

Texas Department of Public Safety  
Information for the Press

(Advance for Release Sunday, March 30, 1969)

AUSTIN--A new dimension in versatility for the Department of Public Safety will soon begin with the launching of five new helicopters which will join two others already in operation and be available over the state for any type of emergency mission that might arise.

Col. Pat Speir, DPS director, said today that three of the new craft have been delivered and two other are expected to arrive in April. The federal government, as a result of its interest in law enforcement, has approved sharing with the state the cost of purchasing and operating them.

Speir said the DPS initially became interested in helicopters two years ago and leased a pair of two-place craft. After some experimentation with them, he said, they proved to be very valuable tools for various types of emergency work, and were purchased by the Department.

"The OPS is very desirous of expanding its services to the people of this state and to the city police department and Sheriff's department," Speir said. "We feel this is a splendid opportunity to provide them with better and more versatile service.

"It is seldom a day passes that we don't receive a request for assistance in an incident in which a helicopter can be very useful, such as looking for lost persons, rescue operations, and so forth. We plan to station these aircraft strategically over the state so they will be more readily available when needed."

The main thrust of the new program, Speir continued, is to increase the capabilities of the DPS in all phases of emergency and law enforcement work, particularly mercy missions such as the rapid transfer of injured persons, when feasible, from limited treatment centers to hospitals with more sophisticated facilities.

"Medical authorities have known for some time that many lives are lost each year throughout the nation because accident victims do not receive adequate attention early enough to save them," Speir said.

"In addition, it has been estimated by national medical authorities that of some 166,000 accident victims who suffer permanent disability from injuries, 25 percent could have been saved from such disability if they had been given proper care immediately after the accidents."

In some cases, he added, it may well be that the use of a helicopter in rushing a traffic accident victim from the scene of a remotely-located accident to a hospital will be the difference between life and death. The copters also will be used for such things as searches, rescue operations, jail breaks, disaster relief, apprehension of felons, riot control and mob violence, traffic surveys--any type of emergency work deemed practical.

The DPS helicopters will include three jet-powered five-passenger "Jet Ranger" helicopters which can be altered in minutes to accommodate two stretcher patients. The three larger craft will be stationed initially in the Dallas, Lubbock and Austin areas.

The DPS director said the usefulness and versatility of helicopters have been demonstrated numerous times since the DPS has had the original two aircraft. He cited these examples:

--In March of last year, the craft was used for surveillance of a remote area near Abilene where narcotics suspects were known to be in a car. The vehicle was spotted on a dirt road. Under observation of officers in the helicopter, two people got out of the car and walked into a field. The officers alerted ground units when they observed the men burying something in the ground. They landed and found a plastic bag containing one and one-half pounds of marihuana. The officers on the ground apprehended the suspects.

--In May, 1968, a Braniff International passenger plane crashed near Dawson, Texas, during a torrential rain storm, killing 85 persons aboard. A DPS helicopter was used to search for missing bodies and missing debris. The area and surrounding fields were impassable to vehicles due to the mud. The search from the air was made in a very short time. Maps locating debris were made and photographs were made of the entire area to be used by the National Transportation Safety Board for its accident report.

--In August, 1968, the helicopter was requested to search for a missing person in Delta County. The man's car had been located at his farm with tire trouble and a run-down battery and it was presumed he had started to walk back to town but had not arrived the next day. A search party had looked for him all night with no results. Within 15 minutes after the plane began its search, the man's body was found in a cotton patch. He had died of natural causes.

--In September, 1968, DPS Narcotics Agents and U.S. Customs Agents at Van Horn called for the helicopter to assist in a narcotics investigation. A cache of about 200 pounds of marihuana had been found in an abandoned building at the nearby airport. The agents called the copter crew on the radio and advised that it had been loaded into a car and gave its description. They believed the car was to make contact with another vehicle to transfer the load. This did not happen and it was decided to go ahead and stop the car. The agents in their car began to give

chase, the helicopter overhead. The chase lasted for 53 miles, running up to speeds of 120 miles per hour. The copter crew radioed for a Highway Patrol road block, gave the escape car's description, and when it was stopped by the road block, landed and assisted in the apprehension.

--In October of last year, the DPS helicopter was flying a photo reconnaissance mission for a downed aircraft in the hilly lake country west of Austin. The crew noticed a car parked in heavy brush 200 feet away from a county road. They landed and checked the area and the license number of the car. They learned that it belonged to an Austin man who had been missing since June. After a thorough search of the area, the man's body was found near the edge of a cliff. He was a suicide victim.

--In March of this year, a DPS helicopter crew was instrumental in flushing a band of six burglars out of a heavily-wooded area near Bandera and into the hands of sheriff's officers and a Texas Ranger. Within 10 minutes after arriving at the area, one of the suspects was spotted in the woods. The others suddenly broke out of the brush and began running, the helicopter overhead about 10 feet off the ground. When they were ordered to halt and didn't, the crew fired a few bursts over their heads with a semi-automatic rifle. The copter then landed and one of the crew chased one of the suspects to the road where other officers were waiting. The helicopter pilot stayed in the plane and with it chased the others to a similar fate.