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Torrent of Threats On Ford Received

Publicity Is Blamed By Simon

By Stephen Isaacs
Washington Post Staff Writer

Treasury Secretary William E. Simon testified yesterday that the Secret Service is receiving a torrent of threats to kill the President, a phenomenon he blames on publicity given to recent assassination attempts.

Simon said that "we've had 320 possible threats against the President of the United States in the first 20 days of September, and this compares with an average of 100 to 110 in recent times."

Simon was testifying before a Senate hearing into the Secret Service's handling of the two September attempts in California.

At the same hearing, it was revealed that a key reason the Secret Service released Sara Jane Moore from custody the night before she allegedly shot at the Presi-



Secret Service Director Knight, left, and Treasury Secretary Simon confer at hearing.

By James K. W. Atherton—The Washington Post

dent was a statement from a San Francisco policeman to the effect that "she's no trouble."

The Secret Service also revealed that Moore called its office three times on the morning of the shooting, as well as having called the San Francisco police and the FBI. On the three calls to the Secret Service, it was testified, she hung up after being told that the people she wanted—the agents who had questioned her—were not in.

Simon, under whose aegis the Secret Service falls, said he felt the spate of threats on the President was directly traceable to the publicity, which, he said, "tends to invite these deranged human beings to come out."

"... All the publicity that's attached to all of these individuals, I believe, tends to exacerbate conditions. I sincerely question the value of all this publicity."

"It's the responsibility of the press, certainly, to tell the American people indeed what is happening—that is their responsibility in a very straight fashion."

"But when these people are glamorized on the front pages of our national magazines, I think that this has to be thought of as doing great harm..."

Simon's worries about the media coverage given to Lynette Alice Fromme, who is accused of trying to assassinate President Ford on Sept. 5 in Sacramento, and Sara Jane Moore, accused of trying the same in San Francisco Sept. 22, was echoed by a number of witnesses before the Appropriations subcommittee chaired by Sen. Joseph M. Montoya (D-N.M.).

"It's one thing to report the news," said Sen. Hubert H. Humphrey (D-Minn.), "and it's another thing to make it a cover story." Humphrey testified as one who has had Secret Service protection, as Vice President and as a presidential nominee.

Also testifying were Sens. Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.), the 1964 Republican presidential nominee, Edmund S. Muskie

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(D-Maine), the 1968 vice presidential nominee, and George McGovern, the 1972 Democratic presidential nominee.

Goldwater said he thought all the publicity over the assassination attempts would "encourage other idiots or nuts to say, 'Well, I'm not going to kill him, but I'm going to scare the daylights out of him.'"

Goldwater, Humphrey and McGovern insisted that the President or other candidates should not be constantly shaking the hands of ordinary citizens.

"I don't agree that you have to have your hand shaken by every little tot in the United States," said Goldwater.

Humphrey said, "Pressing the flesh, I don't think that's necessary at all."

McGovern went further: "Plunging into crowds and working up and down the airport fences... has to be curtailed and curtailed seriously."

"In all honesty," McGovern testified, "there are some very superficial reasons why candidates engage in that kind of... handshaking."

"The first reason they do it is to get some kind of symbolic demonstration that they're close to the people."

"The second reason is to raise their own spirits. When

you're under attack by your opposition or by editors and others (and are) down a little, there's no better time to go out and shake hands with a lot of warm, smiling, potential voters.

"On top of this, if word gets out that you're in danger or some kind of incident occurs, then you have an additional reason to do it, and that's to demonstrate that you're brave."

"Now none of these are very good reasons. None of them have much to do with the na-

tional interest," McGovern said.

Secret Service Director H. Stuart Knight and intelligence director James T. Burke stoutly defended the decision of the two agents who had Sara Jane Moore in custody the night before she allegedly shot at the President as he emerged from the St. Francis Hotel.

Their account of what happened did not jibe with what San Francisco police told re-

porters in the days after Moore's arrest.

San Francisco police had told reporters they could not understand why the Secret Service had turned Moore loose on Sunday night, after a tip from the police had encouraged the service to pick her up for questioning.

But Burke testified yesterday that San Francisco detective Jack O'Shea, whose tip originally alerted the Secret Service, had in effect vouched for her.

