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Retired Secret Service Agent Speaks to Pentagon Police about the Near Assassination of President Reagan

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The Pentagon Force Protection Agency (PFPA) and the Secret Service are not dissimilar agencies. Both are charged with protecting the lives of those they serve: the President and Vice President of the United States for the Secret Service; and Pentagon military and civilian personnel for PFPA.

And, for both the Secret Service and PFPA, most days are marked not by high drama, but rather by vigilance, preparation and training. An agent or officer, after all, never knows when he might be called upon to act. He knows, though, that when duty calls, he had better be ready.

On March 30, 1981, Secret Service agent Jerry Parr was ready. President Reagan had been shot, and Parr had to make split-second command decisions that would determine whether Reagan would live or die. And, as Parr told a PFPA audience on Nov. 30, it was by no means obvious what he should do.

Although Reagan had been shot, there was initially no sign of blood, he explained, and the nearest hospital was far from a secure location. And for agents charged with protecting the president, this is no small matter: They are trained to avoid and avert risk, not to court or flirt with danger. But Parr said he knew something was wrong, and that decisive action was needed. And so, he made the command decision: Transport Reagan to the hospital - immediately.

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As soon as the first bullet was fired, Parr and his fellow Secret Service agents acted with dispatch to literally shield and protect the president. Parr himself fell upon Reagan and hurled him into the car. This was a violent but unavoidable act to save the president from additional potential danger.

"If you do it the right way," Parr explained, [hurl someone into a car], "someone's going to get hurt... But when someone's shooting at you, you can't say, 'Mr. President, I think maybe we should get into the car.'" "You have to act.

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“Man, you really hurt my ribs,” Reagan told Parr. “Sorry about that, Mr. President,” the Secret Service agent responded. There was no sign of blood -- yet. The president's lung soon collapsed, though, and he would need emergency surgery just to stay alive.

Parr had initially thought that he might have caused Reagan's injuries. After all, there had been no visible sign that Reagan had suffered a bullet wound; and Parr himself had violently hurled Reagan into the vehicle to shield and protect him from danger. Perhaps, then, Reagan had escaped a bullet only to suffer a devastating trauma at the hands of those charged with protecting him.

But in point of fact, the president had been shot. The assassin's bullet had ripped through his lung and settled close in to his heart. And far from causing Reagan's injuries, Parr instead had helped to save his life.

“Reagan made an amazing recovery,” Parr said. “He recovered quite rapidly and served [as president] for eight years.”

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Parr is today retired. He left the Secret Service in 1985 after enjoying a long and distinguished 23-year career.

Parr is the subject of a new book, *Rawhide Down: The Near Assassination of Ronald Reagan*, by *Washington Post* reporter Del Wilber. Parr spoke to PFPA as part of the agency's distinguished speaker series. Past speakers include: retired Army General and former National Drug Czar Barry McCaffrey, *Washington Post* reporter Bob Woodward, and Washington, D.C. Police Chief Cathy L. Lanier.

NOTE: Below thumbnail photos are available as high-resolution .jpg files upon request.

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Jonathan H. Cofer, the Principal Deputy Director of the Pentagon Force Protection Agency (PFPA) (left), shakes hands after presenting a gift to retired Secret Service agent Jerry Parr (right).



Former Secret Service agents, now executives with the Pentagon Force Protection Agency (PFPA), meet with the man who saved Ronald Reagan: agent Jerry Parr. (From L-R: Assistant Director, Threat Management, Michael Ferrario; Acting Assistant Director for Support John Wampler; Special Agent Peter Hoelen; Special Agent Brian Krompasick; retired Special Agent Jerry Parr; Assistant Director for Law Enforcement James Knodell).



Former Secret Service agent Jerry Parr speaks to the Pentagon Force Protection Agency about the near assassination of President Reagan.



Former Secret Service agent Jerry Parr signs the poster promoting his appearance at the Pentagon Force Protection Agency (PFPA) .

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