

Beat: Politics

Reagan Press Secretary Jim Brady's death ruled a homicide

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USPA News - James "Jim" Brady, the former White House Press Secretary who died in Virginia earlier this week, passed away as a result of injuries he sustained in an assassination attempt on U.S. President Ronald Reagan in 1981, making his death a homicide, officials said Friday. Brady, 73, died at his residence in Alexandria, Virginia, at approximately 10:40 a.m. local time on August 4. "An autopsy was conducted and revealed the cause of death to be a gunshot wound and consequences thereof, and the manner of death was ruled a homicide," said Gwendolyn Crump, a spokeswoman for the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Police Department (MPD).

The Chief Medical Examiner's Office for the Northern District of Virginia did not provide additional details about Brady's cause of death. Crump said investigators from the MPD's Homicide Branch, the U.S. District Attorney's Office, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) were reviewing the case, and it was not clear if prosecutors intend to file murder charges. "The U.S. Attorney's Office is reviewing the ruling on the death of Mr. Brady and has no further comment at this time," said Bill Miller, a spokesman for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia. Brady was injured on March 30, 1981, when 25-year-old John Hinckley, Jr. fired six shots in quick succession as President Ronald Reagan walked from the Hilton Hotel in Washington, D.C. to his waiting limousine outside. The shooting also wounded Reagan, Secret Service agent Tim McCarthy and D.C. police officer Thomas Delahanty. Hinckley, who was immediately subdued by MPD officers and members of the U.S. Secret Service, was charged with the attempted assassination of the President of the United States, in addition to other charges relating to the shooting, including the shooting of Brady. Hinckley was eventually found not guilty by reason of insanity of all charges and remains under institutional psychiatric care. After the 1981 shooting, when Reagan was told that his assistant and press secretary had been severely wounded by a bullet to the head, the president's eyes filled with tears, according to newspaper reports at the time. "Oh damn, oh damn. ... Oh dear, we must pray," Reagan was quoted as saying. The serious head injuries left Brady partially paralyzed for life and meant he would never return to work as press secretary, although he formally kept the title for the remainder of Reagan's presidency. Brady had been appointed Assistant to the President and White House Press Secretary only two months before the shooting, fulfilling a lifelong dream. After leaving the White House, Brady spent countless hours lobbying with his wife Sarah to establish stricter gun control laws. His campaigning led to the "Brady Handgun Violence Protection Act" which was signed into law by President Bill Clinton in November 1993 and required that every gun sale by a licensed dealer must be referred to law enforcement for a background check. In September 1996, Clinton awarded Brady the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian award, for being a "courageous, outspoken" leader for responsible gun control. Clinton also named the White House Press Briefing Room after Brady in February 2000, and a plaque honoring him still hangs in the room today. "This room is named in honor of James S. Brady, White House Press Secretary from January 22, 1981 until January 20, 1989," the plaque reads. "Mr. Brady served his nation with honor and distinction, strengthening the bond between government and press. May his courage and dedication continue to inspire all who work in this room and beyond."

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