

# Chapter 17

## Characteristics and Activities of the US Secret Service

**Agnieszka Piekarz**  
Independent Researcher, Poland

### ABSTRACT

*The United States Secret Service is one of the world's oldest and most elite security agencies protecting the most important people in the country such as the President and Vice President, among others. However, this is not the agency's only responsibility. This chapter covers the organization's other duties such as locating counterfeit money, discovering fake documents such as passports, fraud, and intelligence / counterintelligence. Furthermore, the chapter explains how the Secret Service was established, how its responsibilities have changed over the years, and major historical events which highly influenced the entire agency. Finally, the chapter examines the agency's international cooperation with the Polish security agency, Biuro Ochrony Rządu (BOR), and domestic cooperation with the US Diplomatic Security Service (DSS).*

### INTRODUCTION

Since ancient times, nations have had leaders or other heads of ruling institutions. All of them have had opponents and supporters as well as people protecting them who are normally referred to as special agents. Although their roles and responsibilities have changed over time, their primary aim has remained the same – protection. In 1865, the United States formed the US Secret Service that today is one of the most elite government units in the world. The agency has achieved its current reputation over the past 140 years by fulfilling two missions: protection and investigation. Headquartered in the nation's capital of Washington, DC, the agency currently has over 150 field offices stationed throughout the USA and abroad.

Originally established solely to suppress the counterfeiting of US currency, the agency today is led by Joseph P. Clancy who became the 24<sup>th</sup> Director on February 18, 2015 after being nominated by US President Barack Obama. Clancy and his deputy, Craig Magaw, oversees more than 7,000 employees worldwide working on a nearly US\$2 billion budget. The following sections discuss how the agency was established and how its role and structure have changed over the years (US Secret Service, 2016).

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## **Formation and Historical Highlights of the US Secret Service**

The US Secret Service was formed in 1865 under the name *Secret Service Division* in Washington, DC specifically to combat the counterfeiting of American currency following the US Civil War (1861-1865). Their first chief was William P. McCulloch and in 1867 the agency's responsibilities of agency were extended to detection people breaking federal law including the Ku Klux Klan, smugglers, postal thieves, land frauds, and many other related cases. In 1870, the agency's headquarters moved to New York City only to return to Washington, DC a mere four years later. In 1883, the US Secret Service was placed as a separate organization under the US Treasury Department and became the first intelligence and counterintelligence agency in the country (US Secret Service, 2016).

In 1884, the agency began to protect the President in Cleveland, Ohio on a part-time and unofficial basis. On September 6, 1901 in Buffalo, New York, the 25<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, William McKinley was assassinated (The White House, 2016). McKinley went on a nationwide trip to visit his constituencies following his victory as President. On this day, the President was speaking at a Pan-American exhibition in which he wanted to welcome those who had arrived to see him. Unfortunately, the son of a Polish immigrant family named Leon Czolgosz was also attending the event that included anarchist sympathizers. Czolgosz did not agree with government actions and was blaming the government for social injustice.

An unbalanced man, Czolgosz got very near the President with his hands covered in bandages and a gun hidden underneath. The officer in charge of McKinley's security asked Czolgosz if he had been injured to which he answered in the affirmative. Although the officer suggested Czolgosz to go to a hospital, the latter stated he first wanted to welcome the President. Czolgosz then proceeded to shoot the President twice upon which the latter was immediately transported to hospital. The doctors were unable to locate a bullet in the wounded President although they never conducted an X-ray examination. The President was released from the hospital after the doctors stated his condition was stable.

Unfortunately, gangrene soon set in the President's body which caused his death the night of September 13. The assassin was sentenced to death in the electric chair (About Education, 2016). Following the assassination, the US Congress made an informal decision to ensure Presidential protection and from 1902 the Secret Service started this executive protection full-time. Furthermore, from 1908 this protection was extended to the President-elect. Later, President Theodore Roosevelt transferred Secret Service agents to the US Justice Department.

In the following years, agency protection for a defined period of time was provided to the Vice President, the Vice President-elect, and former Presidents and their spouses and minor children through 16 years of age. This also included the widows of Presidents until their next marriage or death, and leaders of foreign nations and their spouses. Threats addressed to those persons were treated as a violation of federal law. Later, the Special Division was established to protect the White House, as well as diplomatic missions in Washington and elsewhere in the country. This part of the Secret Service was later named the Secret Service Uniformed Division.

In November, 1960, there was an assassination attempt on President Harry S. Truman when he was relocated from the White House which was undergoing renovation to the Blair House. Two assassins, Oscar Collozo and Griselio Torresola, who were pro-independence activists from Puerto Rico, attempted to enter the Blair House. Torresola was killed by a police officer while Collozo was wounded by a Secret Service agent (About Education, 2016). Three years later in November, 1963, Lee Harvey Oswald murdered the 35<sup>th</sup> President of the United States of America – John Fitzgerald Kennedy (JFK, 2016).

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