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1. What is it like to be a Secret Service agent?

Having a job as a special agent with the United States Secret Service is exciting and it's also hard work. Not only are the men and women of the Secret Service serving the country by helping to protect the nation's leaders and financial systems, but in the process, agents are required to travel a lot and are exposed to people and places that most people can only dream of.

The Secret Service is unique among federal law enforcement agencies because not only do its agents provide protection for the president and vice president of the United States and their families, former presidents, presidential candidates and visiting heads of state and heads of government to the United States, but they also work criminal investigations - the responsibility for which the agency was first mandated in 1865. Throughout their careers, agents will perform a variety of assignments- both protective and investigative.

2. What do I have to do to become a Secret Service agent?

Applicants should have either a four-year college degree or a combination of education and criminal investigative experience, be in good physical condition, and have a record that is clear of criminal behavior. Lots of people apply to become Secret Service agents, so the process is very competitive. If you are interested in becoming an agent, you should study very hard in school and always abide by the law.

3. What types of cases does the Secret Service investigate?

The Secret Service usually works criminal cases that are related to the nation's financial security. The Secret Service was originally founded in 1865 to suppress counterfeit money and while the agency still spends a lot of time investigating counterfeit money both in the United States and overseas, today's agents also investigate a variety of other financial crimes, including credit card fraud, computer fraud and bank fraud. Even though the Secret Service now relies on computers to help carry out these investigations, agents still go out and ask questions of victims, witnesses and suspects because talking with people is one of the best ways to tell whether people are telling the truth.

The Secret Service also investigates people who make threats against the president, vice president and any of the other people the agency protects. These are probably Secret Service's most serious cases because it must be determined whether the person making the threat really wants to hurt one of these people or whether they may have some medical problems of their own, for which they need help.

4. Why do agents agree to sacrifice their lives for the sake of saving the president?

A key mission of the Secret Service is protection. As such, agents are trained to make sure the president and the other people they protect are safe at all times, including in situations that may be dangerous or even life-threatening.

5. Who are the people in uniform at the White House gates?

Those individuals are members of the Secret Service Uniformed Division. They wear uniforms because their jobs require them to be recognized as police officers. Many of these officers are posted at different areas around the White House, at the vice president's residence and at embassies. These officers protect these buildings as well as the people in them. You may also see them patrolling the streets of Washington, D.C., in marked Secret Service vehicles.

6. Has anyone ever been shot while guarding the President?

Fortunately, very few Secret Service personnel have been shot while guarding the president or other protectees, but the risks are always there.

Examples of employees who have been shot in the line of duty are Officer Leslie Coffelt and Special Agent Tim McCarthy. Officer Coffelt was shot and killed in 1950 when two Puerto Rican nationalists tried to assassinate President Harry Truman. Special Agent McCarthy was shot in 1981 by John Hinckley, Jr, when Hinckley tried to assassinate president Ronald Reagan. Special Agent McCarthy recovered from his injury. In both of

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these incidents, other law enforcement personnel also were wounded.

A Secret Service agent also was wounded in the attempted assassination of Presidential candidate Governor George Wallace. Special Agent Nick Zarvos was shot in the throat, but survived, as did Governor Wallace.

Secret Service personnel spend a lot of time training, and also make a lot of advance preparations at every location around the country and around the world before one of their protectees travels in order to prevent every possible threat.

7. Why do agents seem to always wear sunglasses?

Secret Service agents sometimes wear sunglasses to keep the sun out of their eyes, so they can increase their ability to see what people in the crowd are doing. Agents do not always wear sunglasses.

8. What is it like to carry a gun?

Agents undergo extensive firearms training to ensure firearms safety.

Carrying a weapon and understanding the dangers associated with guns is an extremely serious responsibility. The Secret Service feels very strongly about gun safety. If you come across a gun, you should always follow these rules:

1. Stop and do not touch the gun
2. Leave the area
3. Tell an adult what you have found

9. What kind of training do agents get?

All new agents spend 11 weeks in Glynco, Georgia, at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, where they are taught basic police skills.

These basic skills include law, firearms training, defensive tactics and report writing. After completing the first school, all Secret Service agents come to Washington, D.C., where they undergo 16 additional weeks of training.

The second school is only attended by Secret Service agents and officers. During this second phase of training, the curriculum is specific to the Secret Service mission including how to detect counterfeit money and credit card fraud, physical protection, and advanced driving techniques. Even after agents or officers have completed both schools, they continue to receive advanced training throughout their careers.

10. What subjects in school will I have to use if I become a Secret Service agent one day?

It's important to study hard in all subjects in school because every day, Secret Service agents use skills from many different subject areas in their investigations including: science, computer science, law and government, arithmetic, reading comprehension, writing, foreign languages and public speaking.

11. What kinds of things do agents take with them when they're on an assignment outside the office?

For protective and investigative assignments agents use their standard issue weapon, handcuffs and radio to maintain contact with one another. They also are issued bullet-resistant vests.

12. Why does the Secret Service use dogs as part of their work?

In 1975 the Secret Service began its canine program because the canine and its handler were found to be the most effective way of detecting explosives. The Secret Service uses canines from Holland called the Belgian Malinois. This breed is small and has short hair so it is easy for it to work in the heat, it is faster and is very sociable. Each canine and his handler must complete 20 weeks of training before they are ready to begin working. After graduating from basic training, each canine retrains eight hours every week for the rest of its career.

Secret Service canines remain with the Uniformed Division handlers 24 hours a day. They become members of the family. The average retirement age for a canine varies depending on its physical condition, but for most dogs it is at about 10 years of age. When a canine is ready to retire, it is retired to the handler.

13. I saw people on the roof of the White House. What do they do?

The people you saw on the roof of the White House are members of the Secret Service Countersniper Team, which is composed of specially trained Uniformed Division officers. Their mission is to prevent any long-range threat to a protectee. They are trained with specially built weapons and other sophisticated equipment.

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