

HIGH ALERT

Providing security for celebrities and high-profile Angelenos in the information age is a constant challenge.

BY MARK MAYFIELD

It has been 80 years since someone crept up a makeshift ladder, snatched the 20-month-old son of aviator Charles A. Lindbergh from his second-floor nursery, and disappeared into the New Jersey night. The 1932 kidnaping and murder of the Lindbergh baby still stands as one of the most infamous crimes in American history. It happened in an era without computers, cell phones, and the Internet, yet it still serves as a stark reminder of the all-too-high price that can come with fame. Unfortunately, in the years since, there have been hundreds of reminders of the security threat that exists in a world where celebrity and wealth are accompanied by an obsessed public with instant access to information and media coverage that was unimaginable in Lindbergh's day.

"There is a heightened sense of vulnerability," says Sarah McNeilly, vice president of marketing and business development for The World Protection Group, Inc., an executive security firm with offices in Beverly Hills, New York City, Scottsdale, and Mexico City. "A lot of our clients are part of the one percent, and as much as they're financially well off, they're vulnerable to the excessive amount of information out there about them and the pent-up frustration people may have because of the economy, layoffs, and a feeling of unfairness."

It doesn't take a security expert to understand that the threats are real. While the 1989 stalking and murder of *My Sister Sam* actress Rebecca Schaeffer may have faded from the headlines, there are new threats almost daily. Consider Ryan

Seacrest. To millions of fans, Seacrest is the upbeat host of *American Idol* and a national radio personality with a popular public image who has been free of controversy. But that didn't stop a 25-year-old Army reservist, Chidi Uzomah Jr., from attacking one of Seacrest's bodyguards and later showing up with a knife at E! Entertainment Television studios where Seacrest cohosts his *E! News* TV show. Uzomah was sentenced to two years in prison in 2010 after pleading no contest to felony stalking.

The threat to Seacrest is the same one faced by Leonardo DiCaprio, Jennifer Aniston, Madonna,

"You try to minimize the threat, and one way is to make your movements very discreet."

—SARAH MCNEILLY

Jewel, Sandra Bullock, Halle Berry, Charlie Sheen, Uma Thurman, Mel Gibson, and others who have been stalked recently by obsessed fans. ESPN's Erin Andrews was followed into various hotels and videotaped naked through peepholes by 48-year-old Michael David Barrett. Convicted and sentenced to 27 months in prison, Barrett is scheduled to be released this summer.

While cameras, GPS systems, alarms, fences, and gates add to the layers of security at a celebrity's home, venturing out even to get a latte at Starbucks can be a challenge. "It requires close protection accompanying a celebrity to an event, a restaurant, and sporting events like the Super

Bowl," says McNeilly. "There is no way to do that electronically. You need to have a person there, never looking at the celebrities themselves, but looking everywhere else. At the Super Bowl, it means memorizing 12 ways out of that building, where car No. 1 is stationed, where car No. 2 is. This is the kind of emergency preparedness that is not going away—even with modern technology."

The same technology that has helped transform the private-security industry in communications and surveillance has also created new challenges. Online social media sites—Twitter and Facebook in particular—can

make it easier for stalkers to track high-profile clients. "It's a double-edged sword," says McNeilly. "If you're protecting a celebrity and that celebrity is tweeting their location or checking in at a restaurant or tweeting 'I'm going to the Skybar this evening,' those kind of things are difficult to work with. You try to minimize the threat, and one way is to make your movements very discreet." Nevertheless, security experts also use social media to their advantage, monitoring possible threats to their clients via Twitter and Facebook posts, online forums, and chat rooms. "Social media is extraordinarily useful," says McNeilly.

While rapidly advancing technology has



Johnny Depp is held by a bodyguard as he leaves the May 2011 screening of *Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides* in Cannes, France.

changed the way people communicate with one another, it has not been able to eliminate the kind of brazen attacks that are now familiar in American history. Unlike in the past, when communication to a wide audience was possible only through the filter of the media, individuals can now reach millions instantly online. While the result can be extremely positive in bringing awareness to victims of natural disasters, for instance, it can also threaten to incite violence among already disturbed individuals looking for any excuse to act.

Former Alaska Governor Sarah Palin's use of gun scope-type crosshairs on a website graphic targeting congressional districts was widely criticized after a gunman opened fire on January 8, 2011, at an event sponsored by former US Representative Gabrielle Giffords, an Arizona democrat. Six people were killed and 13 others wounded, including Giffords. Her district had been one of those included on the Palin map.

Social media didn't exist when John Lennon and Yoko Ono left a recording studio and returned to their Dakota apartment building in New York City just before 11PM on December 8, 1980.

months in jail before former President Jimmy Carter commuted her seven-year sentence. Former President Bill Clinton, agreeing that she suffered from Stockholm syndrome during her captivity, later granted her a full pardon.

Two years after Hearst's kidnapping, actor Sal Mineo was stabbed to death outside his West Hollywood apartment when he returned home from a rehearsal on February 12, 1976. A pizza deliveryman, Lionel Ray Williams, was convicted of the murder in 1979, sentenced to 51 years in prison, and released on parole in the early 1990s. Unlike so many other crimes involving public figures, Mineo's murder appeared to be a random attack.

