

They ride where the President rides, walk where he walks, sit where he sits—America's Secret Service men

How They Guarded

Roosevelt



by MICHAEL SAYERS

MOST AMERICANS have forgotten that, a few months after his first election to the Presidency, an attempt was made to assassinate Franklin D. Roosevelt. On the night of February 15, 1933, in Miami, Florida, a great crowd assembled to hear him speak at Bay Front Park, Miami. In the crowd was Joseph Zangara of Hackensack, New Jersey, with a hidden gun and a plan for murder.

As soon as Roosevelt stopped speaking and got into his car, the tumultuous, cheering crowd surged towards him. Anton Cermak, mayor of Chicago, rushed forward to shake Roosevelt's hand. At that moment, Zangara drew his gun.

The bullet intended for Roosevelt killed Mayor Cermak. Before the gun was wrenched from him, the killer shot but missed again, wounding three persons.

A month later, Joseph Zangara was electrocuted. His attempt to kill Roosevelt was a warning. In Europe and Asia, terrorists like Zangara were doing the work of the secret Axis assassination rings. Within two years after the attempt on Roosevelt's life, Nazi-inspired fanatics in Europe assassinated Dollfuss of Austria; Alexander of Yugoslavia; Barthou of France; Pieracki of Poland; Duca of Rumania; Kirov of Soviet Russia, and scores of others.

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If Americans in general did not realize the serious warning implicit in Zangara's attempt, the Secret Service of the U. S. Treasury Department did. Intensive reorganization of the Secret Service was immediately initiated. By 1936, under the new, youthful leadership of Chief Frank J. Wilson, a former Treasury intelligence agent, a revised and up-to-date Secret Service training course went into operation.

Most of the men who entered the Secret Service under Chief Wilson's program were picked recruits from other Federal law-enforcement agencies, from local police departments and private detective agencies. They had to be physically fit, intelligent, alert and cultured. At any time, their duties might call on them to put on white tie and tails and mingle as guests at lavish diplomatic functions or to stand at some windy street corner as part of the curious crowd at Casablanca, Washington or Quebec. Every recruit had to pass through a rigorous course at a Secret Service training school. They were taught to have a deep sense of the responsibility of their assignment, to be unobtrusive and vigilant at all times. They became crack marksmen with pistols and learned to handle machine-guns.

Although the Secret Service knew about steel vests, bullet-proof glass, disguises, doubles, and the innumerable devices used by the Axis security organizations to protect Hitler, Mussolini and the Mikado, the American group was a



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model of democratic protection. There was nothing about it remotely suggesting an "élite guard" or Gestapo. It went about its vital job without publicity, fuss or fanfare. It had no special insignia. The nearest thing to a uniform in the Secret Service was the habitual belted raincoat and slouch hat of the White House detail when, hands on guns in pockets and eyes always on the crowd, they clung to the running-board of the President's car or walked beside it when it rolled slowly through crowd-lined thoroughfares.

In 1939, there were tense hours in Washington when President Roosevelt addressed Congress after the Nazi invasion of Poland. Shortly before, the news had reached the White House that Premier Calinescu of Rumania, who had refused to submit to certain Nazi demands, had been assassinated. The FBI had evidence that thousands of Bundists, many of them armed and all sworn by oath of loyalty to Adolf Hitler, were at large. Any one of them or any crackpot under their influence might seek to make trouble.

Twenty-four hours before Roosevelt was scheduled to speak in the House of Representatives, Secret Service men entered the building and went over it from roofs to cellars. Next day, Secret Service men took over the duties of the regular doormen in the House. Admission to the Chamber was by special card, and every person admitted was checked and carefully scrutinized by trained eyes.

The President arrived at the House by car. Every inch of the way from Pennsylvania Avenue to the Capitol had been previously inspected and traveled over by the Secret Service. The route was guarded by troops, police and special detectives. Secret Service men moved inconspicuously in the crowd. A picked detail rode on the running-boards of the President's car, others were in cars ahead and immediately behind.

The tense day passed without untoward incident.

FROM THE moment of the Axis attack on Pearl Harbor, all Secret Service security measures had to be reinforced. The White House grounds were patrolled by special armed guards known as the White

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House Police, trained and supervised by the Secret Service. In the event of an enemy suicide attack by bombing planes, a fortified underground executive office was constructed beneath the White House grounds, air-raid drills were held, and arrangements made so that the Secret Service could escort the President at a moment's notice to the underground shelter. As an additional precaution, powerful anti-aircraft batteries were installed on top of the White House and on the roofs of adjacent buildings.



Michael Reilly

The White House detail, headed by six-foot Michael Reilly, stayed beside the President at all times. They became his shadows, unseen in the public glare, but always at hand. Secret Service men rode where the President rode, walked where he walked, sat where he sat, and stood outside his bedroom door when he retired for the night.