'I Came to Assassinate'

Illness, Not Politics, Spurs Would-Be Killers

By Don Oberdorfer
Washington Post Staff Writer

"All of a sudden I began to picture myself as a potential assassin for the first time. It was an idea I kept trying to ward off, but my mind just wasn't strong enough to do that. I actually began to make plans—plans that I really had no means of carrying out . . . Before I had a chance to make anything concrete, I was told that my next duty station would be in Italy rather than back in the states as I thought."

Kenneth Braden sat erect in his chair, pale blue eyes sparkling, and described with clinical coolness the growth and development of an obsession. It began in his childhood in Memphis, came to full flower during overseas service as a Navy radio-man in 1969, and on Jan. 15, 1975, brought him face to face with the Secret Service outside the White House.

"I came to assassinate the President," the agents quoted him as saying. "I brought the tool [a sharp kitchen implement] from my mother's house. It looked like the perfect tool for the jugular vein. I've been trying to get a gun but every place I went I had to wait two or three days. My destiny is to kill the President."

Charged with threatening to assassinate President Ford, Braden was found not guilty by reason of insanity in U.S. District Court here and was committed to St. Elizabeths Hospital at court order.

These days the slender 27-year-old passes the time under care of doctors behind the heavy steel locks of the maximum security ward, listens to the radio and studies Esperanto. While at present he is no threat to anyone, the problem he embodies is a danger of serious proportions. Twice within the last month the life

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of the President and the stability of the United States have been gravely threatened.

What sort of persons would contemplate such a thing and why? Is the government powerless to identify and stop them? Such questions have been asked repeatedly, and sometimes mournfully, throughout this country's often-bloody political history.

National commissions, scholars, medical and social scientists who have studied the problem agree that nearly all assassins or known would-be assassins of Presidents have been "loners" with obsessional interests and a history of mental instability. Until last month, they all had been men.

In historical terms, the chief danger has been not so much conspiracy as pathology, not so much political rebellion as unseen and obscure individuals living beyond rationality in worlds of their own.

According to Dr. Bertram S. Brown, director of the National Institute of Mental Health, "tens of thousands" of overly paranoid psychotics are living on the fringes of society at any given time.

Psychology does not provide an exact way of saying "who will be the one, two or three out of those tens of thousands who will act," said Brown, who has been consulted on this problem in the past by

the Secret Service.

A computerized Secret Service file of potential threats lists about 38,800 people, most of them with mental aberrations. Dr. Eugene S. Stammeyer, director of psychology at St. Elizabeths Hospital and a student of such cases, estimates that "somewhere in the range of 5,000 people in the United States, given sufficient environmental provocation and stimulation, might act out against the President."

The American presidency, combining powers to destroy or favor, public visibility and a direct relationship to every citizen, exerts a powerful attraction to troubled as well as healthy minds.

More than 30 times in the average month—roughly once a day—the Secret Service interviews some abnormally persistent or unusual visitor who turns up at the White House demanding entrance. About 10 of these interviews per month—376 of them in the past 38 months—end with the visitor being taken away for mental observation or treatment at St. Elizabeth Hospital. All but 42 were admitted to the hospital by examining physicians, some temporarily and others for long periods of time.

The "White House cases," as these patients are known, have exhibited a wide variety of bizarre behavior at 1600 Penn-

sylvania Avenue. Some claim to be God, the President, members of the First Family or secret agents. Some want to help the President through alleged magical powers, and some believe they are being oppressed by the President or government agencies controlling their thoughts through radio waves or brain-implemented devices. Still others are bent on collecting large sums they claim the government owes them.

"The vast majority do not have any emotional steam behind a vendetta against the President," observed Dr. Prescott B. Holt, acting director of admissions at St. Elizabeths, who interviews many of the "White House cases" on arrival.

By no means all such cases are benign, however. Some disoriented people threaten the President in ugly terms, and a few seek to act out their fantasies. An escape from a New York state mental hospital, disgruntled over his military discharge, was arrested with a loaded rifle a block from the White House in 1966. A released mental patient from Iowa carrying a rifle and pistol was arrested at Andrews Air Force Base in 1968 the night before President Johnson was scheduled to go there to embark on a trip.

Attempts to scale the White House fence have been more frequent than publicly reported. In early 1968 a former Ohio school teacher successfully climbed the fence at 1 a.m. and proceeded up the driveway to the White House entrance, telling the Secret Service later that "the President is done and I'm going to take over." Last December the White House grounds were penetrated in spectacular fashion by a man claiming to be wired with explosives drove in a gate, and February, 1974, by an Army private in a stolen helicopter.

