

Wallace Bullet Out; Spinal Cord Intact

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Alabama Gov. George C. Wallace underwent successful surgery yesterday for removal of a bullet from his spine, but the surgeons who performed the operation said they doubted he would ever regain normal use of his legs.

"It's not an impossibility but nobody expects that," Dr. Stacy L. Rollins Jr. said after operating on Wallace for 90 minutes at Holy Cross Hospital in Silver Spring. Dr. Rollins said that while the governor's spinal cord had not been severed, it had been badly damaged and "the chances are less than 50 per cent that

there will be any recovery in his legs."

A one-time classmate of Gov. Wallace at the University of Alabama and now professor of neurosurgery at Georgetown University School of Medicine, Dr. Rollins told newsmen that he expects Gov. Wallace to attend the Democratic National Convention in Miami Beach next month and quite possibly to walk with the help of braces and crutches before the year is out.

"I think a wheelchair will be the way he'll attend the convention," Dr. Rollins said, "but I think he can go to his hotel suite, meet with people, talk with people and deal with people as he has to. If candidates make an appearance (on the convention floor) he might even do that."

Dr. Rollins was less certain about Wallace's walking with braces and crutches in the near future, but felt there was a good chance he might do so in six months if he set his mind to it.

"We will consider that quite an accomplishment," the neurosurgeon said.
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rosurgeon said, "but most of us feel that the governor will be able to ambulate and get around in an up-right position even though he may never recover the use of his legs."

The 90-minute operation by seven doctors disclosed that the bullet that had lain lodged in his spine for more than a month did not sever the spinal cord. Dr. Rollins described the damage to the spine as a "concussion and a contusion of the spinal cord," meaning the spinal cord had been badly shaken and bruised by the bullet's impact.

"We found the nerves not actually severed," Dr. Rollins said, "but the bullet was in a critical place, surrounding delicate nerves and right at the top of a network of nerves that branch out from the cord."

Dr. Rollins conceded that the spinal cord often never recovers from a bad bruise, and other neurosurgeons not on the surgical team said that the thousands of nerves inside the cord might have been permanently misaligned by the bullet's impact.

"The cord can look absolutely normal on the outside," one neurosurgeon said, "but the nerves that make up the inner network of the cord are so delicate that even a moderate bruising can cause permanent damage."

The doctors who removed the bullet from Wallace's spine and who examined the spinal cord during and after the surgery said it might be 18 months before they know if Gov. Wallace will be permanently paralyzed by the damage.

"He (Gov. Wallace) raised the question about the paralysis being permanent and the reply I gave him was that it was too early to make any determination," said Dr. J. Garber Galbraith of the University of Alabama School of Medicine.

One of the seven doctors in the operating room was Gov. Wallace's personal physician, Dr. Hamilton H. Hutchinson.

"I think," Dr. Hutchinson said, "that the governor has accepted the fact that he may have to resort to braces and

crutches."

The fact that the spinal cord was not severed was regarded by doctors as a good sign, but the fact that Gov. Wallace still has no feeling or movement in his legs is looked on as a bad sign.

"He has no feeling in his

legs, none at all," Dr. Rollins said. "Whatever movements he's had in his toes and feet have been involuntary (reflex actions) and serve no useful function. His bladder and bowel functions are still out of control."

The operation began at 8:40 a.m. and apparently went without a hitch. Gov. Wallace was wheeled out of the operating room at 10:30 a.m. and was awake less than 30 minutes later.

"I informed him that he went through surgery very nicely," Dr. Rollins said. "I told him that he'd required no blood and that there were no changes in his condition."

His doctors said that Gov. Wallace would stay another

week to 10 days at Holy Cross Hospital before leaving for Alabama, and that they foresaw an uncomplicated recovery.

"I think he can start taking fluids by mouth this evening," Dr. Rollins said. "His abdominal infections are clearing up very nicely, and we anticipate no infection from today's surgery."

Called into the Wallace case only two weeks ago, Dr. Rollins said that the decision to remove the bullet from the governor's spine yesterday was made at least partly because Gov. Wallace had begun to feel some pain from the bullet's presence.

"The pain was due to irritation of nerves," Dr. Rollins said. "By removing the bullet

we hope to reduce that pain to a certain extent."

Doctors pointed out that if Gov. Wallace is to walk with the help of braces and crutches, he must begin a long and rigorous program of physical therapy in a short time.

"This is a matter of months and months of training," Dr. Rollins said. "He must learn to retrain his muscles to take over for the damaged nerves in his spinal cord."

This means that Wallace must learn to use his arms, chest, abdomen and thighs to do things his legs formerly did, so that he can do things like stand up, thrust his feet forward and swing his body into a chair.