How Great Was Danger To Nixon at San Jose?

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

There 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 KCBS-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 rampup 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 "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 him and others who were heaved, but not a shower of them.

Inconsistencies were in some cases born of the location or predilection of the observer. In others, they resulted from speculation or switching of stories. Whatever individual impressions might be, 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.

Deeper Look at the Incident

Editor's Note: One need hardly emphasize the constant danger elected representatives face in making required public appearances and mingleing 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, Medger 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.

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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.

There 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?

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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 at least one aerial damage. The Secret Service said an aerial had been torn off, and at the Western White House in San Clemente, each time 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 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 splattered glass hit riders inside, though the company reported that none of the missiles penetrated the buses and none of the objects left gaps holes.

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

A police car bringing up the rear of the motorcade had a wiper 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 Park, who 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 operations manager Ken Lampton said that among the debris were a few dozen rocks, perhaps a dozen soft drink cans, possibly 10 or 12 bottles, plus a metal post, many sticks, broken glass and at least two bricks.

About 68 or 70 per cent of the debris was in the general vicinity of the motorcade route through the lot, said Lampton, though neither he nor Wickham said they knew what had been done with the materials by the crowd during the demonstration.

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

Lampong and Wickham also said that at least 30 damaged Continued Page 5, Col. 1

cars parked in the lot were reported to the firm, including at least a dozen with damaged winds and doors, and at least a dozen fresh chips in the glass, at least two chips in the glass and two small dents.

At least two reporters have quoted Nixon as saying at the time of the incident: "You can't believe half the stories. They exaggerate it."

De Vries later denied as "totally false" a charge that the president personally agitated and provoked the incident in the lot for political purposes. De Vries also feels the incident is warranted.

De Vries and other reporters claim the newsmen's reports of the incident have greatly exaggerated it. De Vries noted that if the president had stayed five or 10 minutes longer or 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 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 not be 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 special security for Nixon unless the President could be surrounded by law enforcement officers, including Stinnett, didn't think so.

San Jose Police Capt. Haller said that if the limousine and 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 intersection. Nixon could then have cleared traffic 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 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 the crowd. The car would then have had to proceed on Park Avenue, which had little or no traffic on it, Haller said.

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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.
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.