

Conversation with Marc Wolf , Appraisal Archivist at National Archives
May 15, 1995 Joan Zimmerman
Re: Secret Service Records

Wolf said that Bonnie Curtin is in the program to evaluate agency adherence to record management plans in gross and in detail. She looks at the authority for the disposition of records and at how well agencies execute their schedules. She notes gaps in the records. She establishes what needs scheduling and how well agencies are implementing schedules, and what agency internal management is like. For example, with investigative case files: Secret Service should decide whether these should be saved based on certain criteria: 1) national media attention on the case; 2) a change in policy resulting from a case; 3) the case was reported in the Secretary of the Treasury Annual Report. This includes sweeping the field office files. All of these go to headquarters case file, e.g. wire fraud and counterfeiting cases.

Permanent files include regular protection of the President and Vice President. These include: 1) plans; 2) shift reports; 3) unusual occurrences; 4) parade route planning. These should be processed by the Secret Service team covering at the time and the technical backup people, and they stay in the Secret Service files. Other protective materials, e.g. pertaining to visiting dignitaries, usually end up in the hands of the visiting dignitary's security force.

Wolf mentioned that the United States (?) provides local security support (I assume Wolf was referring to police) and defense backup when foreign dignitaries come.

Before 1976-1977, Secret Service drew up retention plans without looking at the records. Since 1976-1977 agencies have their disposal authority approved by National Archives. Agencies had 3 years to go through their records beginning in 1976-1977, and the Secret Service completed their plan before the 3 year window was up.

(Wolf stated that the National Archives looked at the records in 1973)

Wolf said that Headquarters keeps all Policy, Procedural and Executive documents. These include: 1) handbooks on management procedures (time and agenda); and investigative procedure manuals. These items are distributed by headquarters.

Since 1976 an official copy of these items has been in a Central File, i.e. it is the official file copy. The Central File has internal and external correspondence. It is filed in accordance with the Secret Service uniform file code. (There is an acronym for it, but Wolf could not remember it.)

Central File has:

- 1) administrative material, e.g. time and attendance information (routine info.) And
- 2) programmatic material: time and attendance as policy. Rules and regulations.

Disposal of these items is done after 30 years. Some are transferred to the National Archives.

Items pertaining to the protection of the President and Vice President are cut off (?) at the end of the administration. Since 1976, these protective records have been held in the Central File for 8 years, then sent to the presidential library. This pattern should be the same for the Lyndon Johnson materials.

Talk to John Machado. Machado had to come in and clean up a mess. He has been at the Secret Service for 8 or 10 years. He came from the National Archives where he was in records management.

Since then he seems to have picked up the "cop culture" of the Secret Service. That mind set focuses on pursuing the chain of custody or categorizing by case files.

Wolf looked in his copy of Guide to Records of the National Archives. Secret Service is Record Group 87. There is a gap from RG 84 to RG 89: the Secret Service is not included.

Related to SS records:

Since Nixon, the Secret Service has saved the "who is cleared" records. These track guests at the White House electronically.

Wolf said we will notice Case files slipping through the cracks: either misfiled or lost.

The archivist/historian at the Secret Service is Mike Sampson. He has a lot of material including textual and audiovisual material. He has other items of interest, e.g. photographs of security around FDR.

There is a complete register of the Secret Service White House Uniform Detail. This group guards property. Their records are in bound ledgers going back to 1921 through Truman. This includes the register on the attack on Truman by Puerto Ricans in which a Secret Service agent was killed. These records are locked in safes in the L Street building. (White House Uniform Detail). The Management and Operations division is at 1310 L Street.

Mike Sampson is at 18th & G. He has files marked "sealed secure files-hold for Secret Service historian." Wolf continued to describe what Sampson has, e.g. personal weapons owned by the Secret Service agent killed by the Puerto Ricans.

The uniformed guards protect property; this is different from the mission of protecting the President and Vice President..

The Secret Service has training tapes (I think Wolf meant training films).

