

How Great Was Danger To Nixon at San Jose?

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How serious a situation was it in San Jose on Oct. 29 as President Nixon was leaving a rear parking lot of the city's Civic Auditorium? Was his limousine pounded by missiles? Was he in real danger?

Were news reports of the incident exaggerated? Were the Nixon-haters provoked by his waving of peace signs in the form of two Vs made by his fingers? Could the whole thing have been avoided by planning which would have prevented the crowd from getting near the presidential motorcade?

The Tribune interviewed many sources this week seeking answers to these and other questions, and received a variety of objective and subjective responses about the controversial incident.

There are those newsmen, trained observers, who describe it as an ugly or at least a major demonstration, replete with thrown objects, angry chants and obscene gestures from a large number of hostile and predominantly young people in the crowd. But there are others, also trained observers, who feel that it was not a very serious matter at all and contend that few missiles were hurled.

To White House correspondent Eugene Risher of United Press International, it was "certainly the most vicious demonstration that Nixon has faced" since becoming President. But to Tom De Vries, a reporter for San Francisco's KQED-TV's "Newsroom" program, there was not much to the situation and he says "it never occurred to me that anything happened until the next morning," when he was stunned by news reports talking about a rumpus at San Jose.

De Vries, who was standing in the crowd while the presidential motorcade moved through a hastily-made, narrow corridor through the assemblage, declared that

Deeper Look at the Incident

Editor's Note: One need hardly emphasize the constant danger elected representatives face in making required public appearances and mingling with crowds.

There is the sorrow and the shame of the deaths of the brothers Kennedy which have left a deep unhealing wound on the memory. There is the stain imbedded by the loss of national figures such as Martin Luther King, Medgar Evers and others.

Thus what transpired after President Nixon's speech in San Jose a week ago Thursday night is a matter of deep concern which ought to be closely examined.

In order to shed a bit more light on the events outside San Jose Civic Auditorium on that hectic, pre-election, pre-Halloween night The Tribune here presents a review and elaboration to reports carried by various media — reports which in many respects have been confusing and contradictory.

Inconsistencies were in some cases borne of the location or predilection of the observer. In others they resulted from speculation or switching of stories.

Whatever individual impressions might be, the danger was there. The situation was explosive. As one photographer said: "I could just feel the hate of the crowd."

From the moment the President emerged from the auditorium it was evident he and his entourage were locked in a keyhole of people.

They would have to run a gauntlet to depart. And they did.

"there was no major attack. There was no hail of rocks or bottles."

But Risher, riding in a car four vehicles behind Nixon's sedan, says "I saw a helluva lot of missiles flying" during the motorcade's trip down the corridor, including a rock that bounced off a car in front of his.

Earl Behrens, veteran political editor of the San Francisco Chronicle, riding four or five cars behind Nixon, also reports seeing many missiles flying.

Then there are many reports in between, including

those of San Jose police officials, who said some missiles were heaved, but not a shower of them.

The Secret Service and the White House claim that the presidential limousine was hit by missiles, as do Gov. Ronald Reagan and Sen. George Murphy, who were riding in it with the President after leaving a rally for Murphy inside the auditorium.

Reagan said later that it was like being inside a drum, and Murphy said rocks hit the side of the car. "They must have been at least the size of half a brick by the sound they made," Murphy said.



CHIEF RAY BLACKMORE
Changed his views

The Tribune has not found a newsman who saw the car actually being hit. Risher, who stated unequivocally in a story early on Oct. 30 that "missiles bounced harmlessly" off the sedan, says the information came later at San Jose Municipal Airport from Secret Service agent Arthur Godfrey, a man he knows and trusts, and who was riding in the Nixon car.

Risher says he did not actually see missiles hit the car himself, nor did Behrens, nor did many other reporters who were even farther back in the motorcade in press buses than the others and had a poor vantage point.

One reporter standing in the crowd said he saw a red flag thrown toward the Nixon limousine, but didn't know if it hit the car.

San Jose police officials said some missiles were thrown toward the president's car, but said their men, who were helping form the walls of the motorcade's corridor, did not know if the objects struck the car or what they were.

Police Chief Ray Blackmore reported he was in an unhit car riding directly in front of Nixon's. Behrens also reported that his car wasn't hit.

Several reporters said a youth swung a large belt at either Nixon's car or one near it.

