



WHAT'S NEWS

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A Survivor Looks Back on January 25 Tragedy, And Looks Ahead

Over the weekend, What's News called on Nick Starr, who was seriously wounded in the attack four months ago today. He asked that we publish the following, which he composed in tedious, hunt-and-peck style using his one good arm.

Dear Friends,

After I was shot in January, I was literally deluged with cards and letters — far too many to answer individually. But I owe my friends a status report and a tangible sign that I am, in fact, still alive. I hope that nobody will be offended that *(continued on p. 2)*

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A Survivor Looks Back on January 25 Tragedy... (from p. 1)

this missive is less personal than I would wish. I will begin with my recollection of the events on January 25th — a classic case of being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

As I often did, I stopped at a fast food restaurant in McLean that morning to work *The Washington Post* crossword puzzle over the day's first cup of coffee. Normally after a stop for coffee I would get to the stoplight at the Rt. 123 entrance to the Agency around 7:30-7:40, but I dallied over the crossword a little longer than usual. So I arrived closer to 7:50 — just in time to be a target.

Maybe I wasn't very alert that morning (maybe I'm never at my best at that hour), but I have to confess that I did not notice either the shooter or his car as I pulled up to the stoplight. In fact, I wasn't aware of anything amiss until I heard shots behind me and to my left. They sounded like somebody playing with a gun — firing a few rounds in the air to show off. The noise was fairly loud, but not deafening. The thing I remember most clearly is that the gun (which I later learned was an AK-47 assault rifle) made a dull noise — not the sharp crack of television gunfights.

Mine was the first car in the right-hand of the two left turn lanes. I can't be sure that I recognized the shots immediately for what they were, but at least I suspected that something out of the ordinary was

happening, because I turned my head toward the sound to see what was going on. The shooter must have spotted my movement, because he immediately shot me in the left upper arm.

That was enough to convince me that something, indeed, was amiss. I suppose that self-preservation must have come into it somehow, but my only recollection is of concern that the guards wouldn't know what was happening — or even that anything was happening — at the stoplight that is a considerable distance from the main gate. So I put the gearshift into first, scrunched down as far as I could in the seat, and made the left turn across oncoming traffic through the red light. As I was beginning to move, he shot me a second time in about the same place — so close to the same place that the hospital staff wasn't aware that I had been shot twice until I told them.

I don't know what I said when I reached the guard post, but if I was incoherent I guess the shattered car windows and the bloody wreck of my arm would have told the story. I suppose I passed out because the last thing I remember clearly that morning was pulling through the gate and over to the side of the road. After that, it's a confused jumble of a lot of shouting and dim awareness that I was being carted off in a helicopter.

I hope that alerting the

guards saved lives by making it clear to the gunman that he would not escape unless he cut short his shooting spree.

I don't know how many hours passed before I woke up in the Intensive Care Unit at Fairfax Hospital. What I do know is that it was a genuine miracle that I woke up at all. Maybe it took a succession of miracles, beginning with the fact that the Medivac helicopter was in the air at the moment it was needed. I'm told the human body holds some eight pints of blood, and that they poured twice that much into me before they could seal up the leaky places. Special thanks to all whose blood is now coursing through me!