

Cheers, Then a Shot, And Crowd Screams

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By LACEY FOSBURGH
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SAN FRANCISCO, Sept. 22 —The corner of Post and Powell is usually quiet and sedate. Here, just a few yards in on Post Street from Union Square, is the side entrance to the elegant St. Francis Hotel.

This is the spot where the Rolls-Royces and Cadillacs wait, the place where chauffeurs walk the toy poodles, and the place where, if necessary, a President can come and go with a minimum of trouble.

Today, about 3:30 P.M., the corner of Post and Powell was a madhouse. Hundreds, probably thousands, of people had wedged their way toward this place hoping to catch a glimpse of Gerald R. Ford. The President was inside the hotel, they knew, and some even had heard he was speaking to the World Affairs Council there.

They lined the streets, and for two, almost three, blocks the sidewalks were dense with people, pushing and shoving, hoping to see Mr. Ford.

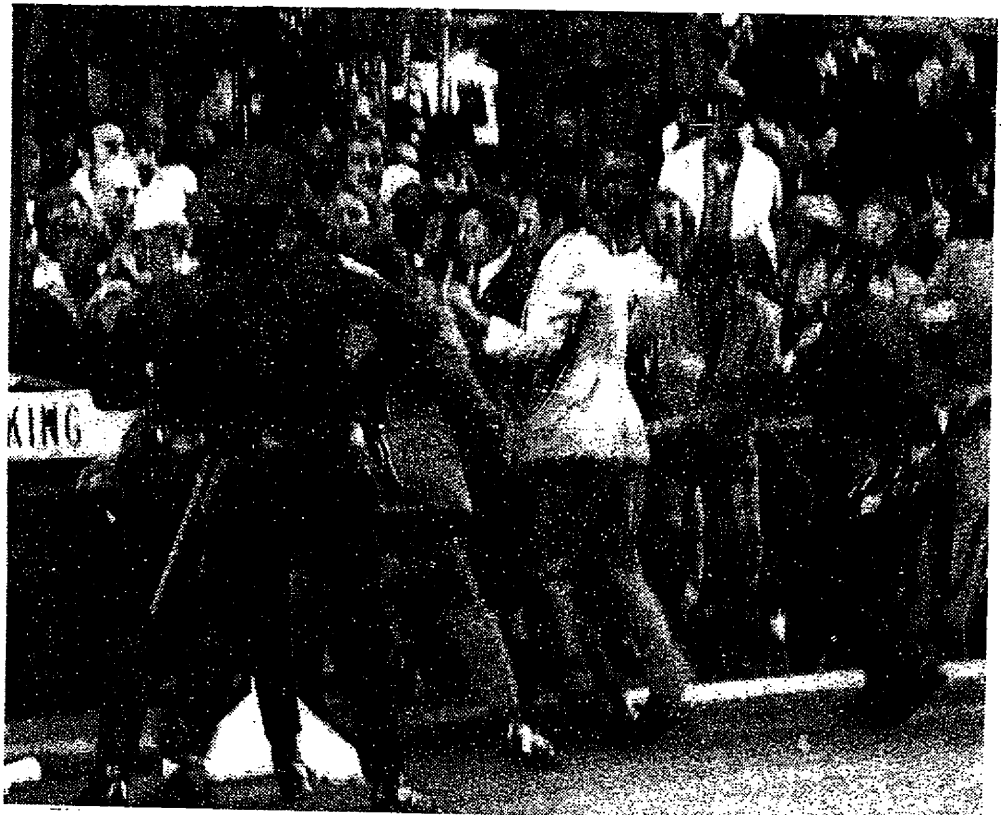
Then, a wave of excitement began to move across the crowd.

Ken Fisher remembers it. He was directly across the street from the hotel entrance and he knew, he said, that the President had to be coming because, first, he saw the tall muscular men, the Secret Service, he thought to himself.

