

Dan Rather Presents

Episode Number: 103

Episode Title: Crisis Inside the Secret Service

Description: After security lapses at the White House, an examination of what's gone wrong inside the agency in charge of protecting the President.

ACT 1

DAN RATHER

GOOD EVENING FROM WASHINGTON. TONIGHT, A SPECIAL *DAN RATHER PRESENTS*... WE CONSIDER THE CURRENT CRISIS IN THE U.S. SECRET SERVICE.

WHEN OMAR GONZALEZ JUMPED THE WHITE HOUSE FENCE ON SEPTEMBER 19th AND MADE IT ALL THE WAY INTO WHAT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE ONE OF THE MOST PROTECTED BUILDINGS IN THE WORLD, IT SPARKED A POLITICAL AND MEDIA FIRESTORM.

BUT BEHIND ALL THE HYPE AND HISTRIONICS, WHAT REALLY HAPPENED? IS THERE OR IS THERE NOT SOMETHING WRONG WITH THE SECRET SERVICE? AND IF THERE IS, WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT AN AGENCY THAT FINDS ITSELF UNDER THE BRIGHT GLARE OF PUBLIC CONDEMNATION.... TONIGHT ON DAN RATHER PRESENTS.

ACT 2

DAN RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WASHINGTON D.C. MAY BE A CITY OF MONUMENTS, BUT IT IS ALSO A TOWN IN CONSTANT FLUX. NEW CONGRESSES... NEW ADMINISTRATIONS... NEW IDEAS AND CHALLENGES. BUT OVER THE PAST SEVERAL DECADES THERE SEEMED TO BE ONE CONSTANT - ONE THING THAT BOTH DEMOCRATS AND REPUBLICANS COULD AGREE ON, THE PROFESSIONALISM AND PRIDE OF THE UNITED STATES SECRET SERVICE.

YOU'VE SEEN THOSE MEN AND WOMEN IN DARK SUITS AND EARPIECES CHARGED WITH PROTECTING OUR PRESIDENT, VICE PRESIDENT, OTHER DIGNITARIES AND VISITING HEADS OF STATE. THEY NEVER SIT STILL, EVEN WHEN THEY ARE STANDING, THEIR EYES ARE ALWAYS MOVING, SEARCHING FOR THREATS.

ANOTHER UNIT OF THE SECRET SERVICE WEARS UNIFORMS AND IS IN CHARGE OF GUARDING ONE OF THE MOST FAMOUS ADDRESSES IN THE WORLD, 1600 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE - THE WHITE HOUSE.

BY THEIR VERY NATURE, SECRET SERVICE AGENTS SHUN THE SPOTLIGHT. THEIR JOB IS TO SEE, AND BE SEEN - NOT HEARD. BUT ALL THAT CHANGED THIS PAST SEPTEMBER...

NEWS REPORTS (SOUND CLIP)

It's the most heavily guarded residence in the country, if not the world. And yet we begin tonight with a man who jumped the fence at the White House, ran across the north lawn and made it all the way inside the front door before he was subdued.

Carrying just a knife, he jumped the fence Friday, crossed the lawn and got through the main door to the White House before he was arrested.

This video shows a man running up to the doors of the White house Friday night as Secret Service agents pursued him...

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

TROUBLESOME DETAILS ABOUT THE INTRUDER, OMAR GONZALEZ, SOON FOLLOWED.

NEWS REPORTS (SOUND CLIP)

Prosecutors said today that Gonzalez is a danger to the President. They say the 42 year old homeless Iraq veteran parked his car several blocks away from the White House. Inside 800 rounds of ammunition, 2 hatchets and a machete.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THEN AN EVEN BIGGER BOMBSHELL...

NEWS REPORTS (SOUND CLIP)

We learned today that the breach was more dangerous than the Secret Service acknowledged.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

GONZALEZ HAD MADE IT FAR DEEPER INTO THE WHITE HOUSE THAN INITIALLY REPORTED.

NEWS REPORTS (SOUND CLIP)

Sources tell CBS News that he ran through the entrance hall to the cross hall, past the staircase leading up to the First Family's residence. He was confronted by a female Secret Service agent and overpowered her. He entered the East Room and was brought down at the door of the Green Room by other agents. None of that was in the initial report issued by the Secret Service.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

IT WAS FAST BECOMING A CERTIFIABLE SCANDAL WITH QUESTIONS COMING FROM ALL CORNERS.

NEWS REPORTS (SOUND CLIP)

Why weren't trained dogs used to stop Gonzalez? Why wasn't he tackled? And why was the front door unlocked?

I got deep concerns that the President is not as safe as we want or need him to be. I've got questions about leadership, about protocol, and about the training at the Secret Service.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND THEN THERE WERE REVELATIONS OF WHAT SEEMED TO BE PREVIOUS FAILURES BY THE SECRET SERVICE.

NEWS REPORTS (SOUND CLIP)

It took the Secret Service four days to realize a gunman hit the White House seven times back in 2011.

On a November night in 2011, Oscar Ortega Hernandez fired multiple rounds at the White House with a semiautomatic rifle. The Washington Post reported yesterday that a Secret Service supervisor thought the noise was backfiring construction equipment and ignored eye-witness accounts of a shooting. It was not until four days later that a housekeeper discovered broken glass and plaster even though the bullet-proof windows had held. A total of seven bullets had hit the building in and around the First Family's living quarters. One of the President's daughters was home at the time.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND THE BAD NEWS FOR THE SECRET SERVICE JUST KEPT COMING....

RACHEL MADDOW

Oh but wait, there's more. As we were absorbing that somewhat terrifying detail today, we also learned that just three days before that incident with the armed guy getting all the way into the White House and running amok, Secret Service agents allowed President Obama to ride in an elevator with a man who had a criminal record and a gun.

REPORTER

Can you continue to serve?

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WITH WASHINGTON AT A FEVER PITCH, SECRET SERVICE DIRECTOR JULIA PIERSON WAS SUMMONED TO CAPITOL HILL. A LIFELONG AGENT, SHE HAD ONLY HELD THE DIRECTOR'S JOB FOR 18 MONTHS - AND SHE WAS THE FIRST WOMAN TO EVER RUN THE SERVICE. ... THE HEARING DID NOT GO WELL.

