

# The Human Shield

As Presidents go, Gerald Ford is an easy mark for assassins. Not only does Ford travel incessantly—as President, he has visited 39 states so far—but he goes to places where the Secret Service is hard pressed to protect him. To ski, he has ascended Vail Mountain in a gondola that makes him virtually a sitting duck for a potential sniper. He has journeyed 1,200 feet into a mountainside to inspect an oil-shale project, helicoptered 36 miles to an oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico and got trapped in a sleet storm in the middle of a geyser field. At least twice, Ford has proposed to plunge deep into the earth to look at coal mines—until he was dissuaded by the Secret Service.

Ford, moreover, is a man who loves to press the flesh. At fund-raisers and luncheons, he shows up early and stays late, making small talk and slapping backs. He stops his motorcade to greet well-wishers, and at airports he seeks out every cop to offer his personal thanks. Agents who protest such gregariousness are told, "Well, I'll only shake a few hands." Two weeks ago in Providence, R.I., an exuberant crowd mobbed Ford so badly that agents nearly had to hack their way out. The experience disturbed even Ford, who later vowed: "I'll never do that again."

He will, of course, and the service will have to protect him as best it can. "We have certain formations," says one agent. "We are taught to give him 360-degree coverage and yet let the people get at him to shake his hand." But at times, NEWSWEEK has learned, the agents attempt a blocking action, hoping to cut Ford off as he heads into a crowd. On foot, the President is usually surrounded by a dozen agents, such as Larry Buendorf, who continually scan the crowds for "types" and the buildings for rifles. In a motorcade, Ford's car usually has four to six agents trotting alongside. On multicity tours, such as Ford's trip last week, up to 100 agents may be involved.

**Drinking:** Ford is no stranger to the need for Presidential protection; as a congressman he served on the Warren Commission that investigated the 1963 assassination of John F. Kennedy by Lee Harvey Oswald. The commission's investigators found that nine of Kennedy's 28 agents had stayed out late the night before, one until 5 a.m., and several had drinks; with more sleep, the men might not have averted the tragedy, but they "might have been more alert." Although Oswald's name was known to the FBI, it was missing from the service's paltry collection of 400 dossiers. And the book depository building along the motorcade had never been inspected. The Secret Service had proved "seriously deficient," said the commission, and it urged sweeping reform.

Since then, the service has grown from

450 agents to about 1,300, based in 62 field offices across the country; its budget has also soared, to \$95 million last year. Agents diligently follow up the thousands of threats made yearly against the President. They have perfected a car with bullet-proof hood, windows and tires, and have themselves been armed with powerful miniature walkie-talkies and .357 magnum revolvers, Israeli Uzi submachine guns or M-16 rifles. They are also schooled by psychiatrists from Washington's St. Elizabeth Hospital in the profile of an assassin—although, one agent admitted to NEWSWEEK, that "the profile doesn't include a female."

Before Ford goes near the water, mili-

wear sunglasses even in rainstorms.

Ford is also closely guarded in Washington. Agents inspect all food and parcels that enter the White House and scrutinize the lines of tourists. TV cameras buried in the ground, hidden under bushes and disguised as lanterns scan all visitors, while seismic sensors planted in the grass pick up the lightest footsteps—and in the Old Executive Office Building next door, agents monitor the instruments around the clock. After a helicopter unexpectedly landed on the South Lawn last year, White House police reportedly armed themselves with Redeye shoulder-fired anti-aircraft guns. And the White House's wrought-iron gates were reinforced after another intruder crashed through them last Christmas. Should it come to that, there is a bomb shelter in the East Wing, a tunnel leading to it and a



Wally McNamee—Newsweek

Agent Buendorf (left foreground) on guard: Looking for that face in the crowd

tary frogmen check undersea for bombs and a Coast Guard craft patrols offshore. And a week before a visit inland, agents descend on the town to construct a "sanitized zone." They select routes where motorcades can be kept moving and crowds observed, compute travel times and estimate the number of men needed to keep an eye on rooftops and windows; they may take on spare hands from the local police or FBI. Perhaps most important, they call up on a 47,000-name computer the names of persons in the area who are believed to be security threats, and place those considered most dangerous under surveillance. Agents closest to the President often memorize faces from photographs in order to spot them in a crowd. To prevent the crowd from knowing where they are looking, and to protect their own vision, some of the agents

helicopter waiting nearby for evacuation.

The service's best-laid plans, however, hinge on Presidential cooperation—and that has often been withheld. Even when the known dangers are avoided, moreover, the unknown may be deadly. One of the seemingly innocent faces in one crowd belonged to Arthur Bremer, the man who shot George Wallace. "There's nothing unusual about a guy who is covered with Wallace buttons and smiling," says an agent. "The unusual was the movement: raising the gun." In the end, for all the Secret Service's electronic gadgetry and computerized files, it is the quick reactions of the agent on the spot that, as it did last week, usually decides whether an assassin's bullet finds its intended target.

—SANDRA SALMANS with ANTHONY MARRO in Washington and THOMAS M. DeFRANK in Sacramento