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WASHINGTON'S



SECRET SERVICE BOSS

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will be due in Pittsburgh, where later he will speak to a worldwide meeting of transportation officials. Plans for a return are not established as yet. For after the talk he will probably be met by an unknown number of ordinary citizens, who will jam the entrance of the Pittsburgh Hilton in the customary efforts to catch glimpses of his person. Greater crowds are expected to appear as his limousine is driven toward the Pittsburgh airport, probably delaying his arrival. And once at the plane, many hands will be shaken; pictures will be taken. An immense amount of ceremony.

For "the Man" is none other than Gerald R. Ford, the 38th President of the United States.

For Charles L. Gittens it is vital information. As the Secret Service's special agent in charge of vital field operations in the District of Columbia, part of his job is to make certain of the fact that men from his office are dispersed in the crowd when the President's party returns to the city. Indeed, on this occasion he will tag along himself. The new administration is only one month old and he has not had a chance to meet the current Chief Executive.

The presidential meeting is later handled with finesse, an impressive example of the famous Secret Service efficiency. It is Monday at last and Gittens has arrived at Maryland's Andrews Air Force Base for the presidential return. Via radio intercom, a message is conveyed to Air Force One—in flight—that Charlie Gittens of the Washington office would appreciate a moment of the President's time. No problem whatever. Thirty minutes later, when the jet is on the ground, Richard Kaiser, the agent in charge, introduces the two men.

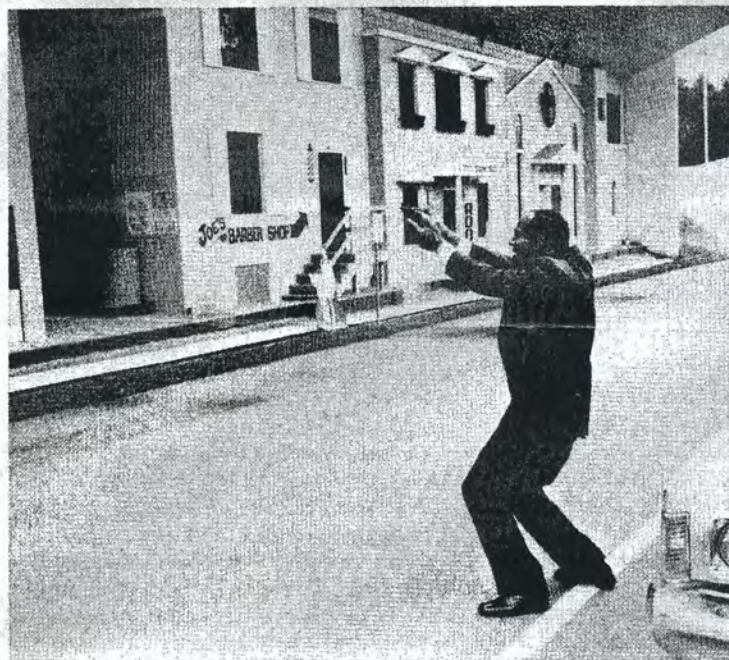
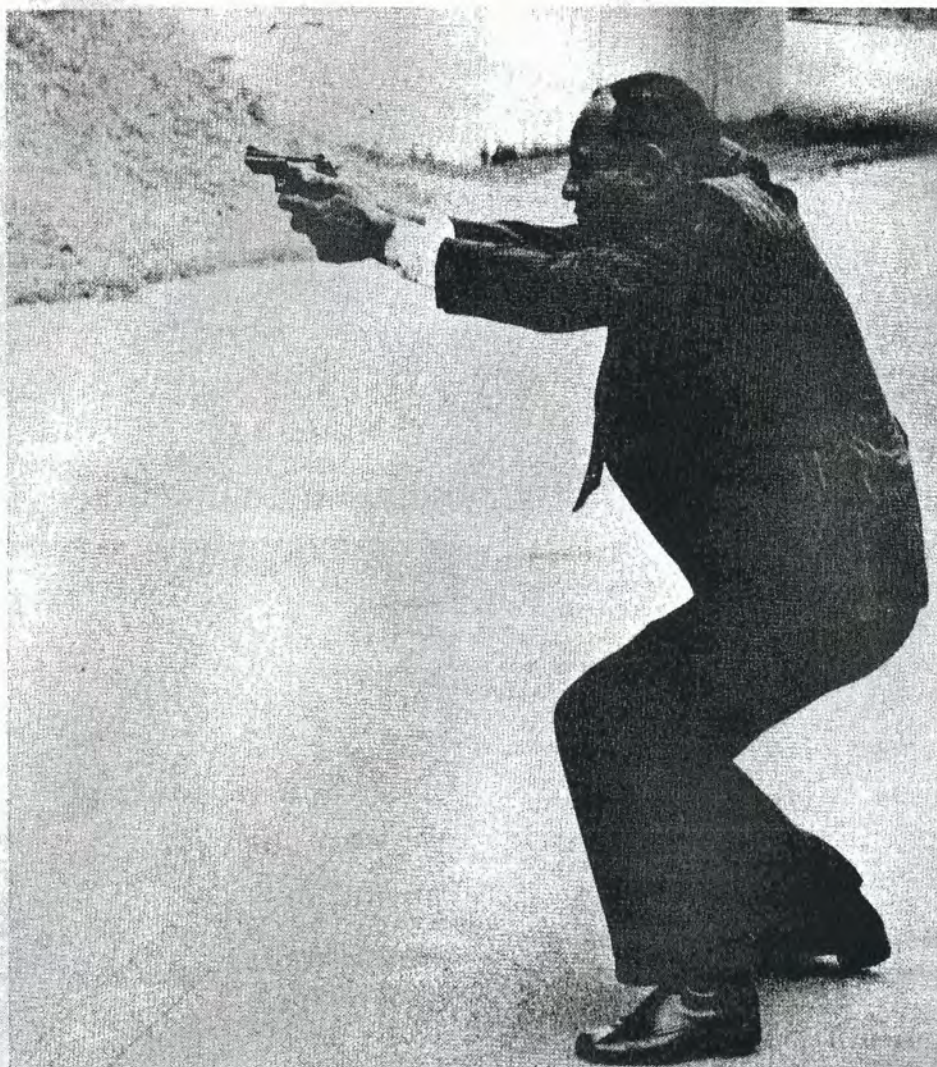
But the movements of "the Man" are only a part of Gittens' problems. As the person in charge of a major Secret Service field office, his principal assignment is investigating cases involving counterfeit currency and those which involve forgery of federal government checks and bonds.

