

19 AUG 1976

# 'Miracle Man', Given Credit for Ford Drive

Special to The New York Times

KANSAS CITY, Mo., Aug. 18 — The man most responsible for President Ford's performance on the floor of the Republican National Convention tonight may well be the tall, suave Texan known as "the Miracle Man."

The sobriquet is the code name for James A. Baker 3d on the Ford campaign's walkie-talkie network here. It might also serve as a description of Mr. Baker, the deputy campaign chairman. His gleeful associates were crediting him tonight with having turned the most crucial phase of the Ford effort — the delegate hunt — from a failure into a success.

That alone was something like wine from water. What made it seem even more a miracle was that Mr. Baker, a gray-in-7 46-year-old establishment lawyer from Houston, seemed such an unlikely choice to accomplish it.

There he was, minding the nation's business when the President pressed him three months ago to give up his post as Under Secretary of Commerce, which he assumed barely eight months earlier and loved. What Mr. Ford wanted him to do was to direct a desperate nationwide search to convert Republicans into Ford delegates, as if multiplying loaves and fishes.

### Did Not Want Job

Mr. Baker did not want to do it. Who would have?

The President had just begun to suffer successive losses to Ronald Reagan in primaries in Texas, Alabama, Georgia, Indiana and Nebraska. The President Ford Committee, already blessed with a surplus of deputy chairmen, was torn by internal bickering.

"Things looked quite dreary," Mr. Baker recalled the other day, with typical understatement.

To top it all off, Mr. Baker had dabbled in Houston and Texas campaigns, but never been involved in, let alone directed, a critical phase of a national campaign. And he would be entering into a rivalry with John P. Sears, the Reagan campaign manager, who was reputed to be the best delegate hunter in national politics.

He accepted the assignment because the President asked him to.

George Bush, the Director of Central Intelligence, the close friend who had enlisted Mr. Baker as an ally in an unsuccessful 1970 Senate campaign, advised him that it was difficult to say no to a President

Mr. Bush knew that well; he accepted the C.I.A. assignment last year and thereby put himself out of consideration for the Vice-Presidential nomination.

"If I said no to the President," Mr. Baker said later, "there'd be no reason for him to want me on his team in the next term. I'd sit over there and be a lame-duck Under Secretary of Commerce."

### How He Did It

The first thing he did was to try to find out how to hunt delegates. He consulted experts from past campaigns and then designed his own system, with regional coordinators, a grid of state whips and a "buddy system" to have one Ford delegate keep tabs on another.

"He's very organized," one colleague said of Mr. Baker. "He's always two steps ahead of everybody else in this organization."

But the heart of the system consisted of two elements: the tone set by Mr. Baker for a low-key sales pitch to the uncommitted delegates who would determine the closest contest in Republican convention history, and the establishment of credibility with the news organizations, which were maintaining their own delegate tallies.

In his contacts, mostly by telephone, with uncommitted

delegates in every section of the country, Mr. Baker was invariably cordial, and, especially with those in the South, where the Reagan campaign had humbled the President, he was understanding.

"We'd love to have you," he would say, in a smooth Princeton voice overlaid with the slight Southern of the University of Texas Law School and his native Houston. "If you're inclined to do any moving, please call me. I won't bug you."

### Confidence Explained

Others bugged the delegates in behalf of Mr. Ford. But they saved Mr. Baker for the soft sell on the hardest cases.

"When I couldn't close on somebody," said Peter Roussel, one of the subordinate headhunters, "I'd give the delegate to him. Believe me, if anybody deserves the credit for winning the nomination, it's James A. Baker 3d."

Some Ford operatives urged

Mr. Baker to use razzle-dazzle, to toss out numbers without names and claim delegates not yet confirmed and thus create a momentum in fiction that might lead to one in fact. He refused.

Why wondered a visitor to his command post atop the Crown Center Hotel here, had he always seemed so confident and unshakable when he made his delegate claims to the news media? "You can be unflappable when you're telling the truth," he said.

Unlike his counterpart in the Reagan campaign, where claims of 1,140 delegates—10 over the number needed for nomination—stood for weeks without evidence, Mr. Baker edged along slowly to the magic number, citing three delegates in Virginia or five in Hawaii and handing out their names and addresses.

The independent news media

canvasses invariably confirmed the switches and, within a few delegates one way or the other, matched the Ford count and rebutted the Reagan count.

Even so, Mr. Baker was uneasy when he arrived in Kansas City for the showdown. He sprawled his six-foot-one-inch frame on a bed in the combination command post-sleeping center that the Ford forces established at Crown Center, glanced at a list and muttered, shortly before the decisive procedural vote last night, "There are 15 people it's hard to figure out. The inscrutables."

And perhaps it didn't hurt that last Sunday evening, while the rest of the Ford camp was frantically chasing after delegates, Mr. Baker, an Episcopalian, accompanied his wife, Susan, a Roman Catholic, to mass.

"If the count had been 1,250" for Mr. Ford, he joked, "maybe that wouldn't have been necessary."