

**As
Wallace
Lay
Healing
— How
Holy Cross
Hospital
Met the
Pressure**

By Aileen Jacobson



Press Relations Administrator
Tom Burke:

— "We lost control
of the building for
a few hours."

One day in May a small man with a cold smirk and a gun reached out for George Wallace in a crowd and shot five times. The Alabama governor fell back to the pavement; his wife rushed to shield his bleeding body. Wallace lived and other politicians began to muse.

Even on that night of near-assassination, politicians around the country were wondering what might happen if the Presidential aspirant arrived at the 1972 Democratic convention—pained but proud in a wheelchair.

Gov. Wallace may not make such a dramatic appearance at the convention beginning tomorrow. But his political power was evident, even as Wallace lay healing. His room at Holy Cross Hospital in Silver Spring became something of a political touchstone. President Richard Nixon came to pay his respects and so did Rep. Shirley Chisholm (D-N.Y.). Sen. George McGovern (D-S.D.), then the front-runner for the Democratic nomination, showed up at Holy Cross, as did Sen. Hubert Humphrey (D-Minn.) and Ethel Kennedy, widowed in America's previous major political assassination.

Holy Cross, a nine-year-old, 340-bed commu-

Aileen Jacobson is a staff reporter with Potomac.

nity institution run by the Sisters of the Holy Cross, is the only American hospital in recent years to house the survivor of a political assassination attempt.

So for a few weeks in late spring, the modest Maryland hospital basked in the spotlight of national recognition—and balked at, but met, the unexpected pressures.

It was nothing new for the technician. Mike Hall, 20, in his gray lab coat, heard the emergency call "Code Blue" crackle over the loudspeaker. In his year at Holy Cross, Hall had handled dozens of Code Blues.

It was May 15, 4:45 in the afternoon. Hall waited. As the emergency patient was wheeled by, the technician looked down and was shocked by the dark-browed famous face of Governor George C. Wallace.

"You say to yourself, golly, this is an official running for President. Then I got to thinking, I've got to get this man straightened out. I had to get to work right away. Thinking about the procedures got my mind straight," remembered Hall, who had often agreed with the feisty "messages" of the Alabama aspirant.

Things then got "right hectic." Medically, Wal-

8

lace's case seemed to be nothing unusual; Holy Cross had treated 31 cases of gunshot wounds in the last year. The tiny Code Blue room, where Wallace lay, had been set up just two weeks earlier to handle the overflow. But this gunshot wound was already causing an extraordinary overflow, a situation that the hospital administration could not have foreseen.

Tense, hard-shouldered Secret Service men were swarming through the hospital corridors. "I couldn't tell you how many there were. It was unreal," Hall said later. "They tried to get out of the way, but every time I went out to the hall, to push a piece of equipment in or out, they were all over."

He remembers Cornelia Wallace coming in and out of the room, her face composed, whispering to her husband while the doctors cleaned the wounds that a lonely janitor had blown open with a snub-nosed, five-shot pistol.

On that first day, CBS cameraman Laurens Pierce had filmed an astounding sequence—the glint of a gun barrel, bursts of smoke, shocked old faces, Wallace bleeding on the pavement, the frantic whirl of

The Washington Post/Potomac/July 9, 1972



Technician
Mike Hall:
"Thinking about
the procedures got my
mind straight."



Father
Roger M. Fortini:
"When I couldn't
keep her (Mrs. Wallace)
busy enough,
her eyes would fill
with tears."



Assistant Director of Nursing
Nerome McKenna:
"It's been interesting
to have Wallace here,
but it's... wearing."

lawmen capturing the would-be assassin. Those pictures, moving at regular pace and in brutal slow motion, were being watched all over the country while Wallace still lay in surgery.

Pierce had been following George Wallace into the crowd at Laurel Shopping Center. He was only three feet behind him when he heard what at first sounded to him like a firecracker. "After the first crack," he recalled a week and a half later, "I thought, what a bad joke." Then he saw the gun.

"My first real feeling was to put the camera down and to come to his aid. But I knew that putting it down would do no good, that other people were there to help him.

"I knew that recording the event was an element that should be done, and that it was just as important. It never dawned on me to take my eye off the camera. I've been knowing Wallace 23 or 24 years now." He continued, without embarrassment, "I couldn't help but cry."