Psychologist Stammeyer, who conducted extensive interviews with 25 "White House cases" in 1968-69 and since has interviewed convicted George C. Wallace assailant Arthur E. Bremer, says:

"Consistently, there is a real absence of the father or at least an emotional absence . . . The family has often moved a lot, with an instability in domicile . . . There are often severe learning difficulties in school."

Very few of the "White House cases" have a genuine interest in political matters or in the President as a person, Stammeyer found in interviews spanning several administrations. Nonetheless, most of the disturbed people display extraordinary drive and persistence, even a willingness to deprive themselves of creature comforts over long periods of time in an

urgent search to fulfill their fantasies, he said.

"The benign types seem to have achieved their sense of fame, at least in their own heads, through special gifts, royalty, wealth or some other pathologically grandiose idea. The violent types seem striving for fame and recognition . . . They are really urgently seeking. Oftentimes the violent acts occurred as they have almost given up in despair that they can find the kind of solution and relief they need," Stammeyer said.

Kenneth Braden, the former Navy radioman now behind locked doors at St. Elizabeths, fits some of the descriptions by Stammeyer and other researchers. In at least one respect, however, his case is exceptional: a lifelong fascination with assassination, which he calls by the obscure historical term, tyrannicide, "because assassination has such a stigma attached to it."

Son of a traveling salesman and his French-born wife, Braden, by age 11, had formed his own mythical "John Wilkes Booth fan club." He read every article and book he could find about famous assassins, particularly Booth and Gavrilo Princip (whose fatal shot at Archduke Francis Ferdinand in 1914 precipitated World War I). Early this year, Braden signed a threatening letter to the White House, "J. Gavrilo Booth."

As Braden told it in a recent interview, he suffered a mental breakdown while serving in Morocco as a Navy radioman in 1969. Recurrent crises of his "roller coaster" mental life led him to conduct a soon-abandoned assassination plan against French President Georges Pompidou and to attempt suicide twice. He ended up in U.S. Navy mental hospitals.

Braden's behavior became the subjects of a government report which found its way into the Secret Service computerized intelligence network. Agents called on him in Memphis soon after his discharge in 1972 and returned every three months, with additional visits and warnings to keep away whenever a President came to town.

Disappointed in love, tired of being a shoe salesman and convinced he was being "blackballed" for government jobs by Secret Service reports, Braden tried four more times without success to commit suicide via carbon monoxide in his car.

At the suicidal low points, he recalled, he felt the desire to "take someone down with me." He came to Washington this January, he insisted, not to try to kill the President with his crude kitchen imple-

ment but to die from Secret Service bullets when he unveiled his forked "weapon." A White House policeman foiled that plan by seizing him from behind on Jan. 15.

The Secret Service picked up Braden before he could pose a threat, as it failed to do in the recent cases of Lynette Alice Fromme and Sara Jane Moore. This was because of Braden's history in the military service. But had he not been so prominently obsessed with assassination, what would have been the chances for his early identification?

From available indications it seems the chances are only fair. In response to a charge of the Warren Commission in 1964, the Secret Service has authorized a series of scientific and technical efforts to spot potentially dangerous people. Reportedly it has had little success in developing practical criteria. The Secret Service has been told, Director H. Stuart Knight testified yesterday, that it is "most difficult" to predict group behavior and "almost impossible" to predict individual behavior.

The emergence of women as a threat in the dramatic cases of the past month is particularly troublesome, for most work in the field proceeded from the previous assumption that men were the principal danger. Among the 1,361 Secret Service agents, there are only 16 women.

Several psychiatrists and researchers as well as popular commentators have related the two dramatic threats by women to the rising consciousness and frustration symbolized by the women's movement.

A recent study reported that women have been charged with a steadily growing share of serious crimes since 1953, but nearly all of the increase is in fraud, embezzlement and other nonviolent crimes against property.

Male or female, it comes as no surprise to students of the field that threats against the President have suddenly soared since Lynette Fromme incident aimed a gun at President Ford Sept. 5. "The contagion phenomenon" arising from the power of suggestion on troubled minds is familiar to psychiatrists and social scientists. A few days ago National Institute of Mental Health Director Brown offered the guess that the risk to the President over the next two to three months will be temporarily increased "by at least a factor of three to five." Treasury Secretary William E. Simon's testimony yesterday reporting roughly tripled threats in recent weeks appear to bear out Brown's unhappy guess.