Bonnie Curtin has written a draft of her report on the Secret Service and it is being circulated for comment and editorial changes. After Marc Wolf has commented on it, the report will be shown to the Secret Service so they can comment on factual errors. The report does not become a formal national archives publication until the Archivist of the United States accepts it. (JZ note: perhaps we should ask for this sooner rather than later given the impending change in personnel at Archives)

Marc Wolf has worked on other evaluations, e.g. the DOJ. He said agencies rarely make comments on the drafts. There was a report done on the records of the Attorney General. The Archives got back one name change and the name of one more person in a meeting but that was the only comment from the DOJ. The Archives had said that the DOJ lacked a finding aid for Griffen Bell; DOJ sent back a notice saying they do in fact have this aid.

On the courts:

Wolf said that the District Courts were making tapes on the appellate level.(?) (JZ: I think Wolf meant specific cases from district courts that were particularly interesting and that were appealed) National Archives said these had to be scheduled. The Courts said no; these are records for the judge. National Archives wanted them scheduled (40,000 tapes per year). National Archives does not want them, but N.A. wants them scheduled.

We could request an advance copy of Bonnie Curtin's report on the Secret Service from the Archivist. Agency (SS) may want to check for factual errors before it goes out.

We will find case files. This type of organization reflects the "cop mind," the case-organization method.

Sampson is responsible for records over 30 years old: permanent Secret Service records come to the National Archives. Center Point is a staging area. Materials in a staging area did not go through a processing point. SS may not have applied select v. disposable categories. These records are therefore in a state of being unscheduled.

Secret Service can dispose of (i.e. transfer or destroy) materials if they applied the appropriate criteria.

Example of material the SS would destroy: intelligence analyses performed by contractors, usually psychiatric matters pertaining to hostage situations. Local experts help SS with these types of cases and these records are not scheduled. The doctors who help are worried about public disclosure of their association with police. Wolf questions the value of these records-not worth keeping.

Wolf took responsibility for the SS last Fall. He used to have Housing and Urban Development. Wolf also has DOJ and Courts and US Mint. He was helping Richard Marcus who has 2 other evaluations to do for the Archives.

Wolf has not been to Suitland. That material is scheduled; Wolf looks at unscheduled materials. Before the Record Center at Suitland was built in 1968 there was a "pre" holding area in Franconia which started to hold documents in 1950. Those records were transferred to Suitland.

Secret Service has kept its 135 forms for records it has destroyed. Most of the destroyed records were case files.

SS used to investigate every fraudulently cashed federal check. The US Attorney now says we decline to process a case unless it involves a certain amount of money.

Also, Wolf talked about the mall passer case. It was an example of a criminal investigation meriting permanent retention. It involved credit card fraud from the Midwest through Appalachia. SS found that this criminal also was raping and killing women. It was broad in scope and received media attention in the early 1980s. Unlike this one, the bulk of the criminal files were routine, mostly wire fraud.

Threats to the President are in Protective files not criminal files.

It depends on how the threat is made. A letter sparks an alert to people protecting the President. Threatening letters go to forensics to check fingerprints. SS is tied into nationwide fingerprint sharing system. The Intelligence Division alerts the protective team. They keep names as long as 75 years. Threats are cases kept open as long as they are "hot operational." SS distinguishes between threat and suspicion. Phone threats seem to be open as long as the SS has not been able to identify the source. SS pays attention to threats and keeps them up to 75 years. Casual menacing remarks in a bar are kept 8 years.

Trip files. Central Office materials are at Center Point. These are administered and processed by Management and Operations. Case materials are at Center Point. Parts of Central Office files are destroyed. This destruction depends on the filing codes: administrative matters are more likely to be disposed of while program materials are more likely to be kept.

Before 1963: attn on Truman.

After 1963 procedures changed. The SS became paranoid and is still quite sensitive about JFK. Memos on changes are in Case file. SS revised regulations and procedures. A little history on Information Management: from 1945 to 1970s: laissez faire: records were casually kept. Then big change with American Friends Service case (v. Webster).

