

NATION & WORLD

UNDER CLO



UDY SKIES

Personnel losses and plummeting morale are hobbling the Secret Service's Uniformed Division

BY CHITRA RAGAVAN

This summer, a rather odd advertisement appeared in *Simulcast*, the trade newspaper of the Washington, D.C., branch of the Fraternal Order of Police, the nation's largest police union: "FOP D.C. Lodge #1 Tells Applicants, 'Say No' to U.S. Secret Service." The ad said that during recent Secret Service recruiting interviews, "information, believed to be false and misleading, was passed to prospective applicants in order to secure their employment." The ad further stated that such "false and misleading statements along with Secret Service mismanagement," is why the FOP "must strongly discourage anyone from applying for positions in the Secret Service or the Uniformed Division at this time." As if that weren't enough, the ad recommended nearly half a dozen other federal law enforcement agencies that would be preferable to the Secret Service for its members weighing future employment prospects. Similar ads are expected to run in FOP publications nationwide, reaching nearly 300,000 members.

INVESTIGATIVE
REPORT

The FOP ad illuminates a deepening series of problems that confront the Secret Service at one of the most critical moments in its history. As President Bush continues prosecuting the war on terrorism and contemplates opening a second front in Iraq, the security threats he and other U.S. leaders face are at an all-time high. At the same time, the Secret Service is beset by what many veteran officials call crises of leadership, morale, and personnel. Last month, Secret Service Director Brian Stafford, suddenly and quietly, announced his retirement. First among the challenges facing his successor is a manpower shortage that is hobbling protective details from those of the president on down. Next is a debilitating rift between the service's Uniformed Division, consisting of fewer than 1,000 officers, and the plainclothes special agents who guard the president, vice president, and other dignitaries. Internal statistics provided to *U.S. News* indicate that in the past year, the Secret

A uniformed Secret Service officer, as Marine One lifts off from the White House South Lawn

Service has lost nearly 320 uniformed officers and more than 100 plainclothes agents.

The numbers only begin to tell the story, however. In a yearlong inquiry, *U.S. News* spoke with nearly 50 current and former Uniformed Division officers and plainclothes special agents as well as more than a dozen officials from other law enforcement agencies that interact regularly with the Secret Service. The magazine's inquiry has documented numerous instances of criminal and official misconduct, security lapses, and abuses of government authority. Secret Service executives have declined repeatedly to respond to the magazine's findings. In an internal E-mail sent on Sept. 3, 2002, Director Stafford said that the agency is "affording our nation's leaders, their families, and others we are mandated to protect the highest level of protection possible." Four months ago, the Treasury Department's assistant secretary for enforcement, Kenneth Lawson, sought voluntary interviews with Uniformed Division officers to ask about the findings of the *U.S. News* series. That inquiry is ongoing, as is a major leak investigation by the Secret Service's inspection division to identify agents and officers who may have spoken to *U.S. News*. President Bush was so disturbed by the magazine's reports, several senior government officials said, he demanded detailed explanations of Secret Service executives.

Whoever is chosen to lead the Secret Service, there is no indication that its

problems will be solved easily or quickly. One reason: The agency will be absorbed into the newly created Department of Homeland Security. The difficulty of putting the new agency together, officials say, is likely to preclude dealing immediately with the problems of any of its subsidiary departments.

Rookies. The deepest and most troubling of the problems facing the Secret Service, current and former officials say, involve the management and direction of the officers of the Uniformed Division, who form the front lines of defense at the White House and foreign embassies. They include officers in the Special Operations

DOUG MILLS—AP



HIGH STAKES. Talking down a determined gate-crasher

Section who man X-ray machines, elite countersniper marksmen who protect the White House from possible terrorist attack, Canine Explosive Detection Teams, crime scene search technicians, and the Emergency Response Team, trained to react to hostile assaults with deadly force. The departure of so many uniformed officers has affected the performance and morale of all of these units, veteran officers say. Consider:

- Secret Service executives are assigning rookie recruits to man security posts around the White House and the vice president's residence and at foreign missions. Many of these recruits have not yet been fully trained or, in some cases, had criminal background checks completed. The trainees, unarmed, have been given temporary White House identification passes and are

allowed to work the magnetometers, check bags, staff security details, and stand post at numerous checkpoints. The security risks are considerable: The Secret Service was forced to fire one trainee just a week before graduation, before he was posted, because he failed a background check. Under the agency's current policy, other recruits with criminal records could inadvertently be assigned to security details on the White House grounds, veteran uniformed officers say. That risk exists especially because the agency has drastically cut the average time it takes to recruit, check, polygraph, and train someone from 2½

A MISSION EVOLVES

Bogus bucks, presidents

1865—Secret Service division is created in Treasury Department to fight counterfeiting.

