

# When the Circus Comes to Town

By S. CHRISTOPHER SUPRUN

In a few weeks, Detroit will see two teams, hundreds of media outlets and thousands of spectators fill the Ford Center to watch the Super Bowl. At large events, the same forces that drive us in droves to attend will also bring out celebrities, politicians and others. Many times, these people, called protectees or principals, will travel with their own security details. Between the event itself and dealing with dignitaries' special needs, it will seem as though the circus has come to town. Many elements will be going on behind the scenes to make sure the "show" goes on without a hitch.

Whether a person's security detail is headed by the Secret Service, a private security force or some combination thereof, the local EMS and fire department might be called in to provide additional supportive functions to the security detail while the protectee is in your jurisdiction.

Typically, the Secret Service provides protection for the president, the first lady, the vice president, their immediate families and visiting dignitaries and heads of state. Although officials from other countries have their own security with them, the Secret Service also assists in preparation and arrangements during their travel.

Secret Service personnel, whether uniformed or in civilian clothes, all undergo some medical training. This training consists of classroom and practical material that covers the First Responder and part of the EMT Basic curriculum. Nonetheless, when traveling in your area, the Secret Service might want to supplement their medical resources by adding part of your EMS capabilities to theirs. In these cases, an "advance man" may approach your

organization's leadership to select a team of EMS providers who will assist the security detail with the medical aspects of the operation.

## Background Investigations

Those members of your selected group will likely undergo at least a cursory background investigation. This will normally involve the various members' complete name, Social Security number and date of birth. This basic investigation will yield both outstanding warrants, arrests and will be compared to a list of known threats in a given area. Obviously, various security groups will have a strong concern about members of the team who are under consideration if they could present potential threats to the protectee.

Documentation of relevant certifications, employment history, and references might be requested as well, depending on the duration of the assignment and proximity or job function of the personnel involved in the visit.

## Advance Work

Prior to visiting a city, many security groups will conduct advance assessments of the area. This can happen weeks in advance and includes visits to the sites that will be visited by the protectee and the available medical options as well.

Dignitaries often travel with their own physicians or nursing staff but will still need assistance on the site and as part of motorcade operations. In the case of the president, Secret Service personnel might be assigned to one or more local emergency rooms to secure those areas should he become sick or injured.

Working with local police, fire and EMS, a security group will likely develop a medical assessment similar to the ones many SWAT groups develop prior to assaulting a location. This medical threat assessment will include locations, distances and routes to hospitals, your closest burn unit and possibly landing zone locations. A medevac helicopter might be placed on standby depending on the protectees and rules they establish regarding transport times and level of care. Specific facilities might be added to the MTA, such as heart centers, depending on the protectees and their medical history.

Your personnel on the ground will have the best knowledge of this localized information and may be able to facilitate this for the Secret Service or other security group.

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In addition, your people should be prepared for a thorough inspection of their equipment, both your unit and your gear bags. The ambulance, if it is going to be in a secure location, will certainly undergo a screening for explosives, and your cabinets and bags will likely be opened to inspect for weapons and or explosives.

Although it may seem redundant to mention it, your unit should be spotless of any debris and should be at a parade state of cleanliness. If it is true that a clean ambulance is a happy ambulance, this is a time to make your ambulance deliriously thrilled. Any time your organization is called on to assist with a venture of this nature, you will have a tremendous amount of media exposure. Although your mission of assisting in the protection of a celebrity is important, you also have the chance to make an incredibly strong impression on the citizens you care for every day in your community.

## The event

At the event, your personnel will probably be in one of two modes: staged at a pre-selected location for response into the event or placed within the event for movement away from the event. Less likely, but possible, is it that your ambulance will be part of motorcade operations.

All of these options have inherent risks and benefits for the protectee, but the decisions will be made by the security group that is handling the event. Remember that there could be political consequence to having an ambulance close to a protectee. Having an ambulance in close proximity might encourage the media to speculate about medical conditions that are troubling the protectee. While it is your job to care for the protectee, the decision about how to do that will be made by the professional political and security personnel on the scene. Defer to their judgment.

Another issue for EMS personnel pulled into a protection assignment is that their job—their entire job—is to be available for the care, treatment and transportation of the protectee and not

any other patients. In large events there will be many people crowded together. In almost all of those situations, someone will need medical help. They are someone else's job. Anyone assigned to protection is assigned only to protection; freelancing to provide care elsewhere is dangerous to both the unit cohesiveness and the protectee.

Perhaps the most important thing of all to remember: Do not wander away from your unit or assigned area. Whether you are harmlessly looking for a quick bite to eat, a bathroom or trying to get a better view of the event, you could invite suspicion or even receive the wrong kind of Secret Service attention.

One former Houston firefighter shared that while assisting with a dignitary visit, he was dismissed at his appointed hour. He said his goodbyes and left down the stairwell to the parking garage. As requested, he had been in his bunker gear and had his SCBA with him.

When he arrived at the garage, he was quickly seized by several members of the protection detail and introduced to the working end of a Secret Service-issue sidearm. A few moments later, the protectee in question walked by, entered his vehicle and was driven away. While the firefighter in question was able to be released nearly immediately after having his story of the events verified, the situation shows how innocently a problem can occur without proper communication and careful attention to the details of a protection assignment.

Simply because this firefighter decided to go into the garage instead of onto the street to head home, the plan went awry, and something unexpected had happened. This is an example of how seriously most protection personnel take their assignments. Simple variances like wandering around can lead to problems with the response plan and, more important, the integrity of the site.

Should your ambulance be in plain view of the public, a protection detail is not the time to be opening compartments and doors to provide a

public relations show for the community. Once it is allowed onto the site, your ambulance has been inspected and is considered clean or sterile. By allowing unknown people to tamper with the cabinets, you are potentially making it vulnerable to those who want to harm the protectee.

## The Protectee

Understand that you might get no advance information on anything other than the fact that a protectee is coming to visit. You will not, nor should you expect, to be provided with any information regarding the protectee's medical history. Under no circumstances other than escort of protection or professional staff, should you ever approach the protectee. This may be viewed as a potentially threatening action and will likely be viewed poorly by both the protection staff, your organization's leadership and the community.

There may be opportunities to participate in a photo opportunity with the protectee prior to the event or directly prior to the departure. Often, this will depend on available time and other priorities affecting the protectee at the time. Should one occur, the protectee will often offer a few kind and quick words, the picture will be taken, and the entourage will continue on with its schedule.

As part of the protection group, you may have some access to the protectee's schedule. Under no circumstances should you release this to anyone including family members, friends, co-workers or the media. Additionally, you should not take advantage of this information yourself to show up at certain locations as the protectee is approaching that area.

There are more than three rings to a dignitary visit. It is important that you know where you fit in the big picture of all these events so that you can both assist with your assignment in the protection plan and be prepared to deliver the world-class EMS service you do every single day for your citizens. ●