

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

April 3, 1981

MEMORANDUM FOR RICHARD G. DARMAN

FM: Frank A. Ursomarso

RE: Assassination Attempt

At 2:25 p.m., I was in a meeting with David Gergen, Ed Harper, Dick Darman, Craig Fuller, Larry Speakes and Linda Gosden in the Roosevelt Room to discuss the auto package. Someone from the Press Office ran into the room and said, "There's been a shooting." Gergen, Speakes and I immediately got up and ran into the Press Office and looked at the teletypes. Nothing was coming over.

David Gergen said, "Go outside and see if the motorcade is coming." I ran out the door to the South Lawn driveway to the Guard House. The Guard had two phones up to his ears and I asked him if the motorcade was en route to the White House. He said, "Yes, I think they're going to the hospital."

I went to Jim Baker's office and when I arrived, David Gergen, Jim Baker, Larry Speakes, Lyn Nofziger, Ed Rollins and Secretary Regan, among others, were present. Phone calls were coming in from Michael Deaver and we were in contact with the Vice President. It was decided that Ed Meese, Jim Baker, Lyn Nofziger and Larry Speakes would go to the hospital. At this point we already knew that the President was injured, along with Jim Brady and several other security persons.

At first it was believed that the President's ribs were bruised. As Jim Baker, Ed Meese, Lyn Nofziger and Larry Speakes walked down the hall to go to the hospital, David Gergen told us to tell the Press they were en route to the hospital. I did so. Then I went into Baker's office.

By this time the Secretary of State had arrived. David Gergen said, "The Secretary and I are going to the Situation Room. You go to the Press Office and make sure things are covered there."

I went to the Press Office, which was completely filled -- wall-to-wall -- with screaming reporters. Connie Gerard saw me standing there and told me Larry Speakes was on the phone. I went to Connie's desk, picked up the phone and Larry told me, "Lyn Nofziger has put out a statement that the President has been shot in the left chest and his condition is stable. I want you to put out the same information." I asked him if he wanted me to do it, "Right here, right now." He said yes.

By now the reporters were in a state of hysteria. I thought that I should check this out with David Gergen first. However, since Speakes was at the hospital, and because Nofziger had announced from the hospital that the President had been shot, I put it out. I decided that it would be much calmer to do it off camera in the Press Office, instead of standing in front of the cameras. I stepped up on Connie Gerard's chair and said, "I am confirming what Lyn Nofziger has just said at the hospital. The President has been shot in the left chest. His condition is stable." I was asked to repeat this three times -- and I did so.

At this point, Fred Fielding appeared at the back of the crowd and motioned me toward him. He took me into the Situation Room. From this point on, I moved back and forth between the Situation Room and the Press Office to monitor activities. At this time, I will not go into any great detail as to what happened in the Situation Room. I will give some of the details here and the rest in a separate memo.

While in the Situation Room, David Gergen, Secretary Haig, Secretary Regan, Attorney General Smith, Dick Allen, Martin Anderson, Fred Fielding and myself, among others, were present.

As we were receiving and placing calls, and discussing the matters at hand, Larry Speakes suddenly appeared on TV in the White House Briefing Room. David Gergen said, "What's he doing up there?" I said, "I don't know, I thought he was at the hospital." Gergen said to go up

there and pull him off. I left the Situation Room and ran to the Press Office Briefing Room. I gave Larry Speakes a note that said to please leave the podium. Speakes read the note, concluded his remarks and left the podium. As I turned to leave with Speakes, I saw Secretary Haig, Dick Allen and David Gergen coming down the hall to the Briefing Room. I said to David, "What's Haig doing in there? Should I stop him?" David said, "No- let him go." I stood aside and let him go in.

As the briefing got underway, I said to Gergen, "I'm not sure I like this, should we pull him off?" Gergen said, "No," so we let him stay at the podium. I said, "OK -- it's your call."

When Secretary Haig had finished, he stepped down from the podium and into the hallway where I said to him, "That's not bad for a Lower Merion graduate, but I bet Upper Darby can still beat you at football." He laughed as he left the Briefing Room and walked down the hall to the Situation Room. We continued working there as before.

I continued to monitor the events in the Situation Room, Press Office and Jim Brady's office, during which time I funneled reports into the Situation Room, making sure that the Press Office staff operated properly.

During this time, I noticed Herb Klein in Jim Brady's office. Sometime between 3:00 and 5:00, Larry Speakes and I had a short meeting with the Press Office staff and told them to stay in his and to continue to do their job as they had in the past. David Gergen, Larry Speakes and I had a meeting with the Press Office staff in the Roosevelt Room about thirty minutes later. David Gergen spoke to them. This greatly improved their morale and understanding of the situation. We cautioned the staff not to put out new information, but only to repeat what had been said.

Early in the afternoon, Secretary Regan said that he had just learned of the news about Jim Brady. Later he announced Brady was dead. Dick Allen said we should observe a moment of silence for our fallen colleague. We all bowed our heads and prayed. I remember standing in the corner and praying that no one else would die. Karna Swali, who was in the Situation Room, was visibly shaken. I put my arms around her in an attempt to comfort her. Later we got the report Jim Brady was not dead.

I ran upstairs to determine where the erroneous confirmation to the press had originated. I believe that CBS put out the statement that Brady was dead. I learned from Connie Gerard that David Prospero had mistakenly nodded while talking on two phones at the same time, and a reporter interpreted his nod to mean that Brady was dead.

I sent Connie Gerard and Kim Hoggard to find Prospero and bring him down. Prospero appeared. Gergen and I talked with him. He stated the mistake on his part and on the reporters part. David Gergen and I told Prospero to go back to work.

When word was received that the Vice President was en route to the White House, I walked out to the West Executive driveway and met Pete Teeley. Pete and I stood waiting for the motorcade to arrive. I suggested that Ken Khachigian help him with the Vice President's remarks.

The Vice President's car arrived and Ed Meese was also in the car. Before the Vice President arrived, Jim Baker came into the Situation Room. I escorted the Vice President into the Situation Room and he took the position at the head of the table.

It was decided that the Vice President would go to the Briefing Room and give the report to the people. The activity decreased and I stayed in the press area, attempting to help the Press Office and staff and reporters with their stories.

Obviously, I have not given a complete record of all the events that happened during this confusing time. I have attempted to provide you with the highlights. I will give you a more detailed explanation of some significant events which occurred.

Additionally, I have prepared a critique for Dick Allen. I will send you a copy.