

July 1995

WHITE HOUSE

Staff Use of
Helicopters





United States
General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

National Security and
International Affairs Division

B-261222

July 14, 1995

The Honorable Roscoe Bartlett
The Honorable Newt Gingrich
The Honorable Bill Clinger
The Honorable Dick Armey
The Honorable Dave Camp
House of Representatives

In response to several congressional inquiries concerning White House officials' use of a military helicopter to visit Camp David and a golf course on May 24, 1994, the White House provided information on 14 helicopter flights by White House staff in instances where the President, the Vice President, the First Lady, or the wife of the Vice President was not traveling. You asked us to (1) independently determine the frequency of helicopter flights by White House staff from January 21, 1993, to May 24, 1994, and (2) ascertain whether applicable White House procedures were followed in requesting and approving the May 24 trip.

Background

Since 1976, the Marine Corps' HMX-1 Squadron, located in Quantico, Virginia, has been solely responsible for providing helicopter support to the White House. The Squadron is specifically tasked to fly the President, the Vice President, the First Lady, the wife of the Vice President, and visiting Heads of State. White House staff may be authorized to use HMX-1 helicopters when they are directly supporting the President, the Vice President, and the First Lady or conducting immediate White House activities. Manual records of flights undertaken by, or in support of, the President, the Vice President, First Lady, the wife of the Vice President, or Heads of State, are maintained at the Squadron's Quantico facilities.

The Squadron also supports the Marine Corps' Combat Development Command and various Defense schools located at Quantico and provides a number of helicopter test and evaluation services to other Marine Corps organizations.

Did the White House Staff Use Helicopters Frequently?

According to HMX-1 manual records, approximately 1,200 flights were flown in support of the President, Vice President, First Lady, and Heads of State during the 16 months prior to May 24, 1994. These records indicated that, as previously disclosed by the White House, staff members flew 14 times without the President, Vice President, First Lady, or Heads of State

during the period in question.¹ We performed several tests to independently verify the completeness and accuracy of the HMX-1 manual records. (See a detailed discussion of our methodology below.) Our work did not identify any additional White House staff flights. We found a high degree of conformance between the automated database maintained by the Navy and the Marine Corps and used to track and manage all naval aircraft and the manual records maintained at HMX-1. Based on the results of our other tests, we are also reasonably sure that the HMX-1 records we reviewed were complete.

Were Applicable Procedures Followed for the May 24, 1994, Trip?

White House Military Office officials must approve all HMX-1 helicopter travel by White House staff. There were no written procedures detailing how such flights are requested or the criteria used to approve flights.² We were told that the infrequency of helicopter use by White House staff made written policies and procedures unnecessary; each request had to be reviewed on an individual basis. The former Deputy Director of the White House Military Office stated that he approved the use of an HMX-1 helicopter for the May 24 trip and for the majority of the other 13 trips previously disclosed. A request for helicopter service was made orally well in advance of the May 24 trip, and approval was given orally. The former Deputy Director also told us that most requests and their approval were oral.

White House Comments

In commenting orally on a draft of this report, White House officials generally agreed with our report. Their few specific comments have been incorporated into the report where appropriate.

Scope and Methodology

To determine the frequency of helicopter use by White House staff, we reviewed approximately 1,200 manual records (HMX-1 After-Action Reports) of flights by or in support of the President, the Vice President, the First Lady, and Heads of State. An after-action report is filed by the pilot after a flight has been completed. The report includes a list of passengers and an itinerary, identifies the flight crew, and is retained by the HMX-1 White House Liaison Office, which is located at Marine Corps Squadron,

¹In examining the HMX-1 records, we found that the great majority of White House staff flights were at the same time as flights of the President, the Vice President, the First Lady, and Heads of State.

²According to a White House memorandum dated May 31, 1994, the approval authority for staff's use of military aircraft was raised to the White House Chief of Staff or the Deputy Chief of Staff. If a request involves the Chief of Staff, the White House Counsel or the Deputy White House Counsel must approve it.

HMX-1, Quantico, Virginia. Among the after-action reports we examined were the 14 flights previously reported by the White House as the only flights taken by White House staff when the President, the Vice President, the First Lady, or a Head of State was not on board. According to officials from the White House Military Office and HMX-1 and an Associate Counsel to the President, the after-action reports we reviewed covered all White House-related flights between January 21, 1993, and May 24, 1994.

We performed several audit steps to independently verify the completeness and accuracy of HMX-1 files for all helicopter travel. First, we compared the President's itinerary, as reported in the Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, with HMX-1 after-action reports. We then listed instances in which the President had traveled but no after-action reports existed. A White House official then provided us documents from the Presidential Diarist and the Secret Service. These documents verified that the President had used other forms of transportation on the days in question.

We then asked Marine Corps Headquarters, Arlington Annex, Arlington, Virginia, to provide us a portion of the Naval Flight Record Subsystem (NAVFLIRS) database in an effort to find the flights identified by the after-action reports we reviewed at HMX-1. This database is part of a larger automated flight record system used by aircraft managers to track and manage all naval aircraft flights. Records are maintained within this system by individual aircraft, home squadrons, and flight dates. The NAVFLIRS database is maintained by the Navy and the Marine Corps, using flight information provided by pilots after each flight. The automated data we obtained covered 6,120 flights of HMX-1 aircraft from January 21, 1993, through May 24, 1994. We found 93 percent of the flights recorded on the manual after-action reports in the NAVFLIRS database. We were unable to match 7 percent of the manual records that we reviewed at HMX-1 with the NAVFLIRS records. According to Marine Corps officials, the automated system was not completely accurate due to keypunch errors. Errors in any of the three key data elements—date, home squadron, or aircraft number—would preclude a match with the Squadron's after-action reports we reviewed.

