

**Statement of Director Joseph P. Clancy  
United States Secret Service  
Department of Homeland Security**

**Before the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform  
United States House of Representatives**

**April 29, 2015**

**Introduction**

Good morning, Chairman Chaffetz, Ranking Member Cummings, and distinguished Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to be here to discuss the Secret Service's role within the interagency, National Capital Region (NCR) airspace security effort. The relationships developed over time with the other agencies represented here today -- the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the Department of Defense (DOD), the U.S. Park Police (Park Police), and the U.S. Capitol Police (Capitol Police) -- are critical to our collective successes in securing protected sites and individuals from airborne threats.

The type of threats the Secret Service must be prepared to confront continuously evolve, as do our measures to defeat them. Threats from small manned and unmanned aircraft systems represent a quickly evolving capability with widening availability to the public. As these capabilities have become available, the Secret Service has worked aggressively with our partners to develop the means necessary for us to successfully carry out our protective mission. This work to better counter existing threats and anticipate future ones will never stop.

For perspective, threats to the White House from the air are not new. On February 17, 1974, Robert Preston, a private in the Army, stole an Army helicopter from Fort Meade, Maryland, and flew it to the White House Complex. He passed over the Executive Mansion and then returned to the south grounds, where he hovered and touched down briefly in proximity to the West Wing. Officers forced the helicopter down on the south grounds with shotgun and submachine gun fire. Less than a week after the Preston incident, Samuel Byck, a failed businessman with a history of mental illness, attempted to hijack a commercial airliner with the intention of crashing it into the Executive Mansion. Byck committed suicide during the hijacking attempt at the Baltimore-Washington Airport. In 1994, Frank Eugene Corder, after expressing an ambition to kill himself "in a big way" by flying an airplane into the White House or the dome of the

Capitol, crashed a Cessna P150 airplane onto the White House south lawn, striking the base of the Executive Mansion.<sup>1</sup>

The 1994 crash and subsequent White House Security Review conducted by the Department of Treasury resulted in a heightened focus on airspace security at the White House and at all of our protected venues. Subsequently, the events of September 11, 2001, resulted in significant enhancements to the way the Secret Service and agencies across government address threats from the air.

### **National Capital Region Airspace**

Airspace security for the NCR is coordinated by the interagency National Capital Region Coordination Center (NCRCC). The NCRCC was created after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks to provide real-time information sharing and tactical coordination to address potential airborne threats in and around the Washington, D.C., area. It has representatives from the military, the FAA and, certain federal civilian law enforcement agencies on duty at all times to speed communication and coordination in the event of an unknown or hostile airborne track of interest. The Secret Service staffs its positions in the NCRCC at all times with specially trained personnel assigned to the Secret Service Airspace Security Branch.

Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the dimensions of the restricted flight zones over Washington, D.C., changed. The FAA implemented the Special Flight Rules Area (SFRA) which includes within its boundaries, the Flight Restricted Zone (FRZ) and Prohibited Area 56 (P-56). The White House and the Vice President's residence are located in the P-56.

In order to enter the SFRA or the FRZ, an aircraft must have approval from the FAA. After obtaining this waiver, flights seeking to enter the P-56 must seek an additional waiver and meet a number of additional requirements. The Secret Service was granted use authority of the P-56 by the FAA, which provides the Secret Service the authority to administratively control who flies within the P-56.<sup>2</sup> The Secret Service, in consultation with the Capitol Police and Park Police, advises the FAA on the waiver and it is the FAA that issues the Certificate of Authorization to the pilot.

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<sup>1</sup> United States Department of the Treasury, *Public Report of the White House Security Review* (Washington, D.C.; Government Printing Office, 1995); available at <http://fas.org/irp/agency/ustreas/usss/t1pubrpt.html>.

<sup>2</sup> 14 C.F.R. § 91.133.

## **Secret Service Airspace Security Branch**

The Secret Service personnel at the NCRCC are part of the larger Secret Service Airspace Security Branch. In response to the 1994 White House Cessna crash and other threats, the Secret Service personnel began monitoring radar feeds provided by the FAA in an effort to detect aircraft that violated the P-56.

The mission of this program was, as it remains, to give early notification to the protective details and provide real-time information to allow personnel appropriate time to make informed decisions about actions to take to ensure the safety of their protectees. Given the pace at which events unfold in an air incursion, maximizing the time to react is critical.

Following the 9/11 attacks and the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security, the Airspace Security Program was aligned under the Presidential Protective Division. In 2004, the Secret Service began to employ Detection System Specialists who have military or civilian radar operator backgrounds, professionalizing this critical component of Secret Service protection. In 2007, the Airspace Security Program was realigned under the newly-created Special Operations Division as the Airspace Security Branch.