Such an assignment can entail a lot of undercover work so the hazards it presents are often every bit as great as the protection of President Ford and other designated people.

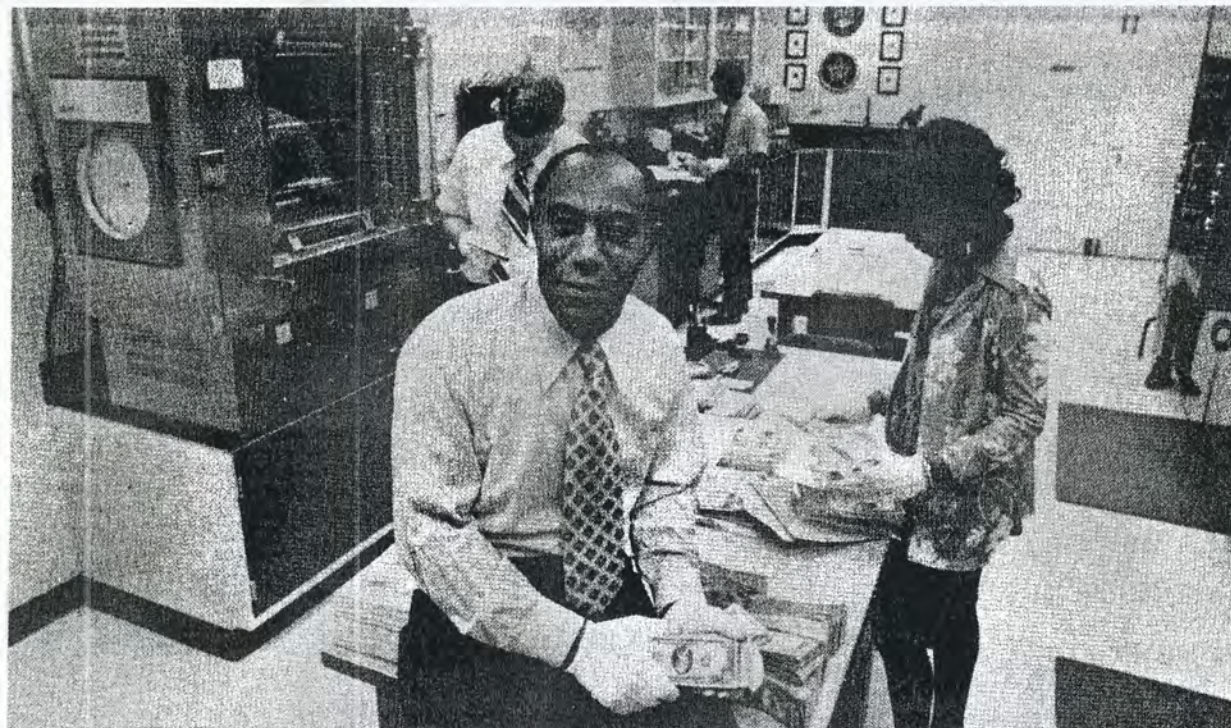
Well, not any more, because Gittens is now a desk man. But prior to his job as a regional manager, Gittens served for a decade as undercover man in the Secret Service's action-filled New York field office.

