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'Nothing Went Wrong'

By Victor Gold

WASHINGTON—Nothing could reflect the chronic frustration of the Secret Service better than two related but contradictory political short reels acted out on Capitol Hill the morning following the arrest of Sara Jane Moore in the streets of San Francisco.

Here we could see a special Congressional committee assembled to consider ways in which the Secret Service might stretch its already strained manpower resources to assume protective responsibility for a plethora of Presidential candidates even now bounding about the country, while not far distant two such candidates, themselves in line for that protection, were embracing the spot-news opportunity offered by network television to criticize the agency's performance of its duty.

How many viewers, after all, would stay tuned to hear Senators Henry M. Jackson and Birch Bayh in one-minute analyses commending the Presidential security force? No that is the stuff that litters TV cutting-room floors.

Indeed, it is intrinsic to the Secret Service's mission in protecting the President and Vice President that when the agency performs its duties without incident its consummate professionalism goes unnoticed.

Save, possibly—as I learned while traveling with a Vice President and his Secret Service detail—on those occasions when some officious United States Senator, newsman or other dignitary might suffer the momentary inconvenience of having to show identification to enter a secured room—at which times, invariably, the Secret Service is criticized for overprotectiveness at the expense of civility and/or civil liberties.

Predictably then, we were to hear, first, Senator Bayh inquiring as to how it could possibly have come to pass that "two nuts" were "out there, who can't be detected and can't be kept away from the President of the United States?", immediately followed by Senator Jackson, looking earnestly into the camera's eye to ask, "What went wrong?"

What went wrong? In this anguish of media opportunism, post-Sacramento/San Francisco, let us not lose sight of the Secret Service's mission regarding Presidential security. It is to keep the President alive and uninjured. Your answer then, Senator, is that

nothing went wrong.

There have been two assassination attempts within a span of three weeks and Mr. Ford is alive and uninjured. Thankfully so, despite his mistaken equation of helter-skelter public appearances with "dialogue" and despite his political decisions—the sort of decisions that the Secret Service does not make, but must nevertheless acc-

cept—to return to northern California's politically volatile climate within 17 days of his narrow escape in Sacramento.

But, of course, there are those critics, like Senator Bayh, who insist that the Secret Service is due no special thanks for Mr. Ford's San Francisco escape. What, they demand to know, was that "nut" doing in the crowd anyway? Had the President's security detail been truly efficient in their mission, Sara Jane Moore would have been—dare we attach this ugly phrase to the implied suggestion of a

notable civil libertarian like Birch Bayh?— in protective custody.

Well, now, what have we here? I for one have in mind a fictitious "scenario" (to borrow an overused word from the Nixon White House) in which President Ford's Secret Service protectors, anticipating his San Francisco visit, move in for a massive sweep of all "nuts" off Bay area streets.

Build the detention compounds. The President will be secure in his travels. And Sara Jane Moore, though technically not in violation of any law preceding the President's arrival in San Francisco . . . well, the woman has a certain look in her eyes.

Ah, "suspicion." Nine-tenths of a truly efficient security force, as any police-staff official can tell you.

It would seem reasonable that at a time when other Federal law-enforcement agencies are under investigation for relying on just such overzealous "suspicion" in the conduct of their missions, something praiseworthy might be said of one which goes the other way in its operations.

If the Secret Service did in fact err in San Francisco, or Sacramento—and if I read my Constitution correctly, the agency emphatically did not—then the error was on the side of individual liberties and a free society.

For which we may have cause to be even more thankful.

Sara Jane Moore, to the point, was in that crowd because, barring the application of police-state techniques, there was no way to keep her from being there. A risky process—but a risk that goes with the system.

No, the question then is not, as Senator Jackson has defined it, "What went wrong?" with the President's security arrangements in San Francisco. That, like Senator Bayh's approach, constitutes a form of political scapegoatism that evades our real problem.

Rather what we should be asking, more urgently than ever in the aftermath of these incidents, is what has gone wrong with an America that can produce two assassination attempts against its President in less than three weeks.

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