

VIP Chinook in 1968

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From my files....

Clipping from the Saigon English Language Newspaper....

September 1962....

"Archer On Prowl Bags Helicopter"

Memo to helicopter pilots: If you meet anyone named William Tell, be careful; he's probably a VC.

This is the opinion, at least, of Captain Mark C. Kendall of the 8th Transportation Company (CH-21C) stationed at Qui Nhon.

Kendall claims the unique distinction of being the only helicopter pilot in history to fall prey to a crossbowman.

After a recent mission during which Kendall was proud of his "nap of the earth flying", he had second thoughts upon discovering a 30-inch arrow protruding from the belly of his craft.

Reconstructing the flight, Kendall concluded that a crossbowman – the arrow was the crossbow type - had shot him as he skimmed along the ground. After all, the proof was there.



In June and July 1968, Major Mark Kendall and I flew VP Hubert H. Humphrey during his bid for the 1968 Democratic nomination for President.

We had to pass a Secret Service background check, have a "Top Secret" clearance, have over 1000 hours in CH-47's and a R/W Special Instrument ticket, needed to allow us to move the aircraft in all weather conditions.

Now we had to "VIP-up" two CH-47C's at Ft Eustis, VA, for the missions. I called a flight school classmate in the Executive Flight Detachment in Texas, who had a Chinook "VIP kit" for the backup aircraft for President Johnson. The next day, the "kit" arrived by C-130 at nearby Langley AFB.

Complete sound-proofing insulation panels for inside the sides of the CH-47C, 8 U-8F seats on tie-down floor panels, an "air-stair" door for the right front door, plus "No Smoking" and "Fasten Seat Belts" lighted signs for the compartment. This CH-47C would be "Army Two" when the VP and his personal party were aboard.

We located a second "VIP kit" at the Boeing factory at Philadelphia Airport, PA, for the second CH-47C that would carry the Press and the rest of the Secret Service detail.

We had "augmented" crews, FE, 2 CEs, and a "mech" with a small parts "fly-away" kit. Greens were the uniform "of the day".

On 2 June 1968, we, and the second CH-47C flew from Ft Eustis, VA to Floyd Bennett Field, on Long Island, NY. As this was in the middle of the "anti-war" demonstration time.... we were not told when nor where we would pick-up VP Humphrey on 4 June. He was attending a fund-raising dinner in NYC and was the subject of the demos. He was scheduled to give the Graduation Speech and award diplomas at the USCG Academy in New London, CT on the 4th.

On 3 June, we flew in a NYPD "Jet Ranger" (OH-58) to practice orientation landings on several "LZs". The "Sheep Meadow" field in Central Park was quickly ruled-out. It was the HQs of the "Peaceniks", and they covered the area.

Next, we flew to the PanAm building in Manhattan, where NY Airways had a roof-top heliport for their civil versions of the CH-46. "Big LZ" compared to Vietnam, so a "quickie approach" was done to a "wave-off", then on to the Port Authority HQs building in lower Manhattan. This was fun.... small roof-top LZ, with steel nets all around, to catch you if the landing was a "crash". Two approaches to a landing, then back to Floyd Bennett Field. Then I told the NYPD pilot that I had never flown an OH-58 before. He said, no sweat, he had just transitioned from an OH-13 with floats, and only had 30 hours.

On 4 June 68, the Secret Service decided that any park or roof-top was too risky, so we made a quick flight to the "Marine Terminal" ramp at LaGuardia Airport. It was interesting to watch the Secret Service come aboard with "weapons bags".... nice to have "Door Gunners".

VP Humphrey arrived and came up to the front and shook our hands, and welcomed all of us to his "support crew". A nice guy!

The flight to the USCG Academy was easy, all the CT VIPs were there, Governor Ribicoff and Congressmen.

After the graduation, we flew to the Kaman Helicopter Plant at Bloomfield, CT, where the VP had a chartered 737 awaiting to take him to his next campaign stop.

VP Humphrey posed with all the flight crews for "official" photos. They arrived a week later with personal autographs.

Back to Floyd Bennett Field to RON, prior to the flight back to Ft Eustis in the morning. At an early hour, the Secret Service informed us that overnight, Bobby Kennedy, also running for the Democratic nomination, has been shot and killed in CA. We could not leave until the SS cleared us once again, as we had been with the VP the prior day. At noon, we were released and went back to Eustis.

We were instructed to keep the VIP kits at Eustis for another possible mission.

Soon, we were alerted for a mission over the 4th of July. VP Humphrey was to give the holiday speech at Independence Hall, Philadelphia PA, home of the Liberty Bell.

On 3 July 68, the two CH-47C's left Eustis for Philadelphia Airport, bad weather all the way, the Special Instrument tickets came in handy, we cleared ourselves out of Eustis' Felker AAF with about a 300 foot ceiling. In the soup all the way north, we flew as a flight "of two", the FAA controllers were amazed that we could maintain over 150 knots, "tucked-in" tight.

Handed-off to Philly Approach Control, they advised that many commercial aircraft were diverting, as the ceiling was less than 100 feet with ½ mile visibility.

We advised them that we had Army authority to "halve" the ceiling and visibility. "OK, be careful and continue the ILS approach". We went into a trail and broke-out at about 70 feet. Quick flare and the wheels were down.

We taxied to the Boeing ramp, and there was a FAA sedan waiting for us to see our authorization. We always traveled with copies of AR 95-63 and AR 95-67. OK!

VP Humphrey would be arriving early the next day, so the Secret Service decided that it would be to risky to "motorcade" into the center City. The highway went through bad areas, where danger was high. We noticed that the protective detail had doubled since the June mission, due to Bobby Kennedy's killing.

Several agents flew with us in one CH-47C, into the Independence Hall area for a "recon". In a SS vehicle, we checked the area in front of the Hall. It was narrow and tree-lined and crowd control would be tough. We looked at a large field, about 3 minutes away from the Hall, directly across from the famous "Bookbinders" restaurant. Room enough for both CH-47Cs and a police bird. Done!

The VP arrived in Philly on the Forth, we flew from the airport to the "field" and they all went to the ceremonies. We stayed with the aircraft, and the kind staff of "Bookbinders" brought us all a sandwich lunch, including a piece of their famous cheesecake.

Back to the airport, more handshakes, and the VP departed in his 737. An hour later we were "released", we left the Boeing VIP kit at the plant and we flew to Eustis.

Down memory lane....

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