

Secret Service

Flap Over Guarding Nixon

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WASHINGTON—It's called the "Secret Service," but in recent years some of its doings have received the kind of public scrutiny normally reserved for the center ring of a three-ring circus.

Last week the Secret Service was back on the front pages when the White House confirmed that the special agent in charge of the Service's Presidential Protection Division, Robert H. Taylor, had been transferred to another job.

The White House said that the transfer of Mr. Taylor was the result of an internal decision within the Service. But sources familiar with the inner workings of the division said that Mr. Taylor had run afoul of the White House chief of Staff, H. R. Haldeman. They said a rift had developed after Mr. Haldeman had tried on several occasions to change security arrangements ordered by Mr. Taylor.

One alleged example was a demand by Mr. Haldeman to drop ropes holding back the crowd when President Nixon arrived at the Providence, R.I. airport during last fall's Presidential campaign. Mr. Haldeman reportedly wanted to allow a "spontaneous demonstration" by the President's supporters. Mr. Taylor flatly refused on the ground that it would endanger the President's security.

Another instance of friction between the two men occurred, it was

reported, at last month's Inaugural parade and concerned the large number of Secret Service agents who trotted alongside Mr. Nixon's car, getting between the President and the crowds lining Pennsylvania Avenue.

The White House Press Secretary, Ronald L. Ziegler, categorically denied that Mr. Taylor had been squeezed out of his post at Mr. Haldeman's behest.

Just before the weekend, the director of the Secret Service, James J. Rowley, spoke up for the first time to insist that he himself had initiated the transfer of Mr. Taylor as part of a routine policy of rotating supervisory personnel. "At no time has any member of the White House staff either requested or implied to the Secret Service that Mr. Taylor should be removed or transferred," he said in a statement.

But several sources, including Secret Service agents assigned to the White House, privately insisted it was so. One result, they said, has been that the morale of at least some agents assigned to guard the President has plummeted. One told an acquaintance that he would quit the Service if "the political monkey business" did not stop.

Like the conservatively dressed, serious-faced agents who accompany the President wherever he goes, the Secret Service itself prefers to remain inconspicuously in the background. But it has not always been possible. After the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963, for example, the Service was exposed to the most intensive publicity. The Warren Commission exhaustively examined the Service's role in protecting the President. Its report commended the courage and devotion of the special agents. But it found much wrong with the organization and methods of the Service.

Thus, in the 10 years since, the number of special agents in the Secret Service has more than tripled to 1,230, and the budget of the Service has increased ten-fold, to \$60-million

a year. As the commission recommended, the Service has adopted sophisticated, computerized intelligence techniques and has established formal liaison with other Government law enforcement agencies, state and local as well as Federal.

When the Secret Service was first created on July 5, 1865, as a bureau of the Department of the Treasury, its chief function was to suppress counterfeiting of United States currency. It retains that function today and also acts against forgers of checks and government bonds.

But the protection of the President is the heart of the Secret Service mission. There are always at least 50 special agents on duty on the White House grounds and at the nearby Executive Office building.

Special agents at the White House work regular shifts, but the job can be grueling, especially when the President goes on trips and the agents must deal with crowds in unfamiliar surroundings. Considerable stamina is required, not to mention the sheer physical strength needed to hold back people surging forward toward the President. Many agents are former athletes.

The controversy last week centered on just where the Service's White House responsibilities begin and end. According to John Warner, a special agent who acts as public information officer of the service, "The Secret Service does not tell the President what to do. We can only make recommendations."

But can a Presidential aide decide what means shall be used to safeguard the President? "It is the responsibility of the Secret Service to establish security for the President of the United States," Mr. Warner said.

There are at least some Secret Service agents, however, who believe that the departure of Mr. Taylor from the White House demonstrates that others are seeking to take part of that responsibility.

—PHILIP SHABECOFF