

March 31, 1981

MICHAEL DEEVER TESTIMONY

DARMAN: When did you know the President was hit, and how did you learn?

DEEVER: When we arrived at the hospital, I was in the control car - two cars behind - and the President got out on his own and started to walk in with the help of Agent Jerry Parr. We got inside the doors and through the waiting room and just at the end of the waiting room going into the emergency room the President went down - slowly - and he was picked up by three or four people, and they started ripping his clothes off and carrying him at the same time, and he seemed to be in a lot of pain. He was grimacing, and there was a lot of confusion, obviously, at that point - aides, doctors, nurses - and Secret Service Agents. The only staff in there was myself and Dave Fischer and Dr. Ruge, and when the doctors got him on the table I backed off but stayed so that I could see what was happening for a couple of minutes. I then got Ruge and said, "Tell me what's happening," and he said, "I don't know, I think maybe he had a cardiac." It was about that same time that they brought Brady in, and I then went over to the Administrative area - in the secretarial area of the Emergency Room and asked for a phone and got it and called Jim Baker's office. That was within about five minutes of our arrival, and got Margaret and told her to find Jim wherever he was and NOT to leave the line - to have somebody hold the line open. I talked to him and told him we didn't know quite what the problem was - that it may be a heart attack - and then I yelled at Fischer, "Go find out what's going on in there," because at this point I wasn't in the Emergency Room. He came back and said, "He's taken a shot in the back," which I relayed to Baker. I then gave Fischer the line and said, "Stay here with Margaret on this line. We're going to keep this line open to the

White House, because all the rest of the lines were tied up." I went back into the room where they were working on the President and got Dr. Ruge and said, "I've got to have some more information. What's going on?" I then put Ruge on the phone with Baker.

Darman: When they said, "Everybody who doesn't have to be in here - back out," or do whatever it was they said, you just sort of stood back?

Deaver: I had no problem. I went in and out. They pulled the curtains around him. I went in and out of there - and tried not to get in the way unless there was something - but I was trying to find out what was going on, but I didn't want to hamper what the doctors were doing.

Darman: Right. You knew his condition.

Deaver: I knew he was serious, but I didn't know what had caused it. I could tell by his face and color and the way he went down there was a problem.

Darman: Now, on our end there was quite a bit of time - or so it seemed to us - waiting for determination as to what had happened.

Deaver: "Well, it seemed like a long time to me, and I think it was about ten minutes before they came out and said, "He's got a wound. He's been shot." But you know, Jerry had him in the car and had his coat up over his head and was feeling up and down his back and sides and there was nothing there, and it wasn't until he spit blood up - and Jerry realized that it was bright red and coming from the lungs that they made the determination to go to the hospital.

Darman: You were in the second car back at that point?

Deaver: That's right, and I kept saying, "Can't you find out if he's been hit?", and the agent said, "We can't ask that over the radio," which I understand, and I said, "Well, there must be some way you can ask the question," and he

came back and said, "They tell me he has not been hit," and then when we pulled into the hospital I figured there was either a problem, or they were taking him there to get checked out. The first I knew he was seriously hurt was when he collapsed. Somebody now should be in the limo, but I made the determination on my own not to try to get into the limo.

Darman: To sum up, you learned about as fast as you could learn.

Deaver: The only faster way I could have learned would have been to have not left the trauma room, and it might have been 30 seconds to a minute sooner I would have known he had taken a shot. For ten minutes or more it was like a "graze" - that's the way they were talking about it - in the side - hadn't even entered. Then the doctor came in and said, "Well, it's lodged - the bullet is still lodged in him." They then came in and said, "We have the X-rays and it doesn't appear as if the bullet has touched the heart." I said, "Well, where is it?", and they said, "In the lung," and Nancy said, "In the lung?", and they said, "Yes, and here's what we're going to do. We're going to take him and do an abdominal tap to find if there's any blood in the abdomen. If there is, that's a serious problem. That means he's bleeding from a main artery. If that's negative, we're going to roll him over and open him up and check everything out, including his heart, because you can't really be sure until you get in there, and try to get the bullet out and stop the bleeding." I said, "How do you stop the bleeding?" "Well, we'll clamp it or suture it, or if it isn't necessary, it could be a wound that would heal itself." Then 20 minutes went by and they came in and they still hadn't done anything. I asked how much longer before they were going to take him to surgery, and they said, "Well, he's been prepped now." Nancy said, "I want to see him," so she went

in to talk to him and he kept saying, "I can't breathe." She came back to the doctor and said, "Why can't he breathe?" He said, "There's so much blood in the chest cavity that his lungs have collapsed and we're having to make him breathe. That's why he's got the oxygen." In the meantime he had lost all of that blood out of his side.

