

Secret Service Guards

By MALVINA STEPHENSON
WASHINGTON (NANA) — Sen. Robert F. Kennedy's life might have been spared if he had been under the protection of the U.S. Secret Service.

That was no fault of either the Secret Service or Congress. It was urged upon all the major candidates as long ago as last March.

To a man, all refused. The main reason was that the presence of Secret Servicemen would somehow emasculate the "common touch" with the public, so dear to the electioneering campaigner.

SO REPORTED Rep. Tom Steed, D-Okla., chairman of the House appropriations subcommittee for post office and treasury budgets — which include the money for the secret Service.

Steed disclosed that soaring

"hate mail" addressed to the White House and a growing list of suspects now on file with the Secret Service added up to unprecedented danger to major public figures in all walks of government, but most particularly to the candidates for presidential nomination.

James Rowley, chief of Secret Service, in testimony before Steed's committee, underscored the "dangerous atmosphere" long ago, the congressman said. Neither his committee nor the service itself, however, could act until Congress had voted authorization and funds.

Not that Rowley—nor Steed for that matter—took the position that the secret service would have "necessarily" prevented the attack on Senator Kennedy:

"I suppose that a shrewd,

cunning, determined assassin could kill anybody," Steed said. "The Secret Service itself will never tell you that it can give perfect protection to anybody moving among the general public.

"BUT KNOWING from experience the more likely way that these things can happen," Steed added, "the service can minimize the danger just by invoking certain practices, which, believe me can be done without embarrassing the candidates or barring them from 'their public.'—

How right—or wrong—this will prove to be should be settled immediately. Since last weekend, 21 agents each have been assigned to the major presidential candidates, the number being based on the use of seven men for each eight-hour shift in a

24-hour period. This is nothing like the contingent assigned to the President and vice president, but it is considered "adequate."

An emergency allocation of \$400,000 has been immediately voted to cover initial costs, but the service's budget was upped \$3 million to \$21 million for the fiscal year beginning July 1.

In addition, since recommendations of the Warren Report were implemented, the Secret Service has spent \$7 million on new equipment, \$2.5 million of it on a computer to file data on threatening and suspicious characters throughout the U.S. who might harm the President or other officials under its protection.

Manpower has been more than doubled to a 1,000 man force, plus an additional 100 just

Might Have Saved Kennedy

added to cover the new assignment of protecting candidates. Low salaries, however, has made recruitment difficult. Pay average is about \$8,700.

ANOTHER PART of this \$7 million has been spent on two additional armored vehicles for the protection of the President. Steed disclosed their purchase had been planned two years ago but had been vetoed by President Johnson.

"This time, we didn't ask him," Steed said. "The last time it was brought up one senator made a big fuss over the estimated \$150,000 cost for each auto. That was why the President put his foot down and the idea had to be dropped."

Steed would not disclose the cost of the new fleet — which includes three special cars for

the Secret Servicemen accompanying the President — but he did say it was "heavy." Some money was saved by converting custom limousines rather than building original models. He also disclosed that the construction would protect the President from bombs.

"We believe they are quite safe," Steed said of the new cars. "The open model has a little glass wall but no top because you can go only so far in isolating the President from the people. He won't stand for it. But the new design minimizes the opportunity that some maniac might seize to repeat the ('President John F.) Kennedy affair."

Of even more significance in the protection of the President, however, Steed found that the addition of the computer to the

Secret Service "arsenal" was likeliest to pay off "big."

"THE LIST is drawn from the 'hate mail,' he said, "and the flow of names into it was far too great for manual compilation. Now, if the President is about to visit 'Town A' the service can query the computer and get a complete list of persons and addresses in and around that town who might be inclined to harm him."

Steed noted the "hate mail" started tapering off immediately after President Johnson announced his intention of withdrawing from politics at the end of his current term. "But complaints are still pouring in on Vietnam, the draft, and crime. People have a way of blaming the President for everything.

Another controversy that has given official Washington great

worry has been the question of the advisability of President Johnson exposing his two sons-in-law to the possibility of enemy capture.

Steed feels strongly that no member of a presidential family should have combat duty or be dangerously close to a war zone. Capt. "Chuck" Robb, a company commander in the First Marine Division, has been in the thick of bloody action, and Airman First Class Pat Nugent loads bombs at an Air Force base at Cam Ranh Bay.

When Steed approached the President, he was quoted as responding flatly, "This is not a matter for consideration." And then the President added, "These men (Robb and Nugent) will not tolerate favored treatment, and I will not impose it on them." And that was that.