

Stennis's Condition Still 'Very Serious'

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 31—

Senator John C. Stennis, one of the capital's most powerful political figures, was in "very serious condition" today at Walter Reed Army Hospital after being shot and robbed in front of his home last night.

The 71-year old Mississippi Democrat, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, survived six and a half hours of surgery last night and early today and was taken to the hospital's intensive-care unit with one bullet still lodged in his lower back and another in

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his left thigh.

Meanwhile, President Nixon and many of the Senator's colleagues in Congress not only expressed shock and dismay but also called for the passage of anticrime measures they said would do much to deter such assaults.

In a hastily called news conference at the White House, the President expressed hope that a new attempt would be made on Capitol Hill this year to control the inexpensive pistols known as "Saturday night specials." [Question 9, Page 20.]

Mike Mansfield, Democrat of Montana, the Senate majority leader, asked the Judiciary Committee to try again to write legislation that would help prevent crimes and keep guns out of the hands of criminals.

Their responses to the shooting of the eighth-ranking member of the Senate typified the flood of statements issued from Capitol Hill today, an outpouring not unlike those that followed the assassinations of President Kennedy and Senator Robert F. Kennedy and the attempted murder last May of Gov. George C. Wallace of Alabama.

Nevertheless, there was no great optimism in either the House or the Senate that gun control measures, opposed by Senator Stennis as adamantly as he opposed civil rights bills, would be enacted this session.

Senator Stuart Symington of Missouri, the second-ranking Democrat on the Armed Services Committee, assumed its acting chairmanship today.

Meanwhile, the metropolitan police and agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation continued their search for two young black men suspected in the shooting and described in radio bulletins as being in their late teens.

At 4 P.M. the wounded Senator's son, John H. Stennis, a 37-year-old lawyer and state legislator in Jackson, Miss., told reporters at the hospital that his father's condition remained stable but that any prognosis was necessarily guarded.

A team of thoracic specialists, experienced in dealing with gunshot wounds suffered in combat, completed the surgery on the Senator at 3:30 A.M. today.

Bullet Not Removed

The bullet lodged in his back was not removed, a hospital spokesman said, because "it's causing no trouble." The fragments in his left leg were likewise considered inconsequential for the time being.

The surgeons' primary concern was to repair the Senator's intestines and pancreas, penetrated by what the police later described as a small-caliber bullet.

Although the hospital's "very serious" classification is its most serious description of a patient's condition, members of the Senator's staff said that he was conscious about noon today after dozing and resting through the morning under heavy sedation.

When the Senate convened at noon, some members offered personal tributes to Mr. Stennis's 25 years in the Senate, a career that began in 1948 when he succeeded the fiery segregationist, Theodore G. Bilbo.

Elsewhere in the country, civic and political leaders from both ends of the political spectrum expressed shock. Governor Wallace, recuperating from surgery in a Birmingham hospital, described Senator Stennis as "a great public servant the country needs."

In Mississippi, Charles Evers, the black Mayor of Fayette, whose brother, Medgar, a civil rights leader, was murdered in 1963, expressed sorrow and said, "It's got to the place that no one is safe."

The sympathetic response and angry reaction were, in some respects, a measure of the respect Senator Stennis had gained from his colleagues in Congress and other politicians throughout his career.

His power in military affairs has been enormous and his support of the President's positions and policies on the Vietnam war has been unwavering. In his news conference today,

Mr. Nixon said that without Senator Stennis the peace settlement recently reached might have been impossible.

The Senator, a man who often described his legislative duties as his only diversion, spent most of Tuesday working in his suite at the Old Senate Office Building, leaving shortly after 6 o'clock to attend a reception of the National Guard Association.

His administrative assistant, John Cresswell, accompanied him to the reception in a hall near the Capitol and noticed his departure about an hour later.

Wedded to Habits

Like many others who made Congress their life, Senator Stennis has been known as a deeply disciplined man, inextricably wedded to habits practiced for years until they became as much a part of his person as the drawl in his voice and the courtliness of his manners.

Senator Stennis, according to his aides, invariably took the same route each evening when he drove his white, four-door sedan the six miles from his office to his fashionable section of Northwest Washington.

Last night was no different than any other, and from a variety of sources—his wife, his neighbors and the wounded Senator himself—the police were able to reconstruct what occurred in the moments after he arrived home.

According to their account, he stepped from his automobile, leaned back in to retrieve his brown, leather briefcase and overcoat, and turned to find himself face-to-face with two young men, at least one of whom was armed with a small-caliber pistol.

"Get 'em up," one of them said, according to the police account of the Senator's recollections.

Without resisting, he gave them his wallet, which contained several credit cards; his gold pocket watch; a quarter, the only coin in his pocket, and the Phi Beta Kappa key he earned during his undergraduate days at the University of Virginia.

Inside the three-story, cream-brick house, Mrs. Coy Hines Stennis, his wife for 43 years, was putting the final touches on their dinner when she heard what she described as "two pops." Across the street, Mrs. Sullivan heard "what sounded like a couple of firecrackers."

One bullet entered his left chest, coursing downward diagonally, piercing his stomach, pancreas and intestine before lodging in the region of the lower right back. The other struck his left thigh, hit the bone and was shattered by the impact.

Mrs. Stennis recalled later that she thought she had heard him call "Miss Coy" but was uncertain of her own memory.

Just down the street, Mrs. Robert J. Best pulled back the drapes at a front window of her house and saw what she later told the police were two young black men running away from the Senator's Buick Electra and then driving away in another car.

Wife Told to Call Police

The wounded Senator pulled himself erect and made his way across the grassy strip between the curb and the sidewalk, then up a small set of concrete stairs, down the narrow, paved path, up onto the small porch and into the entrance hall of the \$70,000 house.

"I don't know how he ever made it," a police officer said later.

Once inside, he calmly asked his wife to telephone the metropolitan police and Walter Reed Army Hospital and then lay down on the couch in the adjacent living room while she made the two calls. His blood pressure began to weaken immediately, a result of the internal bleeding from the abdominal wound, but he did not lose consciousness.

The police recorded her notification at 7:40 P.M., and when a District of Columbia fire department ambulance arrived a

few minutes later, the metropolitan police were already there, talking with Senator Stennis and his wife.

A policeman accompanied the two attendants in the ambulance and conversed with Senator Stennis until they arrived at the hospital's emergency entrance just after 8 o'clock. The Senator was taken immediately in the operating room, where, as one spokesman said later, "the first team" was waiting and ready.

Mrs. Stennis was escorted from the house by two policemen and was driven away in a police car. By the time she arrived at the hospital, she was only moments ahead of Senator James A. Eastland, her husband's colleague from Mississippi; Senator Henry M. Jackson of Washington and Representative Jamie L. Whitten, also from the wounded Senator's home state. All are Democrats.

Over the next few hours, some of the Government's most powerful figures arrived at Walter Reed, including Secretary of State William P. Rogers, Secretary of Defense Elliott L. Secretary of Defense Elliot L. Senators who served with Mr. Stennis over the last quarter-century.