At the airport, newsmen saw egg and eggshell splattered on the car's hood and noticed that at least one aerial had been torn off. And at the Western White House in San Clemente early this week, the limousine was inspected more closely by newsmen, who found at least a dozen fresh chips in the car's paint, at least two chips in the glass and two small dents.

The Secret Service issued an unusual statement saying the damage to the car "could only have been caused by rocks or other hard objects." Godfrey, the Secret Service agent, estimated that perhaps 10 missiles hit the car.

There was no question that at least two of the press buses were pelted by missiles heavy enough to produce thuds on impact and to crack several windows.

Greyhound Lines West, which supplied the buses, said one bus had four cracked windows and the other had two cracked windows. Some of the splintered glass hit riders inside, though the company reported that none of the missiles penetrated the buses and none of the objects left gaping holes in the glass.

The only other damage to the buses was a tiny nickel-sized hole in the body of one, the firm said.

A police car bringing up the rear of the motorcade had a window and a beacon atop the vehicle broken, while a police motorcycle in the procession wound up with a dent in its gas tank, officers said.

Employees of AMPCO Auto Parks, which operates the Auditorium parking lot for the city, cleaned the lot after the crowd left following the motorcade's departure. General Manager Don Wickham and operational manager Ken Lampton said that among the debris were a few dozen rocks, perhaps a few dozen soft drink cans, possibly 10 or 12 bottles, plus a metal post, many sticks, broken glass and at least two bricks.

About 60 or 70 per cent of the debris was in the general vicinity of the motorcade

route through the lot, said Lampson, though neither he nor Wickham said they knew what had been done with the materials by the crowd during the demonstration.

John P. Adams, 21, an AMPCO parking attendant who helped clean the lot, said that "there wasn't that much junk around." He felt "there wasn't evidence of Nixon getting stoned to death or anything."

Lampson and Wickham also said that at least 30 damaged

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cars parked in the lot were reported to the firm, including at least a dozen which they said they personally saw being stomped on by youths jumping up and down on tops and hoods. Some other cars were apparently damaged by the weight of people using them to get better vantage points, they said.

Damage to doors of the auditorium was also reported, some of it by demonstrators trying to break in while Nixon was inside, police said.

Two policemen suffered minor injuries.

The White House and the Secret Service say the President, Reagan and Murphy were not in real danger once they were inside the completely closed and heavily fortified limousine.

The only real worry, said Police Capt. Lewis Haller, was if the car stopped on its way through the crowd or if the crowd tried to block it. Except for a brief stop by the entourage, the limousine was not halted in the corridor, police said.

Police Chief Blackmore was quoted the day after the incident as saying that the limousine came within moments of being hemmed in by the crowd and as saying "how we got him out of there I don't know. It must have been an act of God."

But two days later he gave a greatly toned-down version of the incident and said the barrage on the president was "verbal, not physical." He told The Tribune this week that he had changed his picture of the situation after consulting with his men. "No one has the answers right off," he said.

When Nixon first came out to the back lot after his appearance inside, he was in a

cordoned-off, floodlit area that would have been used for an emergency helicopter evacuation if it had been needed.

A few missiles, most of them apparently eggs, flew into that area at that time from the crowd, which has been estimated at as low as 1,000 to 1,500 by police and some newsmen, and as much as several thousand higher by other reporters. By no means all of those in the crowd were vocal or in league with the louder elements, several observers noted.

An object that was later identified by the Secret Service as a rock whizzed by Nixon. An egg hit a policeman in the face.

Nixon climbed onto the hood of his limousine and gave the crowd the double V salute. Many newsmen claimed that this action served to inflame the crowd more than it had already been.

Tribune photographer Robert Stinnett said he had come out of the auditorium about five minutes before Nixon and "I could just feel the hate toward the press, toward everyone." That feeling increased when Nixon came out, Stinnett said, and when he made the V salute, "he was in effect was shaking his fist in their faces, and that was the straw that broke the camel's back."

Tribune Political Editor Gayle Montgomery said the V salute was what turned the situation "from a noisy demonstration into violence."

At least two reporters have quoted Nixon as saying at the time to an aide, "That's what they hate to see." And Reagan said the next day that "we were most of us giving the peace sign back to them through the window (of the car) because we know that

nothing infuriates them more."

Ziegler later denied as "totally false" a charge that the president personally aggravated and provoked the incident in the lot for political purposes.

