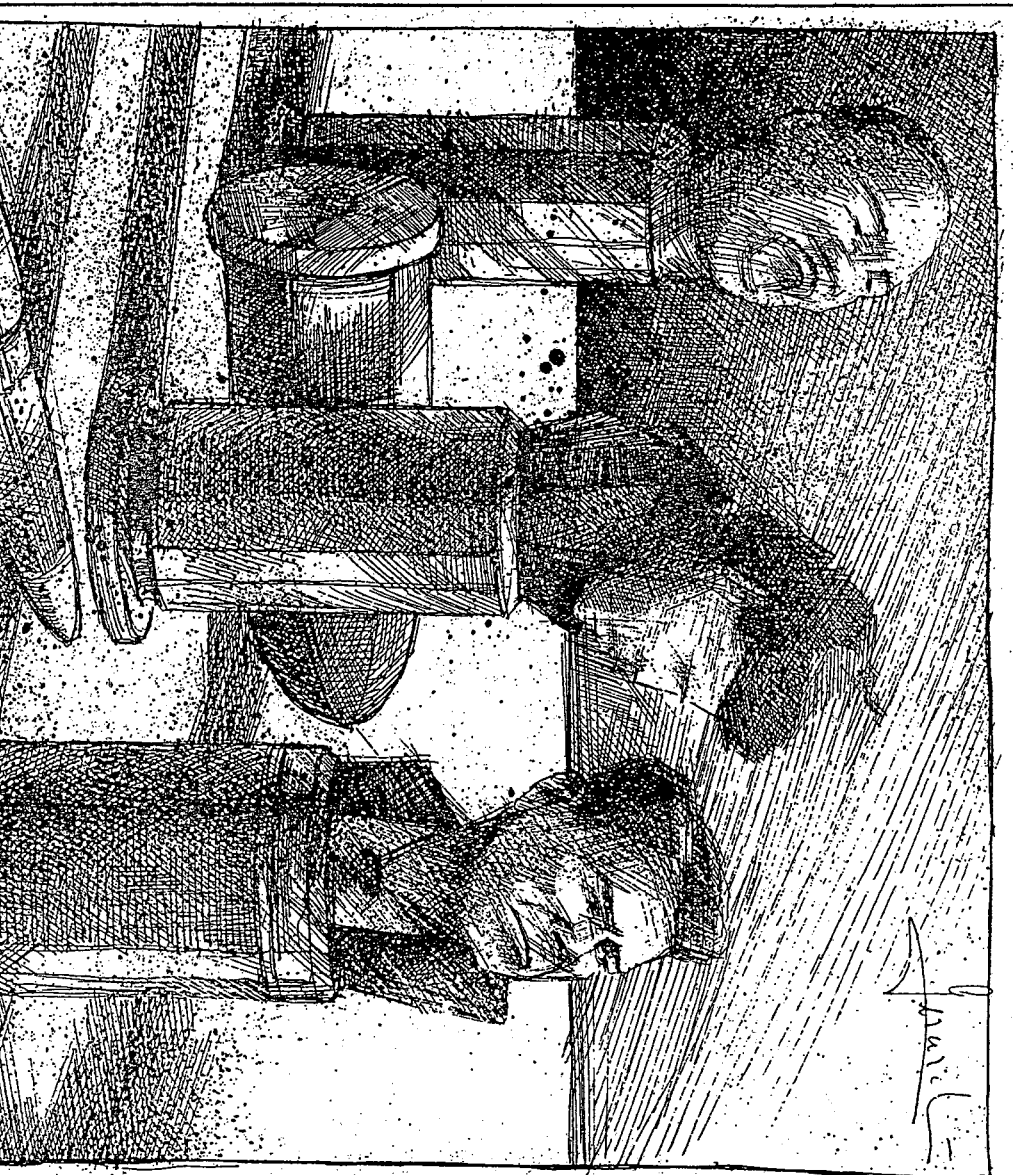


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Assassination and gun control RFK report puts spotlight on protection of president

By JOSEPH R. LAPLANTE
Journal/Bulletin Staff Writer

When the Los Angeles Police Commission released a 1,500 page summary of the investigation into the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy 10 days ago all the old questions and doubts were renewed. What did the police find in their investigation of the assassination and not released? How good was the investigation?

asking them to come forth with the evidence and if it is not there and if it is not strong, then that is a problem. "Also, there is a second problem. The police have destroyed very vital evidence in this case. The primary example is that FBI photographs and memoranda talk about bullets and bullet holes in the door frame of the pantry (in the kitchen of the Ambassador Hotel where Sen. Kennedy was shot). The police removed those door frames from the Ambassador Hotel and they removed several ceiling tiles as well. They booked them into evidence and that is where the possibility for extra and unaccounted for bullets lay. "However, they destroyed them while Sirhan's appeals were still in the courts, a year after the assassination. They destroyed that evidence and the explanation was that they couldn't fit these items into a file drawer."