During the first two weeks of Wallace's hospital stay, Pierce filmed the governor once, briefly, with his family standing around him. "George winked at me as I came in, and said, 'Hi, Laurens.' But he said 'hi' to everyone."

Over the years, the silver-haired cameraman had become a friend to the Wallace family, just as

The Washington Post/Potomac/July 9, 1972

Another nurse, who also worked in the intensive care unit, agreed. "It's the first exciting thing that's ever happened in the five years I've been here."

Not all the nurses were as unabashedly excited. Assistant Director of Nursing Norene McKenna noted, "In nursing, patient care comes first. It's been interesting to have Wallace here, but it's also a lot of responsibility, and it's wearing." She pointed proudly to a survey of head nurses showing that nursing care had not been impeded by the sensational emergency.

During those first few nights, when Wallace would wake up almost every hour, Cornelia Wallace stayed up until 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning to be at his bedside when he called. She slept in a semi-private room on the same floor, sometimes accompanied by her mother, "Big Ruby," or by some of the Wallace children. Even at three in the morning, with fatigue clouding her beauty queen face, Cornelia Wallace always appeared, said several nurses, impeccably dressed and coiffed.

For their efforts amid the turmoil the nurses did not go unappreciated or unrewarded. They were given gold charms imprinted with the seal of the governor of Alabama.

Continued on page 14

9

he had grown close to the Martin Luther King family. Four years ago, as he waited to hear whether the Nobel Peace Prize winner would live or die, he had filmed King's aide, the Rev. Andrew Young, reenacting the balcony scene of that other nation-shaking shooting—and the tears had come then, too.

During his weeks at Holy Cross Hospital, Pierce joined Mrs. Wallace in several "warm family gatherings." One time, he recalled, "She said to me, 'Laurens, I guess you'll win some kind of award for this.' I told her, 'Cornelia, this is not the kind of award I want to win.'" Cornelia Wallace squeezed his hand.

The unaccustomed bustle in the hospital halls continued for weeks, and some nurses found it an exhilarating change. A nurse's life can gray a bit in the daily cycle of bed pans, sponge baths, thermometers, endless patient complaints.

"When I heard on TV that Wallace was coming to Holy Cross, I was really excited," one chipper nurse in crisp white recalled. "I knew that he would be in my unit, the Intensive Care Unit. It's a great honor for the hospital—and at least it breaks the routine a little."

Holy Cross Hospital
from page 9



Calming Cornelia Wallace that first night was a job that fell to the hospital's chaplain, Father Roger M. Fortin, a gentle man with a warm voice.

First, in the emergency

room, Father Fortin spoke to Wallace, who was asking for medication for his pain.

"I told him that I'd pray for him, and that I was there. Then I turned to Mrs. Wallace and said, 'There must be a lot of people we have to call.' I wanted to get her into the office and out of the operating room. It was good therapy for her, to keep her busy, doing something that demands concentration. It doesn't dispel any of the upset, but it does spread out the focus."

He led her into a room at the end of the emergency corridor, where they spent half an hour trying to reach Wallace's personal doctor, so they would have a complete list of his allergies and other information. She made calls to her family in Alabama and talked with members of her staff about how to get the children to Silver Spring, where they would sleep — "practical things, so that she wouldn't go into a tailspin, which she never did," Father Fortin said. All this activity kept her "periodically misty. When I couldn't keep her busy enough, her eyes would fill with tears. She would stop and be silent, and there would be a pause." Cornelia Wallace, in that bitter night, had her secret moments.

Veteran of hundreds of

similar, agonizing waits, the bespectacled priest considered Mrs. Wallace's reactions normal, though he was impressed by her relative composure. At one point that night, "She expressed fears for him (the governor). She said she didn't want him to be alone with 'all strangers.' And she

made a point of going into the emergency room and making her presence known."

After about an hour and a quarter in the emergency room, Wallace was moved down a long, pale green corridor to the main operating room for four hours of surgery. During those four hours, the doctors announced that no major organs had been hit. "After that, Mrs. Wallace felt a great sense of relief. We were over the hurdle." A little later, while waiting with Father Fortin and some staff members in the doctors' lounge, Mrs. Wallace reassured the rest of the staff: "He's going to be all right. I talked to him." Arthur Bremer's snub-nosed, five-shot pistol had not dressed Cornelia Wallace in widow's weeds.

