

BLAKEY NARRATION: SECRET SERVICE

Tuesday, September 19, 1978

Of all the federal agencies that were in any way involved in protecting President Kennedy or investigating his assassination, the Secret Service has come in for the most scathing criticism. Within hours of the tragedy in Dallas, press accounts were pointedly suggesting that the agency had been derelict in its duty to provide presidential security.

The more obvious questions were raised first. Why had the motorcade been routed through Dealey Plaza, an open, park-like area surrounded by tall buildings? Why wasn't there more physical protection of the President -- why, for example, were there no agents in the limousine itself, forming a human shield? Why was the limousine moving at such a slow speed? And why were agents in an open car directly behind the limousine so slow to respond at the sound of the first shot?

The Warren Commission was quite blunt in its admonishment of the Secret Service:

The Commission has concluded that at the time of the assassination the arrangements relied upon by the Secret Service to perform this function were seriously deficient.

And, the Commission adds in its report:

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The Commission believes that the facilities and procedures of the Protective Research Section of the Secret Service prior to November 22, 1963, were inadequate.

The approach of the Warren Commission seems to have been (a) to document the conduct of Secret Service agents physically present at the assassination scene; and (b) to record the perceptions of supervisory personnel as to Secret Service performance on the trip to Dallas and as to reforms called for to improve the protective operations of the agency.

The Select Committee, while not disregarding the physical performance of the Secret Service on November 22, 1963, has attempted to go one step farther. It has assembled data on threats against President Kennedy from Secret Service files, in an effort to establish a basis for a fair, objective analysis. This has enabled the Committee to scrutinize the extent to which Secret Service protective measures reflected the agency's grasp of potential danger to the President during the Kennedy years.

In other words, was the Secret Service in part to blame for the assassination, because it failed to gather sufficient information on security problems in Dallas, or because it failed to analyze that information for its full significance?

The questions this Committee posed for itself were these:

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1. How skillfully did the Secret Service acquire information about threat activity around the country?
2. What was the quality of the insight used to analyze the information?
3. Did protective operations in the field reflect a thorough awareness of threat activity?

Before we get to testimony bearing on these questions, it would seem useful to consider for a moment the historic background of the Secret Service and its evolving role in the federal law enforcement picture.

It is worth noting that the Kennedy assassination was the first and only event of its kind since the Secret Service was assigned to fulltime protection of the President in 1901, as a result of the assassination of William McKinley. Originally, when it was formed in 1865, the Secret Service was not given responsibility for presidential protection, even though that was the year Lincoln was murdered.

The primary purpose of the Secret Service at the outset was to deal with counterfeiting, which had become a national outrage in the period before 1862, when a standardized national currency was adopted. By the end of the 1860's the new agency had all but eliminated the problem.

For the balance of the 19th century, the Secret Service engaged in various criminal detection activities. It investigated

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the Klu Klux Klan in the 1870's, Spanish espionage in the 1890's, organized crime in New York City in the eighties and nineties and syndicated gambling in Louisiana at the turn of the century.

Even with the assignment of presidential protection as its primary ^{ROLE} purpose, the Secret Service was not guaranteed the necessary annual appropriation to carry out the task. It wasn't until 1908 that the agency's mission was clarified, and, at that, for an ironic reason.

When the Secret Service exposed the participation in land fraud schemes by Members of Congress from several western states, legislation was passed restricting the operations of the agency and creating a new federal law enforcement body which ultimately became the Federal Bureau of Investigation. So, the original FBI men were eight agents transferred from the Secret Service.

The law limiting the Secret Service's responsibilities left it with two concerns: Treasury matters, or counterfeiting, and protection of the President. On occasion, however, it was given exceptional assignments. During World War I, for example, it went after German saboteurs, and in 1921 it investigated the roles of Secretary of the Interior Albert B. Fall and Attorney General Harry M. Daugherty in the Teapot Dome Scandal.

From about 1930 on, the Secret Service was an anti-counterfeiting agency with the additional assignment of protecting the President. For the latter function, on only two occasions before November 22, 1963, was the agency tested by an actual assault on a President. In February 1932, the car in which President Roosevelt was riding was fired on in Miami, killing the mayor of Chicago, Anton Cermak. In November 1950, members of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party tried to force their way into Blair House, the temporary home of President Truman.

It ought to be clear, therefore, that the best way to evaluate the performance of the Secret Service at the time of the Kennedy assassination is to look at it not so much in the context of history, but rather in the context of the climate in 1963 and how well the Secret Service appreciated that climate, especially as it might have been evident in Texas.

President Kennedy posed a problem for the Secret Service from the start. As a policy maker, he was liberal and innovative, perhaps startlingly so in comparison with the cautious approach of President Eisenhower. His personal style was known to cause agents assigned to him to tear their hair. He traveled more frequently than any of his predecessors, and he relished contact with crowds of well wishers. He scoffed at many of the measures designed to protect him and treated the danger of an assault philosophically - if someone wanted

to kill him, he reasoned, it would be very difficult to stop him. On at least one occasion, President Kennedy was literally "lost" by the Secret Service detail guarding his hotel room.