REP. STEPHEN LYNCH (D-MASSACHUSETTS)

This is disgraceful, this is absolutely disgraceful...

REP. STEVEN HORSFORD (D-NEVADA)

I believe that you have done a disservice to the President of the United States.

REP. DARRELL ISSA (R-CALIFORNIA)

Ma'am. No, stop please. To head an agency whose morale has gone down, it has had a series of embarrassments...

ANNOUNCER

Under fire, the Secret Service director who could only admit to failures...

JULIA PIERSON

People make mistakes; they need to be held accountable.

ANNOUNCER

The Obamas had just left...

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

EVEN THOUGH THE PRESIDENT HAD NOT BEEN HOME AT THE TIME OF THE FENCE JUMPING, THERE WAS NO DENYING THIS WAS A MAJOR SCREW-UP. DIRECTOR PIERSON RESIGNED THE NEXT DAY. THE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY ANNOUNCED AN INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATION... BUT BY THAT TIME THE COUNTRY HAD LARGELY MOVED ON TO THE NEXT CRISIS... EBOLA.

RATHER

...AND FOR MOST OF US, THAT'S WHERE THE STORY ENDED. TODAY'S MEDIA HEADLINES WASH OVER US EVERY DAY AND WE'RE USUALLY LEFT WITH LITTLE UNDERSTANDING...ESPECIALLY ABOUT AN ISSUE AS IMPORTANT AS THIS. AS YOU WILL SEE TONIGHT, THERE IS SO MUCH MORE TO THIS STORY THAN JUST A FENCE JUMPER. THIS IS ABOUT PROTECTING THE MOST IMPORTANT PERSON IN OUR GOVERNMENT. AND IF THERE'S A PROBLEM WITH THE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR THAT PROTECTION WE THE PEOPLE, NEED TO KNOW. SO WE SET OUT TO FIND A WIDE RANGE OF VOICES TO BRING CONTEXT AND PERSPECTIVE TO THIS STORY - MAYBE AN OLD-FASHIONED NOTION BUT AN IMPORTANT ONE ON AN ISSUE SUCH AS THIS. ..

MARC AMBINDER

No one should be allowed to get unimpeded access to the White House complex regardless of whether the President is there or the President is not there. Sort of an axiom -- it's an axiom that the public understands too, which is one reason this security breach is so public.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

MARC AMBINDER IS A SEASONED JOURNALIST WHO HAS REPORTED EXTENSIVELY ON THE UNITED STATES SECRET SERVICE AND HE HAS FOLLOWED THE FALLOUT FROM THE SECURITY BREACH AT THE WHITE HOUSE WITH GREAT INTEREST.

AMBINDER

There was a failure here beyond human error, because human error is accounted for in the Secret Service's procedure, they know that people aren't going to be perfect. They know that people manning the post aren't always going to do exactly what they should do because every situation is different, but that's why there are so many different layers of security. That's why the Secret Service's budget is more than a billion dollars a year. That's why they spend lots of money on technical counter measures -- many of which are classified, designed to make sure that stuff like this does not happen

DAN BONGINO

I know it wasn't just me, I communicate with a lot with retired and former agents. And we all, the common thread of the emails and the phone calls was how? How does this happen? Because they've successfully mitigated the threat of a fence jumper for 50 years.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

DAN BONGINO IS A RETIRED SECRET SERVICE AGENT LIVING IN MARYLAND. HE SERVED ON THE PROTECTIVE DETAIL FOR BOTH PRESIDENTS GEORGE W. BUSH AND BARACK OBAMA.

BONGINO

One thing about the Secret Service I'm 100% confident in, is they know this was a screw up. There's nobody in the Secret Service saying, "Well we did the right thing, and just a couple..." No nobody's saying that. Everybody knows this was a catastrophic failure, they'll fix it.

DAN EMMETT

People have every right-- Americans have every right to think that the Secret Service screwed up here.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

FORMER MARINE DAN EMMETT SERVED AS A SECRET SERVICE AGENT FOR 21 YEARS, REACHING THE HIGHEST ECHELONS OF THE AGENCY. HE SERVED *WITHIN ARMS' LENGTH* OF PRESIDENTS GEORGE HERBERT WALKER BUSH, BILL CLINTON AND GEORGE W. BUSH.

EMMETT

You have to look at the bottom line here. What is the mission? The mission is to safeguard the White House against all intruders. In this case, an intruder entered the White House; therefore, the Secret Service failed their mission. There's no mitigating it. There's no-- there are no excuses for it. It's something that should never have happened. And it can never happen again.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

FOR THE MOST PART, THE PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF THE SECRET SERVICE HAS BEEN ONE OF UNFLAPPABLE MEN WILLING TO PAY THE ULTIMATE PRICE FOR THEIR JOB - A REPUTATION PERHAPS BEST EXEMPLIFIED IN THE HIT FILM, "IN THE LINE OF FIRE" - WHERE CLINT EASTWOOD PLAYED A GRIZZLED SECRET SERVICE VETERAN WHO SAVES THE LIFE OF A PRESIDENT.

CLINT EASTWOOD (as Agent Frank Horrigan)

Gun!

JEFFREY ENGEL

I think because of recent scandals and recent mistakes, the Secret Service's reputation has clearly taken a hit.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

JEFFREY ENGEL IS THE FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR OF THE CENTER FOR PRESIDENTIAL HISTORY AT SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY. AND ONE FOCUS OF HIS SCHOLARSHIP HAS BEEN THE INTERACTION BETWEEN PRESIDENTS AND THOSE CHARGED WITH PROVIDING THEIR SECURITY.

ENGEL

We also have to remember that the reputation is, in fact, an important part of the protection. And if the pr-- reputation has been sullied then so, too, is the protection not as intimidating as it might otherwise have been, and therefore not as effective as it might otherwise have been.