In the following weeks, the Alabamans never called in another clergyman—Wallace is Methodist, Mrs. Wallace is Baptist—and Father Fortin grew to be understandably a bit proud of that.

And, he admitted shyly, with the ready smile that precedes his bursts of speech, he had also found it "thrilling, in a funny sort of way," to sit down on that first night and have coffee with Sen. Hubert Humphrey (D.-Minn.) and Mrs. Wallace.

On Friday, four days after the shooting, Mrs. Wallace asked Father Fortin if they could pray in the chapel together. When she arrived at 10 in the evening, she was accompanied by a woman friend and a Secret Service man.

As they were coming out, Father Fortin recalled, a 15-year-old boy stood "gawking at her. She talked to him and asked him his name." It turned out to be Mike Schanno, son of the

head of the team of six physicians who had operated on Wallace, Dr. Joseph F. Schanno.

"She hugged him and kissed him, and the poor

Washington Post/Potomac/July 9, 1972

kid didn't know what to say. Then she invited him and his father to visit the governor's mansion in Alabama. The kid's eyes were like saucers. I think he was ready to fly there that evening. It's little things like that I like to remember."

Little things that certain people at Holy Cross don't like to remember include what befell the hard-charging press that first night. The hospital administrators were to receive a shock that they had never anticipated, even after they were told George Wallace was coming.

"We lost control of the building for a few hours," press relations administrator Tom Burke remembered.

Reporters scattered to every floor. They walked into patients' rooms, into nursing stations, anywhere a phone was available. A woman reporter from the New York Times allegedly was roughed up by a Secret Service agent when she refused to leave one phone. (The incident is being investigated, according to a Secret Service spokesman.)

Several reporters said afterwards that they saw journalists there whom they'd never seen actually covering a story before—the kind they'd usually seen just hanging around the

Press Club.

The administrators responded by eventually throwing the press out—a decision they continued to think was right, but which

rankled the frustrated press for much of the episode at Holy Cross.

Burke, who had to deal with the grumpy press, heard of Wallace's impending arrival from a nurse at 4:30. By the time he arrived in the emergency corridor with Sister Helen Marie, the hospital's top administrator, the hallway had already been cleared of the extra stretchers and beds usually stored there.

Burke sent out a call for surgeons over the loud-speaker and doctors began to arrive from all over the hospital. An obstetrician came. He was told it was not his kind of emergency.

Another doctor, temporarily a patient, heard the call, ripped out his own intravenous injection and went down in his pajamas. By the time he got there, though, enough surgeons had already gathered for a team.

In one sense, it was the best of times for Wallace to get shot. Most major surgery is performed at the beginning of the week, in the morning, and the surgeons stay for afternoon visits with their recovering patients.

Taking care of Wallace proved to be something the hospital could handle—quite routinely. But all those other people who came with him filled the halls and the lobby and the waiting room.

Brisk, pipe-smoking Tom Burke gave up his own of-

fice to Billy Joe Camp, Wallace's public relations man; Camp spent 45 minutes there alone, making phone calls. (The long distance ones were on his credit card; Burke, a sharp-eyed administrator, made sure of that beforehand.) Then Camp spent two hours conferring with his staff. Burke never got his office back.

He gave it next to Secret Service agents, so they could screen gifts and visitors to Wallace. The first bomb threat came within 25 minutes of Wallace's arrival.

The caller said that a bomb would go off at 6:30. The bomb squad arrived, 6:30 came and went, uneventfully. Within the first 10 days, the hospital received 10 or 12 bomb threats.

Before the night was over, the Secret Service

The Wa

had requested another room in the seventh floor Intensive Care Unit where Wallace was to stay. And Camp's staff had asked for additional space to handle phone calls, well-wishers, flowers, gifts. (Burke again made sure they would pay their own phone bills.) The reporters, meanwhile, had taken over the second floor auditorium, and before surgery was completed at 11 p.m., a crew had installed a microwave antenna on the roof of the hospital. The visiting dignitaries, Maryland Gov. Marvin Mandel and Sen. Hubert Humphrey, were sent up to the auditorium. "That gave us an hour's breathing time," said Burke.