Assignments there could be dangerous.

"Some of the cases sort of stick in your mind," he recalls. "Among them was one involving \$20 bills being passed in Brooklyn—about as phony as they come. I got an introduction to a member of the ring and bought the usual couple of thousand, at a 10 percent rate. Well, one introduction simply led to another, and soon I was prowling around Boston and Toronto, where at last I got a line on the number one guy, the counterfeiter himself. And not a bad sort of person. I eventually grew to like him. When the deal came down I ar-



Pistol range affords Gittens an opportunity to maintain shooting eye. Moving targets along a simulated street (left) provide a realistic backdrop. Facility is a part of agency's training institution near Beltsville, Md. The weapon, a .357 Magnum revolver, is standard equipment for all the service's special agents. Gittens takes aim about once every month, although since his promotion, the majority of his duties have been managerial.



Laboratory aides in the Service's national office wear sanitized gloves while handling evidence. Facility is equipped to study counterfeit currency and to analyze handwriting and fingerprint data in cases of check and bond forgeries. Gittens later meets (below) with his assistants (from l.) Bert de Froese, Kevin Tucker, Phil Strother, Roger Warner and Darnelle Sneed. Partly hidden is Joseph Worthington.

SECRET SERVICE AGENT *Continued*

ranged to be arrested along with everybody else, so that no one knew about the role that I had played until the case came to trial. And I'm telling you the truth. That guy came over and actually shook my hand. Begged my pardon, would you believe. Apologizing and everything. 'Look, I'm sorry to have gotten you into this.' Going on and on. I then took the stand—as a prosecution witness—and gave my identity. Special Agent Charles L. Gittens, U. S. Secret Service. His jaw must have dropped about two or three inches.

"Another guy in the office had a line on a ring and an arrest was set up. He was talking to the leader on monitored telephone and the rest of us were eavesdropping. They couldn't agree on where to make the transaction. The agent, incidentally, was a great comedian. 'Dammit,' he said, 'let's do it in style. Meet me on the steps of the Treasury Department building. Right under their noses. That'll serve them right.' It was all I could do just to keep from laughing. But he was so cool. And we got our arrest. At a Washington airport.

"Often you'll find among counterfeiting people that once it's over—when the jig is up—there is very little malice toward the undercover man. The attitude is this: 'It was a test of wits. You came up winner.' I have never been involved in any shooting situations. I'm a hell of a lot safer being a Secret Service man than I would be driving cabs in either New York or Chicago."

COUNTERFEIT work is still the essence of the job. But Gittens today directs a Secret Service office which is second in the nation in importance and prestige, and a vital part of the greater Secret Service network. Three metropolitan areas—New York, Chicago and Los Angeles—exceed his district in the counterfeiting of money, but the District of Columbia, as seat of the government, gets more than its share of the stolen check business. Washington, moreover, for obvious reasons, gets the



largest production of "protective intelligence" cases—or abusive mail, often with threats to the President. The national office has the prime responsibility. But it must depend for success of its work on the contributions of Gittens' some 65 agents who patrol the District and 33 counties in Maryland and Virginia. Also, Washington agents get most of the assignments relating to character checks of prospective Treasury Department employees (the Secret Service is a part of the Department), as well as other odds and ends relating to duty in the capital, working closely on occasion with the FBI, the CIA and with local police.

(Indeed, where duty in the capital is concerned, it is sharing that counts. Presidential protection, to cite one example, is shared in Washington by three distinct entities: the Service's Presidential Protective Division, the White House Police and the Service's District Field Office. But only Service agents travel regularly with the President.)

But counterfeit money—and check and bond forgery—remains the prime responsibility of the Washington-area district. And the single biggest problem. In fiscal 1974, Secret Service agents seized \$19 million in false U. S. currency around the nation and the world. In a typical year, some 1,400 persons are arrested in such cases. In Gittens' own district, there were 358 arrests in the period for counterfeit money or forged checks and bonds. Most counterfeit bills are \$10s and \$20s rather crudely produced on offset presses in backrooms and basements. Great skill is not required and quality often suffers.

