

# GI Pleads Guilty in Copter Case

FT. MEADE, Md., Aug. 26, (AP) — Army Pvt. Robert K. Preston pleaded guilty in a military court today to charges stemming from a helicopter joyride that ended last February on the White House lawn.

"I just had the urge to fly," Preston said as he described how he stole an unguarded Army helicopter from Ft. Meade and flew it to Washington, where he twice landed on the White House lawn before surrendering.

Preston, who is from Panama City, Fla., said he was angry at the Army for flunking him out of flight school and depressed over troubles he was having with a girlfriend.

"I thought at least that would get attention," Preston said of his escapade, which took place in the early morning hours of Feb. 17.

Preston's plea came in accordance with a pretrial agreement in which the 20-year-old helicopter mechanic admitted guilt to charges of wrongful appropriation and breach of the peace, carrying a maximum sentence of a dishonorable discharge and 2½ years hard labor. The military jury now must decide what Preston's punishment will be.

Preston also has pleaded guilty to two minor assault charges in a civilian court and is awaiting sentence there as well.

Preston originally had pleaded not guilty to stiffer charges that could have resulted in a 10½-year sentence.

In a calm, matter-of-fact voice Preston told the judge how he found the helicopter completely unguarded at the Ft. Meade air base as he returned from a local dance hall.

"I just walked out, prepared the aircraft for flight, started it and took off," Preston said. "I was really surprised. I thought there would be somebody out there."