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Onetime Secret Service Hero Takes Back Seat Under Nixon

WASHINGTON (AP) — Rufus W. Youngblood was a guardian shadow to five presidents and an unforgettable hero to age 47, as the Secret Service's No. 2 man.

"If you know who is shoving the spear in your back, you can grab him by the collar and hit him in the mouth. But a little innuendo here, a little there ... what the hell am I supposed to do?"

By Youngblood's account, his duties as deputy director were slowly rendered superfluous after President Nixon took office.

He makes it clear he holds Nixon blameless. "He's a real gentleman," said Youngblood. "All the presidents I've served have been good people. They don't cause you any trouble. It's these second-or third-string quarterbacks who come in and say 'Let's get rid of this guy because he was there with LBJ'."

Youngblood said he was subjected to petty harassments and backbiting, apparently because Nixon aides considered him too closely identified with Lyndon Johnson when the Texan was president.

Youngblood's responsibilities included supervision of the White House detail and he still traveled some with the President. He could have stayed on in the \$36,000 post, he said in his gentle Georgia drawl, "but I don't want to waste the taxpayers' money."

Youngblood was publicly decorated by the Treasury Department for exceptional service in protecting Johnson on the day that President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. Johnson said the agent's performance was "as brave an act as I have ever seen anyone perform."

When Lee Harvey Oswald opened fire on the presidential procession, Youngblood jumped into the vice president's car and threw himself on top of Johnson. When the motorcade reached the Dallas hospital, he guarded Johnson with drawn revolver and then, upon word

of Kennedy's death, rushed him secretly to the presidential jetliner.

Youngblood says he "sort of grew up" in the Johnson administration. But he insists his loyalties, in line with Secret Service tradition, always have been to the presidency itself, not any particular man.

Although Youngblood would reflect only upon his own case, other sources indicated that several more agents who made their mark in the Johnson administration have been shunted out of the covered White House assignment causing considerable, if guarded, disgruntlement in the ranks.

They include Thomas L. Johns, who was bumped from assistant director to a post in Birmingham, Ala., and Clint Hill and Emory Roberts, both of whom earned high ratings for their actions during the Dallas tragedy.

The White House has declined comment on the assertions that politics have influenced Secret Service assignments.