"Years ago," remarks a Secret Service spokesman, "a skilled counterfeiter had to be a good engraver as well as a printer. Today, modern methods of photography and printing make counterfeiting relatively easy."

There is, in addition, the problem of check and bond forgery—in Washington particularly, with its tens of thousands of federal employees. Of the 600 million government checks



Gittens shares moment with H. Stuart Knight, the current Secret Service director, in latter's suite of offices.

SECRET SERVICE AGENT *Continued*

which are sent through the mail during a 12-month period (to federal workers, old-age pensioners, war veterans, Social Security recipients and others), some 50,000 never reach the beneficiaries. Modern methods of fingerprint detection, as well as handwriting analysis, often apprehend the thieves, but forgery of checks is a growing law enforcement challenge. In Gittens' opinion, any forgery is damnable. "A guy passes you a \$20 bill that turns up phony, well, I guess that's a problem. But falsifying the signature of an invalid pensioner and so cheating this person of a month's worth of income takes a special kind of person. Some of these people you can take or leave alone. Others you can hardly wait to see behind bars."

Because he is based in the nation's capitol, Gittens also chooses agents to protect various visiting foreign dignitaries. That job can be ticklish. "Usually it's a matter of simply using your head as to which agents to assign to any given individual. If the person in question has a special kind of interest, such as swimming or horseback, of course we get a man who would share such an interest. V.I.P.s are like everybody else. Some of these people, like Jordan's King Hussein, are great sports-minded men. I'll assign them an agent who is knowledgeable about sports. We try to be flexible. But there is one thing that will never be tolerated. A Secret Service man is not a butler or valet. Most of the people respect our professionalism. But often we are asked to perform a certain kind of service, such as the carrying of packages. We always refuse. How can we protect them if we're struggling with a suitcase?"

Gittens can recall many interesting experiences when he himself was in protective situations, working with people such as Dwight D. Eisenhower, Richard M. Nixon, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, Hubert H. Humphrey, Jacqueline Onassis, Linda Bird Johnson and others. He recalls Mrs. Onassis (at the time she was Mrs. Kennedy) hysterical at the sight of an outsized bat which had strayed into her room at the Hyannisport compound. "Don't kill it," she demanded, "just make it go away." In 1964, he was the only black agent on the scene in Dallas during President Johnson's first visit to the city following the Kennedy assassination several months before. "About four or five of us were headed for a meeting with the presidential party," he recalls. "Somebody said 'Let's stop for a hamburger.' I could sense something wrong the minute I walked into the place. And sure enough. No colored people served. The other guys were a lot angrier than I was. But the manager came out and apologized profusely. And we eventually got served."

A year before, assigned to President Kennedy (whose autographed picture is displayed in his office), Gittens was the victim of a rather different kind of embarrassment. But he relates it with gusto. "We'd gone up to Hyannisport for a weekend's stay and had just settled in at the President's home. Mr. Kennedy, as usual, immediately sank into his rocking chair. Then he glanced my way. He said, 'Come here, Charlie.' Of course I responded. No sooner had I done so when this little dog suddenly rushes up past me and jumps into his lap. That was Charlie, of course. The President's dog. President Kennedy just laughed his head off."



An office outing gives Gittens the chance to meet families of his agents and other office personnel.

SECRET SERVICE AGENT *Continued*

GITTENS' lively accounts of experiences such as these invariably are delivered in the Down East vowels which have complicated his life as a Secret Service agent. ("We prefer that our agents sorta blend into the crowd. Can you picture me, as an undercover man in a place like Harlem saying, 'Bahk up the money, boys, the boss is gettin' itchy?')")

Gittens is a native of Cambridge, Mass. and is one of seven children of a contractor father who had moved from Barbados. After graduating from high school, he was serving in the Army as trombone player with a military band. While stationed in Japan, he was urged by friends to enter officers training school. Earning his commission, he eventually was assigned to duty in North Carolina, where he met his wife.

"I had dreamed of making a career with the military. You had better believe it. But then I got to thinking. Here I was, all married and everything. And I was getting pressure from my wife and her friends, all of whom had studied at the local black school, North Carolina College. There had been a possibility that I'd go to West Point. But the Academy had a rule against married cadets, so I gave up the commission and finally went back to school."

