. I do not know.

END

8:15 P.M. EST

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

March 30, 1981

BRIEFING FOR THE PRESS
BY LARRY SPEAKES

The Briefing Room

(4:09 P.M. EST)

MR. SPEAKES: Mainly I wanted to come here to let you know that I will be present here throughout. Lyn Nofziger's at the hospital. He will be making statements from there. We will have the same information here.

I can only say what we said earlier, that the President has a gunshot wound in the left side of the chest, is in stable condition.

Jim Brady has been shot. It is a head wound. We have no information on his condition.

That's the extent --

Q Is the President in surgery?

Q Are they in surgery yet?

MR. SPEAKES: I can't say.

Q Is Brady?

Q We have gotten confirmed reports, so have other network news, so have the wires, can't you help us with that, Larry?

MR. SPEAKES: As soon as we can confirm it we will, and I just --

Q Larry, his brother's been called by the White House and has been told that the President is in surgery right now, that he's already had blood transfusions. Is your information going to be that far behind what we're getting from other sources?

MR. SPEAKES: Lesley, we will do our very best to keep it up. As you know, earlier when I was out here, our initial report was that the President was not hit. That's what we run into when we try to give information when we are not hundred percent sure or we don't have it from the source. We do have somebody there with the President. I will be here. I just wanted to let you know I'll come down every 15 or 20 or 30 minutes just to let you know exactly what we know and will also let you know when we don't have any further information.

Q Is that the extent of what you know, what you've just said now, is that the extent of what you know?

MR. SPEAKES: That's the extent of what I can say at this point.

Q Can you check on the surgery and come back?

MORE

Q Could you confirm the surgery report with a phonecall or something?

MR. SPEAKES: I will.

Q Not 15 minutes, but a few minutes?

Q Larry, can you give us an understanding of how serious the chest wound is?

MR. SPEAKES: No.

Q Do you have any idea? There are reports that it punctured the lung.

MR. SPEAKES: We can't confirm that yet. We've talked to the doctors but, you know, we cannot confirm that yet.

Q Larry, can you confirm reports that Jim is in surgery now?

MR. SPEAKES: Yes.

Q What process does the United States government go through with foreign governments when something like this occurs?

MR. SPEAKES: Jerry, there is a notification process and I think the State Department has moved on that.

Q Has the U.S. military been placed on any higher readiness?

MR. SPEAKES: Not that I'm aware of. There were some questions about the Vice President. I understand he was in Texas today. He is returning. He's expected to arrive at Andrews around 8:00 o'clock this evening according to the information that I have now. He has been informed, he is in communication.

Q Would he assume emergency powers?

Q Will there be a division of labor of any kind?

MR. SPEAKES: Not that I'm aware of. We just haven't crossed those bridges yet.

Q What's the nature of the notification that the State Department is making with foreign governments?

MR. SPEAKES: I'm sure it's a notification to indicate that the President is in stable condition.

Q Who's running the government right now?

Q If the President goes into surgery and goes under anaesthesia, would Vice President Bush become the acting President at that moment or under what circumstances does he?

MR. SPEAKES: I cannot answer that question at this time.

Q How about the crisis management team? Would that come into effect?

Q Larry, what is the consideration is not keeping us

more up to date on the President's condition? We know he's in surgery and no one seems to be able to come out and confirm it. Why the time lag?

MR. SPEAKES: Lesley, I would assure you there is no reason except we want to be completely sure of our facts.

Q Well, is the President's surgery a fact?

MR. SPEAKES: I'm sorry, I cannot do it from here at this time.

Q What can you tell us about the gunman who's in custody?

MR. SPEAKES: Absolutely nothing. That would have to come from Secret Service or the police.

Q Larry, who'll be determining the status of the President and whether the Vice President should, in fact, become the acting President?

MR. SPEAKES: Pardon?

Q Who will be determining the status of the President --

MR. SPEAKES: I don't know the details on that.

Q Larry, what's the note say?

MR. SPEAKES: I'll let you know shortly.

Q Listen, will you announce it each time you come out here, Larry?

END

4:25 P.M. EST