

White House 'Air Raid'

Distraught GI's Flight

In a Stolen Helicopter

Washington

A distraught soldier, reportedly upset about flunking out of Army flight school, was identified as the pilot of a stolen Army helicopter that crash-landed in a hail of buckshot on the White House lawn early yesterday morning.

The soldier, identified as Private First Class Robert K. Preston, 20, of Panama City, Fla., landed 100 yards short of the President's residence. Preston is a helicopter repairman at Fort Meade, Md.

No one was hurt seriously in the 2 a.m. EDT incident. Secret Service men shot holes in the sides of the helicopter, forcing it to bounce down tail-up on the south lawn of the White House, and tackled the struggling pilot.

President Nixon and his family were out of town. Mr. Nixon and his daughter, Tricia, were in Key Biscayne, Fla., while Mrs. Nixon was at the hospital bedside of daughter Julie, who is recuperating in Indianapolis from an ovarian cyst operation.

Secret Servicemen bundled Preston off to Walter Reed Army Hospital where, according to Army sources, he entered "laughing like hell." He was treated for superficial buckshot wounds and later held for psychiatric examination.

"From what I've heard, he was upset about flunking out of flight school and was going to the White House to see the President," one soldier in Preston's 661st Transportation Company told newsmen. "He's a helluva pilot—especially for a PFC"

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who has no pilots' qualification, said Don L. Sewell, a

Maryland state police helicopter pilot who chased Preston helplessly on an hourlong buzzing spree that led from Fort Meade to the White House. Sewell said he hovered alongside Preston a few feet above the lawn at the Washington Monument as the soldier took his final bead on the White House and roared in just high enough to clear the steel picket fence. "From my indications, his intention was to fly the aircraft directly into the White House," Sewell said. But shotgun fire brought him up short and Secret Service agent Jack Warner said Preston's craft then "appeared to land on its own." "If he had not harassed the citizens of the state of Maryland as he did, and had not made such a big show of it . . . the man could have flown directly into the White House at 160 knots and there wouldn't have been anything anybody could do," Sewell said.

Secret Service spokesman Jack Warner said there is a contingency plan for dealing with an air attack on the White House, but he refused to discuss its details or to say whether it was activated during the Preston incident.

Warner said, however, that the stolen helicopter had hovered briefly over the White House earlier, at about 1 a.m., without attempting to land, and that was the first time White House protection officials knew of its existence.

Tony Johnson, a metropolitan police detective who questioned Preston after his arrest, said the soldier told him he actually landed the helicopter at the White House on his first pass and stayed on the ground approximately one minute without being apprehended.

According to Johnson, Preston said he did not intend to harm anyone in the

White House but was "just goofing off" and "buzzing everything that was popular." He said he knew it was forbidden to fly over the White House, Johnson said, and came back the second time to turn himself in for having done so.

Preston had completed 157 hours of helicopter pilot training at Fort Rucker, Ala., more than half the Army's complete course, but was "washed out" in September when he failed to master instrument flying for the second time. He is an experienced pilot of fixed-wing aircraft. pu tk2e

Three Army pilots examined the aircraft later yesterday, and flew it back to Ft. Meade.

As recounted later by Army officials, the pilots pursuing him and the gunners who cut off his final run at the White House, Preston had:

- Swiped an unarmed UH-1B transport helicopter, the same type used in Vietnam, from Ft. Meade, midway between Washington and Baltimore, about 12:30 a.m.

- Flew toward Washington at speeds ranging from 80 to 120 m.p.h. and heights ranging from hundreds of feet to car-top levels, buzzing traffic along the highways and at one point clipping the aerial off a police car.

- Feinted one of the two state police helicopters chasing him right off the trail with what admiring pilots described as "modern dog-fight tactics" and reached the capital with only Sewell on his tail.

"He came down the Baltimore - Washington parkway and then flew downtown," State Policeman William Clark said. "He then turned on all his lights and hovered five minutes at the Washing-

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ton Monument grounds seven feet off the ground.