Before 1963 at the Secret Service: regular course of business. Then post 1963 memos of meetings. If main ones are missing then suspect that they have been destroyed. SS may not have documented its meetings. Wolf noticed in his examination of State Department logs that memos on telephone conversations declined from 1950-1959, fewer records kept or written down in the first place. This trend continues.

Mike Sampson: gets 2 or 3 calls a week from people who say they have something for SS historical collection.

Rowley? Personal file? He may have taken some of them with him. Family might know. He did not have the tenure that Hoover did.. If Rowley memos are at Center Point there is no way to tell.

In early 1960s the 135 forms were sketchy; would need to look through each file folder. For example, a 135 form from 1963 might say political staff chronological files and give dates or Personnel Subject File (A-Z) or they might be in numbered case files.

Missing files that are listed in 135 but are not physically there could have been misfiled when returned to the box. Or the Agency could have retired the file. The date of the file might change if something in it was relevant to another case. Then it would be reopened and given a new date.

On John Connally's request to have SS files on the assassination brought to him. SS does not keep reference track of each file but records the whole accession if it is under the category of permanent withdrawal. Wolf said if a file out of a box were missing, he would not be surprised if there was no record of it. (Incoherent note here: listing of accession in past inventory, withdrawn by agency, no record of retirement. If folder missing out of box, no record of it. This would not surprise Wolf.) If it is part of permanent file, there may be closer accounting of it.

Machado won't do a page by page search at Center Point so don't expect him to.

Mike Sampson: has oral histories. Find out what is in Sampson's holdings. Reference holdings: pick from folder, title, do not make sweeping general requests. Same for Center Point. Machado: records and holdings details: must provide this to Machado to open the process and start.

SS is very sensitive about sources and methods. There is a 30 year delay in release

1) privacy = names of individuals on shift reports

2) permanent record comes to National Archives

(except current methods), aside from well known SS techniques is declassified by National Archives.

Wolf's observation: protective envelope failed in 1963 so protective methods used at that time were not successful. Should they deserve nondisclosure? Does no loss over the past 30 years argue that we

have learned? SS has not lost one since then.

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On DC Internet Mail

Walter Hill E-mailed Marc Wolf who called me back at 11:30. This is in regard to my request about the report done by Archives on Secret Service material in the 1970s. Wolf called again and said he would try to track down this report done in the 1970s. Apparently Hill was having trouble finding it. Wolf said there is a 20 year delay on National Archives material RG 64 (at Records Center?) Marc Wolf has microfiche of this report and will try to call reference people to get paper copy sent to me. He will let us know.

Conclusion from this conversation: we will get more cooperation from the Secret Service if we are specific in our requests rather than broad and general. To ask Machado to search for memos from Chief's office is the wrong approach. We should request their schedules and lists of their holdings. Also ask the historian about his lists of records. This will entail a personal visit to Machado and Sampson. I could set this up for Thursday.

This conclusion seems confirmed by my examination of HSCA requests to the Secret Service many of which did not yield what was asked for. For example, the HSCA asked for a guide published in 1963 for agents. The SS said they did not have such a guide and went no further. Obviously, the SS had guides but none that were published in 1963. They seemed very literal in their responses. The HSCA also gave the SS a long list of names and asked if the SS had reports on any of these individuals. The SS replied that they had found a small number of them and the SS was willing to show their files. One of the names was Sergio Arcacha Smith. The SS said they had nothing on anyone by that name. In fact, the SS does have information on Arcacha Smith contained in the report about New Orleans by SA Rice (the one I gave to Jeremy out of the open SS files at College Park). Point is, that the more specific we are, the more successful we will be in obtaining and reviewing the materials we want. The first step is a request for schedules or inventories both to Machado and Sampson. Then we make more specific requests for material at Suitland and in Central Office files. Having spoken with Wolf, I am not sure that anything like the boilerplate letter will get us what we want.