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C1

Agent Rufus Youngblood, Protector of Presidents

Traveler Retires, Aims to Be Tourist

By Hank Burchard
Washington Post staff writer

Secret Service agent Rufus Youngblood, who traveled 20 years of most of his life in the service of presidents, has now retired. He wants to be a tourist.

It's not quite the same as the case of the bus driver who spends his vacations driving around the country.

While Youngblood, 47, has traveled the world more times than he can count, he hasn't seen much of the outside of it.

He knows the corridors of the White House, where matters of state are decided. He's been to Bangkok five times, "but all I know about Thailand is an airport, a hotel and the palace."

In Rome, he knows the Colosseum, but only because he slipped over there at 2 a.m. with another agent and a woman.

The man was sitting in the back of the car, and the agents are men who take great pains to remain obscure.

But he is Rufus Youngblood, of formidable name, the man who when the first shot rang out during the Dallas motorcade on Nov. 22, 1963, threw then Vice President Lyndon Johnson to the floor of his limousine and shielded Johnson's body with his own.

That moment—the crack of the rifle, the falling of a bomb—is the instant toward which all the agents are trained, but which comes to fewer than one in 1,000.

Youngblood is tired of talking about it. "I just happen to be there. Any other agent would have done the same. It was more a matter of luck than of skill."

Perhaps. But Johnson said Youngblood got him down before the second shot was fired, during that moment when everyone else, in that awful film Mr. Zapruder took, seemed to hesitate for a moment or two as if he were about to be splashing forward. The President's car from too far away, as more shots came.

Johnson singled out that moment and it made a hero of Youngblood. In the normal course of things it also made Youngblood, peacefully, talked to Johnson, then heard of the White House Detail, then assistant director, and finally deputy director of the service.

Youngblood would like it remembered also that he never drank because his work had to be done. His wife was "considered safe factory" (read: outstanding). He mentioned, in passing, that all the repetitions ac-



Photos by Gerald Kerthens—The Washington Post
Rufus Youngblood holds a scrapbook of photos taken on trips with presidents. Other pictures hang on den walls.



Relaxing with his wife Peggy in the yard, Youngblood holds GIGI, the family pet.

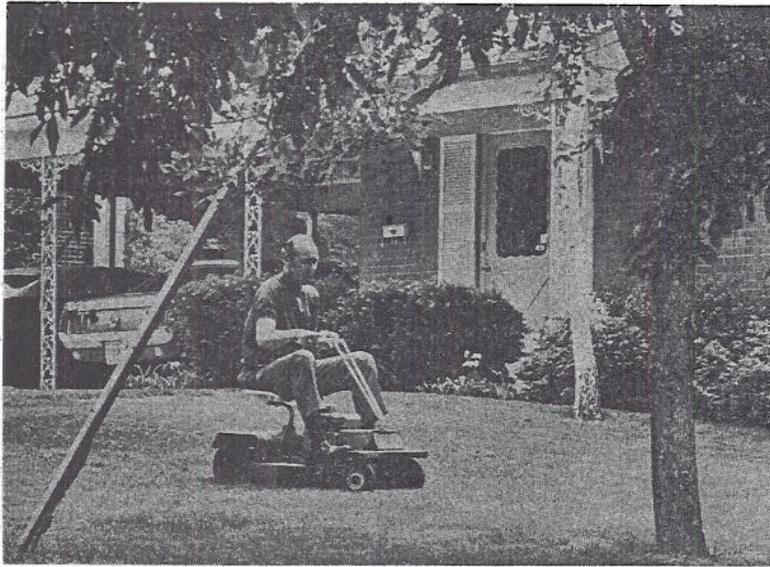
counts in the press over the years of his heroics in Dallas stimulated "a certain amount of jealousy" among his fellows.

Youngblood's instant response to the one fast life and-death crisis in his career would suggest that he is a tense man, always coiled, finger-tapping, vice-out.