When the President made a trip, either on official business or for vacation, the Secret Service had to okay the schedule of travel. If for any reason the proposed itinerary seemed dangerous, the Secret Service could revise it or even veto it altogether. Before the President set out, Secret Service men went ahead to inspect the route and to rehearse the trip in full detail. Pilots, railroad men, chauffeurs and even chefs and waiters were trained weeks in advance by the Secret Service, so that the President's schedule would be exactly followed.

The President was not permitted to set foot in any place that had not been thoroughly investigated beforehand. Roosevelt once laughingly complained that he could never catch any big fish on his fishing trips because the Secret Service were always in the waters before him!

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Roosevelt's unprecedented war-time journeys to Cairo and Teheran in 1943 faced the Secret Service with a new set of problems. Endless intricate details of security were involved. The President's route of travel was mapped out in Secret Service headquarters in the Treasury Department in Washington with the intimate collaboration of military and naval authorities and Allied Intelligence. Every step of the long route was tested in advance for safety and timing.

The Cairo Conference was held in the Mena House, formerly a luxury hotel near the great Sphinx. The meeting-place was heavily fortified, equipped with steel-and-concrete shelters, and protected by powerful anti-aircraft towers. The grounds were surrounded by a dense thicket of barbed wire guarded by American machine-gunners and Infantrymen.

En route to Mena House, the President had to drive a short way through crowded streets. Since early morning, Secret Service men had been mingling with the Egyptian crowd. They knew to the split second when the President's car would round a particular corner which might be dangerous. At that second, they created a diversion. Two inconspicuous individuals in the crowd shouted excitedly, an argument began, a fist fight broke out. Before the distracted onlookers realized what had happened, the Presidential car sped safely past.

ROOSEVELT'S decision to go to Teheran in November, 1943, involved the most important security assignment in Secret Service history. A month before the Conference, Secret Service men and Allied intelligence officers arrived in Cairo. There was an air of mystery and urgency about their movements. The Secret Service men took over a big hotel in Cairo, and all guests were politely requested to move out for a temporary period. Axis agents were allowed to spot other Secret Service men and Allied intelligence officers making detailed inspections of the streets, examining the rooftops of the tall buildings, and taking other advance security measures. The ruse worked. While the Big Three Conference was actually in progress at Teheran, Radio Tokyo "revealed" Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin were

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about to meet somewhere in Cairo!

In a city like Teheran, as President Roosevelt later told newspapermen, there were literally hundreds of Axis agents around. One especially, a hunted, key Gestapo agent, Franz Mayr was still at large when the first American Secret Service men arrived in Teheran to prepare the security measures for the protection of President Roosevelt. Then, on the eve of the Conference, Mayr was caught. His diary carried a significant entry dated 1942. Learning that Winston Churchill had passed through Iran, the Gestapo agent had noted in his diary: "I lost a great opportunity to serve the German cause."

The night Roosevelt arrived in Teheran, alarming news reached Reilly, who was in charge of the Secret Service detail there. Members of an Axis terrorist ring who had escaped capture knew of Roosevelt's arrival at the American Legation. That same night Marshal Stalin called Roosevelt on the telephone and warned him that Soviet agents had got on the trail of what looked like a dangerous assassination plot.

The American Legation was a mile away from the compound in which the British and Soviet Embassies were housed and where the Conference was to take place. That meant that each day President Roosevelt would have to travel a mile by car through the narrow Teheran streets. The security chiefs felt that this was much too risky in view of the circumstances. They told Roosevelt that he would have to move to a safer spot.

Next morning, guarded by Secret Service and Russian NKVD men, escorted by armored cars and motorcycle troops, the route patrolled all the way by Soviet tommygunners and crack British Sikh troops, Roosevelt moved from the American Legation into the Allied compound along with Churchill and Stalin. He remained within the Soviet Embassy as a guest of Marshal Stalin for the duration of the Conference.

EVEN AFTER his return to the United States, there was reason for vigilant precautions. In Chicago, a Bundist who openly talked of "getting Roosevelt" was apprehended. Also, Secret Service men were keeping under strict watch the pro-Nazi propagandist George

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Christians of Chattanooga, Tennessee. Christians headed an organization called the Crusader White Shirts. When the President came to Chattanooga, Christians planned to cut off the electric power in the city. "Anything can happen in the dark," he said. He was arrested, tried and imprisoned for sedition.

To the very last, the Axis terrorists dreamed of the elimination of their greatest opponent, Franklin Roosevelt, by assassination. Just after Roosevelt's return from Yalta, a sensational off-the-record Secret Service story was disclosed in Washington.