AMBINDER

The Secret Service relies on its mystique to be a force multiplier, and if that mystique is gone that in and of itself is a security concern, and that's happened.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AMBINDER EMBEDDED WITH THE SECRET SERVICE DURING THE 2012 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AND WAS GIVEN UNPRECEDENTED ACCESS. HE WROTE ABOUT HIS EXPERIENCE FOR THE ATLANTIC MAGAZINE. AND WHILE HE SAYS HE'S SYMPATHETIC TO THE FACT THAT A LOT OF CURRENT AND FORMER AGENTS FEEL UNFAIRLY MALIGNED BY ALL THE NEGATIVE ATTENTION, HE SAYS - UNFAIR OR NOT - IT COMES WITH THE JOB.

AMBINDER

It is absolutely fair to hold the Secret Service's feet to the fire. It is absolutely fair to hold them to an extremely high standard, even if that standard is a standard that realistically they can't possibly meet. And the reason for that is fairly obvious and fairly simple. I mean, the Secret Service has lost Presidents on its watch. President Kennedy, almost lost President Reagan; you know, the margin for error is so small and we've seen what happens when it's erased. So that means that you just have to take every mistake extremely seriously.

EMMETT

Every day that the President survives, the Secret Service wins. You don't really read about all of the victories. You only read about the failures. And there are failures. I mean, it-- it's absolutely out there for everyone to see. But rather than trying to cover those failures up and put a veneer over them and just move on, business as usual, they need to change the way they do things. The Secret Service needs to get rid of its arrogant attitude that "We're the best of the best of the best" and realize that perhaps they're not.

RATHER

EMMETT, LIKE MANY FORMER AGENTS WE TALKED TO, FEELS THAT THE BIGGEST PROBLEM AT THE SECRET SERVICE IS THE WAY IT HAS BEEN MANAGED. BUT OTHER CURRENT AND FORMER AGENTS SAY IF YOU LOOK CLOSELY AT ANY COMPANY OR ORGANIZATION YOU'LL FIND PROBLEMS. WHEN WE COME BACK, A FORMER HEAD OF THE SECRET SERVICE SAYS HE WANTS TO SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT AS HE SEES IT. SO STAY HERE WITH US.

ACT 3

DAN RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE WHITE HOUSE HAS ALWAYS BEEN ONE OF THE TOP TOURIST ATTRACTIONS IN WASHINGTON, D.C. EVERY DAY IT ATTRACTS THROGS OF MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN FROM AROUND THE WORLD. OF COURSE ALMOST NONE OF THEM POSES EVEN THE SLIGHTEST SECURITY THREAT. BUT THE SECRET SERVICE CAN NEVER BE SURE.

IN THE AFTERMATH OF OMAR GONZALEZ JUMPING THE FENCE AND MAKING IT ALL THE WAY INSIDE THE WHITE HOUSE, THE SECRET SERVICE TOOK SOME IMMEDIATE TEMPORARY MEASURES - SUCH AS HEIGHTENED PRESENCE OF UNIFORMED OFFICERS... AND NEW BARRIERS.

RATHER

What's changed since the recent publicity?

RALPH BASHAM

Well first of all you see, the officers are now in place here.

RATHER

Outside?

BASHAM

Outside. They had roving patrols before but now they are stationed here They put up a temporary structure, a barrier here, so that if someone goes over that temporary structure, they've got time to react before they can get up on that fence and get themselves over.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

RALPH BASHAM HEADED THE SECRET SERVICE DURING THE GEORGE W. BUSH ADMINISTRATION AND HE SAYS THE FACT THAT THE SERVICE HAS TAKEN

STEPS IS EVIDENCE OF HOW SERIOUSLY THEY TAKE WHAT WENT WRONG. THERE IS A MUCH LARGER CONSPICUOUS SECURITY PRESENCE OUTSIDE THE WHITE HOUSE ON PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE THAN I HAVE EVER SEEN BEFORE. AND THERE'S A SHORT TEMPORARY FENCE IN FRONT OF THE PERMANENT ONE. IT MAY NOT LOOK LIKE MUCH BUT BASHAM SAYS IT WILL BE YET ANOTHER BARRIER, GIVING SECRET SERVICE AGENTS MORE TIME TO CORRAL SOMEONE LOOKING TO JUMP ONTO THE WHITE HOUSE LAWN.

RATHER

There was a period where the Secret Service was perhaps the most elite security unit in the world.

BASHAM

Right. Right.

RATHER

With tremendous respect.

BASHAM

Right.

RATHER

My question is, does it still deserve that reputation?

BASHAM

I would say unequivocally-- that it does. I truly believe that the Secret Service remains-- the elite-- organization in the world-- in protection of-- of-- high ranking officials-- whether it's the President-- foreign heads of state.

I do believe that the commitment-- of the men and women who are there now-- is no different and maybe even greater-- than when I was-- a young agent. The idea that this agency does not still pride itself as one of the-- as the best in the world at what they do is just not in my opinion true.

RATHER

A guy gets over the fence. He gets in the White House. He overpowers a Secret Service agent in the White House. And he's running in the White House. Then they find out a guy with a criminal background, quote unquote, and is armed gets into the same elevator with the President. It creates this-- it-- it creates this--

BASHAM

I hear ya...

RATHER

--Piercing of, "Wow, what if five terrorists decide to get over the fence and get inside the White House, and maybe occupy the place?" I mean-- to the public's mind and, again I'll be candid with you, through my own, it's "Shouldn't we be concerned about this?"

BASHAM

And that's why we're going through what we're going through right now. The fact that they have established-- a panel, an independent panel, to d-- to take a look at this, to determine why'd it happen-- of this-- this elite organization, which I still think is an elite organization. Why do these things happen? What can we do to-- you know-- prevent them from ever happening-- again. And that's what they will do. They will learn from these-- these-- these events. And-- I-- the-- there-- I'm not makin'-- I hate to sit here and appear to be the apologist. But I truly think we need to get to the facts before we rush to judgment. And I totally agree with you the American people, they're asking how could these things happen. But they're not going to be told-- everything-- for obvious reasons. There-- there-- I mean, you-- you-- you-- you just said what if a gang of terrorists comes over the-- the fence. I can tell you right now, that is gonna be a whole different scenario. There are gonna be a lotta people killed if that happens-- innocent people killed. But I wanna tell you right now, the President of the United States and his family would be secure. And I'm not gonna go into detail, but I'm tellin' they would be secure.