1894—The agency begins informal part-time protection of President Grover Cleveland.

1902—Secret Service assumes full-time responsibility for protection of the president following assassination of President



Harding

William McKinley.

1922—White House Police Force is created at the request of President Warren G. Harding.

1950—White House police officer Leslie Coffelt shot and killed by Puerto Rican nationalists while protect-

ing President Harry S. Truman at Blair House.

1951—Congress permanently authorizes Secret Service protection of the president.

1970—White House Police Force renamed the Executive Protective Service. Role expands to protect diplomatic missions in Washington, D.C.

1975—Duties of Executive Protective Service expanded to foreign diplomatic missions nationwide.



Officer Coffelt, mortally wounded

1977—Executive Protective Service officially renamed the Secret Service Uniformed Division.

years to under six months. "They are trying to recruit now," says one officer, "but we are in a bottomless pit."

- Uniformed Division officers must work so much overtime that they are not given time to train on new weapons or to requalify for continued use of existing weapons. Secret Service regulations require agents and officers to requalify every month for handguns and every three months for shotguns and submachine guns. Uniformed Division officers were assigned new Remington shotguns months ago, but they have yet to receive training to use them, even though they carry them in their marked police cruisers. "It's all muscle repetition," says an officer. "You need the training." Plainclothes special agents on the president's protective detail have also been scoring low on pistol, shotgun, and submachine gun qualifications, several sources say, because they, too, have been given insufficient time to train.

- In their scramble to beef up security, Secret Service executives have pulled Uniformed Division officers from their posts at foreign embassies around Washington to guard the White House, leaving these missions dangerously vulnerable, officers say. In 1970, there were 400 officers assigned to guard 144 diplomatic locations. Today, there are fewer than 100 officers assigned to the Secret Service's Foreign Missions Branch to guard roughly 600 locations. In 1991, the Uniformed Division posted 35 to 40 officers per shift at foreign missions. Today, there are only 13 to 14 officers per shift.

- The Secret Service has eliminated two-man police cruisers, foot patrols, bicycle and motorcycle patrols, and motorcade assignments. Today, junior officers must patrol alone in marked cruisers. "These are young kids," says a veteran officer. "They don't have the background, [and] they're going to get their asses kicked one of these days."

- On the morning of the September 11 attacks, Secret Service executives did not implement an "emergency call-up" of all personnel until the third plane crashed, into the Pentagon. When the agency finally set up a perimeter around the White House complex, officials ordered uniformed officers to stow their submachine guns out of sight because they feared they looked too "militaristic." Uniformed officers were enraged. "All we were left with," says one, "were our pistols." When President Bush returned to the White House, the Secret Service's Emergency Response Team, the Uniformed Division sharpshooters assigned to respond to any terrorist strike, was waiting for Marine

ROAD TRIP

What the president wants...

At around 6 p.m. on May 20, 1995, Alexander Flax had just eased his brand-new, blue Toyota Corolla through an intersection in downtown Washington when the tail car of a Secret Service motorcade ran a red light and slammed into him. Washington, D.C., traffic regulations and Secret Service policy required vehicles in the front and rear of presidential motorcades to proceed through intersections with their lights flashing and sirens blaring. But several uniformed officers say President Clinton didn't like the sirens and the

the Congressional Black Caucus. The motorcade's tail car, driven by Officer Hugh Wilkerson, who was accompanied by Cullen McInerney, another officer, barreled through the red light at 20th and E streets just as Flax pulled his Toyota into the intersection after the light turned green. Flax, a prominent aerospace engineer, was knocked unconscious and suffered a collapsed lung, a crushed pelvis, and broken ribs. McInerney also was injured in the crash.