On the very day of the assassination, Presidential Assistant Kenneth O'Donnell is reported to have told a Secret Service agent, "you are not at fault. You can't mix security and politics. We chose politics."

The core of the presidential security arm of the Secret Service is the White House Detail, which in 1963 was composed of 36 special agents. Also, there were six special agent-drivers, eight special agents assigned to the Kennedy family and five special officers detailed to the Kennedy home in Hyannisport, Massachusetts. On the trip to Texas, there were 28 special agents in the presidential entourage.

In all, out of 552 employees in November 1963, there were 70 special agents and eight clerks - of 17 per cent of the total Secret Service work force - assigned to protecting the President and Vice President directly or to the Protective Research Service, a preventive intelligence division charged with gathering and evaluating threat information and seeing that it is usefully disseminated.

In addition, there were 30 employees in the office of the Chief of the Secret Service, plus 313 agents and 131 clerks in 66 field offices, all of whom were on call to assist in presidential protection. It would seem, therefore, that the

Secret Service was not undermanned in 1963 for its assignment to guard the President.

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The time of need for the most manpower was in 1963, as it is now, when the President traveled and was exposed to crowds of people in open spaces. Then, the Secret Service called on municipal, county and state law enforcement agencies for personnel who assisted in the preparation of large-scale protective plans.

In planning a presidential trip, a set of procedures was customarily followed. It is expected that they will be detailed in testimony today, along with answers to certain specific issues stemming from the Kennedy assassination, such as securing buildings along a parade route and liaison between the Secret Service and other agencies, federal as well as state, county and local.

From the beginning of its investigation of the Secret Service, the Committee realized the great importance of the Protective Research Service. PRS is the memory of the agency, and it is responsible for analyzing threat data. By reviewing PRS files and interviewing its personnel, the Committee has sought to clarify just how much the Secret Service knew about the sort and degree of the dangers the President faced in the fall of 1963, and to learn what protective tactics had been devised in response to them.

The Committee was at pains to make a valid distinction between major and minor threats to the President, in order that it could concentrate on the follow-up action to the significant

ones. A threat was considered major if (a) it was verbal or communicated by a threatening act, and (b) if it created a danger great enough to require an in-depth and intense investigation by the Secret Service or other law enforcement agency.

The Committee examined all threat profile investigations from March to December 1963, 313 of them in all, and it incorporated into its analysis information on some major threat activity dating back to December 1962.

The Committee also considered the following questions in its investigation of Secret Service threat activity files, questions raised by the Kennedy assassination itself:

1. Was there an indication of a conspiracy to harm Secret Service protectees?

2. Was there information developed in investigations of earlier threats that might be useful in the investigation of the assassination?

3. Was the pertinent information in the Secret Service files made available to the Warren Commission?

The first witness today will be Inspector Thomas J. Kelley. Inspector Kelley was assigned to represent the Secret Service in the investigation of President Kennedy's assassination. Inspector Kelley served as Secret Service liaison to the Warren Commission.

Inspector Kelley received a B.A. from Providence College and an L.L.B. from Georgetown University Law School. He has been the Special Agent in charge of the Philadelphia Field

Office, an Inspector in the Washington Office, the Assistant Director of Protective Intelligence and Investigations in Washington, D.C., and he currently is the Assistant Director of Protective Operations in Washington, D.C.

Inspector Kelley is a member of the International Association of Chiefs of Police and he has served as consultant to several Far Eastern police agencies, as well as consultant to the Dominican Republic on protective matters.

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It would be appropriate at this time, Mr. Chairman, to call Inspector Kelley.

The next witness will be Mr. Ernest I. Aragon. Mr. Aragon was in charge of Cuban intelligence with the Miami Office of the Secret Service from 1961 until his retirement in 1977.

Mr. Aragon began his service in the United States Secret Service in 1953. In 1958, while stationed in Los Angeles, he received the Exceptional Civilian Service Award.

It would be appropriate at this time, Mr. Chairman, to call Mr. Aragon.

The next witness will be Chief James J. Rowley. Chief Rowley was Director of the Secret Service from 1961 until his retirement in 1972. As Director of the Secret Service in 1963,

he exercised general supervision of President Kennedy's trip to Dallas.

Chief Rowley entered the Secret Service in 1938 as a special agent. He received a master's degree in law from St. John's University in Brooklyn, and in 1939 he was transferred to the Presidential Protective Division. He was named Special Agent in Charge of the Division in 1947, a post he held until he was appointed Director of the Secret Service in 1961.

Chief Rowley has served six presidents during his career with the Secret Service - Roosevelt, Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon.

It would be appropriate at this time, Mr. Chairman, to call Chief Rowley.