

Permanent Leg Paralysis

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Alabama Gov. George C. Wallace emerged from more than four hours of surgery last night facing the possibility that one or both legs may be permanently paralyzed due to a bullet lodged near his spinal cord.

His vital signs were reported to be stable, however, and his medical team said he is expected to make "a good recovery" otherwise.

Dr. Joseph Schanno, vascular surgeon at Holy Cross Hospital in Silver Spring, told a press briefing today that while Wallace remains on the critical list, he is doing well and physicians are optimistic.

Difficult to Evaluate

However, the 52-year-old governor remains paralyzed in both legs. "What disability (may remain) as a result of his wounds is difficult to eval-

uate at this time," Schanno said.

He said that Wallace is being kept on the critical list because "nobody is completely out of danger with this kind of injury for several days."

During the briefing, doctors said that 4 or 5 bullets may have struck Wallace. Two remained in the body. One was removed. But the other, lodged near the spinal column, still is in Wallace's body.

No decision has yet been made whether to try to remove that bullet. Asked if it could be dangerous, Schanno said, "yes."

In Good Spirits

The governor has been given 8 pints of blood so far. He was described as a "very vigorous" patient and as being in good spirits.

Asked what he has said, Schanno said the governor said, "It hurts."

No immediate plans have been made to remove Wallace from Holy Cross.

The decision to be made is whether removing the bullet might lift the pressure and permit the bruised cord to recover and restore sensation to the legs.

Apparently, the bullet is embedded in a way that would entail considerable risk in removing it. A nerve or a blood vessel might be cut, creating a complete paralysis.

There were also indications from the medical team that doctors had not attempted to remove the bullet near the spine last night because they feared the governor's system couldn't tolerate more surgery at that time.

Still Uncertain

Dr. Schanno, stressed it's still not known whether this paralysis will be permanent.

He indicated it's conceivable

Feared

that nerve bundles of the spinal cord may recover from the bullet's impact on the boney column.

If the paralysis is permanent, he said, Wallace would still be capable of carrying on plenty of activity from a wheelchair or with crutches, just like Franklin D. Roosevelt, who was crippled by polio.

The spinal cord, which holds the key, is a cylinder-shaped, elongated structure about 18 inches long. It acts as a kind of bodily "telephone cable" for carrying nerve message.

Shooting off the main cord are spinal nerves which carry messages to various organs and structure of the body.

If the cord is completely severed, which did not occur in Wallace's case, there can be no regeneration of the nerve fibers. But, if the injury involves damage to only part of the cord, then affected tissues can repair themselves.

Wallace arrived at the hospital at 4:15 p.m. and was described as awake, cogent but in great pain. After preliminary consultations and precautions, the surgeons began surgery shortly before 6 p.m. He was taken out of the surgery suite to the hospital's recovery room shortly after 10:30 p.m.

The surgery was halted at 9 p.m. while doctors consulted with Mrs. Wallace on the seriousness of the situation. The operation was then resumed.

During the operation it was determined that there was "through and through penetration" of the stomach, damage to the ligaments of the large intestine and that the intestine itself had been grazed on the left side.

Schanno said that he and three other surgeons had repaired these injuries, but that one bullet had lodged itself near the spinal column at the first lumbar vertebrae, below the left lower rib, and had to be left in place.

It was this bullet that apparently caused Wallace's "loss of power in the lower extremities."

At a 2 a.m. briefing for

newsmen, Schanno reported that Wallace was "in the recovery room resting comfortably."

"The vital signs are stable. At this point his progress is satisfactory. Mrs. Wallace is with him," he said.

Hemorrhages Stopped

He said there were wounds in the right forearm, right upper arm, a superficial wound under the right shoulder, and a grazing wound at the back of the left shoulder.

Schanno said there is a possibility that the bullet which entered Wallace's upper arm also entered the chest and abdominal cavity.

In the course of the surgery, doctors were able to locate and stop hemorrhages in the chest and lower abdomen and to recover a bullet at the lower edge of the thorax — the part of the body between the neck and the spine and the bottom-most ribs.

Just how many bullets had entered the governor's body and how many had been removed, however, was unclear.

Other doctors on the Holy Cross staff who participated in Wallace's care in the operating room were: Dr. Joseph Peabody, a chest and vascular surgeon, Dr. John Haberlin, a general surgeon, Dr. Balthazar Perez, a neurosurgeon and Dr. Herman Maganzini, a specialist in internal medicine.

In addition, Dr. William Lukash of the Bethesda Naval Medical Center was dispatched by President Nixon to help out if necessary. The chiefs of medicine and neurosurgery from the University of Maryland hospital in Baltimore were similarly rushed to the scene by Maryland Governor Marvin Mandel.

During the surgery, Dr. Edgar Berman, Hubert Humphrey's personal physician also paid a visit to the operating room.

At last night's press conference, Dr. Schanno said that Wallace was clearly a "viable person" and barring complications, might return home to Alabama in 4 to 10 days.



Alabama State Trooper E. C. Dothard, a long-time Wallace friend, was hit by bullet intended for governor.



Agent Nick Zarvos clutches his throat, where he was hit.