According to a Marine Corps official, pilots are supposed to assign an HMX-1 Squadron-specific mission purpose code to all flights for logistical support of an executive aircraft, as well as to all flights by White House staff that are not directly associated with a flight of the President or Vice President. During our review of the previously reported 14 White House

staff flights, we found that 10 had the Squadron-specific mission purpose code. We therefore attempted to find any staff flights not previously disclosed by searching the NAVFLIRS database for all flights with that specific mission code. In our search of the NAVFLIRS database, we found an additional 72 flights. Of these 72, 34 had been reported by HMX-1 pilots in their after-action reports, but 38 flights had no after-action reports. Because it was unclear whether after-action reports should have been included in HMX-1 records, we asked for clarification. We ultimately confirmed with White House and HMX-1 Squadron officials why the 38 flights with the specific mission code were not included in the manual records we reviewed at the Squadron. Examples of the purposes of some of the flights with no after-action reports include flights to and from the contractor for maintenance, flights to aircraft test facilities, and flights to support the President's travel.

As one last check that the Squadron had not inadvertently omitted a flight from the after-action records we had reviewed, we interviewed 52 pilots who had previously flown a White House mission during the 16-month period being reviewed.³ In the presence of officials from the White House and the Squadron, we asked the pilots if they had ever flown a White House mission without filing an after-action report. The pilots stated that they always filed an after-action report when they flew a mission in support of the White House.

To ascertain whether applicable White House policies were followed in requesting and approving the May 24 trip, we interviewed a former Director and a former Deputy Director⁴ of the White House Military Office and an Associate Counsel to the President. We also reviewed White House and Office of Management and Budget (OMB) policies, including memorandums on how White House staff were to request and approve military aircraft, OMB Circular A-126, OMB Bulletin 93-11, and a classified procedures manual for the operation of HMX-1 helicopters.

Our review was conducted from August 1994 through May 1995 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

³The 52 pilots interviewed represent 67 percent of the pilots assigned to the Squadron from January 1993 through May 1994. The remaining 24 pilots are no longer assigned to the Squadron and were not interviewed.

⁴There were two Directors and two Deputy Directors of the White House Military Office during the period January 21, 1993, to May 24, 1994. The current Director and Deputy Director (now titled the Chief of Staff) assumed their responsibilities in November 1994 and March 1995, respectively.

Appendix I provides information on the stated purpose of the 14 helicopter flights identified by the White House as trips taken by White House staff.

Unless you publicly announce the contents of this report earlier, we plan no further distribution of this report until 5 days from its issue date. At that time we will send copies to interested congressional committees, the Assistant to the President for Management and Administration, the Director of the White House Military Office, and the Director of the Office of Management and Budget. Copies will be made available to others on request.

Please call me on (202) 512-5140 if you or your staff have any questions about this report. Major contributors to this report are listed in appendix II.



Mark E. Gebicke
Director, Military Operations and
Capabilities Issues

HMX-1 Helicopter Flights Officially Reported by the White House

Date	White House officially stated purpose
Apr. 29, 1993	Orientation of the Assistant to the President with the communication system on the helicopter and at Camp David and the secure facilities at Camp David.
June 21, 1993	Orientation and training of the new Deputy Director of the White House Military Office (WHMO). Included tour of the Quantico/HMX-1 facilities.
Sept. 16, 1993	Multiagency emergency medical training exercise for support of the President.
Nov. 16, 1993	Classified military training at a secure facility.
Feb. 25, 1994	Pre-advance site survey of <u>U.S.S. George Washington</u> .
Mar. 4, 1994	Orientation of the new Director of the WHMO with the facilities and emergency action procedures for the President.
Mar. 7, 1994	Multiagency training exercises for support of the President.
Mar. 14, 1994	Multiagency training for support of the President. Second phase of March 7 training.
Mar. 15, 1994	Classified military training mission.
Apr. 14, 1994	Classified mission.
Apr. 15, 1994	Secretary of State foreign policy address for Senate Democratic Members.
May 12, 1994	Review of <u>U.S.S. George Washington</u> .
May 22, 1994	Advance team's preparation for President's arrival on <u>U.S.S. George Washington</u> .
May 24, 1994	Briefing on and inspection of classified construction sites at Camp David and golf course visit.

Major Contributors to This Report

**National Security and
International Affairs
Division, Washington,
D.C.**

Sharon Cekala, Associate Director
Robert Eurich, Assistant Director
C. Frances Coffey, Evaluator-in-Charge
Beverly C. Schladt, Evaluator
James J. Ungvarsky, Computer Specialist

Ordering Information

The first copy of each GAO report and testimony is free. Additional copies are \$2 each. Orders should be sent to the following address, accompanied by a check or money order made out to the Superintendent of Documents, when necessary. Orders for 100 or more copies to be mailed to a single address are discounted 25 percent.

Orders by mail:

**U.S. General Accounting Office
P.O. Box 6015
Gaithersburg, MD 20884-6015**

or visit:

**Room 1100
700 4th St. NW (corner of 4th and G Sts. NW)
U.S. General Accounting Office
Washington, DC**

**Orders may also be placed by calling (202) 512-6000
or by using fax number (301) 258-4066, or TDD (301) 413-0006.**

Each day, GAO issues a list of newly available reports and testimony. To receive facsimile copies of the daily list or any list from the past 30 days, please call (301) 258-4097 using a touchtone phone. A recorded menu will provide information on how to obtain these lists.

**United States
General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548-0001**

**Bulk Mail
Postage & Fees Paid
GAO
Permit No. G100**

**Official Business
Penalty for Private Use \$300**

Address Correction Requested