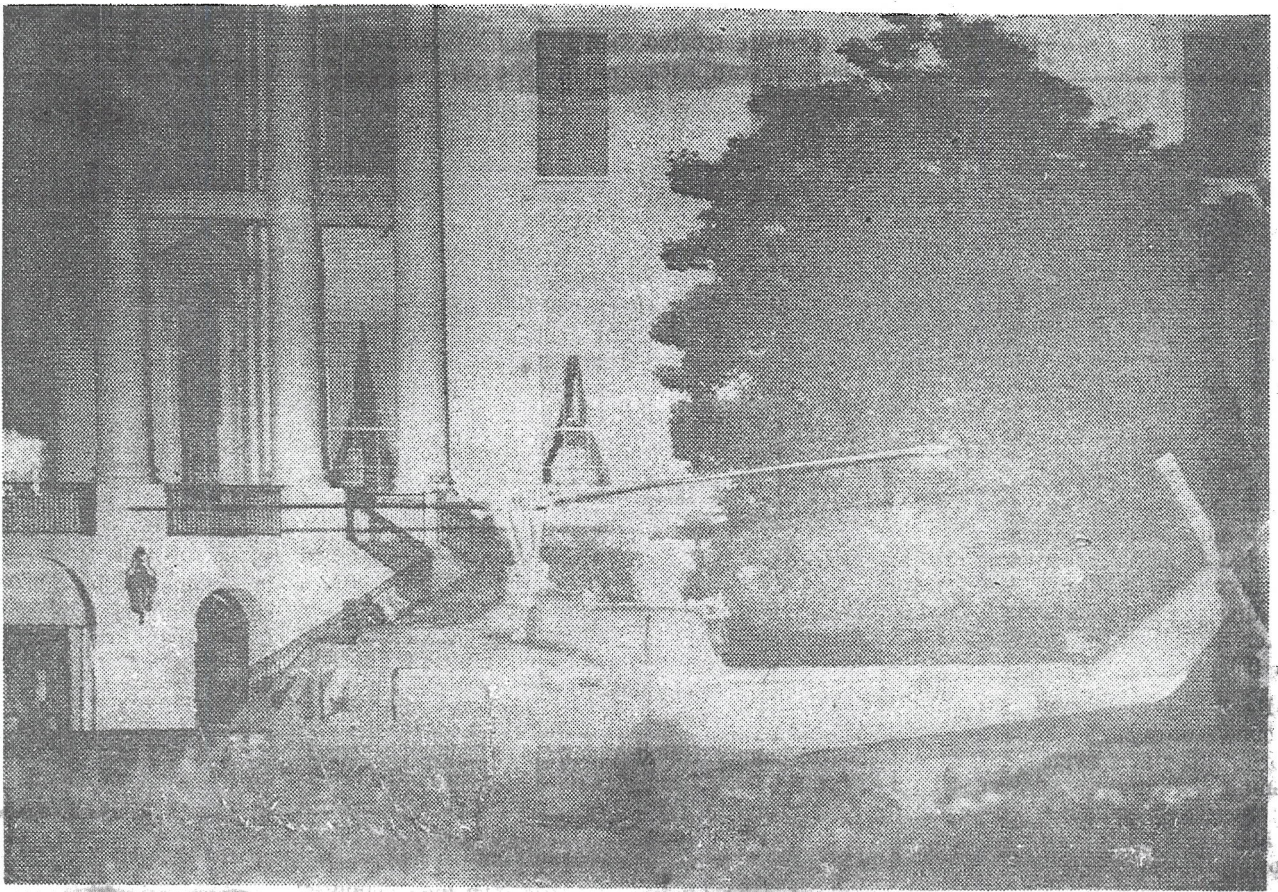
"Then he flew across to the White House like he was going to crash into it and the floodlights (on the darkened White House lawn) came on."

Clark said Preston "lowered to three feet" before the Secret Service shotguns tore half-dollar-sized holes in his fuselage. "The copter bounced around on the lawn and the Maryland helicopter (flown by Sewell) landed between it and the White House," he said.

Major John Northridge, Preston's commanding officer said Preston's records, which were being examined by the FBI and Army intelligence agents, indicated the soldier was "of above average intelligence and (gave) no indication of a mental problem."

He was on a three-day pass when he took the helicopter, officials said.

A.P. & U.P.



AP Wirephoto

Shotgun blasts riddled the stolen helicopter, which came to rest 100 yards short of the White House



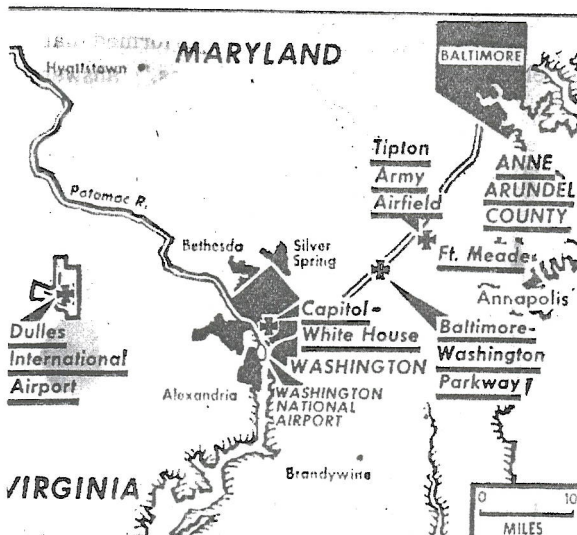
UPI Telephoto

PFC. ROBERT PRESTON
'A helluva pilot'



UPI Telephoto

White House aides inspected the gunfire damage to the grounded helicopter



AP Wirephotos

The route of the soldier's flight