

KENNEDY BARRED CAR-STEP GUARDS

4 Days Before His Death He Asked Secret Service Men Not to Ride on Auto

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On the day he was assassinated President Kennedy might have been shielded by a Secret Service agent standing on the right rear step of his car if he had not requested several days earlier that this position be vacated.

Four agents who guarded the President at Tampa, Fla., on Nov. 18, 1963, testified before the Warren Commission that Mr. Kennedy had ordered the two men riding on the "jump" steps on the right and left rear of the open limousine to get off and enter the follow-up car just behind.

The agents' statements were given in response to a request from J. Lee Rankin, the commission's general counsel. They were not asked and did not volunteer any statement as to whether the steps that flank the trunk of the limousine would have been occupied by agents except for the President's request.

However, Gerald A. Behn, chief of the White House detail, put it this way:

"The policy of special agents covering the Presidential vehicle is flexible and is based on the speed of the motorcade; the amount and type of accompanying escort; the number, enthusiasm and character of the people watching the motorcade and how well-controlled they are by the police; and finally but certainly not least but perhaps the dominant factor, the desire or instructions of the President.

"Shortly after I was promoted to special agent in charge of the White House detail in November 1961, he told me that he did not want agents riding on the back of his car. As late as Nov. 18, of last year, he told Assistant Special Agent in Charge Boring the same thing. He gave me no reason for this."

Floyd M. Boring, the agent mentioned by Mr. Behn, told in a separate statement how the President had requested the removal of the agents riding on the rear steps during the Tampa trip.

"It was the understanding among the agents on the White House detail assigned to the President," Mr. Boring went on,

"that they should not jump onto the rear steps of the Presidential limousine when the crowds along the route were sparse unless it was absolutely necessary."

Differing Views Given

The Secret Service Chief, James J. Rowley, put a somewhat different interpretation on the facts. He told the Commission in personal testimony that it had never been the practice of the Secret Service to have an agent ride all the time on the rear step of the President's car. It depended on the circumstances.

As chairman of the Commission, Chief Justice Earl Warren sought to clarify the picture. He said to Mr. Rowley: "Chief, as I understand this, President Kennedy did not give any general instructions to the agents never to ride on his car—it was only in specific circumstances where for one reason or another he did not want them there at that particular time."

Mr. Rowley replied that "No President will tell the Secret Service what they can or cannot do."

"Sometimes," he went on, "it might be as a political man or individual he might think this might not look good in a given situation. But that does not mean per se that he doesn't want you there. And I don't think anyone with common sense interprets it as such.

"I think there are certain things that you have to allow the man who is operating as a politician and not as head of state. I mean this makes a difference in your position."

It seemed clear from Mr. Rowley's testimony that while no President would attempt to tell the Secret Service what to do, it was equally true that the Secret Service could not tell the President what to do for his own protection. In this he seemed to differ substantially from J. Edgar Hoover, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Mr. Hoover suggested a list of inhibitions on the President's freedom of action, including the following:

¶He must never ride in an open car.

¶"Avoid publicizing routes of travel as long as possible. In Dallas the route was publicized at least 24 hours before, so everybody knew where he would be driving."

¶The President should "use a specially armored car with bullet-proof glass and have such cars readily available in locations frequently visited. The President had no armored car. But if it had been armored, I believe President Kennedy would be alive today." (The President now has an armored limousine.)

¶He should "avoid setting a specific pattern of travel or other activity such as visiting the same church at the same time each Sunday."

¶He should, on public appearances, have "maximum feasible screening of persons in attendance including use of detection devices sensitive to the amount of metal required in a firearm or grenade."

¶He should "use a bullet-proof shield in front of the en-

tire rostrum in public appearances such as the swearing in ceremony at the Capitol on Inauguration Day, the Presidential reviewing stand in front of the White House on the same day and on the rear of trains."

¶He should also "keep to a minimum the President's movements in crowds, remain on the rostrum after the public addresses rather than mingling with the audiences."

¶"In appearances at public sporting events such as football games, remain in one place rather than changing sides during the half-time ceremonies."

Curb on Pickets Urged

In addition to banning picketing in front of the White House except on the other side of Pennsylvania Avenue, Mr. Hoover proposed tighter control of the sale of firearms by mail order houses and notification of the Secret Service of Presidential travel plans as far in advance as possible.

Other recommendations by Mr. Hoover were that the President limit his public appearances by using television whenever possible and that he "avoid walking in public except when absolutely necessary."

Mr. Rowley appeared several times to be approaching discussion of greater caution by the President in his public appearances and travels, but each time he asked that his testimony be off the record.

The Secret Service chief was pressed closely by Chief Justice Warren about nine agents who had visited the Fort Worth Press Club the night before the assassination. His investigation disclosed, the chief said, that three of the men had one Scotch each and the others had "two or three beers."

Questioned by Warren

Four of the agents were assigned to guard the President during the Dallas motorcade and the Chief Justice wanted to know if the agents would not have been more alert and keener of vision if they had gone to bed at a reasonable hour instead of staying up until 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning.

Mr. Crowley answered: "Yes sir, but I don't believe they could have prevented the assassination."

He acknowledged that the agents, including several others who had attended a "beatnik" cafe for coffee, had merited dismissal from the service by this violation of regulations.