But in that time, the administrators decided that the press center should be

somewhere else. They made arrangements with the Boys' Club across the street to use their gymnasium. Unfortunately, they didn't check with the boys, who complained bitterly when the press moved in and ruined their floors with heavy cameras, scraping chairs, spilled drinks, and hard-soled shoes. "Then the problem was, how to break it to the press, who had already installed all the equipment and brought in their big cameras." Burke's job included breaking all the unpleasant news that first night. "I gave a medical briefing, then I took a deep breath and said, 'this is the last bit of public information that you'll get in this building.' Man, the howling and screaming that started then."

The doors were closed to any newly arriving journalists, no matter what their press qualifications, and this set up a hue and cry outside the doors. The Wallace people were not pleased. Mrs. Wallace wanted to make a statement about her husband's health. Reporters from major publications were stuck outside the door. Billy Joe Camp came out to appease them. "It's not me, it's not me," he said to one reporter trying to get in. "He seemed to be distraught and upset," the reporter recalled. "He said it was the hospital administration, and made some reference to, 'They're playing politics.'"

Then, the reporter said,

Washington Post/Potomac/July 9, 1972.

Camp grumbled in exasperation, "Maybe they're trying to make people think he's worse than he is, so they won't vote for him tomorrow." (The Michigan and Maryland primaries were to be held the next day.)

Camp made arrange-

ments to have a pool of network newsmen record Mrs. Wallace's statement, even though the hospital administration had forbidden any more interviews inside the building.

At her press conference Cornelia Wallace's eyes were tired and sunken but her words never wavered. "He didn't earn the title of the 'Fighting Little Judge' for nothing," she said of her stricken husband.

The breach of rules on that press conference made Burke angry but it was over before he knew what was happening.

By the next week both Burke and Camp were more philosophical. "We each had our own needs, our own structure of communications, and our own independent chains of command," Burke remarked wearily, referring to the hospital staff, the Wallace staff, the Secret Service and the reporters. By that time quiet compromise had set in.

Billy Joe Camp, likewise, no longer had any harsh words for the hospital administration. Wallace had won the Michigan and Maryland primaries by wide margins. "I would have preferred that the press could have been inside the hospital," the public relations man said. "But I understand their limitations, and their responsi-

bilities toward all the patients."

In the weeks to come, during Wallace's stay, Burke and the other administrators worked dozens of hours of overtime, at no extra pay. A report to the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospitals was delayed; meetings were cancelled; and at the front door visitors were

turned away and handbags were searched. Burke feared that the hospital's reputation as a friendly, relaxed place might be permanently damaged.

As for cost, the maintenance and housekeeping staffs had overtime and the hospital was charged for extra message units that first night when the calls flooded in and out of the hospital switchboard, relaying the news of George Wallace's agony.

"We'll never be able to sort it all out," Burke lamented. "... We'll never really know how much it cost."

At the end of the corridor that leads left out of the lobby, two heavy wooden doors open into the hospital's conference room. It is a well-lit, wood-paneled room with a crucifix on one wall and a long table in the center.

For almost two weeks it was taken over by the Wallace staff as a place to receive phone calls and take messages. Flower arrangements brightened, then wilted, in there; one was shaped like Alabama, another was sent by some troops in Vietnam. Newspaper-sized cards signed by people from all over the country lay on tables next to plates from the Silver Spring Holiday Inn, where the Wallace staff stayed.

At the end of the second week, the hospital administration reclaimed the room, which it had offered the Wallace staff on the night of the shooting. The hospital needed it for its Friday board meeting. One had been cancelled already. So had a number of training sessions for supervisors. The Wallace staff moved their operations over to the Silver Spring Holiday Inn.

As the hospital board entered the room on Friday morning, it was greeted

with a message on the blackboard: "Thank you very, very, very much. The Wallace staff."

That's the way the Wallace staff people who worked in that room were—soft-voiced, thoughtful, "ni-ice" with a long "i" and a drawl.

Helen Hines, Billy Joe Camp's secretary, was one of those who answered the phone calls that came in all day long. Many calls came from cripples. The name and address of each person who called was written on a pink slip, and each was to receive a thank you note.

