

# Arrests for Threats to the President Up Sharply

By FRED P. GRAHAM  
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Jan. 6—The Secret Service has disclosed that the number of persons arrested each year for threatening the President has increased by more than 500 per cent since the assassination of President Kennedy on Nov. 22, 1963.

According to information released this week by the Secret Service, the number of arrests for threats against the President rose from a one-year total of about 80 against President Kennedy to about 425 against President Johnson in the fiscal year 1967, which ended last June 30.

Secret Service officials were reluctant to discuss the subject because they believe that most of those who make threats are mentally ill and that public discussion of the Kennedy assassination prompted a number of emotionally disturbed persons to make threats against Mr. Johnson.

However, several officials did say in interviews that the large increase in arrests appeared to be attributable to a strengthened Secret Service that has become more sensitive to threats since the Kennedy assassination, as well as to a rise in the number of threats.

## No Exact Figures

The Secret Service declined to release exact figures, but it did give a general picture of the increased volume of threats since the assassination.

After the last fiscal year of the Kennedy Administration, in which about 80 arrests were made, arrests rose to slightly more than 100 in the fiscal year 1964—the period from July 1, 1963, through June 30, 1964.

In the fiscal year 1965 the number of arrests doubled, to slightly over 200. In the fiscal year 1966 it doubled again, to more than 400. Last year, the fiscal year 1967, there was a slight increase to 425.

The Federal statute that makes it a crime to threaten the President or his successors is far more sweeping in its reach than the laws against threats to private persons.

Anyone who speaks or writes threats "to take the life of or to inflict bodily harm upon" the President can be found guilty even if the person has no present intention or the means to carry out the threat.

Thus even an idle, offhand remark can make a person subject to the statute's maximum penalty of five years in prison and a \$1,000 fine. This means that the Secret Service's mood—its sensitivity and willingness to press for prosecutions to discourage hostile talk against the President—

can make a great difference in the number of persons jailed.

The large increases in arrests in 1965 and 1966 occurred during a time when the Secret Service was carrying out the Warren Commission's recommendations that it increase its manpower and work out better procedures for exchanging information on potentially dangerous persons with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Central Intelligence Agency and local police forces.

Since the Kennedy assassination the number of Secret Service agents has risen from 350 to 575. Their main tasks are to protect the President and investigate counterfeiting. Spokesmen for the service say that one reason for the rise in threat arrests is the increased manpower and the fact that far more information relating to Presidential protection is coming in from other agencies.

At the time of the assassination about 100 items of information came in each month. This has now increased to about 7,000 items a month.

## Complaints Against Agency

The Secret Service's file of information on potentially dangerous persons across the country, which contained 400 names during the Kennedy period, now has more than 1,800.

A computer is being used to produce names and information from the file on all potential trouble-makers known to live in any community that Mr. Johnson plans to visit. These people are given special attention by the Secret Service.

During recent months there have been scattered com-

plaints that the Secret Service's zeal in punishing threats against the President has been directed at political dissenters.

James Johnson, a lawyer in Wichita, Kan., who is defending a New Left militant, Charles V. Blackmon, against charges of threatening President Johnson, said in an interview this week that the arrest had been made in such a way as to abort a planned demonstration against Mr. Johnson.

Mr. Blackmon, 25 years old, a former student at Wichita State University and a leader of Students for a Democratic Society, was arrested in Wichita in the early hours of Nov. 11, shortly before President Johnson arrived for a one-hour tour of McConnell Air Force Base nearby.

Four other members of the local chapter of Students for a Democratic Society, who had been planning the demonstration with Mr. Blackmon when his alleged statement was made (and apparently overheard by a Government informer), were also rounded up by Secret Service agents and interrogated as material witnesses, Mr. Johnson said.

"They scared the hell out of those kids, and that was the end of the demonstration," he said.

The indictment charges that Mr. Blackmon referred to President Johnson by saying: "I am going to get a gun and kill the son of a bitch." Mr. Blackmon will be arraigned in Federal District Court in Wichita on Monday.

A trial here last September demonstrated that juries can be markedly unsympathetic to New Left activists accused of

threatening the President, even when the evidence of guilt seems dubious.

A Harlem youth who is a member of the left-wing W.E.B. Dubois Club was found guilty by a jury of threatening Mr. Johnson in a speech at an anti-war rally at the Washington Memorial, even though a judge in another court had ruled that the statements in the speech did not amount to a threat.

Robert Watts, 19, was found guilty of making a threat on Aug. 27, 1966, when he said: "If they make me carry a rifle the first man I want to get in the sights of the barrel is L.B.J."

People at the scene said the statement was not taken seriously and a number of listeners laughed.

Watts was also charged with illegal possession of marijuana, a misdemeanor, after marijuana was found in his pockets at the time of his arrest the following day.

But a Misdemeanor Court judge ruled that the search was illegal because the words had been rhetorical and not a threat and thus the Secret Service did not have probable cause to arrest him for threatening President Johnson.

Mr. Watts is appealing his suspended sentence for threatening Mr. Johnson. The Government dropped the marijuana charge.

Even though a number of those who threaten the President seem to be mentally ill, the Secret Service presses for prosecution in a number of cases (statistics are not available on how many of the arrests result in prosecutions), and the Government sometimes

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## Since the Assassination

gets convictions under surprising circumstances.

Last year in Wichita, William Rothering Jr. was caught by the local police in the act of breaking into a gunshop. He explained that he planned to shoot President Johnson because he believed the President had been implicated in the assassination of President Kennedy.

Despite the argument of Rothering's lawyer that this proved his client was insane, the jury found him guilty, and he is now serving a five-year term.

James R. Hendrick, the special assistant to the Secretary of the Treasury who oversees Presidential protection, said this week that the increase in arrests for threats against Mr. Johnson "is certainly a mixture of more threats and better security."

"All of this talk and publicity about assassinations has been bad," Mr. Hendrick said. "The more you talk about a thing like that, the more people want to do it themselves."

Dr. Roger Peel, psychiatrist at St. Elizabeth's Hospital who is in charge of patients committed for observation by the Secret Service here, attributes the rise in threats to a number of factors, including the ease of travel. He said most of the patients came from out of town.

The Secret Service's arrest figures include an undisclosed number of persons who appeared at the White House and were committed for observation. A number of these did not actually threaten the President but merely seemed to need treatment, the Secret Service spokesman said.

According to Dr. Peel, only 75 of such "White House cases" were referred by the Secret Service during the entire Truman Administration, for an average of about 10 a year. During the Eisenhower tenure the average rose to 17 a year. It doubled to about 35 a year during the Kennedy period and is now running at a rate of about 200 a year.

Dr. Peel said part of the recent increase was due to the fact that the service was now sending all its cases to St. Elizabeth's, while previously some had been sent to another hospital here.

But he said he was certain there had been a drastic rise in the number of Presidential threats by mentally ill persons.

Part of this, he said, may be due to television, which brings the President closer to people who are prone to have delusions and "makes the President more a part of their delusional systems."

An action in the Supreme Court last month strengthened the hand of the Secret Service in protecting the President. The Court declined to disturb a lower-court ruling that said the agents who protected the President were immune from damage suits for alleged violations of citizens' rights.

The lower court had ruled that a Chicago weapons dealer could not sue two Federal agents who refused to let him enter his own home one night in October of 1964 because the man was known to keep a cannon in his garage and President Johnson was spending the night in a motel within easy cannon range.

Months  
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follow