

# The President Is Shot

By Jane Runyon

On the afternoon of March 30, 1981, many Americans experienced a feeling of déjà vu. Déjà vu is the name given to the feeling that a person has that he or she has seen or experienced an event before. Many Americans couldn't help having that feeling on this day.

The news hit TVs and radios immediately. President Ronald Reagan had been shot. He was leaving a Washington, D.C., hotel, turned to wave at some of the people gathered to see him, and fell toward the ground. Before he could hit the ground, his Secret Service agents whisked him into his car and headed to the hospital. This same story had been heard before.

On November 22, 1963, President John F. Kennedy was riding in a motorcade through Dallas, Texas. He smiled and waved to the crowd that had gathered to see him. Shots rang out from a nearby building. The president collapsed into the backseat of the car and was immediately taken to the nearest hospital. He was pronounced dead at the hospital. Now, just seventeen years later, the news sounded eerily the same.

At the scene of the Reagan shooting, police and Secret Service agents rushed to where the gunshots had come from. They pinned the man who had tried to assassinate the president against a nearby wall. They didn't want this gunman to escape. The man turned out to be John Hinckley. Hinckley was 25 years old. He was the son of a wealthy oil executive. What would make a young man like this try to kill the President of the United States? As it turned out, Hinckley was a very confused fellow. He later confessed to police and federal agents that he was trying to get a young movie star named Jodie Foster to pay some attention to him. He had become so obsessed with Miss Foster that reason had left him.

Investigators determined that Hinckley had been able to pull the trigger on his \$25 gun six times. The first bullet hit White House Press Secretary James Brady in the head. The second bullet hit a D.C. policeman in the back. The third hit the window of a building across the street. The fourth hit Secret Service agent Timothy McCarthy in the stomach. The fifth hit the bullet-proof glass on the side of the president's car. The sixth hit the side of the president's car, ricocheted off the side, and hit the president under his left arm.

When President Reagan reached the hospital, it was decided that an operation needed to be performed right away. The bullet which had hit him had missed his heart by mere centimeters. It was a matter of life and death. When the president cannot, for any reason, carry out his duties, the vice-president temporarily takes over the decision making for the country. The vice-president in 1981 was George H. W. Bush. Unfortunately, Mr. Bush was in Texas at the time of the shooting. It would take hours before he could be flown back to the capital. Secretary of State Alexander Haig announced to the world that he was in charge of the country until Vice-President Bush could be returned to the White House.

Surgery on the president was successful. The country breathed a sigh of relief. It didn't take long for his sense of humor to return. While in the hospital, he impressed those in attendance with his quick responses. When Mrs. Reagan arrived at the hospital, President Reagan is quoted as saying, "Honey, I forgot to duck." Before surgery, he said to all of the surgical team, "Please tell me you're all Republicans." Remembering that he was supposed to be in Philadelphia that evening, he told one of the nurses, "All in all, I'd rather be in Philadelphia."

Not everyone was as fortunate as President Reagan. James Brady's head injury was very serious. He became permanently disabled from his wounds. Soon after the events of March 30, Brady's wife, Sarah, became the leader of a movement to control guns in order to cut down on gun violence.

On June 21, 1981, John Hinckley was found not guilty by reason of insanity. He was placed in St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington, D.C., where he resides today. Not everyone agreed with the verdict. The prosecutors in



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the case felt that they had proven that he was indeed sane at the time of the shooting.

President Reagan died in June of 2004 at the age of 93. He had suffered from Alzheimer's disease for ten years. In the end, he didn't even remember the day he almost lost his life while president.

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## Questions

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\_\_\_\_\_ 1. President Reagan was shot in Dallas, Texas, after a meeting.

- A. False
- B. True

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. Why did John Hinckley shoot President Reagan?

- A. He didn't like Republicans.
- B. He didn't like gun control laws.
- C. He didn't like the president.
- D. He wanted to impress a movie star.

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. What job did Alexander Haig hold in Washington?

- A. Secretary of State
- B. Speaker of the House
- C. Vice-President
- D. Press Secretary

4. How exactly did President Reagan receive his wound?

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5. Why didn't John Hinckley go to jail?

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\_\_\_\_\_ 6. Who was the most seriously injured person in this shooting?

- A. A Secret Service agent
- B. The president's press secretary
- C. A policeman
- D. The president

\_\_\_\_\_ 7. Who was the vice-president at the time of the shooting?

- A. Alexander Haig
- B. John F. Kennedy
- C. James Brady
- D. George Bush