Darman: What would you have done if you hadn't reached Baker?

Deaver: Called Meese. If I couldn't have reached them, what would I have done? I would have probably called Shirley to find out where everybody was.

Darman: Have you and the others been briefed on a situation like this and prepared for it in advance?

Deaver: No. For instance, I didn't know we had a special emergency number to the White House that you could get right through on. I learned that this morning. That switchboard rang and rang and rang.

Darman: You were in command insofar as there was need for command - you were working through Baker. Baker and Meese charged over.

Deaver: They operated whatever they were doing with you over here, and I stayed with Nancy and kept on top of what was happening to the President. I got out of having to keep in touch with the White House. I just stayed with her and the doctors the rest of the day until that evening when I thought the press reports were not very good. That's when I went to Baker and said, "They're saying things on there that I don't think are very helpful. That thing is out of control over there. One of you ought to get over there." When they left, Baker said to everyone at the hospital - the hospital Administrator - because I'm not sure the Administrator knew which of us to deal with for a while there, because I had been there and then Baker and Meese got there. When they left, I said, "Would you please let everybody know that I want Nofziger up here in the room with me. I don't want him down there. I want the Administrators to know that I'm the guy who's going to be making the decisions.", which is what Baker did.

We got Nofziger up on the floor with me. Nofziger was down - we were on the second floor and Nofziger was down on the first floor. I assume Baker and Meese knew what he was doing and saying, I didn't.

Darman: What do you figure the key decisions were that were made there? Other than medical decisions.

Deaver: I think - Laxalt and Hickey came over, Strom Thurmond and his wife were there on the fourth floor. We got them out of there. Secretary Block came over and was right on the floor with the President, and I asked him to please leave and go back to the Situation Room. Mayor Barry was there - there were far too many people there. At one point they came out of surgery and the doctor came in this room with maybe 30 hospital staff, and they were all listening. I finally said to the Assistant Administrator, who didn't like it, "Do all these people have to know all of this information about the President of the United States?" and he said, "Well, they're our staff and we need them." I said, "I'd like to suggest we get everybody out of here who isn't absolutely needed." He was telling them what he found and - you know - I didn't think it was -- I suppose all of that is fairly typical in a situation like that.

Darman: Do you have a clear understanding of the command authority for military decisions in such a context?

Deaver: No. Let me just tell you one other thing - and I don't know if it's important. The Washington Police took all of the President's objects, including his code card.

Darman: Can we retrieve that?

Deaver: Well, we hadn't as of yesterday. I said to Muratti, "Where's the code card?" and Dave said, "I'm furious, the Washington Police have taken it and they won't give it to me," and Muratti said, "Don't worry, I always have an extra one." But, they've got the code card. Now the codes change daily, I guess. That doesn't make that much difference, but I thought that was kind of interesting.

Darman: If there had to be a determination, and happily there wasn't, but if there had to be a determination of the President's incapacity, do you have any sense of how that would be done?

Deaver: How it would have been done yesterday? I think the doctors could have told us, but we never faced that problem. He was awake, conscious - until he went into surgery. It struck me at one point to find out where George Bush was. But you never - it was honestly about an hour or more before you really understood what this situation was...clearly...you had - it kept progressing and it went from a chipped rib to a bullet in the lung, and possibly injuring the heart.

Darman: And you came back after the medical announcement?

Deaver: I came back after the medical announcement. I went back to the hospital with Mrs. Reagan and brought her home, and then I came back over and got the VEEP and we went over to see her, and then I came back here.

Darman: But the first time you came back here was after the medical announcement?

Deaver: Yes.

Darman: What I think we'll do, Mike, is do this in stages. What I'm trying to do is get everything pulled together.