RATHER

And you're confident.

BASHAM

I'm absolutely-- I am totally confident.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BASHAM WAS EAGER TO POINT OUT HOW UNPRECEDENTED THIS SECURITY BREACH WAS. HE NOTED REPEATEDLY THAT IN THE LAST 5 YEARS ALONE, 16 PEOPLE HAD JUMPED THE FENCE AND NO ONE HAD GOTTEN CLOSE TO THE WHITE HOUSE. AND SURE ENOUGH, JUST A FEW WEEKS AFTER OUR INTERVIEW, ANOTHER MAN JUMPED THE FENCE.

NEWS REPORTS (SOUND CLIP)

This is a Fox News alert. We now have video from outside the White House where another person has jumped the fence.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THIS TIME THE DOGS WERE RELEASED AND THE INTRUDER WAS QUICKLY ARRESTED. BUT THE QUESTION REMAINS, WHY WAS THERE SUCH A BREAKDOWN WHEN GONZALEZ JUMPED THE FENCE ON SEPT 19TH?

DAN EMMETT

I think Omar Gonzalez for one thing, leaped through a perfect storm in a breach and an opening in the security at the White House. President Obama had just lifted off the South Grounds in a helo lift. Therefore, in my view, probably most of the resources and assets had been relocated to the South Grounds to cover that departure. Before they could resume their normal positions, Mr. Gonzalez jumped the fence. And so he hit the North Grounds at a point of vulnerability. Now that is, of course, no excuse. You have to maintain 360° coverage at all times. That is completely the doctrine of protection. 360° at all times.

JEFFREY ENGEL

I think had the President been either home or more importantly in direct sight of the person who jumped the fence, we would've had an extremely different outcome and one that I think most people would've-- would've understood, myself included.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WHAT ENGEL IS REFERRING TO IS THE DUAL AND DISTINCTIVE DIVISIONS OF THE SECRET SERVICE. AND IT'S MUCH MORE THAN JUST SEMANTICS.

DAN BONGINO

The common confusion I hear in the media reports of this incident and every other incident is they interchangeably use officer and an agent. I've been called an officer and I was an agent. There have been officers called agents and agents called officers. They are two separate and distinct divisions, they have actually very little to do with one another. The Uniform division officers secure the White House. The agents secure the man, the body, the protectee. They move with the protectee. The only time the agents even have a role at the White House is when the President is actually there. So there's some confusion there. That was a uniformed division event, the fence jumper.

MARC AMBINDER

The uniform division of the Secret Service, the White House branch, which protects the grounds of the White House regularly rehearses for fence jumpers at the Secret Service training academy in Maryland. They have a mock White House; they rehearse everything from people firing rocket propelled grenades into the complex

BONGINO

They have a really really tough job. We used to jokingly say “Hurry up and wait,” was the uniform division officer’s job. You hurry to work and then you just sit there and wait all day for something to happen that thankfully, rarely if ever happens.

AMBINDER

And the Secret Service has said publicly they have concentric rings of security around the White House designed to ensure that if somebody breaks through one of the rings, then they’ll be back ups. There’ll be people there; there will be assets there to prevent them from breaking through to the next barrier. In this instance, all of them failed and that’s worrisome.

RATHER

But right from the get-go, isn't someone supposed to be watching the fence?

BASHAM

Yep. And there are monitors. There are alarms. I mean-- without going into a great deal of detail about what the security features are and the uniform division is obviously part of the Secret Service. And why they didn't react, I--I don't have a good answer for you and we need to figure that out.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

A PORTION OF THE INVESTIGATION INTO THE SECURITY BREACH WAS RECENTLY LEAKED TO THE PRESS AND IT DETAILS SEVERAL SERIOUS BREAKDOWNS. FAILURES IN TRAINING, STAFFING AND COMMUNICATIONS. THE REPORT EVEN FOUND THAT ONE SECRET SERVICE OFFICER WAS TALKING ON A PRIVATE CELL PHONE AT THE TIME OF THE INCIDENT. BUT BACK IN THE IMMEDIATE WAKE OF THE SECURITY BREACH ONE QUESTION THAT MANY HAD WAS WHY WASN’T GONZALEZ JUST SHOT?

NEWS REPORT (SOUND CLIP)

I say if you get over the fence then you have to understand that you could be killed. Seriously? Scaling a nine foot fence?

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

EVEN CONGRESS WANTED TO KNOW...

REP. JASON CHAFFETZ (R – UTAH)

I want it to be crystal clear. If you make a run or dash at the White House, we’re going to take you down.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

HOWEVER, MANY WE TALKED TO IN COMPILING THIS REPORT THOUGHT SUCH MUSINGS WERE HIGHLY IRRESPONSIBLE.

BONGINO

We're not granted special powers to terminate people's lives because you raise your right hand and swear to be a Secret Service officer or agent. You are not. This is the United States of America, it's not communist Russia. We don't exterminate people.

ENGLE

There have been some extraordinarily-- callous, uninformed and, I think, embarrassing comments made by not only members of the press but more importantly by Congress, by members of the House of Representative, suggesting that anyone who crosses the fence line should immediately be shot, no questions asked. I think that's just simply an uninformed and embarrassing answer

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

PROFESSOR ENGLE NOTES THAT MOST PEOPLE WHO JUMP THE WHITE HOUSE FENCE ARE MENTALLY ILL. AND IT TURNS OUT IRAQ WAR VETERAN OMAR GONZALEZ, HIMSELF, WAS SUFFERING FROM POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER.

BASHAM

What would the headlines have been had they taken that individual out and you have someone who is suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome shot dead on the White House lawn because he jumped the fence?

