



Associated Press

Officials and military personnel examining the helicopter that landed on the South Lawn of the White House yesterday

Soldier Lands a Stolen Copter on White House Lawn

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Pfc. Robert K. Preston in custody of Secret Service agent

WASHINGTON, Feb. 17—A shot wounds in the legs and soldier landed a stolen Army helicopter in a hail of shotgun

buckshot on the South Lawn of the White House at 2 A.M. today. He was wrestled to the ground by officers of the Executive Protection Service after bouncing the helicopter to a rough landing about 100 yards short of the White House.

The soldier was identified as Pfc. Robert K. Preston, a 20-year-old helicopter maintenance man from Panama City, Fla., who washed out of Army flight school last year. He is undergoing psychiatric evaluation.

President Nixon has been in Florida since Wednesday and a spokesman for the Secret Service, whose agents interviewed the soldier immediately after the incident, declined to speculate on why he had stolen the helicopter and flown it to the White House.

Mrs. Nixon was visiting the Nixons' hospitalized daughter, Mrs. David Eisenhower, in Indianapolis.

The soldier, wearing fatigues, was taken to Walter Reed Army Hospital for what was described as "superficial" buck-

According to Army records, Private Preston, who enlisted in 1972, completed 24 weeks of training in 1973 at the Army's helicopter pilot school at Fort Wolters in Texas before he was washed out for "deficiency in the instrument phase."

The records also indicate that the soldier was assigned to Fort Meade, Md., on Jan. 23. The helicopter was stolen from Fort Meade.

He was "one hell of a pilot," said Don L. Sewell, the pilot of a Maryland state police helicopter, who pursued the stolen helicopter from Maryland into Washington in a wild aerial chase that lasted more than an hour.

The records show that Private Preston holds a private pilot's license for single engine, fixed-wing aircraft.

Just before he flew the helicopter toward the White House grounds, he hovered near the Washington Monument and at one point almost rammed the

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pursuing police helicopter, Trooper Sewell said.

"It put us into a steep dive in a hurry," the trooper told reporters. "After that, he didn't try again. He just hovered at the 'Monument as if to give the world plenty of notice of what he was going to do. I had no doubt he was thinking he would end it all by crashing into the White House. If he had gone there at the start,

instead of making such a long, spectacular show of it and hence giving us a chance, nothing would have stopped him."

The unarmed Huey helicopter, similar to the type used to transport troops in Vietnam, was flown from the White House lawn back to Fort Meade about 11:30 A.M. as sightseers watched from outside the iron fence.

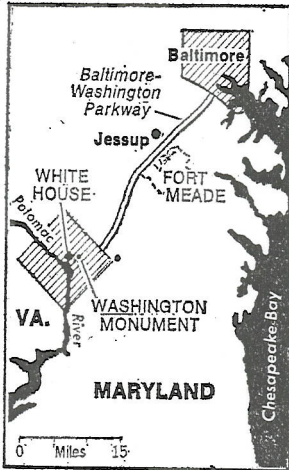
Spokesmen for the Maryland State Police, the Army and the Secret Service gave the following account of the incident:

The soldier allegedly stole the helicopter about midnight from Tipton Army Airfield at Fort Meade, which is about halfway between Baltimore and Washington.

The Maryland police received the first complaint at 12:25 A.M. from a person who reported that a helicopter had landed and then taken off from a trailer park near Jessup, Md., near the Baltimore-Washington Parkway.