De Vries also feels the sudden forming of the department corridor through the crowd shortly before Nixon's V-salute exacerbated matters.

After the reaction to the V-salute, Nixon quickly got into his limousine and it began its move through the corridor, getting through it quickly.

De Vries and other reporters claim the news reports of the incident have greatly exaggerated it, though De Vries noted that if the president had stayed five or 10 minutes longer after the V salute, there

"could have been quite a scene."

But Montgomery and others deny any exaggeration by the press. "I don't think it was blown out of proportion," Montgomery said.

Several newsmen, however, felt some of the politicians were guilty of exaggerating the incident in their rhetoric to the public. One noted that a Murphy newspaper advertisement the day before the election talked about "the riot last Thursday night."

None of the newsmen interviewed by The Tribune categorized the incident as a riot.

Several observers theorized that a confrontation with the crowd could have been minimized by having law enforcement officers keep the crowd well away from the motorcade.

Tom Hanson, special agent in charge of the Secret Service office in San Francisco, said there was no need for keeping the crowd far at bay because the Presidential party was safe in the limousine despite going through the crowd.

He said enough police and Secret Service men were on hand to handle the situation, but several other onlookers, including Stinnett, didn't think so.

San Jose Police Capt. Haller said that if the limousine or its alternate had been moved to another location to await Nixon, people in the crowd would have followed it.

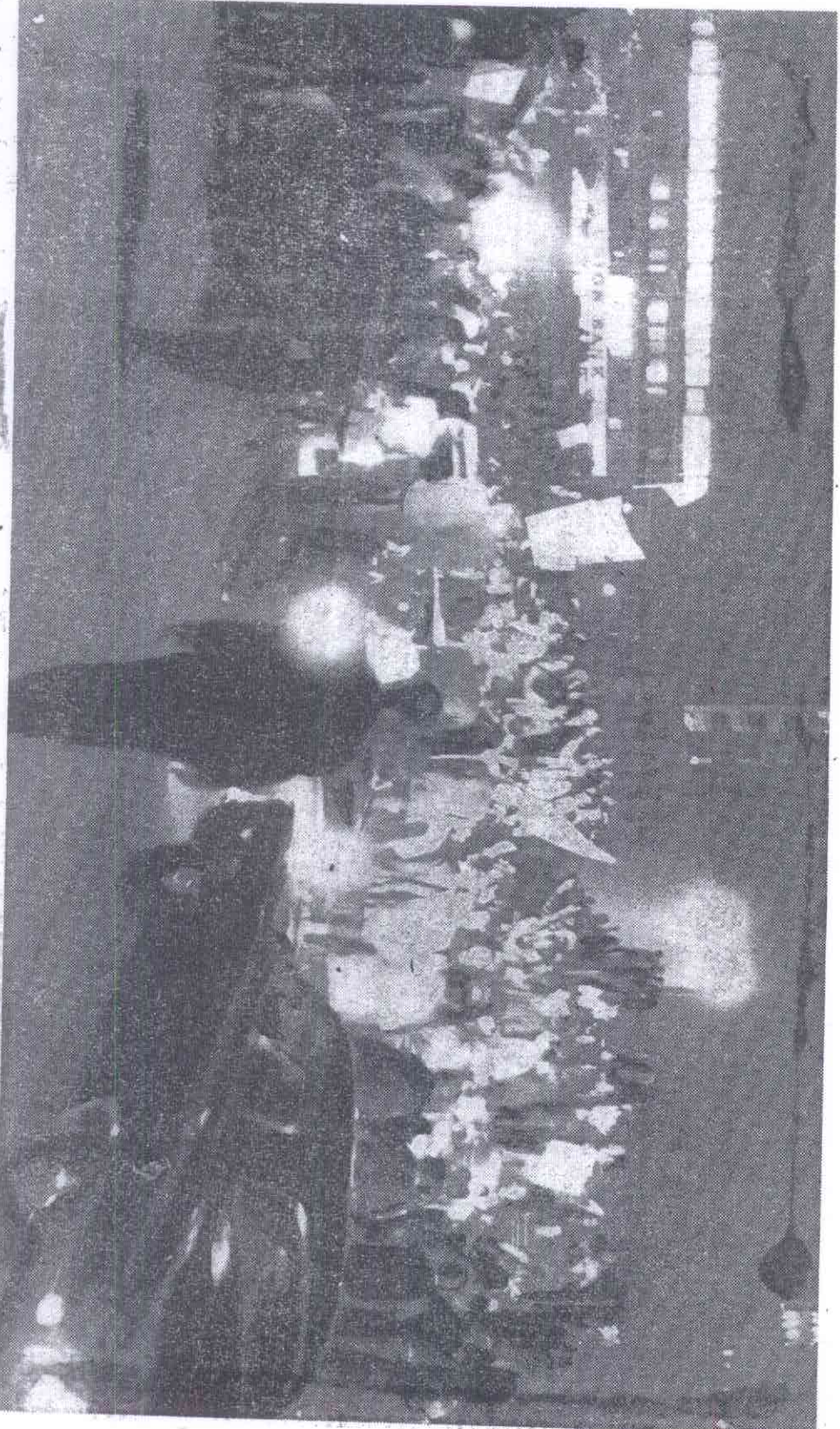
The route chosen for the limousine was straight through the crowd to the far side of the lot so that the car would then have clear sailing afterwards on Park Avenue, which had little or no traffic on it, Haller said.