Familiar territory



Sarah Brady moves from caring for her husband to fighting against the weapon that hurt him

By THOMAS FERRARO
United Press International

ARLINGTON, Va. — Nearly 5 years after a bullet meant for Ronald Reagan crippled her husband, Sarah Brady has publicly parted ways with the President on the volatile issue of gun control.

The wife of White House news secretary Jim Brady knocks on congressional doors and attends hearings, lobbying for tougher gun laws. She writes letters to private citizens and appears on television talk shows, telling her story and seeking reform.

In doing so, Sarah Brady is bucking an administration that has refused numerous calls to clamp down on handguns since the March 30, 1981, assassination attempt by John Hinckley.

"Even before Jim was shot I was interested in the topic," she said.

"Last summer, though, when the Senate passed a bill (backed by the White House and pushed by the National Rifle Associ-

ation) to weaken existing laws, I really got riled. I said, 'That's it. I'm in. I can't wait any longer.'"

She joined Handgun Control, Inc., a 14-year-old, 170,000-member citizens' group that had long been interested in signing up the wife of one of the nation's most famous victims of handguns.

With Sarah Brady in a visible position, Handgun Control stepped up its battle against the legislation, now before the House, that would allow interstate sales of handguns and generally relax the Gun Control Act of 1968.

Sarah Brady, 44, Jim Brady, 45, and their son, Scott, 7, live less than 10 miles from the Washington hotel where Hinckley opened fire with a gun he bought for \$29 — no questions asked — from a Texas pawnshop in the fall of 1980.

"Hinckley lied on his form that he lived in Texas," she said. "If there had been a waiting period and a background check, it

crime, act alone or as part of a conspiracy?

The questions are bothersome to critics of the handling of the assassination of Sen. Kennedy, particularly in light of the commissioner's promise to release all relevant material compiled in the department's probe.

Philip H. Melanson, a political science professor at Southeastern Massachusetts University in Dartmouth, thinks the cover-up stems from the fear that the investigation will not hold up in the light of public scrutiny. Melanson is chairman of the SMU's Robert F. Kennedy Assassination Archive, the only one of its kind in the nation.

"The LA Police Department is actively involved in keeping the record of the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy locked up for decades if they can get away with it, because they don't want to account for their actions," Melanson said. "They don't want to answer questions that perhaps they didn't do as good a job as they tell us they did and when the file is out then it is out there for everybody to see."

"If their files do not back up their conclusions then they obviously have a problem. They have told us in their summary report, 'We have checked this and it is not a problem, we have proved this and it is established.' Now, you are

Melanson, who has studied political assassinations in the United States for the past 12 years. He saw the same stubbornness in the investigations of the assassinations of President Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr.

Melanson has misgivings about the ways in which the country's highest ranking political leader is protected from would-be assassins and in the operating theory of law enforcement agencies in the United States toward political assassinations.

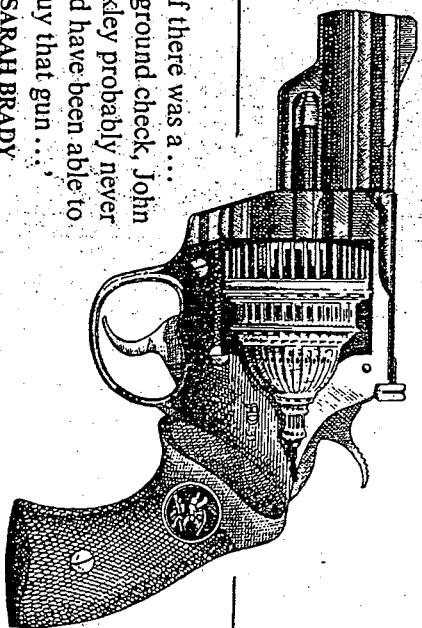
With the growing specter of world terrorism and with the deinstitutionalization of large numbers of mentally ill people the threat of assassination is increasing, he said.

There were 20 new threats a day against the president in 1984 and in a typical year the U.S. Secret Service launches 150,000 inquiries about actual or possible threats that result in the arrest of about 300 persons a year, Melanson wrote in his 1984 book, "The Politics of Protection — The U.S. Secret Service in the Terrorist Age."