BONGINO

You know it's easy to talk about putting a bullet in someone's head until you're the one looking down the front site at this guy. He's not a threat; we tackle him we take him down. And the question comes up too, "Well what if he had a suicide vest on?" He had a t-shirt on, it was pretty clear. The agents are trained pretty well, printing and all kinds of things they look for on the garments, excessive sweating, excessive garments. None of those indicators were there,

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BUT FORMER AGENT DAN EMMETT SEES THE THREAT CALCULUS POSED BY OMAR GONZALEZ VERY DIFFERENTLY.

EMMETT

In no way am I advocating that the Secret Service shoot fence jumpers. Shooting someone using lethal force is a very last resort. It is the last resort and should only employ-- be employed such as in Mr. Gonzalez case, when he had been told to stop on three different occasions and was on the front steps of the White House. He had a clear agenda. He was coming in no matter what.

And someone like that must be taken down with lethal force. The fact that he was a three-tour Iraqi veteran with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder does not enter into this equation. When you have a person rushing the front door of the White House, you don't know what their mental state is. He could be very well in his mental faculties. It just could simply be that he's made the decision on that day that he's gonna go inside the White House. He's going to try and kill the president or do extreme harm to the White House. So for those reasons, he should have been taken down by lethal force at the door.

ACT 4

DAN RATHER

IN THE WAKE OF THE FENCE JUMPING INCIDENT REVELATIONS ABOUT OTHER POTENTIAL MISSTEPS BY THE SECRET SERVICE CAME TO LIGHT - THE RESPONSE TO GUNSHOTS FIRED AT THE WHITE HOUSE IN 2011, A CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL ARMED SECURITY GUARD BEING ALLOWED TO RIDE INSIDE AN ELEVATOR WITH PRESIDENT OBAMA. AND ALL OF THIS ON TOP OF A 2012 PROSTITUTION SCANDAL IN THE COLOMBIAN TOWN OF CARTAGENA INVOLVING SECRET SERVICE AGENTS ON A PRESIDENTIAL TRIP. WASHINGTON, AND THE NATION BEGAN TO WONDER WHETHER THESE WERE JUST ISOLATED INSTANCES OR DID THEY ADD UP TO A SYSTEMIC FAILURE IN THE SECRET SERVICE

DAN EMMETT

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Secret Service agents who are on the job today have never experienced a president being shot. And so I don't know if the agents of today have quite the same feeling of urgency of mission that perhaps my generation did.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

FORMER SECRET SERVICE AGENT DAN EMMETT HAS BEEN ONE OF THE MOST VOCAL CRITICS OF THE CURRENT MANAGEMENT OF THE AGENCY. AND HE THINKS THAT THE REVELATION OF AN ARMED SECURITY GUARD AT THE CDC - A GUARD WITH A CRIMINAL BACKGROUND - WHO WAS ALLOWED INTO AN ELEVATOR WITH PRESIDENT OBAMA MAY BE THE MOST EGREGIOUS OF THE RECENT REVELATIONS.

EMMETT

When the president travels anywhere, if there are going to be people around him who are armed other than the Secret Service, they must be sworn law enforcement officers, sworn law

enforcement officers only. Not security guards, not anyone from Wells Fargo, not anyone from Acme Security, but genuine state, federal, local gun-carrying firearms individuals, sworn officers. They are the only ones. That is doctrine, in terms of conducting an advance for the president. It doesn't vary. It doesn't waver. It never changes.

MARC AMBINDER

Learning that someone who is not supposed to have a weapon, has a weapon who is inches away from the President for you know 20 seconds but in a contained elevator is a surprise and it's a very unpleasant surprise if you're part of the President's personal body guard.

RATHER

A man with a criminal background who was armed got in the elevator with the President himself. Now-- one agent told me, and this is a direct quote, "That's just protection 101." How does that get missed?

RALPH BASHAM

Well, that agent that told you that s-- should know better. He should have his facts about what happened there. He doesn't have his facts. He doesn't know what happened there. And for him to comment on that is totally inappropriate.

RATHER

Well, then, tell me what the facts are.

BASHAM

Because-- because what was reported in the press is not actually what happened.

RATHER

Well, what actually happened?

BASHAM

Well, first of all, you know. You've traveled with the President. It is not uncommon at all to have-- personnel, uniform or non uniform-- law enforcement personnel in and around the President. As a matter of fact, that person was manifest on that elevator and he had a very specific purpose. He was making sure that he pushed the right button so the President got off on the right floor.

RATHER

But--

BASHAM

He-- he had a top-- my understanding is, he had a top secret clearance from the CDC.

RATHER

You-- you said he was manifested.

BASHAM

Certainly he was manifested.

RATHER

How would he get manifested with a criminal background?

BASHAM

Many times when the service goes in to a location, and there are law enforcement personnel there, whether they're, you know-- uniformed or non uniformed-- and they-- have been vetted and this was the CDC. This wasn't-- this wasn't some, you know, commercial building somewhere. This was the CDC. They had cleared this individual. Now where they broke down was they didn't know the individual had the weapon. But it's not uncommon. So not uncommon to have people on those elevators that are not Secret Service agents. Many can be-- who are armed. And they are pinned. You've been-- you've been around this a long time. You know that's the process. So when they go in, and they-- they-- they're requesting-- support to do a spec-- a particular function, then they are given-- this person's—

RATHER

All right, grant the point--

BASHAM

I don't know-- I'm not sure-- I'm not sure that the information on the criminal record is-- accurate.

RATHER

Well, let's-- let me accept your point for the moment about he was manifest. Surely he shouldn't have been armed. I think you said it yourself he should not have been armed.

BASHAM

Clearly, n— well no. I'm not—I'm not saying that. What I'm saying is they should have known that he was armed.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

ANOTHER RECENT REVELATION THAT BASHAM THINKS GOT TOO MUCH ATTENTION WAS CRITICISM THAT IT TOOK THE SECRET SERVICE TOO LONG TO RESPOND TO SHOTS FIRED AT THE WHITE HOUSE IN 2011.