Flax's attorneys filed a claim with the U.S. attorney's office, and

CHARLIE ARCHAMBAULT FOR US&WR



CLINTON. Officers say the former president objected often to noisy motorcades.

lights and often yelled at motorcade agents who insisted on using them. According to the president's wishes, Secret Service executives told lead motorcade agents not to use the lights and sirens but to stop at red lights. Some agents disregarded that option as a security risk, and the issue became a source of tension among officers and agents, sources say, because no one knew what to do from day to day. "That put us in a bind," an officer told *U.S. News*. "Do we listen to him or do we follow the law?"

The Secret Service's dilemma put Alexander Flax in the hospital. After an afternoon round of golf, Clinton was being escorted by the Secret Service motorcade to the Washington Hilton Hotel for a meeting with

the engineer spent months in rehabilitation. McInerney sued Flax, saying he, McInerney, had turned on his lights and siren and was proceeding cautiously. Flax countersued, saying that McInerney's lights and siren were off. Flax says a witness came forward to support his claim. The Secret Service dropped the suit and settled with Flax for \$200,000.

In a statement E-mailed to *U.S. News*, President Clinton's spokesman, Jim Kennedy, said Clinton did not "ask or order" sirens or lights to be turned off. "He did have concerns," Kennedy wrote, "about the impact of his motorcades on traffic and people along the route and wanted as little disruption as possible." —C.R.

One, the white-topped presidential helicopter, on the South Lawn. But senior agency officials, who were also there, ordered the ERT officers to pull back so that the television cameras would not capture images of the heavily armed sharpshooters and alarm the public. Government sources say that several ERT officers reported that they were too far away from the president when he stepped out of Marine One to be effective if something had happened.

Different strokes. Although they work intimately together, uniformed officers live in a world very different from that of plainclothes agents. The cultural, social, and financial gulf between the two communities has resulted in distrust, contempt, and hostility, agents and officers say. Disputes between officers and plainclothes agents are legion. They include disparities in pay, promotion, disciplinary structure, and rules regarding carrying of weapons, and the inability to gain collective-bargaining rights. A controversial restructuring that placed special agents throughout the Uniformed Division's chain of command and a policy requiring officers *not* to write traffic tickets or make arrests has angered officers. But despite filing numerous grievances and lawsuits, officers have made few inroads.

The special agents run the Secret Service. Every Secret Service director in the

WALLY MCNAMEE—CORBIS



OUTS AND INS. Outside the White House, backers of uniformed officers (left) protest in support of collective-bargaining rights and a pay raise during President Clinton's second term. Secret Service recruiters (right) interview prospects at a job fair. Critics say some recruits were misled by promises of fast promotions.

agency's 137-year history has been a special agent. "No member of UD," says one veteran officer, "could ever aspire to be director of the agency. It's not even a *possibility*." Indeed, uniformed officers seldom are allowed to even join the coveted plainclothes ranks—a fact that was underscored in the FOP union's recent ad denouncing the unfairness of the agency. Apparently, agency recruiters were telling applicants that the Uniformed Division was a fast track to plainclothes work. But

senior executives never followed through on their promises to applicants who joined the Uniformed Division, according to several uniformed officers.

This caste system can be seen in other ways. Every special agent gets a government car and parking permit; uniformed officers slog to work on public transit or fight for parking around the White House. Each year, at Christmastime, uniformed officers posted to the White House can only stare through the frost-

COPS AND ROBBERS

Why making a collar can cause trouble

For more than three decades, Secret Service uniformed officers have had police powers similar to those of Washington, D.C., police. They're allowed to make arrests, write traffic tickets, even investigate crimes. Congress gave them those powers when creating a separate branch of the Uniformed Division, known as the Foreign Missions Branch, to protect foreign embassies in Washington. But from the beginning, Secret Service executives made it clear they didn't want uniformed officers playing cops and robbers. "They felt it was taking away from the officers' role of protecting foreign missions," says a veteran offi-

cer, "and they didn't want them involved in local stuff."

