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Wallace's Wife Remains Self-Possessed

By NAN ROBERTSON

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WASHINGTON, May 16 — From the moment George C. Wallace was gunned down and gravely wounded yesterday in a Maryland shopping center, his striking, black-haired wife, Cornelia, has displayed courage, self-possession and an instinct to protect her husband.

Mrs. Wallace, 33 years old and married to the Alabama Governor only 16 months, leaped to shield and cradle him seconds after the shots cracked out, smirching her yellow jacket with his blood.

She stayed by him, talking quietly in the ambulance and in the hospital's emergency room until shortly before he was wheeled into surgery, and she appeared on television late last night after the operation was over.

"The children and I are going in to speak to him," she said. "I spoke to him before he went into surgery. He was conscious all the time, quite aware of everything that was happening to him and only until they put him under to go into surgery was he not conscious.

"I feel very optimistic about him and as you know his nature, he didn't earn the title of 'the fighting little judge' for nothing."

She said she expected him "to continue in that same vein."

Mrs. Wallace, the Governor's second wife and 19 years his junior, spent the night and most of today near him on the seventh floor of the eight-story Holy Cross Hospital in suburban Silver Spring, Md.

With her were Mr. Wallace's four children by his first marriage: Mrs. Bobbie Jo Parsons, 27; Peggy Su, 22, a senior at Troy State University in Alabama; George Jr., 20, a country and Western music performer, and Lee, 11.

Mrs. Wallace's mother, Mrs. Ruby Folsom Ellis Austin; her brother, Charles Ellis; her first cousin and close friend, Rachel Folsom Lichenstein, and the Governor's brother, Jack Wallace, a circuit court judge in the same Alabama county courthouse where George Wallace once sat on the bench, also flew to the scene.

Mrs. Wallace's two children by her first marriage, 9-year-old Jim and Josh, 7, remained in the Governor's mansion in Montgomery.

Thomas Burke, the hospital's public information officer, said a semiprivate room with two beds had been made available for Mrs. Wallace and the Governor's immediate family close by the intensive care unit where he is being treated.

Talked With Family

Mr. Burke said the patient was sedated but had been talking with his family during the day. Mrs. Wallace's first visit was at 7 A.M. Under intensive care rules, a family member may visit Mr. Wallace for 10 minutes out of every hour.

Last night, about 50 minutes after her husband was taken into the operating room, Mrs. Wallace walked down the long ground-floor corridor from surgery to the outpatient clinic. There she comforted Capt. E. C. Dothard, the Governor's bodyguard and close friend, one of the four persons wounded in yesterday's shooting. The L-shaped room was swarming with edgy Secret Service agents.

Captain Dothard, a hefty Alabama state trooper, was seated at a table, clad in a bright yellow hospital patient's smock. Mrs. Wallace appeared totally composed. She smiled at him, patted him affectionately on the shoulder and talked softly to him about her husband.

Mrs. Wallace was wearing a high-necked, long-sleeved white blouse, a yellow skirt and matching shoes. Her glossy hair was swept back in a tumble of curls.

According to Mr. Burke, there was "a big splotch of blood" on it, "almost over her heart."

Among those who visited Mrs. Wallace at the hospital

last night were Senator Hubert H. Humphrey, who expressed shock and grief; Mrs. George McGovern, the wife of the South Dakota Senator, and Senator John J. Sparkman of Alabama.

Senator Sparkman said afterward that Mrs. Wallace "seemed to be quite philosophical about it all." He was asked if she appeared distraught at any time. "Not outwardly," he replied. "I cannot tell how she was feeling inwardly."

Mrs. Wallace also received telephone calls from President Nixon and Mrs. Robert F. Kennedy, widow of the New York Senator who was slain four years ago while running for the Presidency.

Last night's surgery lasted nearly five hours. At 9 P.M., according to Representative William Nichols of Alabama, a hospital visitor, the doctors halted the operation so that they could confer with the waiting Mrs. Wallace.

Mr. Nichols said they wanted to discuss with her whether a bullet lodged near the lower end of Mr. Wallace's spine should be removed. The decision was not to take it out at that time, since they detected no neurological damage.



Associated Press

EXPRESSING CONFIDENCE: Mrs. George C. Wallace in a brief TV report Monday night on husband's condition.