BASHAM

The individual-- pulled up on-- Constitution Avenue, and what is, like, 16th Street, which is directly-- in front of-- the White House-- put his weapon out-- the door, out the window, and-- and fired seven rounds-- which-- hit the White House, and then sped away. But no one had any real evidence that the White House had been hit on-- that night. That portion of the residence was closed down.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BASHAM SAYS EXISTING TECHNOLOGY LIKE BALLISTIC GLASS PREVENTED THE BULLETS FROM ENTERING THE WHITE HOUSE. AND IN THE WAKE OF THE INCIDENT, THE SECRET SERVICE HAS MADE SECURITY IMPROVEMENTS.

BASHAM

Changes have been made as a result of that, because what they did not have-- at the time, was sufficient-- camera coverage-- in that area-- and sensor-- coverage. So, all of that has now been-- corrected. So as I said before, you know, that-- but, the problem is-- to prevent that kind of an attack, would you close down Constitution Avenue? And they moved back to Independence Avenue, and then they shoot from Independence Avenue?

AMBINDER

What was troublesome to the Obamas about the shooting was not so much that it happened, they actually understood from the Secret Service's perspective how they responded and what they did, what was troublesome was that nobody told them about it. So, the primary problem here and it's one that actually plagues the secret service to some degree is communication. Not that they're lying, not that they're covering things up, but that they tend to instinctively be very insular and keep things in house until they are completely ready to talk about them to interested parties, including the President and First Lady.

JEFFREY ENGEL

One of the important lessons we take from studying particle physics, for example, is the notion that objects change when we observe them. The way people act and the way physical world acts and the way bureaucracies act are simply different when we're looking really carefully. If you

look really carefully at something, you're going to see problems. And as an observer from the outside, I'm not gonna be surprised in the least if we start hearing about more and more difficulties, more and more problems, more and more-- people getting reprimanded, more and more people not following proper protocol within the agency, not because there's any more going on but because now we're paying attention. Now we're hearing. Now we're listening. Now we're essentially observing with greater scrutiny. So, if the American public hears more, I'd ask them simply to remind themselves that "Are we only hearing more because we're listening more?"

RATHER

Given what's been in the papers, been on television recently, if I'm not to think there's something wrong with this Secret Service, why-- why am I not to think that?

BASHAM

Because I-- I don't believe-- that-- all of the information-- is-- is-- is being provided, and for good reason. The Secret Service does not do a good job of defending itself. So they have taken a posture that, we don't want our name in the paper. We don't want our name on the news. That's not what we're supposed to be all about. We don't-- we-- we are in the background.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BUT THE SECRET SERVICE IS ONLY GOING TO GET MORE ATTENTION... THAT WAS APPARENT FROM THE GRILLING FORMER DIRECTOR JULIA PEARSON TOOK FROM THE HOUSE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE IN LATE SEPTEMBER.

REP. DARRELL ISSA (R-CALIFORNIA)

Ma'am...no stop please. I want to be considerate to you, you have a hard job. But you head an agency whose morale has gone down. It is lower than other comparable federal agencies. It has had a series of embarrassments...

REP. MATT CARTWRIGHT (D-PENNSYLVANIA)

Profoundly inadequate, shocking, disgraceful, outrageous. Is there any one of those adjectives you disagree with?

JULIA PIERSON

No.

CARTWRIGHT

Thank you.

REP. ELIJAH CUMMINGS (D-MARYLAND)

I think over a course of time folks can be lulled into a culture of mediocrity.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

ELIJAH CUMMINGS IS A VETERAN DEMOCRATIC CONGRESSMAN FROM MARYLAND WHO HAS HAD A LOT OF TOUGH QUESTIONS FOR THE SECRET SERVICE...

CUMMINGS

The secret service is supposed to be the most elite, protective force in the world,

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

HE SAYS HE AND HIS COLLEAGUES HAVE HEARD ABOUT MANY CONCERNS FROM RANK AND FILE SECRET SERVICE AGENTS AND OFFICERS.

CUMMINGS

It reminds me of an organization that is fighting against itself. You have Secret Service agents that feel more comfortable coming to a member of Congress and telling him about the problems in the Service and all of the negative things they see. They feel more comfortable telling him than telling their superiors. That's a major problem and it is a symptom of an organization which is in trouble.

ACT V

DAN RATHER

TO UNDERSTAND WHERE THE SECRET SERVICE IS TODAY, IT HELPS TO KNOW A BIT ABOUT ITS HISTORY. IT WAS FOUNDED BACK IN 1865 AS PART OF THE TREASURY DEPARTMENT. ITS MISSION: TO INVESTIGATE COUNTERFEITING - A BIG CONCERN IN THE WANING DAYS OF THE CIVIL WAR. THEN IN 1901 CAME THE ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT WILLIAM MCKINLEY AND THE SECRET SERVICE GOT A SECOND MISSION - PROTECTING THE PRESIDENT. TEDDY ROOSEVELT WAS THE FIRST TO BE GUARDED BY THE SECRET SERVICE. AND IT IS THIS MISSION THAT HAS BECOME THE PUBLIC FACE OF THE AGENCY...

BUT THE SECRET SERVICE HAS ALSO KEPT ITS MISSION OF INVESTIGATING FINANCIAL FRAUD AND IT REMAINED IN THE TREASURY DEPARTMENT UNTIL THE TERRORIST ATTACKS OF 9/11... IN THE DRAMATIC SECURITY OVERHAUL THAT ENSUED, THE AGENCY GOT A NEW HOME - IT WOULD NOW BE ONE PART OF THE MASSIVE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY.

DAN BONGINO

So you may say to yourself it sounds logical. Department of Homeland Security, you guys are security. It's not. You are better off in the Department of the Treasury where there was no interest other than protecting the President. There were no conflicting frictions there. I think it was a terrible move and I think if you polled, off the record, Social Security men and women the results would be ridiculous. You would have a 98% agreement rate that the Department of Treasury Department of Homeland Security shift was a disaster.