John Alexander, an accountant, was there, too, near the United Airlines office, and he had just started to count the number of black limousines when Mr. Ford pushed through the swinging glass door.

"He was smiling," Laura

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Police officers rushing to apprehend Sara Jane Moore after shot was fired near President Ford in San Francisco

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Pierson, a secretary, remembered later. "He was smiling and waving and I thought he looked like a nice man."

Spontaneously, the crowd began to applaud. Even 21-year-old Frank Levine, a law student who says he doesn't like the President's policies, said later that he, too, found himself clapping.

"The crowd is cheering," George McManus, the local radio newscaster with KCBS, informed his audience.

Traffic on Poest Steet had been stopped and looking across toward the President. Miss Pierson remembered that up until then "everything was just fine."

Began to Reach Out

M. Ford had just stepped onto the sidewalk and was smiling broadly. He began to reach out to shake people's hands.

And then suddenly there was a shot. The sound of gunfire rang out clearly above all the noise and people began to scream.

"A shot," George McManus broadcast. "My God, there's been a shot. There's been a shot. We're being pushed back by the police. Somebody has fired a shot. Right across the street, right across from the St. Francis Hotel. We are trying to get over there. We're being held back here by a policeman. He has a gun in his hand, right in front of me."

"I couldn't believe it," Mr. Alexander, the accountant, startled, terrified. And I saw him double over and I thought he'd been shot.

"I was standing just across the street from him and I thought he'd been hit. I was yelling. I couldn't help it. And then I realized he was trying to get out of the way and he hadn't been hit. And somehow he got in the limousine and the car took off. It was gone. In seconds the care was gone. The siren was terrible."

'Strange Look'

Frank Levine, the law student, was sure Mr. Ford was wounded.

"I saw him coming out of the hotel and then there was the shot and I saw this strange look on his face," he said. "He fell to his knees. I know he did. He looked like

he'd been hit."

Eyewitnesses generally agreed that the moment the shot rang out, the President doubled over and went toward the ground, whether out of fear, or perhaps, out of training.

Then, within seconds, they said, Secret Servicemen had shuffled the cramped figure

into the back seat of a limousine.

Mr. Fisher was one of the people who saw the car speed away. He did not see Mr. Ford. Instead, he saw the Secret Servicemen lying like a blanket over what he assumed was the President's body.

Mr. and Mrs. George Aldrich, British citizens in San Francisco on vacation, were waiting to see the President, but at the last second they turned toward the left because something there caught their eye.

Flash of Gunfire

During that dramatic second, they saw, not the President, but the bright white flash of gunfire coming from the crowd near corner of Post and Powell on Union Square. Then, simultaneously, they heard a loud bang.

"I didn't see who shot the gun," Mr. Aldrich said later. "I just saw that white light. That's all I saw."

Amy Reilly, though, looking too in that direction where the shot had come from, saw what turned out to be Secret Service men suddenly begin to grapple with a woman in bright blue turquoise pants. The woman had blond hair and looked to be about 40 years old, she said, and Mrs. Reilly saw the men wrestle with her and take a run out of her hands.

In the confusion, few people saw where the woman was taken. The crowd waited, stunned. The hotel's exclusive entrance was closed off and the police began going through the crowd looking for witnesses.

Reported Unhurt

Minutes later word arrived from somewhere that the President had not been wounded. At 4 o'clock Mr. McManus and other persons reported to the waiting crowd that Mr. Ford had left San Francisco airport, and finally people like Mr. Levine and Miss Pierson began to drift away.

Mrs. Reilly, though, and dozens more like her were tapped by the police and taken back to the ballroom where Mr. Ford had just made a speech, to be questioned by the Secret Service.

"They wanted to know what I had seen," Mrs. Reilly said when she left. "I told them. 'Nothing, really.' I only came here to arrange a charity ball and instead there's all this."

It was 4:30 P.M., one hour after the shot rang out, and Mrs. Reilly was on her way home.

"I'm still shaking," she said.