

Closer Look At Trouble In San Jose

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San Jose

Security forces were inadequate to control the area around the San Jose Municipal Auditorium during a confrontation Thursday night between President Nixon and anti-war demonstrators.

This was one of several unusual conditions revealed by a post mortem examination of the confrontation which received national attention and has itself become a factor in the 1970 elections.

There were these other disclosures, based on talks with police officials and eyewitnesses:

- President Nixon almost certainly knew the situation was dangerous when he mounted the hood of his limousine under bright floodlights to flaunt a V-sign at demonstrators.

- Despite advance intelligence reports that protestors

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had been invited from all over the San Francisco Bay area to come to the San Jose demonstration, the police did not have enough men to attempt to clear the parking lot area so the President could have safe egress.

- @ The placing of buses and fire trucks, under Secret Service orders, blocked any alternate exit route, forcing the President's motorcade to run the gauntlet of a hostile crowd.

- + Only one of three top police officials remembered seeing any rocks or stones thrown, and that one — San Jose's police chief — said that to his knowledge neither the President nor his car was struck with a missile of any kind. Press reports have said

that the President's party was stoned by demonstrators.

- @ Some reporters at the scene felt the intensity and extent of the disturbance had been exaggerated.

CHRONOLOGY

Following is the chronology of the incident, compiled from interviews with newsmen, spectators and three police officials — San Jose Chief Ray Blackmore, San Jose Police Captain Lewis Haller and another high area official who asked that his name not be used:

A group of 500 to 600 young people attended a rally at around 5:15 p.m. on the campus of San Jose State College, seven blocks from the auditorium. The rally was sponsored by four local organizations and the Peace and Freedom Party. The group planned to march to the auditorium. City officials had denied a parade permit but later tacitly acknowledged they would not interfere with a march.

As the first of some 6000 spectators began crowding into the auditorium to see President Nixon, Governor Ronald Reagan and Senator George Murphy, at around 6:40 p.m., some 1000 demonstrators reached the front of the auditorium.

Meanwhile, police had established a double file of policemen in the rear parking lot as a corridor for the Nixon motorcade. The parking lot is roughly 300 feet by 300 feet, with a 3-foot high brick fence on the east and west, a curbed sidewalk to the north and the auditorium to the south. There were 120 to 140 armed men, including tactical squads from Santa Clara county and San Jose, plus police from several other jurisdictions, on hand to guard the lot. Another 250 men were distributed inside the auditorium, at the airport, at intersections and overpasses.

When the President arrived at 7:05 p.m. through the east entrance to the parking lot, some spectators and demonstrators had drifted around to the back. Captain Haller recalled that the Se-

cret Service had ruled that half the lot — the northern half — would be open to cars and people. "As long as we could protect it, and the President was looking for votes, they felt people should be allowed to congregate in the lot," said Haller.

There was some heckling when the President arrived. The Secret Service decided that the motorcade — 15 cars and 6 buses — would not leave by the same east entrance, because it involved a sharp left turn near a heavy crowd concentration. Instead, the motorcade would go due north through the lot and onto the street.

The agents also decided to place the buses and two fire trucks in an arc fanning out in two directions from the rear entrance of the auditorium, providing a protected area should it be necessary to land a helicopter and get the President out quickly. The placement of one fire truck, however, effectively blocked the east entrance as an alternative exit.

When word got around that the President had come through the parking lot, the demonstrators — plus many non-demonstrating spectators — surged around to the back.

LOT

Asked why the area was not cleared, both Chief Blackmore and Captain Haller replied that it would have been impossible with just 120 men to clear 1500 people from a huge open lot and keep them out.

But Haller said that in his opinion the entire lot should have been declared tactically off limits from the beginning, and sufficient manpower provided to keep it that way. The anonymous police official added, "If we had some additional people, we would have swept them out of there."

Faced with a line of chanting demonstrators, Secret Service men approached Chief Blackmore. "They called me over. We were surrounded. Okay, what do we do? I motioned over to where the first bus was and said

we'd drive through there" — through, that is, one section of the line of protestors. "I got my Tactical Squad and told them, 'When I give the signal, go.'"

Ten minutes before the President emerged, a San Jose policeman and a Secret Service agent test-drove a car through the crowd, finding great difficulty in getting it to open a path. It became clear that the departure would have to be fast and that the choice of exit would have to be a surprise.

TROUBLE

In the meantime, while the President was speaking, 30 to 40 demonstrators tried to crash the front door but were dispersed. Also, the delicate situation out back, was communicated over walkie talkies to the agents in the auditorium.

"The President was advised that there were these people out here, and they were screaming and yelling," Haller said.

The President emerged from the rear auditorium exit at roughly 7:55 and walked to his car a few feet away. Bathed in parking-lot floodlights that had been augmented for a possible helicopter landing, he was fully visible to the shouting crowd, now in an ugly mood.

Mr. Nixon, behind a heavy body shield of agents, talked with Secret Service people for about a minute and then suddenly climbed to the hood of his limousine. Alone on the hood, he faced the crowd, raised his arm in a characteristic V-salute, smiled, and said "Hi." He remained here for several seconds, and then, as he descended was heard to say, "That's what they hate to see."

"We didn't appreciate this, and I doubt if the Secret Service appreciated it," said Haller. "But the Secret Service explained to us before we started that this is a political year, and if he sees something he thinks will get votes, he'll stop."

PAUSE

Before getting into the limousine, the President stopped

to talk to a few newsmen for roughly two minutes, increasing police uneasiness.

Finally, he got into the car. Blackmore signalled his troops, and without warning the lead squad cars and motorcycles, followed by a file of tactical squad police from two sides, surged into the crowd, forcing open a path. The President's bullet proof car and a Secret Service convertible went screeching through. The whole thing (including a sudden stop when a Secret Service man lunged for a car and missed) took about 20 seconds.

Later reports said that the motorcade had been stoned. The President himself, in a statement, referred to "the stoning at San Jose." But there are conflicting eyewitness reports on this.

Chief Blackmore said, "there were rocks being thrown," but added, "to my knowledge, nothing happened to the President's car."

Captain Haller, who was in charge of outside security at the event, remembered seeing a "hail of missiles," but said they consisted of windshield wipers torn from the parked cars, some broken glass, a gear shift lever and eggs — no rocks or bricks.

The unnamed police official concurred, adding, "If you want my professional opinion, this wasn't half as bad as some of the things I've seen around here. They really played it up."