DAN EMMETT

Prior to 9/11, the Secret Service was a part of Treasury, where it operated extremely efficiently since 1865. With 9/11, however, the magnitude of that attack, the federal government did what it always does in such incidents. It hires more people. That is the instantaneous knee-jerk reaction of every administration in time of crisis. We have to have more people. We don't really know why. We don't really know what they're gonna do. But we need more people. And so when the Secret Service became a part of Homeland, the mandate was passed down that several hundred new agents had to be hired immediately. When that occurred, standards dropped.

JEFFREY ENGEL

Anytime you found a new agency with an extraordinarily wide mandate, it's going to be difficult to staff, difficult to regulate, difficult to create procedures for. And the Secret Service, which in many ways used to be the crown jewel of the Treasury Department, who gets special service, special attention within the Treasury Department, because of its public role became just one of-- several important agencies inside of a massive governmental bureaucracy. So, there have been some critiques of-- over the last decade-- that the management of the Secret Service has become more bureaucratically entwined.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BUT THERE ARE SOME WHO ARGUE THIS CRITICISM IS REVISIONIST THINKING. RALPH BASHAM WORKED FOR THE SECRET SERVICE IN BOTH ITS OLD AND NEW HOMES.

RATHER

Well, what about the argument that the Secret Service was better-- was much better when it was part of the Treasury Department. And once it was removed from the Treasury Department and put under this huge, super bureaucracy called Homeland Security that it lost something. So why not take it back, put it under Treasury as it was before?

RALPH BASHAM

That's a great question. I was there when we moved from the Department of Treasury-- to the Department of Homeland Security. And I can tell you, Dan, from-- from the day I walked in the Secret Service there were people, many people, who complained that the Secret Service was at the Department of Treasury. "They're a financial institution. We need to get outta the Treasury Department, you know. We oughta be our own independent agency" -which is another really stupid idea. You know-- you know, a little known fact when the Department of Homeland Security was created and the Secret Service was put under the h-- Department of Homeland Security, the Director of the Secret Service reported directly to the Secretary and still does. I didn't have that when I was at Treasury.

RATHER

You had several people to go through before you got to--

BASHAM

Oh, I had-- you had a s-- deputy assistant secretaries and-- and, you know, assistant secretaries and deputy secretaries. And you had a whole list of people that, you know, before you ever got to speak to the Secretary. But the Director of the Secret Service on the flow chart reports to the Secretary. And that was created specifically for this reason. They didn't want to have all those layers of bureaucracy between the Director and the Secretary when it dealt with the protection of the President of the United States.

RATHER

And your point is to this day that's the case.

BASHAM

Far as I know. It's-- I don't believe it's changed.

REP. DARRELL ISSA (R-CALIFORNIA)

Automated locking is a capability within the White House but not at that entrance at that time.

JULIA PIERSON

Not at that time but has since been installed and is effective today.

ISSA

We learn from our mistakes. The second question...

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

YET AS THE SECRET SERVICE COMES UNDER INCREASING SCRUTINY FROM CONGRESS, MANY THERE HAVE JOINED THE CHORUS OF THOSE WHO QUESTION THE AGENCY'S MOVE INTO HOMELAND SECURITY. IN EARLY OCTOBER, THE SECRETARY OF HOMELAND SECURITY, JEH JOHNSON, APPOINTED A FOUR PERSON PANEL TO INVESTIGATE THE SECRET SERVICE. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN HOW INDEPENDENT THIS INVESTIGATION WILL BE, BUT CONGRESSMAN ELIJAH CUMMINGS FOR ONE HOPES EVERY ASPECT OF THE SECRET SERVICE WILL BE QUESTIONED.

REP. ELIJAH CUMMINGS (D-MARYLAND)

I need to hear what the independent group says. I've said to them they need to look determine whether when the organization was placed under Homeland Security whether that was a disadvantage and whether that hurt. I need to know whether being under the Treasury puts them under a more powerful microscope and whether that helps and I need to also determine whether the Secret Service is trying to do too many things. In other words should we just limit their activities to being responsible for the safety of the president and his family and vice president and others diplomats we need to take a look at that.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BUT MANY CURRENT AND FORMER AGENTS WE TALKED TO SAID THAT INVESTIGATING COUNTERFEIT MONEY AND FINANCIAL FRAUD - THE SECRET SERVICE'S ORIGINAL MISSION - ARE CRITICAL TO ITS JOB OF PROTECTING THE PRESIDENT.

EMMETT

In my view, it would be a tragic mistake to do away with investigations. The Secret Service has discovered that the best protection agents are the best field agents. It's the six years that a new agent spends in the field honing their skills of observation, their people skills, their ability to elicit information, their ability to think on their feet, to multitask, all of those things are crucial in making a good protection agent. To bring someone into the Secret Service, send them through training, and then send them directly to the Presidential detail, I believe you would have far more problems than you're seeing today.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AS WASHINGTON WAITS FOR THE REPORT ON THE INVESTIGATION OF THE SECRET SERVICE, ONE REALITY THAT EVERYONE IS CONTENDING WITH IS THE NUMBER OF LEAKS THAT HAS COME OUT OF AN ORGANIZATION THAT HAD ONCE BEEN SO SECRET.

BONGINO

After the fence jumping incident there was a near mutiny in the Secret Service. And that was the story I found most in the media a lot of folks missed. It's very rare for, they call it the Secret Service for a reason, for the Secret Service to have whistleblowers. But not just one or two, they were getting five or six calls from people saying 'I'm done, I'm finished, we're either going to fix this place now or there's never going to be another opportunity.' They wanted to strike while the iron was hot, they had the opportunity to reform the secret service for the better and the men and women there really spoke out.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

ONE OF THE RECIPIENTS OF MANY OF THOSE LEAKS IS WASHINGTON EXAMINER REPORTER SUSAN CRABTREE. SHE BROKE THE STORY OF THE ARMED SECURITY GUARD ON AN ELEVATOR WITH PRESIDENT OBAMA AND CRABTREE SAYS HER SOURCES IN THE AGENCY BELIEVE THAT MANAGEMENT HAS UNDERMINED MORALE... AND THE MISSION.