"People have been so kind, you just can't believe it," Mrs. Hines said. "Men and women break down and cry. It just tears your heart out. One little old lady called and said she had prayed that the Lord would spare the Governor's life and take her life instead. She said she was glad to hear that the Governor was going to live. She said she was 77. Then she told me that she was dying of cancer. It just killed me.

"One little fella calls every day and asks 'how's my man today?' Another fella said, 'The people will do the walking for him, we'll walk for him.' I thought that was so sweet."

Helen Hines and Ann Smith, another member of Wallace's press staff, had both been in the governor's office in Alabama when they heard of the shooting—not through official lines, but from two people who had called in simultaneously, saying they had heard it on the radio. The next morning, they came into the office as usual, and at 11 a.m. they were told to pack and catch a plane that was leaving in 45 minutes.

"I didn't have a chance to call my family and my boy

friend until I got here, and naturally I packed all the wrong clothes," said Ann Smith, in a pink frilly dress, her blond hair neatly teased and styled. "I've felt all tense and wound up. The continual ring. You hear it in your ears all day long. I still can't believe it. I feel like I'm in a dream. It's not a hysterical feeling. But it's hard. Especially when they cry. When the men cry, that's worse than anything."

"We've gotten quite a

The Washington Post/Potomac/July 9, 1972

few calls from colored people," Ann Smith explained, "and they've been just as upset as the rest of the people. They've been very nice."

Other, less serious, moments cheered the staff, especially when certain gifts came in. One elderly woman sent a pair of salt and pepper shakers to the governor, explaining she knew how hard it was to tear open the paper ones they give you in hospitals. Another well-intentioned soul sent a magnet—for removing the bullet. If it's steel, he explained, the magnet would work. If it's lead, it won't. The Secret Service men who checked every piece of mail, and every gift and flower arrangement, had quite a time with that one.

Cornelia Wallace looked in occasionally and thanked the staff members for what they were doing. Her mother, "Big Ruby," until she left for Alabama again, came down to pick out flowers for the family. As usual, "Big Ruby" had a comment for every occasion. After a Sunday service that Father Fortin held for

the Wallace family—the first half of the Catholic service, without communion—she remarked to him, "You know what the best thing about the service was? There was no collection."

Judge Jack Wallace, the governor's brother, also wandered into the conference room from time to time, and picked over the mail, though he spent most of the time with the family on the seventh floor. On Wednesday of the second week, he visited the conference room again. As he left, he came out into the lobby with a slow walk, his feet shuffling, hands in his pockets.

He approached the glass wall that looks onto the green lawn of the hospital.

A larger-than-life-size stone statue of the Virgin Mary stands on the lawn's edge, beyond the concrete entrance steps where newsmen were gathered at the other end. He tapped the glass a few times with his knuckles, stared out the window. Then he turned and slowly walked away, toward the elevator. The

judge had other sickness in his family as well. That night he flew back to Alabama.

All this time, Holy Cross Hospital was taking care of other sickness, too. No one cancelled out because Gov. Wallace was there. As soon as Mrs. Wallace moved out of her semi-private room on the seventh floor, two patients moved in. Another patient filled the governor's Intensive Care Unit cell as soon as he was moved into a regular private room on the seventh floor. Cornelia Wallace started traveling to other parts of the country; Billy

Joe Camp left for California and for Houston, taking care of Wallace's political interests.

Pragmatic politics took them away, but the hospital was as crowded as ever. A 70-year-old woman was placed in pediatrics because there was no other space for her.

Mike Hall, the technician, was back to pushing equipment in and out and splinting hands, keeping busy, thinking, "Will something like this happen again?"

The hospital received its last bomb threat on May 26. The next day, the hospital went back to its policy of allowing anyone over 16 in to see a patient, relative or not—though the policemen still stood at the door to search suspicious-looking packages.

Tom Burke and the other administrators got back to their regular schedules. The accreditation report got in on time after all, and meetings were back on schedule. The press corps started thinning out.

Ann Smith went back to Montgomery for a few days, and came back; then Helen Hines returned to her husband and 12-year-old son. The phone calls kept coming in at Holiday Inn Wallace headquarters—well wishers and dispensers of miracle cures. The pink slips with names of those to be thanked continued to be stacked.

Wallace, in his hospital bed, practiced sitting up. And two more gunshot victims came through the emergency room. Holy Cross Hospital was returning to normal. ■