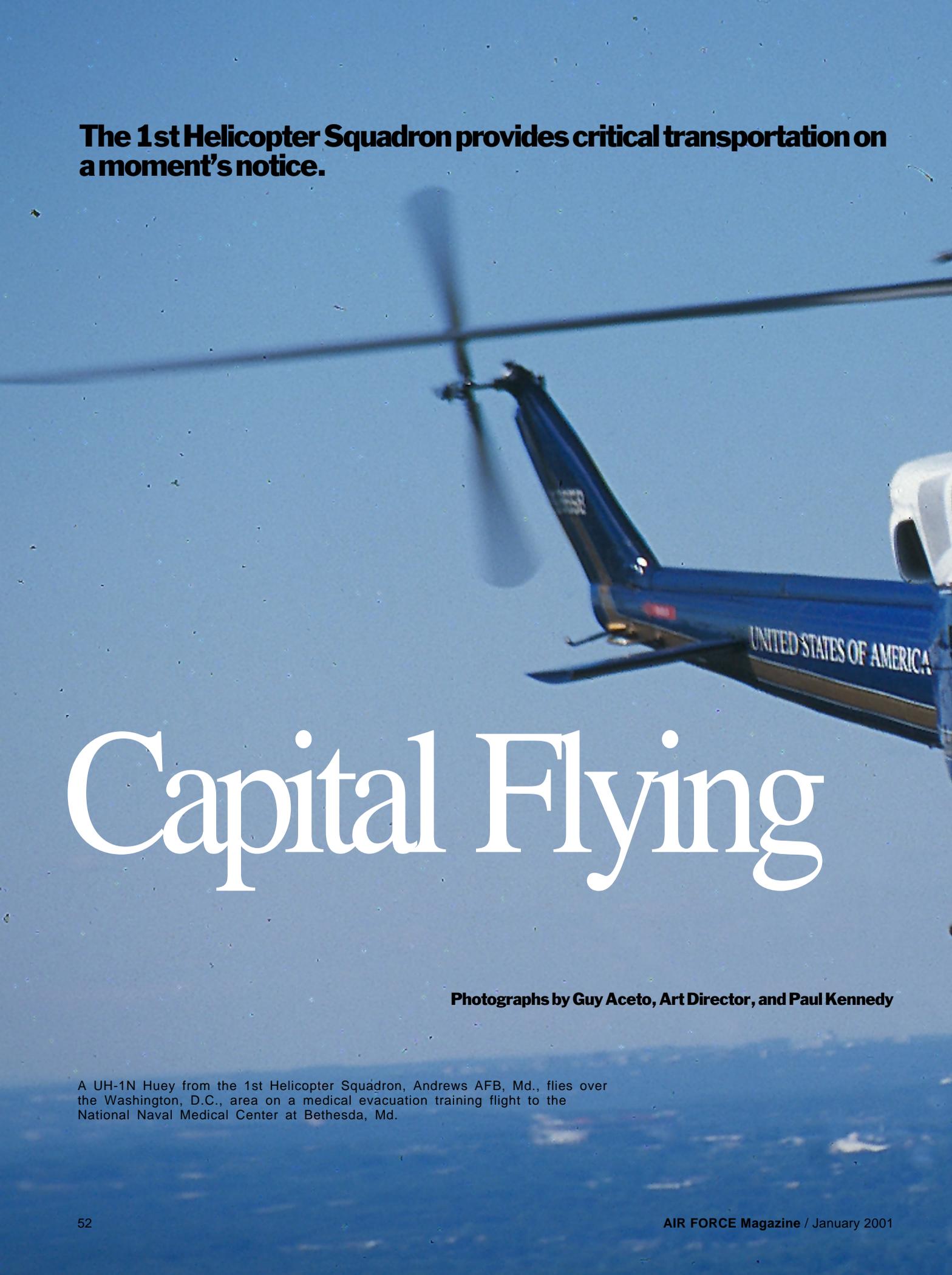


The 1st Helicopter Squadron provides critical transportation on a moment's notice.



Capital Flying

Photographs by Guy Aceto, Art Director, and Paul Kennedy

A UH-1N Huey from the 1st Helicopter Squadron, Andrews AFB, Md., flies over the Washington, D.C., area on a medical evacuation training flight to the National Naval Medical Center at Bethesda, Md.



They have transported VIPs, flown medical evacuations, participated in dramatic rescues, and garnered many awards along the way. The 1st Helicopter Squadron is among the special air mission units of the 89th Airlift Wing at Andrews AFB that provide safe, reliable, and high-priority air transportation for VIPs in the Washington, D.C., area. In July 1957, for example, the unit became the first helicopter squadron to fly an American President, landing on the White House lawn to pick up Dwight D. Eisenhower.



Over the years it has transported such dignitaries as Lord Mountbatten of Great Britain, Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands, and Gen. of the Army Omar Bradley.

The squadron keeps aircraft and alert crews always ready for such missions. The crews regularly practice dashing to the airplane. They work closely with the National Park Service, area hospitals, and other helicopter units in the national capital region. At left, a crew runs to an alert helo already set up by fast-acting crew chiefs.



The aircraft are cocked—already prepared with certain switches set ahead of time, to make a departure as quick as possible.





The crews know every paved runway and grass strip in the area and fly anywhere within a 200-mile radius of the Military District of Washington.

Medical evacuations have taken them to facilities in cities such as Pittsburgh and Christiana, Del.

At top, a 1st Helo aircraft touches down at a small local airport. Below, SrA. Bob Angel scans the horizon, keeping an eye out for other aircraft, birds, and—since the aircraft is flying at about 500 feet—radio station towers, antennas, and other tall objects.