Officers, unsurprisingly, didn't see it that way. On April 24, 1996, the dispute reached a flashpoint. Steve Johnson, the deputy chief of the Foreign Missions Branch, gathered 20 to 30 officers working the midnight shift and told them they could no longer make "minor" traffic stops, enforce Washington's curfew laws, make drunk-driving or robbery arrests and so-called rolling tag checks of suspicious vehicles. According to sources and court records, Johnson instructed the officers that if they were flagged down and the situation were not life threaten-

ing, they "were to tell citizens who needed help to call 911 and drive away." Johnson told officers that if they disobeyed, he would have the word "police" taken off their cars.

Violations. What Johnson didn't know was that an officer was videotaping his comments. The Fraternal Order of Police leaked portions of the tape to reporters. The Secret Service assigned two inspectors, Dana Brown and Michael Prendergast, to investigate. The FOP filed a lawsuit, alleging constitutional violations; it dragged on and was finally dismissed.

During the investigation, an officer named Max Mat-

tern stunned Inspector Brown by admitting that he had made an *audio* recording of the meeting. Brown demanded the tape. Mattern said no. More than a year later, the agency fired Mattern after conducting an investigation into an arrest Mattern had made on April 20, 1996, four days before he had taped Johnson's remarks. Mattern had arrested a juvenile drug dealer who accused Mattern of using excessive force. The U.S. Attorney's office conducted an investigation but declined to prosecute.

When Mattern's case went before the Merit Systems Protection Board, the judge found him "substantially innocent" of the charges and said that Mattern's sworn testimony was "entitled to



ed windows of the presidential mansion as special agents attending the annual Christmas party rub elbows with the president and first lady; uniformed officers are not invited to the party. Officers say that special agents get preferential treatment and benefits. They don't have to use up their sick leave or bring in doctor's notes to prove they were sick; they move up the ranks faster and make more money. The agency is always "working deals," in the words of one veteran, to

benefit agents but not officers.

Despite their discontent, until recently, many Uniformed Division officers had little recourse but to sweat it out until retirement. With the creation of the new Transportation Security Administration after the 9/11 attacks, however, that changed. The sudden demand for air marshals, and the top dollar they command, has led to wholesale desertions from the Uniformed Division. Even before the TSA was created, however, senior

executives were having little success stanching the flow of uniformed officers from the ranks. An April 19, 2000, internal memorandum cosigned by C. Danny Spriggs, now Secret Service deputy director, and Michael Prendergast, then Uniformed Division chief, stated the following: "Over the past 18-month period," the service has "engaged in an ambitious agenda of self-analysis and examination . . . [But] despite our best efforts, the manpower deficiencies and associated workloads within the Uniformed Division, particularly at the White House, remain at unacceptable levels." Secret Service statistics furnished to *U.S. News* indicate that between August and November the fewer than 1,000 officers worked 500,000 hours of overtime. That translates, on average, to 90-hour workweeks per officer. That overtime is equivalent to hiring 208 full-time officers over three months—or doubling the entire force over a year.

Out the window. In 2000, the Treasury Department, the parent agency of the Secret Service, appointed Elisabeth Bresee, then under secretary for enforcement, to head an interagency group to examine morale problems in the Uniformed Division. A Jan. 19, 2001, memo written by Bresee summed up some of the causes. The division, Bresee wrote, "is beset by severe staffing shortages among its key



BUSTED. Secret Service, D.C. police search Jeffrey Cloutier's car.

great weight and probative value." He ordered Secret Service executives to reinstate Mattern with full back pay and to reimburse his legal fees.

Then three months ago, Mattern made an arrest that grabbed headlines. Jeffrey Cloutier drove from

New Hampshire to Washington, D.C., in a rental car stuffed with 16 weapons, ammunition, and a book on bomb making. Cloutier had allegedly made threatening remarks about President Bush. After the bust, Secret Service Director Brian Stafford sent word to Mat-

tern that he would like to personally congratulate him. Mattern declined. Two weeks ago, Mattern quit.

Little training. The controversy over Uniformed Division officers' continuing to make arrests, meanwhile, refuses to go away. Secret Service rules require uniformed officers to receive the same training provided to local police. In Washington, veteran police officers accompany rookies for at least six months, conducting street patrols, making arrests, and going to court. Today, uniformed officers receive a three-week PowerPoint course on policing and get little or no street training. "They don't know *arrest forms*," says one officer. "You have supervisors who never wrote a ticket, never

made an arrest, and don't know what to do."