In 1955, Gittens was graduated *magna cum laude* from N.C.C., majoring in English and Spanish, and was serving as a teacher in a Greensboro high school when a casual inquiry about a Secret Service job just happened to pay dividends. At the time, no black had ever enlisted in the service. Because he was living in North Carolina, he was sent for exams to the office in Atlanta. "When the results became known," he reminisces wryly, "I had passed the written—no problem at all—but flunked the oral. Can you imagine such a thing? The guy in charge had scribbled things down like 'Speaks incoherently' or 'Can't be understood.' Now a Boston accent is a pretty strange thing in Atlanta, Georgia—that much I can assure you. But that was really too much. And I knew the *real* reason." A fresh new test—with auditors from the North—finally landed him the job. For the next 10 years he served in New York, working mainly in the areas of counterfeiting and forgery, on protective assignments and a variety of other details.

Then in 1965 Gittens was assigned to the Puerto Rican district as agent in charge of the island's operations, doing criminal investigations in the rest of Latin America—working, in this case, with local law enforcement agencies. It was during this time, in 1969, that Gittens accompanied Gov. Nelson A. Rockefeller during much of his visit as presidential emissary to Latin American and Caribbean republics. Later that year, Gittens was named assistant agent in charge of the District of Columbia, working closely with the man who eventually would become the national Secret Service Director H. Stuart Knight.

The two are still great friends.

"One thing that I can say about Charlie and myself," says Knight, "is that, administratively speaking, we think about the same. Our philosophies about the running of an office are very similar."

In 1971, when Gittens was promoted to manager of the office



Gittens relaxes in Maryland apartment with his wife, Ruthe. Their only child, Mrs. Sharon Quick, lives with her husband in Alexandria, Va., a suburb of D. C.

SECRET SERVICE AGENT *Continued*

he immediately encouraged the enlistment of black agents. He traveled about the country with teams of recruiters visiting black universities and other likely institutions. Of the Secret Service's more than 1,200 agents (serving in 65 districts in the U. S. and Puerto Rico), only 37 are black. Five of these people—two women are among them—are in Gittens' own office. Where women are concerned, it is bleaker by far: only seven are enlisted with the Secret Service nationally, five of whom are assigned to the District. "We're serious about the hiring of minorities," says Gittens. "But problems have arisen. Blacks have not responded in quite the way that we had hoped. Also, many of the counselors in black universities do not seem to be aware of this career opportunity.

"Maybe I'm biased, but I just can't imagine a young guy out of college who wouldn't want to be an agent. In my own case, it has been a very rewarding life."

The seat of Gittens' vast operation is a large suite of offices above Pennsylvania Avenue only blocks from the White House. Through an intercom system that is technically a marvel, he barks out orders to a staff of about 100 people. Gittens is a man of considerable energy whose raspy voice and often bluff personality hide a merry sense of humor and a real concern about victims. At 46—and a veteran of over 19 years in the service—he will be eligible to retire in less than a year, but figures he will hang around the job for a while before retreating to property in North Carolina which he and his wife, Ruthe, visit regularly. His hobbies are yachting and horseback riding.

A "regular guy" among off-duty staffers, Gittens was invited to an outdoor party at the Maryland retreat of a young member of his staff. Also attending were other staffers in the office, as well as wives, girlfriends, children and friends.

For those whose image of the Secret Service agent is conditioned by pictures shown in magazines and newspapers (depicting angry phalanxes of unsmiling people like intimidating hens around a presidential convoy), the scene would have been eye-opening. Secret Service men are quite harmless individuals—at least at play. They laugh, drink beer, tell stories and play volleyball. They bicker with their wives and scold their children—and eat a tremendous amount of hamburgers.

What sets them apart is the nature of their job. Protecting "the Man" and other designated people—and the less publicized duties which an agent must perform.

"Looking back," says Gittens, "when I enlisted in the Service, I knew everybody. Knew every agent personally. It's a lot different now. We have steadily expanded, both in size itself or in the area of our responsibility. But the Service is a lot like home, even now. And I wouldn't trade it for the world."



Keeping watch with Charles L. Gittens— ace sentry and sleuth

BY HAMILTON J. BIMS

THE man at the window suddenly interrupts the small talk, recalling some business that is pressing for his attention. He aims his voice into an intercom system and the words of an assistant immediately flood into the office.

"You buzzed, Mr. Gittens?"

"Where's 'the Man' gonna be, and what'll he be doing, at nine o'clock Monday?"

A minute slips by before the voice has returned, but when it is resumed, it has the following information: "The Man," at that hour,