FD-350 (Rev. 12-5-78)

(Mount Clipping in Space Below)

(Indicate page, name of newspaper, city and state.)
"The DALLAS MORNING NEWS"

Date: 3/31/81
Edition:

Title: 095A (H2)

Character: 175-83
or
Classification:
Submitting Office: DALLAS

Vice president assumes crisis role after shooting

By Janet Battaile
Washington Bureau of The News

WASHINGTON — Vice President George Bush, sitting in the revolving chair in his private cabin aboard Air Force II Monday as it was about to land at Fort Worth, was thinking about how his newly acquired role as crisis manager had been overblown.

"Too much has been made of this," Bush was saying. "This is not something that happens every day. And anyway, I would only be doing it in the president's absence."

If there was a crisis, Bush was asked, wouldn't Reagan be there? "Well, yes, of course," he said. He paused, then said, "Almost always."

Three hours later, when the crisis struck, it was because Reagan wasn't there. He had been shot.

And Bush assumed the crisis role he was given just last week.

His first decision was to cancel the Austin appearance and return home as quickly as possible, which the pilots of Air Force II did with such speed that it knocked out the reception on the television Bush was watching to supplement the news he was receiving continuously on a special secure line from Secretary of State Alexander Haig, his chief of staff Dan Murphy and White House aides Edwin Meese and Jim Baker.

The atmosphere on the plane was somber and somewhat confused, with press announcements that were later retracted or corrected. But Bush, who remained secluded, was reported to be calm and in control.

The first word of any trouble was relayed almost casually to the half dozen reporters aboard by Shirley Green, a Bush press assistant, at 1:50 CST, about five minutes after taking off from Carswell Air Force Base in Fort Worth. "I've come to fill you in," she began, almost as if she thought those aboard already had heard the news.

She said a gunman had fired shots at the presidential party outside the Hilton hotel, and that a secret service officer and James Brady, Reagan's press secretary, had been hit. "The

WFO-175-311 Sub D-162
~~175-83 Sub 1~~-39

SEARCHED ____ INDEXED ____
SERIALIZED ____ FILED ____
APR 13 1981
FBI — DALLAS

FBI/DOJ

president was evacuated without injury," she said.

About five minutes later she returned from the front cabin with further news. "Our first statement was erroneous," she said. "The president has been hit in the left chest. He was taken to GW hospital and his condition is stable."

The plane refueled under strict security at Robert Mueller Airport in Austin, where Texas Secretary of State George W. Strake and Gov. Bill Clements boarded to confer briefly with Bush before he took off 45 minutes later. Strake pronounced Bush "in total control."

In the 2½-hour trip back to Andrews Air Force Base, 45 minutes ahead of schedule, secret service agents huddled frequently in the aisles as restless reporters were kept informed intermittently with brief statements sparse on facts.

At 4:18 CST Green said, "I'm very sorry to announce that the president's press secretary, Jim Brady, died in surgery." And four minutes later she returned again to relay a statement of condolence from Bush. Five minutes after that she and Victor Gold, a Bush speech writer, both returned, looking chagrined, to say it was all a mistake, that Brady was alive and that they had acted on an erroneous television announcement.

Green, looking drained, said forlornly, "We thought this day was going to be a piece of cake."

While such a crisis was the farthest thing from Bush's mind as he was fiddling Monday morning with the knobs that control the gadgets Lyndon B. Johnson had installed on his plane, it was something Reagan appears to have considered.

Just that morning, the *Washington Post* carried a lengthy story about the Bush in which Reagan was quoted as having asked Barbara Bush: "Is George happy with his job? Does he feel what he's doing is worthwhile?"

"I just want to be sure he's doing enough," Reagan said. "If the awful-awful should happen, George should know everything."

FD-350 (Rev. 12-5-78)

licate page, name of
spaper, city and state.)
"The DALLAS MORNING NEWS"

Date:
Edition: 3/31/81

Title: pg 5A (H2)

Character: 175-83
or
Classification:
Submitting Office: DALLAS

Bush 'in total control' after shots rang out

By George Kuempel
Staff Writer of The News

"I thought the vice president demonstrated a complete command of his own emotions. He was not indecisive about what he needed to do."
— House Majority Leader Jim Wright

WASHINGTON — In an address prepared for delivery to the Texas Legislature Monday, Vice President George Bush planned to talk about this being his first trip home since taking office and how good it felt to be back.

But Bush never got to deliver his message.

Instead, he spent his 50 minutes in Austin cloistered aboard his sleek, white jet awaiting word — like most other Americans — on the fate of President Reagan.