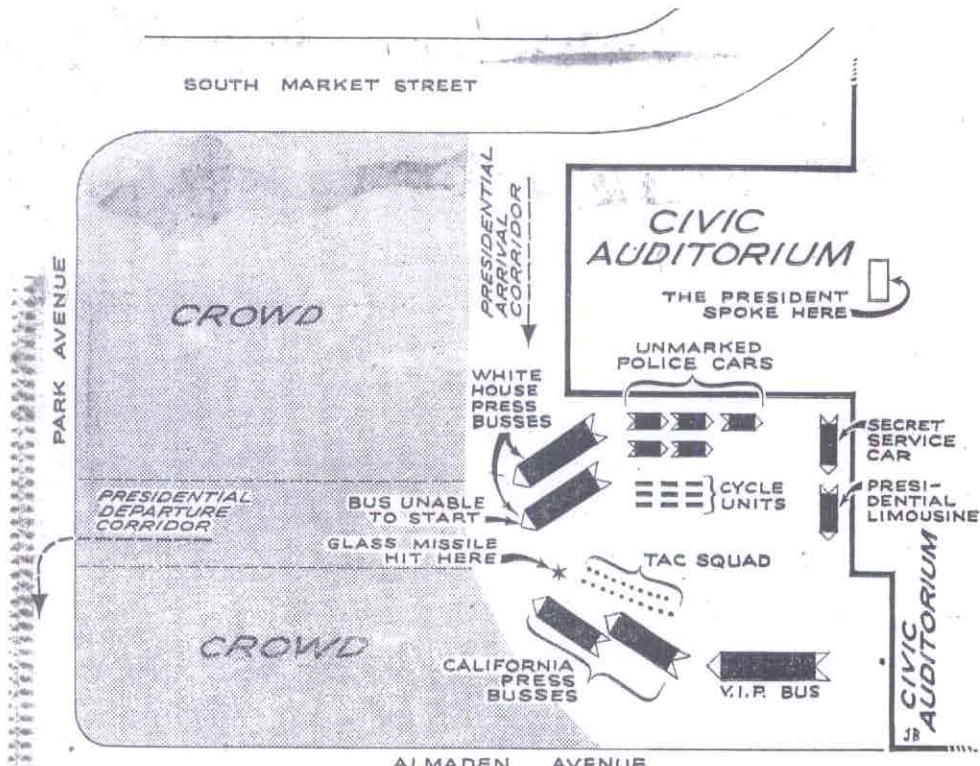
The car had entered the lot from Market Street, but Haller said that leaving the same way would have meant not only going through demonstrators, but also having to slow down in the Market Street traffic while still being near many people in the crowd until it would have gotten to Park Avenue.

Meanwhile, a Santa Clara County Grand Jury subcommittee is studying whether a full-blown investigation of the incident is warranted.

People in crowd shouted abuse, gestured and hurled objects which dented vehicles in presidential caravan, broke bus windows

Tribune photo by Robert Simmitt





PRESIDENT WAS AT TOP OF KEYHOLE - SHAPED POCKET FACING CROWD
 Police wedge advanced to form exit corridor from parking area out to street



NEWSMEN VIEW DEBRIS ON PRESIDENT'S LIMOUSINE AFTER RETURNING TO SAN JOSE AIRPORT
 In confusion some papers carried photo taken before the violence. It showed no marks