Not so. Sitting in the backyard of his home in Vienna the other day, he was the very picture of a man who has done his duty and is taking his time deciding what shall be his pleasure.

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Action Pledged



Taking care of the yard and garden at their home in Vienna occupies much of Youngblood's time at present.

Protector of 4 Presidents Retires

YOUNGBLOOD, From C1

And, after two decades of being a professional drab, of wearing unstriking suits, ties and shirts selected so nobody would look at him twice, he was wearing a blue and white stripe shirt and magenta trousers reminiscent of that sweet slush they sell at the 7-Eleven.

He learned early how to stay alert without becoming worry-warped. "You've got to learn to do the best you can and not to agonize over whether that's good enough," he said. "And when you're off-duty, you have to put it down. It's like when I was a bomber crewman during the (Second World) War. You made it or you didn't. Worrying about it gets you nothing but nightmares."

"Some can adjust, some can't. The men on the White House Detail are a special breed. Some can take it for years at a time, others need to switch back and forth to investigate work."

Most of the men in the Secret Service are engaged most of the time in detective work. Besides guarding the President, the service fights counterfeiting. And most of the work involved in protecting the President lies in preventing sick or savage people who might be moved to attack the President from maturing their plans or impulses beyond the threatening-letter stage.

The service keeps track of thousands of such people, but there is no way to identify them all, Youngblood said.

"We're in the risk business. We assess the risks as best we can and advise the President. He decides when, where and whether to stick his neck out.

"If you could get the Presi-

dent to stay in a room in a bomb shelter and deal with the world by television you could cut the risk almost to zero.

"But that isn't the way it works. So you use the armored cars, the electronic devices, the getaway routes, your eyes and your ears and your instincts.

"You never know, many times, how close it came. And once, we lost a President (Kennedy is the only President to be assassinated since the modern Secret Service took over protection of the Chief of Executive after the assassination of McKinley in 1901).

One can sit in Youngblood's backyard and talk with him for hours without picking up more than a few hints of what his personal feelings are about the four Presidents he served. Nor does he display detectable social attitudes or a political philosophy.

This ability to keep parts of his mind in neutral was carefully developed. It grew out of the necessity of being blind and single-minded while moving among the captains and the kings of this world.

"Many times an agent will find himself in the presence of several heads of state who are talking about what's going to happen in the world tomorrow," he said.

"You have to learn to tune it out. Some of the secrets you get are more than a man wants to carry around with him. You train yourself only to hear what you need to know in order to do your job."

The long strain of security work has left him with little desire to go into anything similar to it.

"That's near the bottom of the list of things I want to

do," he said. "And it's a long list."

Being fit and 47, he plans to do plenty. "Besides, Peggy isn't going to let me sit around too long. She says, 'When do I get to retire?'"

Besides travel, he wants to see an eagle. "You know, in all my life, except at the zoo, I've never seen one.

"And I want to try sailing. People tell me it's great. And I want to go to the grand prix race at Monte Carlo, and see the Indianapolis 500 from the goodyear blimp. And go down the Mississippi on the Delta Queen."

All that takes money, of course. His pension is adequate but not lavish. He'd like to get into consulting work or something of the sort that would allow him to alternate working with experiencing some of the sensations he had to ignore while in the service.

At least until his family is

raised, he plans to stay in Vienna. (He was born in Georgia and was graduated from Georgia Tech.) During the past 10 years he has made his Virginia home a gardening showplace, which is one of the ways he used to unwind.

Daughter Joy is now Mrs. Darrell Rumpf of Salem, N.H., and has made him a grandfather. Son Mark, 21, is junior at Tulane University. Daughters Adele (Candy), 15, and Rebecca (Bunny) 10, are in Fairfax County public schools.

Youngblood confesses missing—a little—no longer rubbing shoulders regularly with the movers and the shakers of the earth. "But it's also nice to have time to keep the damned pyreantha pruned."