Wallace's Spinal Cord

By William Greider
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George C. Wallace, a man who savors uphill fights, has survived an assassin's bullets but, short of a miracle, he will never walk again.

The 52-year-old governor of Alabama lies in a Silver Spring hospital, off the critical list but paralyzed from the waist down, a .38-caliber bullet severing his spinal cord.

His wife, Cornelia, and the men around Wallace's campaign promised yesterday that the Wallace presidential candidacy will continue, despite his injuries.

"He will campaign from a wheelchair, if necessary," said the governor's press secretary, Billy Joe Camp.

The only comment from Wallace was a bedside quip passed on by one of his aides, Frank Daniel, who said the governor asked jauntily, "What do y'all have me scheduled for today?"

The light-hearted remark suggested that Monday's attack at the Laurel Shopping Center was a mere interruption in Wallace's heavy campaigning for the presidency, an impression reinforced by Wallace's aides.

However, according to sources close to the operating team, the prognosis for immediate political activity is bleak. "It will be a miracle if he walks again," said one doctor. "It might be months before he's even well enough to be active from a wheelchair."

Gov. Wallace was hit by four bullets fired at close range. Two ripped through his body; the other two bullets hit his right arm, then continued into the right side of his body—one lodging in the spine. He must undergo further surgery to remove that bullet.

Meanwhile, the man charged with the assault, 21-year-old Arthur Herman Bremer, a busboy and janitor from Milwaukee, was imprisoned in the Baltimore County jail's maximum security cellblock in Towson, facing both federal and state charges, held under $200,000 federal bond.

In bits and pieces, the background and personality of the accused began to emerge—a photography buff with few friends and some "weird" habits, an IQ of 106.

From various sources across the country, it appears that Bremer was following Wallace for several weeks before the shooting on Monday. He was seen at Wallace campaign rallies in Milwaukee, Kalamazoo, Mich., and Maryland before his encounter with the candidate Monday afternoon in Laurel.

Wallace was cut down in the midst of his most impressive year in national politics—a third bid for the presidency in which he has now won five primaries, including yesterday's victories in Maryland and Michigan. Wallace's underdog campaign of protest moved the other major Democrats to echo his complaints this year and he seemed assured of a pivotal role at the Democratic National Convention in July.

Regardless of his immediate prospects for returning to the campaign, the event Monday at the Laurel Shopping Centre was a crucial moment in U.S. political history.

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WALLACE, From A1

Center invests him with a new dimension as a public figure—qualities of tragedy and heroism that alter the public personality of a man known for his feisty style and flashpoint oratory.

At the hospital, his campaign aides spoke confidently of the immediate future and insisted that all will go forward just as planned—seeking delegate support, dispatching stand-in speakers, including Mrs. Wallace, to make campaign appearances until the governor can resume for himself.

"The campaign is going on exactly like it did and it will continue to go on that way until Gov. Wallace decides otherwise," said Charles Snider, his national campaign director. This decision, Snider said, was consistent with Mrs. Wallace's conversations with the stricken candidate.

"We feel likely that the governor will be back with us," Snider said. "The type of individual the governor is, I think he could bounce back from anything."

Hospital officials described friction with the Wallace campaign people over what was to be announced or unannounced. "You have to understand there are two different things going on here," said Thomas Burke, the hospital public relations spokesman. "We're trying to get medical information out and run our hospital. It seems like the Wallace people are trying to run a campaign. That causes problems."

According to medical reports, Wallace will be hospitalized at Holy Cross for at least five days, recuperating from Monday night's surgery. Then he probably will be moved to an Alabama hospital where surgery will be required to remove the other bullet.

Wallace's family and close friends were around him yesterday, visiting for a few minutes each hour. Dozens of Alabama followers and friends flew to Washington Monday evening after news of the attack became available. Sixty or 70 floral tributes arrived at the hospital and Mrs. Wallace urged followers to express their sympathy in some other way.

While precise details of the attack were still being reconstructed yesterday, it appeared that several of the bullets may have passed through Wallace's body and struck at least some of the three bystanders who were also wounded.

Capt. E. C. Dothard, Wallace's personal bodyguard from the Alabama State Police, was released from Leland hospital after treatment for an arm wound.

Dothard returned to Alabama yesterday.

Secret Service Agent Nicholas Zarvos, hit in the neck by a bullet that lodged in his jaw, underwent 7½ hours of surgery Monday night and was reported in satisfactory condition. A spokesman at Leland said Zarvos' teeth were wired and his trachea repaired, and that the agent can speak, though with pain.

Dora Thompson, a Wallace campaign volunteer from Rogers Heights in Prince George's County, was reported in very satisfactory condition at Holy Cross Hospital where she was treated for a wound in the right leg.

Bremer, locked in jail at Towson, is charged by Prince George's officials with four counts of assault with intent to kill, which carry a maximum penalty of 15 years each. He is also accused by federal officials of assassinating a federal officer and violating the 1968 Civil Rights Act that makes it a crime to "interfere with civil rights of a candidate for federal office." Each charge has a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison and a $10,000 fine.

Bremer was in the crowd that pressed around Wallace after his Laurel speech Monday afternoon and, according to witnesses, he thrust a short-barreled revolver at the candidate's chest and fired.

The Milwaukee youth was seized immediately by police at the scene and, according to the Treasury Department, the ownership of the gun was traced to him within 10 minutes after the shooting—thanks to federal gun records required by a law passed in 1968. The weapon, a .38-caliber revolver manufactured by the Charter Arms Corp. of Bridgeport, Conn., sells for $80 to $85, according to one gun authority. Bremer purchased it in January in Milwaukee, according to the records.

During the last few weeks, Bremer apparently followed the campaign of Gov. Wallace — turning up at Wallace rallies in Wisconsin, Michigan and Maryland.

Janet Petrone, Maryland state coordinator for Women for Wallace, said she saw Bremer last week at the Silver Spring headquarters. She recalled: "He came up and said, 'Hi, babe, how's it going?'

In Kalamazoo, Bremer was questioned by police last Saturday afternoon after he was spotted waiting in his car outside an armory where Wallace was to speak in several hours.

"He said he was simply waiting to get a good seat," said Kalamazoo Lt. Alfred Sarquis.

These accounts were prepared from reports filed by Staff Writers Jules Ascher, Donald P. Baker, Carl Bernstein, David Boldt, LaBarbara Bouman, Richard M. Cohen, B. D. Colen, Herbert H. Denton, Ivan G. Goldman, Jon Katz, Alfred E. Lewis, Jim Mann, Philip A. McCombs, Lawrence Meyer, Thomas O'Toole and Sally Quinn.