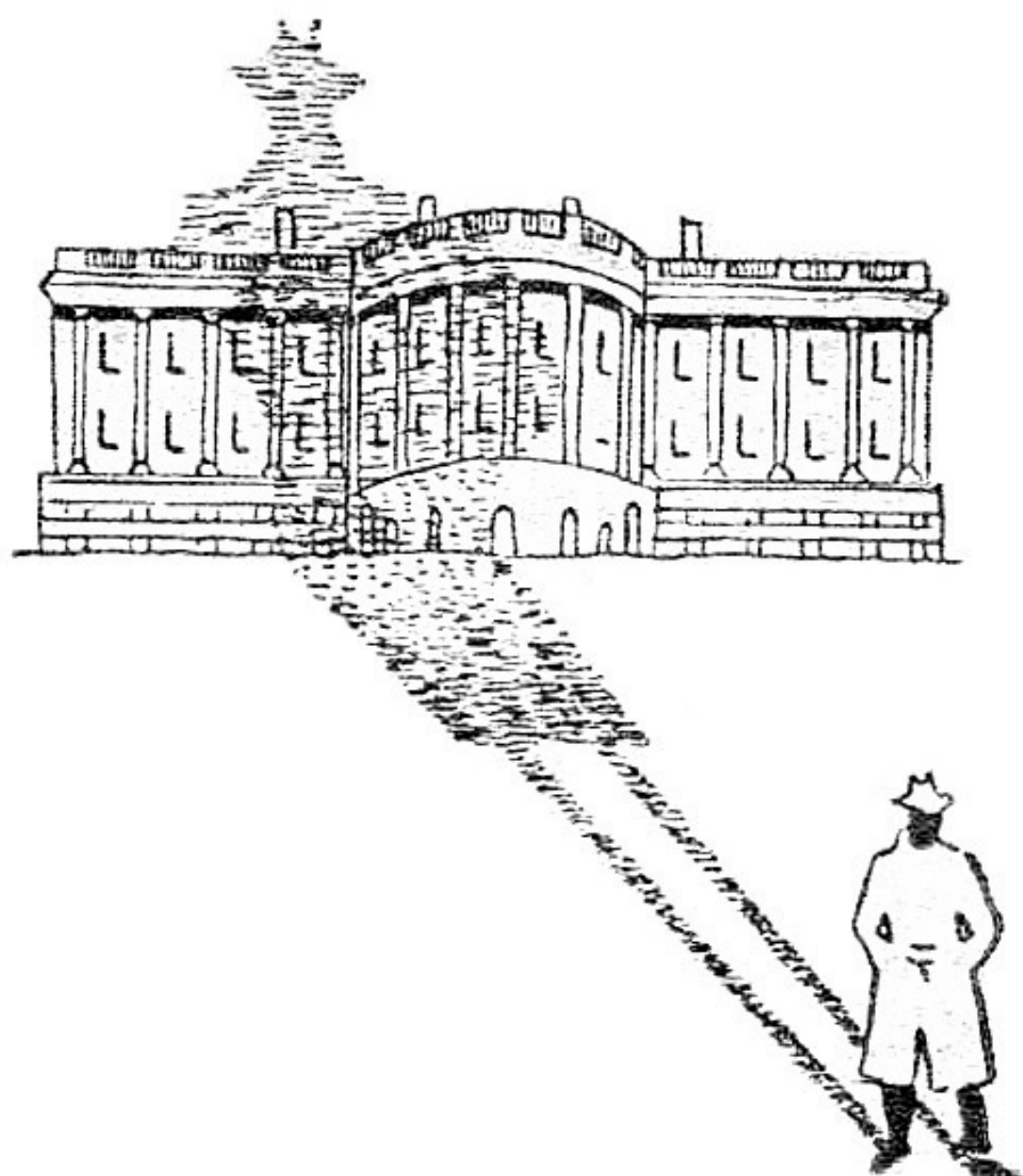
Lord Halifax, the British Ambassador, received a code message from an important British agent in Argentina. The agent claimed he had vital information which he could only reveal to President Roosevelt personally. There was to be no publicity on his movements and the meeting was to be cloaked in secrecy. Halifax contacted the President and a Secret Service man was assigned to investigate. He was escorted by destroyer to an "X" spot to meet a British destroyer bearing the agent.

Something besides the sea smelled fishy to them, and they proceeded to put the British agent through a polite but firm third degree. The British agent turned out to be an impostor. He was actually a key Nazi-Falangist agent, leader of an underground ring in Argentina, who had committed himself to kill Roosevelt. In making his confession, this man also spilled Axis plans to blow up the Panama Canal, and revealed the names of his henchmen in South America. Soon after, the entire ring was apprehended.

Protected by the Secret Service through twelve of the most crucial years in history, President Roosevelt lived to lead his country to the verge of final victory and to formulate his country's policy for lasting peace. On April 12, 1945, a few minutes after the tragic news of Roosevelt's death was announced, the Secret Service had already flung a safety cordon around the home of Harry S. Truman on Washington's Connecticut Avenue.

The Secret Service was simply carrying on with its assignment to protect the President of the United States.

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