

Wallace Was 'Fully Aware'

Candidates' Risks Impossible to

By LEE BYRD

WASHINGTON (AP) — You're at a political rally and a friendly young man sidles up and gives you a slight, painless nudge in the ribs. He is smiling and the gesture seems to say "Hi, how are ya?" But what he really wanted to know is whether you've got a gun.

It's a little trick often employed by the Secret Service. And if it had been used on the right man Monday, George C. Wallace likely would have been spared the bullets which felled him on a Laurel, Md., parking lot.

Yet who would expect the Secret Service or local police to spot every potential assailant in a crowd?

NOT GEORGE Wallace, who took the step of adding Alabama state troopers to the corps of federal men who followed him and still felt "fully aware of the possibility" he would be shot.

And having more agents, said Asst. Treasury Secretary Eugene T. Rossides, "would have made absolutely no difference in a situation like this."

At best, the business of candidate protection is one of reducing the risks. But they never are eliminated. Not as long as politicians insist on demonstrating their popularity in handshaking tours and hoopla rallies. Not as long as just a few men are willing to commit a violent act, whether it is upon a Dr. Martin Luther King or a George Corley Wallace.

The late Robert F. Kennedy told his closest aides that if a man wanted to kill him, he'd probably find a way to do it, no matter what. Meanwhile, said Kennedy, a man has to take a man's chances.

BUT DOES HE? In an era when newspapers, television

and radio can reach virtually every voting man and woman in the nation, is it really necessary to charge through a mob of mere hundreds and thereby subject the will of the majority to the whim of a maniac?

Or should a man running for the highest office in the land forego such gallantry, like the general who remains at the rear line, as a matter of national interest?

Those are questions, of course, which Americans have asked themselves before. But nine years after the assassination of John F. Kennedy and four after King and Robert Kennedy fell, little seems to have changed, at least philosophically.

"This sad and frightening occurrence," said former Atty. Gen. John N. Mitchell of the Wallace shooting, "raises again the strange sense of having witnessed this all before... that the American political process now subjects political leaders to such personal danger."

THE NOTION that massive face-to-face contact is necessary is something of an American exclusive among democracies. Too, America leads the world in the number of lethal weapons among its citizens and the ease by which they can be procured. Remember the great gun debate after RFK was shot?

There were tighter gun controls as a result. And for the first time, major candidates were assigned agents before the nominating conventions. The Secret Service force was nearly quadrupled since that day in Los Angeles, now totaling over 700 agents. But George Wallace was shot nonetheless, as he reached to shake a hand.

Now the protection will be expanded again. Sen. Edward Kennedy, Rep. Shirley Chisholm and Rep. Wilbur Mills have been added to the list of those under guard.

But there are many who share the trepidations of first

lady Pat Nixon: "... to think our public officials cannot go out to present their ideas to the people without being shot," and wonders whether personal campaigning ought not to end.

THE TASK of guarding the Democratic candidates is regarded as far tougher by most agents than that of protecting the president and vice president. In White House travels, the routes are known and can be carefully advanced. Buildings are searched in some cases, with men posted on rooftops.

But the primary candidates don't follow such pre-set routine. The Secret Service declines to say how many men are assigned to each candidate, though it could be as many as 50. No more than eight or 10 are usually at the campaigner's side at any one time, however.

When Wallace made a major speech, at an auditorium or rally, he stood behind a bulletproof rostrum. He used it in three campaigns in the last eight years, and spoke behind it Monday at Laurel. But then, contrary to his more usual practice, he stepped out to shake those hands.

At a typical Wallace rally, four Secret Service agents stood on the platform, arms folded or behind their back, intently studying the crowd as if no one were above suspicion. Others would be in the audience or at the rear of the hall. And all were equipped with pocket radios.