

HELICOPTER PILOT SENT TO HOSPITAL

Private in Psychiatric Unit
—Silent on White House Ride

WASHINGTON, Feb. 18 (AP)

The Army private who flew a stolen helicopter onto the White House lawn yesterday was sent to the Walter Reed Army Hospital's psychiatric center today after Federal charges against him were dropped.

However, the authorities said, Pfc. Robert K. Preston still faces possible prosecution for violating military regulations, including the charge of theft of government property.

Private Preston, a 20-year-old flight school wash-out, remained silent today during his brief appearance in District of Columbia Superior Court. A United States attorney explained that the Government did not wish to press charges because Private Preston was voluntarily returning to the Army. He had been accused of unlawful entry into restricted air space.

The private, dressed in neat green Army fatigues, was immediately turned over to the military authorities and hustled away in a sedan to the psychiatric center for study.

Possible Anger Hinted

Asked by reporters what prompted his wild, unpredictable aerial ride, he declined comment. But asked if the ride had been prompted by anger over his washing out of Army flight school, he replied, "could be."

Private Preston was arrested amid rounds of gunfire as he landed the military helicopter on the White House lawn yesterday at about 2 A.M.

His aerial sojourn began two hours earlier when he stole an Army UH-1B Huey helicopter from the airfield at Fort Meade, Md., about 25 miles north of Washington, the authorities said.

Private Preston, who was a helicopter flight mechanic with considerable flying time, began buzzing homes and cars along the Baltimore-Washington Parkway.

He was immediately pursued by the Maryland State Police in two helicopters. An hour after he ventured into restricted air space between the Washington monument and the Capitol, he lurched forward onto the White House lawn as security guards began firing shotguns at the helicopter.

Wounded by Gunshot

Private Preston was treated for minor shotgun wounds and sent to the psychiatric center for evaluation.

President Nixon, who was in Key Biscayne, Fla., did not witness the incident.

Private Preston, a native of Panama City, Fla., washed out of the Army's helicopter pilot school at Fort Wolters, Tex., in 1973 after amassing 157 hours of flying time. His dismissal came because of his "deficiency in the instrument phase," the authorities said.

Private Preston reportedly held a private pilot's license for fixed-wing, single engine aircraft. After failing flight school, he began training as a helicopter mechanic and was assigned to Fort Meade on Jan. 23.

The helicopter, its metal skin peppered with buckshot, suffered no major damage and was flown back to Fort Meade.