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Helicopter that crashed Saturday near Grand Cay, Bahamas, lay overturned in water

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Nixon Orders Inquiry Into Fatal Crash Of Army Copter Ferrying His Guards

KEY BISCAIYNE, Fla., May 27 (UPI)—President Nixon ordered today an investigation to determine what forced an Army helicopter to plummet into the Atlantic last night while taking seven Secret Service agents to guard him and his family on a Bahama island. One agent died and nine men suffered minor injuries.

The twin-engine helicopter went down shortly after 10 P.M. (E.D.T.) about a mile south of Grand Cay, the island owned by Mr. Nixon's close friend, Robert H. Abplanalp, a New York multimillionaire. The aircraft, which was ferrying the Secret Service agents from Florida for their overnight shift, was approaching a landing pad when it went into the water.

Gerald L. Warren, deputy White House press secretary, said the dead agent's body was recovered by divers at the scene of the crash. He was identified by the White House as Joseph C. Dietrich, 25 years old, of Woodbridge, Va., married and the father of two children. He had been an agent for "three or four years," Mr. Warren said.

Mr. Nixon, immediately notified of the crash, "expressed deep sadness and sympathy for the family of agent Dietrich," Mr. Warren said. "He has ordered all necessary steps be taken to investigate the cause of the accident and directed the Department of Defense to appoint an investigative board."

An Air Force plane flew Mr. Dietrich's body from Homestead Air Force Base in Florida to Greenwich, Conn., where funeral services will be held. Mrs. Dietrich flew in from Washington to accompany his body.

The agent had lived in Greenwich most of his life before joining the White House protective detail two months ago.

The six other agents and three crew members were "slightly injured" and were taken to a hospital at Homestead Air Force Base, Mr. Warren said.

The President and his family flew back to their bayside villa here this afternoon aboard a similar Army helicopter.

The survivors had been assisted from the overturned helicopter by the pilot, Chief Warrant Officer Ronald C. Bean, 37 years old, of Dale City, Va.

The agents were able to climb on top of the chopper and to await rescue aboard small boats dispatched from Grand Cay, where they were heard shouting for help.

The chief White House photographer, Ollie Atkins, was standing on the landing pad awaiting the arrival of the helicopter when he heard the splashdown and the engines cut off.

"It was as dark as a cow's belly," Mr. Atkins told reporters after he radioed to the security communications base at Walker Cay six miles away for help.

The VH3A helicopter is one of three used to transport the President and his family, and Mr. Nixon had frequently flown in it.

"I heard a swishing noise like water being poured on hot cement and then the motor stopped," said Mr. Atkins, adding that for the next few moments "I stood there helpless listening to all these guys . . . yelling for help."

Rescuers got to the craft about 15 minutes later as the

survivors, coughing from fumes and oil-soaked water, waited on top of it.

The survivors were given a preliminary examination on Grand Cay, and then flown by helicopter to the Homestead base for treatment of shock and slight burns from the fuel oil. All were released this morning.

Three Navy frogmen—on alert whenever the President is near water assisted in the rescue.

The surviving agents were identified as Charles W. Rochner, 31 years old; Michael E. Cleary, 26; William H. Brawley, 34; Stephen J. Petro, 30; Robert R. Stewart Jr., 26, and James Keiter, 30.

The other crewmen were copilot Frederick W. Evans, 33, and Sgt. William R. Robinson, 32, both of Fort Belvoir, Va.

Two rubber rafts, one from the nearby Coast Guard cutter Cape Knox and another deployed from the downed chopper by the pilot, were used in the rescue along with a runabout brought from Grand Cay by Secret Service agents.

A barge was summoned from the Grand Bahama Island to assist in the salvage of the chopper, which remained afloat