Bush learned of the shooting minutes after his plane left Fort Worth for Austin on the last leg of a 1-day visit to his adopted state. It was the first time he had returned to Texas since becoming vice president.

A long line of Republican office holders, party officials and friends, including Gov. Bill Clements, had arrived earlier at the airport to greet Bush. But Bush never left the plane.

Instead, he stayed on the ground only long enough for the plane to refuel and take off for a hurried flight back to Washington, where he was taken by helicopter directly to the White House.

Bush's plane arrived at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland at 5:25 p.m. Dallas time. A light rain was falling.

Bush's plane taxied directly into a hangar — which was highly unusual, officials said. A helicopter was parked behind the hangar. A Bush spokesman said Bush was going by motorcade to the vice presidential residence, but he was flown to the White House instead.

After arriving at the White House, Bush went to the Situation Room where he was briefed on Reagan's condition, international intelligence and the state of the nation's defense. He was there from 7 p.m. until 7:30.

Bush also met privately with a number of Cabinet members in his office before meeting with reporters to reassure the nation that the government was functioning properly. Aides said Bush also telephoned the wives of the three other shooting victims.

Reporters who were flying with Bush were not allowed near him after he learned of the shooting by radio. He had just left Fort Worth, where he had helped to dedicate a hotel and addressed the Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association.

The trip was considered so routine that neither of the two major wire services — and only one television network — bothered to send a reporter with Bush. An Associated Press staffer joined the flight in Austin, however.

Pilots of the Boeing 707, Air Force II, cut 45 minutes off the usual 3-hour flight from Austin to Washington in order to get Bush back to the capital as quickly as possible, aides said.

Two Texas congressmen who were on Bush's plane, House Majority Leader Jim Wright of Fort Worth, and Jim Collins, a Dallas Republican, gave Bush high marks for his coolness.

"He was very calm," Wright said. "I thought the vice president demonstrated a complete command of his own emotions. He was not indecisive about what he needed to do."

Collins was equally praiseworthy.

"I couldn't help but think for a good man he was under pressure," he said.

Collins, who said he and Wright spent about 20 to 30 minutes alone with Bush in his private cabin during the return flight, said there was never any doubt in Bush's mind that Reagan would survive the shooting.

"There was never any time they didn't think the president was in good shape," he said.

Clements, who met briefly with Bush at the Austin airport, said Bush was understandably disturbed by the news, but was calm.

"He's very distressed, of course," Clements said. Clements, his wife, Rita, and Texas Secretary of State George Strake Jr. were the only visitors allowed aboard the aircraft in Austin.

Bush was in constant contact with Secretary of State Alexander Haig and White House staffers, press aide Shirley Green said. But despite the elaborate communications system aboard, there were some breakdowns in the transmissions, officials said.

At 4:18 p.m., Ms. Green came to the back of the plane, where the reporters were seated, and said White House press secretary James Brady had died of [illegible]

WFO-175-311-Sub D-163
~~175-83-Sub 1-46~~

SEARCHED ____ INDEXED ____
SERIALIZED ____ FILED ____
APR 13 1981
FBI — DALLAS

FBI/DOJ

shooting. Four minutes later, she came back with a statement from Bush.

Bush, she said, was "stunned" and sent his condolences to Brady's family.

But five minutes later, Bush speechwriter Vic Gold said the report was wrong — that Brady was alive and in critical condition. Gold said the staff was reyling on a television report in announcing that Brady had died.

The TV, located in the middle cabin, also failed because the plane was flying so quickly, Ms. Green said.

Bush spent much of the trip alone in his private cabin, she said. He conferred frequently with aides, and also talked with the congressmen. But reporters didn't see him.

In the prepared statement he planned to make to Texas lawmakers, Bush praised Reagan — whom he had condemned in the primary campaign when he himself was a contender for the GOP presidential nomination — and compared him to some Texas heroes.

"By his every word and deed, President Reagan reflects the same dedication to the idea of individual freedom and dignity that inspired Houston. Bowie, Travis, Crockett, Austin and all those early Texans who shaped the history of our state," his prepared statement said.

"President Reagan now deserves his chance — an opportunity to carry out his mandate in an atmosphere of cooperation and conciliation — a mandate to lead America into a new era in which the idea of individual freedom and dignity becomes a reality for men and women everywhere in a world at peace," Bush's statement said.

Associated Press

Vice President Bush speaks to reporters Monday evening after returning abruptly from Texas.