Which may explain why Secret Service executives don't want uniformed officers out on the streets trying to make arrests—a policy they continue to insist on. When a veteran officer challenged the edict, a lieutenant asked him, "Son, who do you work for? Do you work for the Secret Service or the law?" The officer replied, "The law, sir." The lieutenant, who is no longer with the service, responded, "No, son, no. You work for the Secret Service." The lieutenant then raised his hands to symbolize the scales of justice, sources say, and added, "Son, you have administrative policy, and you have the law. *You* have to obey admin policy." —C.R.

operational units." Not only was the Uniformed Division losing officers; it was having real problems attracting new ones. "Despite an intense recruiting effort," Bresee wrote, the Secret Service "was forced to cancel the first scheduled UD recruit class for FY 2001, due to insufficient applicants." The second class was unable to reach its goal either, swearing in only 20 applicants for a 24-recruit class. Bresee added that, for UD officers, "training time available for physical fitness, firearms, classroom training, and joint exercises with the special agent workforce is almost nonexistent." She

of July 1, internal statistics provided to *U.S. News* show, the average length of service of the uniformed officer corps is just eight years. And nearly half those officers—42.5 percent—have less than three years on the job. Of the entire corps, 10.8 percent are eligible to retire immediately. "Your experience," says one veteran officer, "it's draining out of the window."

Among the officers who remain—and many are still intensely loyal to the Secret Service—the arrogance of the plainclothes agents who compose the agency's executive corps is demoralizing. "It's the treatment," says a veteran officer. "It's all

few minutes. The watch commander quickly descended, ordered Hudren out of the car, locked it, and took away the key, stating that he wanted to see Hudren standing post till the end of his shift because senior agency officials and supervisory agents were about to arrive. According to knowledgeable sources, as he braced against the icy wind, Hudren felt his police hat sticking to his head. His ears burned. His toes felt numb. Realizing something was wrong, Hudren called his sergeant. The man rushed Hudren in to see one of the physicians working in the West Wing. The doctor diagnosed



KHUE BUI—AP

FRONT LINE. Uniformed officers on the North Lawn of the White House. New recruits have been sought to shore up the ranks.

says Secret Service managers had acknowledged that mass transfers of personnel from the Foreign Missions Branch to the White House "clearly affected the overall security effort" but added this caveat, reflecting the insistence of Stafford and other agency executives that everything was fine: "[T]he Secret Service firmly believes that 'critical' protective coverage is still being provided."

Since then, things have gotten worse. The continued loss of key personnel has jeopardized the agency's protective mission, many veteran officers say. It's not just the strain caused by heightened security against a possible terrorist attack but the markedly diminished experience levels of many officers. Not too long ago, uniformed officers stayed on the job 20, 25, even 30 years, often past retirement. As

about the treatment." Many say they feel abandoned by their immediate supervisors, who don't protect their interests, and by the agency's top executives, who don't seem to care. In this environment, they say, it is difficult for them to put their lives on the line. "We are expendable," says one officer. "We are squeezed out, thrown out."

Icy treatment. For many officers, a 1998 incident has become emblematic of their status and working conditions. On a bitter winter morning, when temperatures had plummeted into the teens, Officer Matthew Hudren was standing post toward the end of the midnight shift near the south fence of the White House. With more than an hour to go before his shift ended, Hudren, sources say, decided to jump in a "warm-up" vehicle for just a

Hudren as having the beginnings of frostbite. Furious, the physician called the watch commander and the deputy chief of the Uniformed Division. Neither man expressed any sympathy, dismissing the doctor's complaints. Outraged, the physician filed a written complaint. But the agency ignored that too.

Many uniformed officers say this kind of thing happens all too often. Some of the tiny white booths where officers stand post on the White House grounds have no heating or air conditioning. The joke among some officers is that even Uniformed Division dogs have it better. The vehicles that hold and transport the service's bomb-sniffing canines are air conditioned and parked under special tents to keep the heat out.