SUSAN CRABTREE

They describe the agency as a-- the Secret Service Family. And they take a lot of pride in that. But they also describe it as sometimes a dysfunctional family that has-- where top-- officials are protecting certain-- sort of agents that they like and disciplining others that they don't like. There's not uniform discipline, and consistency across the board.

BASHAM

There are people in the organization that are not necessarily happy with the leadership and perhaps the level of-- training, maybe the level of equipment-- those sorts of things. Certainly, there are those-- sorts of things. But, I can't understand why quote unquote "low morale" would lead someone who is committed to literally laying their life down, you know, for the President of the United States, but at the same time, pointing out-- publicly pointing out vulnerabilities? You're-- you're-- you're exposing potential vulnerabilities to the security of the President of the United States. That's what you are sworn to do, is protect the President of United States. I can't, having been there 33 years, there is absolutely-- there is nothing that would have driven me to do what they've done.

REP. JASON CHAFFETZ (R – UTAH)

One Secret Service agent that I talked to said, 'We just keep getting lucky.'

NEWS REPORTS (SOUND CLIP)

The Secret Service has also come under fire for behavior outside Washington. In 2012 agents in Colombia were caught soliciting prostitutes.

Well guess what? Now we are learning that the day of the fence jumping incident two uniformed Secret Service officers recognized Gonzalez out there in front of the North fence but they did not stop him or even report him.

CUMMINGS

We've got several things going on here now. One, you have media who can instantaneously put things on the news. Two, you have a very frustrated group of Secret Service agents who are willing to go beyond the veil of secrecy and talk to the press and to members of Congress. And so when you get that combination then information bubbles up when before it may have been suppressed. And you've got people who, and I do believe a lot of Secret Service agents, the whistleblowers, I really believe they're good people and they simply want change but a lot of them are afraid to go to their superiors and a lot of them feel that nobody is going to hear them.

BONGINO

They need to get an outside director in with a fresh set of eyeballs; someone who doesn't owe anyone in Washington DC a darn thing. Nothing. A three star general or a former FBI director, someone who's there not to yet another career, not to get another career not to make contacts, but he's there to fix the Secret Service.

EMMETT

Every week, every day, there should be someone from headquarters on a protective assignment with the President, riding in the follow-up, watching, seeing what's going on, talking to the working-level agent. The number one thing in leadership, which is what the Secret Service is lacking, is getting out with your people in the field to see what's really going on. And that's just simply not happening.

MARC AMBINDER

There's a learning curve that the Secret Service has to adopt very, very steeply, and it's gonna be very painful for the organization to do so, but in order to survive as an organization--which I think they will--they're going to have to do it. And it's not gonna be pretty, you know, it may mean that, you know, there will be other security lapses that, you know, come to our attention. But it's probably very necessary. I mean, all organizations have to adapt to the times in which they live. The Secret Service is not exempt from that just because they're the Secret Service.

ACT 6

DAN RATHER (VOICE OVER)

IT WAS IMPLICIT IN THE FOUNDING OF OUR REPUBLIC THAT OUR PRESIDENTS WERE CITIZENS AND NOT KINGS –THAT THEY WERE ACCOUNTABLE... AND ACCESSABLE TO THE PEOPLE WHOM THEY SERVED; AND THAT IDEAL ENDURES.

BUT AS THE WORLD HAS BECOME MORE DANGEROUS AND COMPLICATED, IT BECOMES EVER HARDER FOR THE SECRET SERVICE TO KEEP PRESIDENTS OUT OF HARM'S WAY.

RATHER

In a country such as ours, a people as we see ourselves, we don't want uniformed military people with fifty caliber machine guns--

BASHAM

Right.

RATHER

--posted at every corner of the White House.

BASHAM

Right, right.

RATHER

On the other hand, we insist on maximum protection for the President and his family. How do we weigh these things?

BASHAM

Well I--I --that is the question of the day. How do you balance the idea of protecting the President of the United States, protecting the White House, but at the same time making it accessible to the citizens of this country? You know, you can't put the President in a bunker six feet under the ground and pump air and water to him. The people would not tolerate that.

RATHER

Americans expect that the White House will be accessible.

BASHAM

Exactly

RATHER

I mean, tourists by the thousands go through the White House almost every day.

BASHAM

Exactly. 1.2 million people last year walked through the White House on tours.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND THAT IS THE BALANCE THAT ULTIMATELY DEFINES THE MISSION OF THE SECRET SERVICE. HOW DO YOU PROTECT THE WHITE HOUSE AND THE PRESIDENT IN A DEMOCRACY SUCH AS OURS?

BASHAM

There are inherent risk that the President has to be, wants to be, and should be out among the people. That --that's who we are. That the White House is the people's house. But that comes with a price.

RATHER

THE MISSION OF THE SECRET SERVICE IS A VERY DIFFICULT ONE. AND THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO CHOSE TO DO IT DESERVE OUR RESPECT, DEEP RESPECT.

BUT THE RECENT SECURITY LAPSES RAISE MANY TOUGH QUESTIONS: HAVE STANDARDS FOR AGENTS AND OFFICERS DECLINED IN RECENT YEARS? IS POLITICS INFLUENCING WHO IS BEING HIRED AND PROMOTED.... AND SHOULD THE SECRET SERVICE BE RESTRUCTURED OR EVEN REMAIN IN HOMELAND SECURITY AT ALL? I HOPE THE PANEL INVESTIGATING THE AGENCY HAS THE INDEPENDENCE NEEDED TO ANSWER CONCERNS SUCH AS THESE.

AND YET, WE ALSO SHOULDN'T RUSH TO JUDGEMENT. SOMETHING AS IMPORTANT AS PROTECTING THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES MUST BE CONSIDERED WITH CALM AND DELIBERATION. THIS IS ONE PART OF GOVERNMENT THAT WE CAN'T AFFORD TO HAVE FAIL. AND I THINK THAT'S SOMETHING ON WHICH WE CAN ALL AGREE.

THAT'S OUR REPORT FOR TONIGHT. FROM WASHINGTON, DAN RATHER REPORTING. GOOD NIGHT.

END TRANSCRIPT