But the highly publicized murder of Exxon executive Sidney Reso was no random act. Reso was kidnapped outside his Morris Township, New Jersey, home on April 29, 1992, and held for ransom. His kidnapers, a former Exxon security official named Arthur Seale and his wife, Irene, left Reso with an untreated gunshot wound and bound and gagged inside a wooden box in a storage facility.

helicopters in Mexico City to give executives extra security and to provide an alternative to sitting in traffic jams.

Using a helicopter to get across town for security reasons hasn't caught on to any serious degree in the US, but the demand for private security has nevertheless skyrocketed across the nation since the events of 9-11. And the downturn in the economy has only added to the threat. "I think the US is behaving more like a third-world country, where the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer, and it's wiped out a big percentage of the middle class," says Grinberg. "It's as simple as someone picking a fight with you in a public place and then suing you for self-defense."

All told, the private security business's total annual revenue in this country is anywhere from \$19 billion to \$34 billion, according to a 2010 report submitted to The US Department of Justice by RTI International, a North Carolina-based research firm. While celebrity and executive protection can make headlines, it's the everyday security provided to large and small businesses that makes up a big portion of the revenues in the industry. In a bad economy, even the copper pip-

The private security business's total annual revenue in this country is anywhere from \$19 billion to \$34 billion.

Obsessed fan Mark David Chapman was waiting for them. He pulled out a .38-caliber handgun and fired five times at Lennon as the former Beatle walked toward the building's entrance, killing him. Hours prior to the shooting, Chapman waited for Lennon outside the building and received an autograph from him. Afterward he waited at the scene until police arrived, reading *The Catcher in the Rye*, which he later said was his manifesto.

Lennon's death came 17 years to the day after Frank Sinatra Jr., son of the iconic singer and actor, was kidnapped from his Harrah's Lake Tahoe room. Frank Jr., 19 years old at the time, was released two days later after his father paid a \$240,000 ransom. Three men were ultimately arrested and convicted for the crime.

An even higher-profile kidnapping case began on February 4, 1974, when a militant group called the Symbionese Liberation Army took Patty Hearst, granddaughter of legendary publishing icon William Randolph Hearst, from her Berkeley apartment. Two months later, she was photographed holding an M1 rifle during a bank robbery; she was arrested the following year and convicted of bank robbery. Hearst served 22

months in jail before former President Jimmy Carter commuted her seven-year sentence. Former President Bill Clinton, agreeing that she suffered from Stockholm syndrome during her captivity, later granted her a full pardon.

Reso died after three days of being left unattended in the room, where temperatures rose above 100 degrees. The kidnapers buried his body in a shallow grave 50 miles away. Arthur Seale was sentenced to 140 years for the kidnapping and murder; Irene Seale, who cooperated with police and led them to the body, was released from prison in 2010 after serving 17 years of a 20-year sentence. Although kidnappings are not frequent in the US, the threat is never far from the minds of executives with businesses in Mexico, where there has been an upsurge in drug cartel-related crimes over the past decade. But the overwhelming majority of kidnappings there are committed against Mexican citizens, not Americans visiting or working there, says Roy Grinberg, president of the Mexican franchise of The Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf, a Los Angeles-based specialty chain with nearly 900 stores worldwide, including seven in Mexico. "I think in Mexico, you develop something like a sixth sense where you're always aware," says Grinberg. "When you're driving, you're looking in the rearview mirror to see if you're being followed and [you're] always on the lookout for suspicious people you might see." The threat has even spawned a growing fleet of private

in an office building is a target for thieves and requires an added layer of security to protect it. Surveillance-camera systems, for instance, have been around a long time, but now they can be synchronized and automatically trained on an intruder, with an alert sent through an iPhone or iPad. The same GPS technology can also be used to stay in constant touch with security personnel, allowing a command center to mobilize emergency responders as fast as possible in the event of an intrusion on someone's property.

That kind of security could have prevented the tragedy that befell Charles and Anne Lindbergh in 1932, when a kidnapper took their child in the night. Richard "Bruno" Hauptmann, a German national who had entered the US illegally by stowing away on an ocean liner nearly a decade earlier, was convicted, sentenced to death, and executed for the crime. Despite the massive public outcry that followed what was then "the crime of the century," the case did little to prevent similar attacks in the ensuing years. And today, in a have-and-have-not society, security experts believe the threats are even more pervasive. Overall, says McNeilly, "There is a general ratcheting up [of security], and we're participating in that." **LAC**



THE RISK POOL

History is a constant reminder that danger can lurk around every corner for high-profile figures. ABOVE: Frank Sinatra speaks to the press outside his Palm Springs home after his son, Frank Jr., was kidnapped from Harrah's Lake Tahoe in December 1963. RIGHT: Patty Hearst waves the executive grant of clemency that allowed her to walk out of a federal correctional facility after serving 22 months for armed robbery. BELOW: Yoko Ono and John Lennon outside their NYC apartment building in December 1980, shortly before Lennon was fatally shot.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY GUY WIRE IMAGES (SINATRA, LENNON); BETTMANN/CORBIS (HEARST)