Melanson is sitting in his office at SMU. His shelves are filled with books about political assassination and stacks of documents released to him under Freedom of Information Act requests wait to

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"If there was a...
background check, John
Hinckley probably never
would have been able to
buy that gun..."
SARAH BRADY



Also, the driver of President Kennedy's car had no specific training in evasive driving or in protective driving techniques. He was simply a Secret Service agent who could drive a limo. The car didn't speed from the scene until the third and fatal shot struck Kennedy.

"Those things don't happen today," Melanson said. "Although, there was a security lapse in how Hinckley got that close, but that is not happening again."

According to Melanson, Hinckley walked within 15 to 20 feet of President Reagan by standing in an area outside the Hilton Hotel that was not restricted because it was not a designated press area. Had it been a press area, requiring security passes, the people standing that close to the president would have been screened.

"In the case of John W. Hinckley's attempted assassination of President Reagan . . . I am satisfied it was one of those instances when we had a lone disturbed individual and that is the bottom line," Melanson said. "And yet we know in other cases we disagree. Congress said there was a conspiracy in the King case. We know that some of these other assassinations were conspiracies. There are a lot of things going on. It is important to sort it out and find out which it is."

"I think we owe it to ourselves not to pretend we are exempt (from conspiracies) just because we are America."

One conspiracy

The only assassination attempt the service acknowledges was based on a conspiracy occurred when two Puerto Rican nationalists assaulted President Truman in 1950.

But, no matter how much information the Secret Service has, is it possible to protect the president in an open democratic society?

"Absolute protection can only be provided by absolute isolation. And our system won't permit that," Melanson said. "And we are constantly in a flux about when we will allow our politics to take over and when we give first priority to protection. Reagan is in good shape now partly because he doesn't have to run for office anymore and partly because having had an assassination attempt he accepts the fact that he needs increased protection."

"But as soon as we start the presidential process again in 1988, you are going to have politicians out there again. People are not going to campaign in the hills of New Hampshire from a television studio. They are going to be out there and they are going to press the flesh. And that is what people

expect and there is going to be a lot of exposure and risk. Part of the risk is inherent in the democratic system and part of it is preventable."

Assassins

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be read.

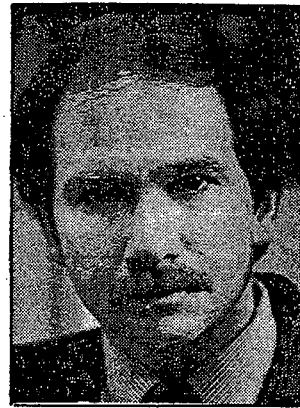
He has been granted access to thousands of pages of documentation on the President Kennedy and King assassinations. Currently, he is writing a book about a possible conspiracy in the assassination of King.

Melanson is impressed, for the most part, by the Secret Service. He thinks it has done a good job of protecting presidents from assassins.

"They have done a very good job in the sense that the number of attacks don't seem to be in keeping with the threats that seem out there," Melanson said.

Finding threats

The service uses a combination of methods to pinpoint individuals who present a threat to the president, but mainly relies on its arrangement with other investigative agencies to alert them to activities and individuals who warrant watching.



—Journal-Bulletin Photo
by RACHEL RITCHIE

PHILIP H. MELANSON

'As soon as we start the presidential process again in 1988, you are going to have politicians out there again.'

Its protective research file lists the names of 40,000 Americans who pose some actual or potential threat, or a problem or characteristic that might endanger the president. Whenever the president takes a trip, every person on the list who lives in the area he will visit is accounted for by the service.

Melanson concedes the protective research file is impressive and effective. The problem is that none of the people who have shot at presidents and other U.S. political leaders — not Lee Harvey Oswald or Sirhan Sirhan or James Earl Ray or Arthur Bremer or Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme or Sara Jane Moore or John W. Hinckley — was on the list.

"Considering that there are several threats on the president's life everyday, and every so often, somebody really tries to do something, it is lucky that the last time somebody shot at the president it was John W. Hinckley," Melanson said. "The other side of that is to say that it keeps happening and it almost took President Reagan as it had President Kennedy and these other figures."

Improved training

The service has greatly improved its training of agents since the assassination of President Kennedy, Melanson said.

For example, the agents who were protecting President Kennedy in Dallas had not been trained in recognizing the sound of gunfire in open areas, so when the shooting started they were looking around thinking they heard firecrackers or a backfire.