Many officers believe they are still

being punished for their efforts nearly a decade ago to win collective bargaining rights and form a union. For several years in the early '90s, the FOP had been trying to get collective bargaining rights for the Uniformed Division. FOP members had supported President Clinton because of his campaign pledge to grant them that benefit. By 1997, seeing no results, uniformed officers picketed the White House. The FOP wrote angry letters to Clinton for failing to keep his promise. At issue was an executive order signed in 1979 by President Carter, excluding the Uniformed

neys told officers not to answer any questions covered under the "protective function privilege." However, Starr's prosecutors told the officers they could be prosecuted for obstruction of justice. Officers felt the dispute placed them in legal jeopardy and agreed to testify at length. "They served up the UD," says a veteran officer, "on a platter."

By the time the Lewinsky scandal ended, so had any chance of obtaining concessions from the Clinton administration. The Clintons and Secret Service executives believed that some of the uniformed officers had provided too much

information, has a business degree, and served three combat tours in the Middle East, said, "Good morning, ma'am." Multiple sources, questioned separately about the incident by *U.S. News*, confirm the same account. They say the first lady looked at Hudren and responded sharply, using offensive language. A spokesman for Mrs. Clinton denies these accounts, calling them "a ridiculous old rumor." Hudren, who had been out of training only three months, told several colleagues about the incident. They, in turn, reported it to the chief of the Uniformed Division. The service was told that an agent had overheard the exchange between Clinton and Hudren and had apologized to Hudren on her behalf. Cockell, the head of President Clinton's protective detail, told *U.S. News* that the agency spent considerable time trying to investigate the matter, which had, Cockell said, been brought to senior agents' attention by Hudren's colleagues. "We tried to corroborate anybody hearing the exchange," said Cockell, "and we couldn't."

Payback. Hudren's colleagues urged him to file a complaint with the Fraternal Order of Police in order to seek a formal apology from Mrs. Clinton, uniformed sources say. The plainclothes agents on Mrs. Clinton's detail, sources say, were sympathetic but urged Hudren to exercise restraint. Afraid that the whole thing would hurt his career, Hudren let the matter drop. Hudren has since left the service.

To many who remain, the incident stands as a bitter coda for the men and women of the Uniformed Division. "When the Lewinsky thing came out," says one officer, "things went really bad. We're still paying for that."

And paying. Shortly after the Starr investigation concluded, Secret Service executives began a complete restructuring of the Uniformed Division and, without any direction or approval from Congress, began assigning plainclothes agents to key positions throughout the chain of command. The Uniformed Division lost all autonomy on providing security at the White House. "Now," says an officer, "you have special agents telling our deputy chief what to do." Special agents—not uniformed officers—today address grievances and resolve disciplinary issues. "Our own people cannot do anything to help us," says an officer. Adds a 15-year veteran of the Uniformed Division, who is contemplating quitting the force: "Our chief is like the queen of England. They roll him in and they roll him out, only for show." ●

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With Anne Bradley and Nancy L. Bentrup



LINE OF FIRE. Bracing for rioters at the World Bank and International Monetary Fund

Division and other law enforcement entities from collective bargaining.

Just as it seemed that officers might finally win that right, the Monica Lewinsky scandal hit the papers. Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr began seeking the testimony of uniformed officers and agents, to determine what they may have seen or heard about the president's relationship with Lewinsky. Then Director Lewis Merletti invoked a controversial new legal theory known as "protective function privilege" and argued that if agents testified before a grand jury, it would destroy their anonymity and even cost lives. In the end, Starr questioned a number of uniformed officers and agents. But only one agent, from the inner perimeter of the president's detail, Larry Cockell, was interviewed. Justice Department and Secret Service attor-

neys provided information to Starr. "The Secret Service was looking at the Uniformed Division to take the fall," says one former officer, because they felt that "you guys ratted out the president."

Several officers told *U.S. News* about an incident that took place in the fall of 1998 that soon came to symbolize the lack of respect shown to officers not only by their own supervisors but even by some White House inhabitants. One morning, a few months before the frostbite incident, Matthew Hudren was standing in front of the White House south portico when Hillary Clinton strode through the doors, to step into her limousine. The Lewinsky scandal was in full flower, and feelings throughout the Secret Service and the White House were raw. Hudren, a former marine who speaks fluent Ara-