At left is an aerial view of Bethesda hospital. A staff neonatologist at Bethesda can make a call directly to the squadron's flight surgeon, who will quickly confirm the need for air evac for a critically ill or premature infant. Help is on the way within minutes.



The 1st Helo was first organized at Andrews in August 1955 as the 1401st Helicopter Flight. Then, the unit flew two Piasecki/Boeing Vertol CH-21s and four Sikorsky H-19s. Thirty people manned the unit. Today, it has 19 twin engine UH-1N Hueys and is staffed by just under 200 people.



The squadron won the USAF Flying Safety Award in 1963 and has since earned many safety and maintenance awards. The unit reached more than 199,000 hours of accident-free flying in December, an important measure for a unit that transports more than 700 dignitaries a year.

Skilled personnel like TSgt. Kevin Kline, working on an engine at left, are key to this safety and reliability record. They allow many tasks—some of them practically depot-level maintenance—to be completed in house.

The unit's self-sustaining maintenance organization is coupled with complete avionics, instrument repair, and even sheet metal shops. A supply section maintains what the unit calls "one of the most resourceful parts stocks within a single organization." In 1994, the squadron started a section to fabricate its own aircraft seats and interiors. At right, SrA. Shane Barrious works in the sheet metal shop.





The helicopter crews are treated to a panoramic view of the city, its monuments, and landmarks—the White House to the left of the newly renovated Washington Monument (in the top photo) and the Jefferson Memorial at right. Reagan National Airport in the background at right is a reminder that the squadron’s pilots fly in a heavy traffic area for a variety of aircraft.

The missions don’t all involve views of landmarks. The 1st Helicopter Squadron has carried out operations as varied as dropping supplies to snowbound residents in a 1966 blizzard; helping apprehend a bank robber in 1976; assisting rescue efforts when an Air Florida 737 crashed into Washington, D.C.’s

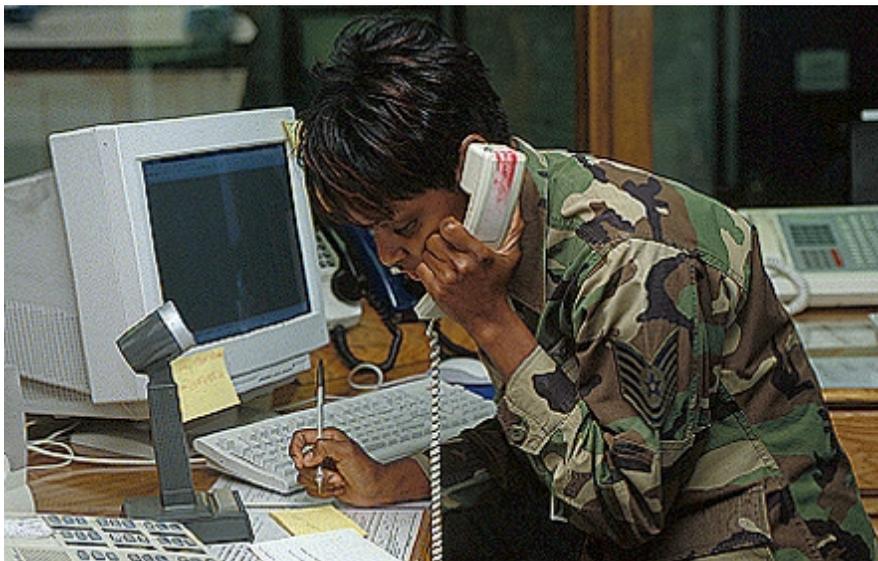


14th Street Bridge in 1982; and flying a medical evacuation in 1995 with 100-foot ceilings and visibility of less than a mile—a feat for which the crew received several awards.

At left, two views of the Potomac River as it winds its way south and with a college crew team training on its waters.

The unit's mission control section directs and monitors day-to-day flying operations.

At right, one of the first people to get the call for a mission is TSgt. Gail Howard, who is jotting down information at the squadron's command center. There is constant contact with aircraft out on sorties and the helicopters on the ground.



Squadron members meticulously plan. But a typical day at 1st Helo often involves last-minute changes. No matter how carefully the crews have planned a mission—maybe even making a practice run to the landing site to be used—they might well have to reassess the flight plan or cancel the mission altogether. Flexibility is the watchword when transporting high-level decision-makers or responding to emergencies.

Here, 1st Helo members SrA. Shane Mitchell (left) and Capts. Mike Kardoos (middle) and Dale Linafelter go over mission plans.

Staff photo by Guy Aceto



Traffic in Washington underlines the need for quick, safe, and reliable transportation to and from places like the Pentagon, whose helipad (above) is tucked between the five-sided building and an interstate.





Staff photo by Guy Aceto

Above, a squadron helicopter makes its final approach into Andrews at the end of another sortie.

Helicopter crews must maintain a high level of combat preparedness. Many come from or will go to the Special Operations Forces or rescue communities. The squadron has added night flights and Night Vision Goggles training to its schedule.

At right, Lt. Donald Snyder, Linafelter, and SSgt. John Rupprecht stop for a photo before heading into an evening with NVGs.

Although it's the secondary missions of VIP flights, medical evacuations, and search-and-rescue assistance that are the daily fare at 1st Helo, the unit's primary mission



Photos by Paul Kennedy



is to support DoD contingency plans for transport of key government officials should a national emergency arise.

Whatever the duty, members of the 1st Helicopter Squadron live up to its unit motto, "First and Foremost."