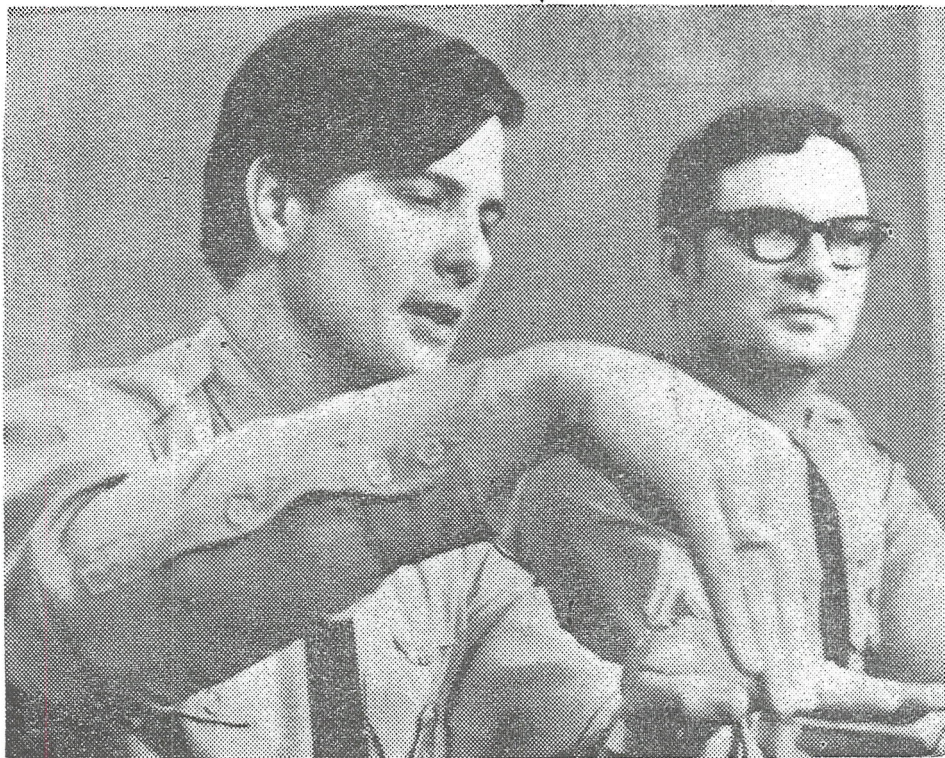
Two Maryland police helicopters took off in pursuit as the low-flying stolen craft buzzed automobiles along the parkway.

"He came down the Baltimore-Washington Parkway and then flew downtown," according to William Clark, a spokesman for the state police. "He then turned on all his lights and hovered five minutes at the Washington Monument grounds seven feet off the ground. Then he flew across to the White House like he was going to crash into it."



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Helicopter landed on the White House lawn after taking off from Fort Meade, stopping off near Jessup, Md., buzzing autos on Baltimore-Washington Parkway and hovering over Washington Monument.



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Don L. Sewell, pilot of the Maryland State police helicopter that chased the stolen helicopter, describing the event. At right is Louis Saffran, who helped subdue the soldier.

The White House security personnel were alerted when the helicopter first entered the restricted air zone over downtown Washington and the White House floodlights were turned on as the helicopter moved toward the White House.

Agents Opened Fire

Agents of the Executive Protection Service opened fire with shotguns as the stolen helicopter crossed the outer fence of the White House. As the craft bounced to a rough landing, Trooper Sewell, who had been a helicopter pilot in

Vietnam, maneuvered his helicopter to the ground in a blocking position between the White House and the other craft.

"As far as I knew, the President of the United States was in that building. I thought it would be far better for the State of Maryland to lose a helicopter," he was quoted as saying later.

Police Cpl. Louis Saffran, who was in the police helicopter and who helped subdue the soldier, described the scene as follows:

"I've never seen so many blue uniforms, black uniforms, yellow stripes and what-have-you. They all came out of the bushes. It was like somebody set fire to an ant colony."

It was expected that the soldier would be arraigned tomorrow on a charge of "unlawful entry" into the White House grounds, which carries a maximum penalty of six months in jail and \$100 fine.

A Secret Service spokesman said that other charges might be filed.

Asked if the security measures at the White House had been adequate to deal with the incident, the Secret Service official replied: "Apparently they were."