Presently, the Airspace Security Branch utilizes a combination of many different radar systems to create an image of the airspace. The Airspace Security Branch maintains daily contact and open communication with its interagency partners and is able to execute its mission in the NCR and on all Presidential trips.

## **Hughes Investigation**

Douglas Mark Hughes first came to the attention of the Secret Service approximately one and a half years ago. On October 4, 2013, the Secret Service obtained information that Hughes intended to fly a single seat aircraft onto the grounds of the Capitol or the White House. No timeframe was provided for the alleged event. That same day, the Secret Service relayed the information to our law enforcement partners at the Capitol Police.

On October 5, 2013, special agents from the Secret Service interviewed Hughes, who denied owning an aircraft or having plans to fly one to Washington, D.C. Corroborative interviews, however, indicated he may have owned a gyrocopter and had expressed a specific plan and intention to fly it to the Capitol in order to symbolically deliver letters to Members of Congress. No one interviewed as part of the Secret Service investigation indicated that they believed he would follow through with his plans.

Hughes was approached a second time on October 8, 2013, by special agents, but he declined to speak without a lawyer present. Although the interviews of Hughes and relevant associates revealed no evidence of intent to harm Secret Service protectees or protected sites, the Secret Service ensured information it had gathered was accessible to other interested U.S. law enforcement agencies.

### **April 15<sup>th</sup> Gyrocopter Incident**

To be clear, the Secret Service had no actionable advance notice that this incident was taking place. On April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015, Secret Service's Tampa Field Office received a telephone call from a reporter with the Tampa Bay Times. The reporter inquired whether the Secret Service would become involved with an individual planning a form of civil disobedience. The reporter was informed that, generally, the Secret Service would only become involved if such actions were directed toward a Secret Service protectee or protected facility such as the White House; otherwise, it would be a local law enforcement matter. The reporter claimed he had enough for his story and ended the call.

On April 15<sup>th</sup>, at approximately 12:55 p.m., the Tampa Field Office received a telephone call from an individual who requested to speak with a special agent who was no longer assigned to the office. After the caller was informed that the special agent was no longer assigned to the office, the caller requested that the special agent be advised that he had called. Prior to ending the call, Secret Service personnel inquired whether any other personnel could assist. The caller replied, "No," and ended the call. The individual, who left his name and no further information, was later identified as a former co-worker of Hughes. At no time during this call was any information relayed to the Secret Service regarding Mr. Hughes or his intentions.

On April 15<sup>th</sup>, at approximately 1:00 p.m., administrative support staff in the Office of Government and Public Affairs in Secret Service headquarters received a call from a reporter with the Tampa Bay Times. The reporter asked if the Secret Service was aware of and had approved a permit for a protestor named Doug Hughes to fly and land a gyrocopter on the Capitol grounds. Given the reference to the Capitol and unaware of any such approval, the caller was referred to the Capitol Police. At no time during the call did the reporter indicate that Hughes was already in flight and on his way to the Capitol.

As the phone calls on April 15<sup>th</sup> were being made to the Secret Service, Hughes had already made unauthorized entry into the FRZ and was traveling west to east over the National Mall when Secret Service personnel in the area of the White House Complex sighted what they believed to be a small aircraft that may have violated the P-56. These individuals relayed that information through their chain of command. While in the process of making those appropriate notifications, the aircraft landed and the incident

was acknowledged on the FAA Domestic Events Network (DEN), effectively placing all relevant parties on notice.

Following Hughes' landing on the west lawn of the Capitol, the Secret Service immediately responded to assist the Capitol Police. That day and in the days that followed, Secret Service field offices in Washington, D.C.; Tampa, FL; Denver, CO; and Harrisburg, PA gathered information regarding Hughes and his activities leading up to the incident. While the Capitol Police are the lead investigative agency in this matter, the Secret Service stands ready to continue to contribute necessary resources and to work collectively with its law enforcement partners. Further, as stated above, our work to better counter existing threats and anticipate future ones will never stop, to include improving current processes for identifying and interdicting air incursions.

### **Conclusion**

Protection of the President, his family, and the White House is paramount to this agency. The partnerships represented here today are critical to the success of our mission as it relates to effectively addressing airborne threats. These strong working relationships between our agencies are in place to provide the most capable responses possible. Continued interagency coordination is vital to ensuring safety and security in the airspace of the NCR.

Chairman Chaffetz, Ranking Member Cummings, and members of the Committee, this concludes my written testimony. I welcome any questions you have at this time.