



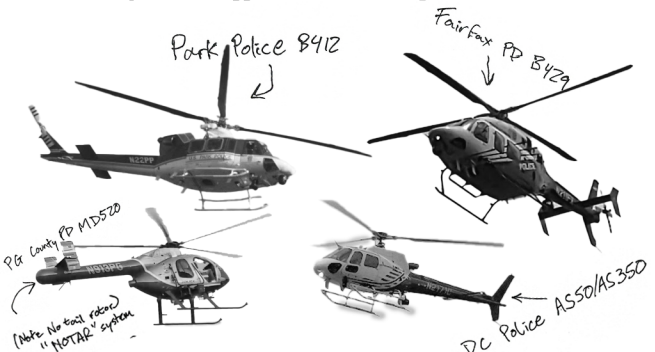
Helicopters of DC's Copter Spotter Guide

2021's GAO report found that 96.3% of helicopter noise complaints to the MAAA from 2018-2021 were unattributed to any specific operator - This is why HelicoptersofDC is dedicated to bringing DC-area residents the most accurate and up-to-date information on what's overhead and fostering collaboration and education about helicopter identification and mission profiles.

In 2021 we developed a crowd-sourced tracking platform

CopterSpotter.com

that allows residents to anonymously submit helicopter sightings and see others' submissions. It also gives residents access to our computer vision program that automatically identifies 19 types of helicopters, correlating their types with area operators.



LOCAL AND FEDERAL LAW ENFORCEMENT

Often observed flying circles with or without a searchlight, these helicopters help authorities track stolen cars and suspects. Telltale features include "Trak-a-spot" searchlight and FLIR thermal camera. Park Police's unique mission includes presidential recon loops and medical evacuations from federal and national park land.

AS-350 (MPDC) "FALCON": 2

MD-520 (PG COUNTY) "GUARDIAN": 8

AW-139 (MARYLAND STATE POLICE) "TROOPER": 12

B-429 (FAIRFAX COUNTY): 2

B-412 (PARK POLICE) "EAGLE": 2 (1X B-206)

TRACKABLE ON APPS? YES

STATIONED AT: BUZZARD'S POINT (MPDC),

EAGLE'S NEST (PP), TIPTON/FORT MEADE (PG)



New VH-92A

MARINE CORPS HMX1 SQUADRON

The most famous and identifiable helicopters over DC, this unit is tasked with Presidential transport and flies Marine One.

VH-3D SEA KING: 11

VH-60N BLACK HAWK: 8

VH-92A PATRIOT: 21

MV-22 OSPREYS: 12

STATIONED AT: JB BOLLING "ANACOSTIA"

TRACKABLE ON APPS? NO

RADIO CALLSIGN: NIGHTHAWK

One often missed nuance: Marine One is the callsign used by any USMC aircraft that the President is on. The aircraft of HMX-1 that carry VIPs are green with white along the top, giving them the nickname White Tops. The classic VH-3D Sea King that has long been associated as Marine One is on track to be phased out and replaced by the VH-92 as part of the VXX program (many of the counts above are in flux).

You'll often see these aircraft flying in twos or threes. This is to provide decoys for the helicopter that the President is on. On overseas trips with heightened threat concerns, you'll even see them in groups of four or five. The HMX-1 squadron is primarily composed of helicopters but also includes V-22 Ospreys that carry the press pool.



UH-1N "Huey"

AIR FORCE FIRST HELICOPTER SQUADRON

An easily recognizable staple of the DC airspace, this unit is responsible for the most regular helicopter traffic above DC. Since 2021 CopterSpotter data has found this to be the most prevalent operator over the DC-area.

UH-1N TWIN HUEYS: 21

TRACKABLE ON APPS? NO

Similar to the US Army unit, they stand prepared to evacuate senior government officials from the district in the event of emergency. While a recent GAO report found the UH-1N to be the military's most reliable aircraft, this squadron's navy and gold "Hueys" have made numerous emergency landings on school playgrounds and sport fields. Note that you may occasionally see one of these that is grey instead of blue - this one is the helicopter for the unit's commander.

RADIO CALLSIGN: MUSEL

STATIONED AT: JOINT BASE ANDREWS



VH-60 "Black Hawk"

ARMY TWELFTH AVIATION BATTALION

Known as Gold Tops (though the black and gold variant is a rarity) the unit provides VIP transportation for the DoD. It is, however, difficult to distinguish their green drab Black Hawk helicopters (sometimes with outboard auxiliary fuel tanks attached) from DHS, FBI and National Guard who also utilize the type.

UH-60 BLACK HAWK: 34

TRACKABLE ON APPS? SOMETIMES.

This unit play a number of other roles, but one of them is also VIP evacuation in the case of emergency. Fort Belvoir is also home to the Army's Night Vision and Electronic Sensors Directorate (i.e. they train at night).

STATIONED AT: DAVIDSON AIRFIELD (FT. BELVOIR)

RADIO CALLSIGN: "PAT" - PRIORITY AIR TRANSPORT



MH-65 "Dolphin"

COAST GUARD AIR STATION ATLANTIC CITY

A set of armed Coast Guard helicopters play a role in the air defense of Washington, DC. If a small, private airplane comes too close, this is what is sent up to identify, make contact, and if necessary shoot it down.

MH-650 DOLPHIN: 3

TRACKABLE ON APPS? SOMETIMES.

These helicopters are on standby at National Airport and offer several key characteristics to complement Washington's air defense system. Able to fly quickly or slowly, this helicopter is well suited for intercepting small general aviation aircraft, a need that was dangerously illustrated in 1994 when a single engine Cessna was crashed into the White House. After quickly vectoring towards an approaching aircraft, the Dolphin could match its speed and attempt to make radio or visual contact. There's even a digital message board on the side of the aircraft that can display large scrolling text. If the need arises, these helicopters also have the armaments needed to shoot down an unresponsive craft. NORAD coordinates periodic "Falcon Virgo" exercises to keep these teams sharp.

STATIONED AT: DCA "BOARDWALK"

RADIO CALLSIGN: BLACKJACK

You can support the project at:
Patreon.com/HelicoptersofDC



EC-35 (note fenestron tail rotor)

MEDICAL HELICOPTERS

There are several medical helicopter operators over DC but Medstar's blue and yellow livery is the most identifiable along with a unique red "SkyBear" helicopter that services Children's National Hospital.

The flight nurses aboard these helicopters are tasked with keeping critical patients stable during transport between hospitals, but also fly missions transporting vital organs. They can be easily identified by high altitude, direct routes to and from area hospitals. "Med-evacs" from the scene of D.C. area accidents are almost exclusively performed by police agencies.



EC-35 AND EC-45: MANY

TRACKABLE ON APPS? YES

RADIO CALLSIGN: MEDSTAR, STAT AIRCARE, HEALTHNET



AS-50/AS 350

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

DHS performs surveillance missions with its camera-equipped AS-350s. They don't appear on tracking apps but their tail numbers are:

N927M N180Q N322V N534P (various liveries)
N6977A N6974A (white with blue stripe)

AS-350: 3 (OFFICIALLY)

TRACKABLE ON APPS? NO

STATIONED AT: MANASSAS

RADIO CALLSIGN: TROY



DOE B412

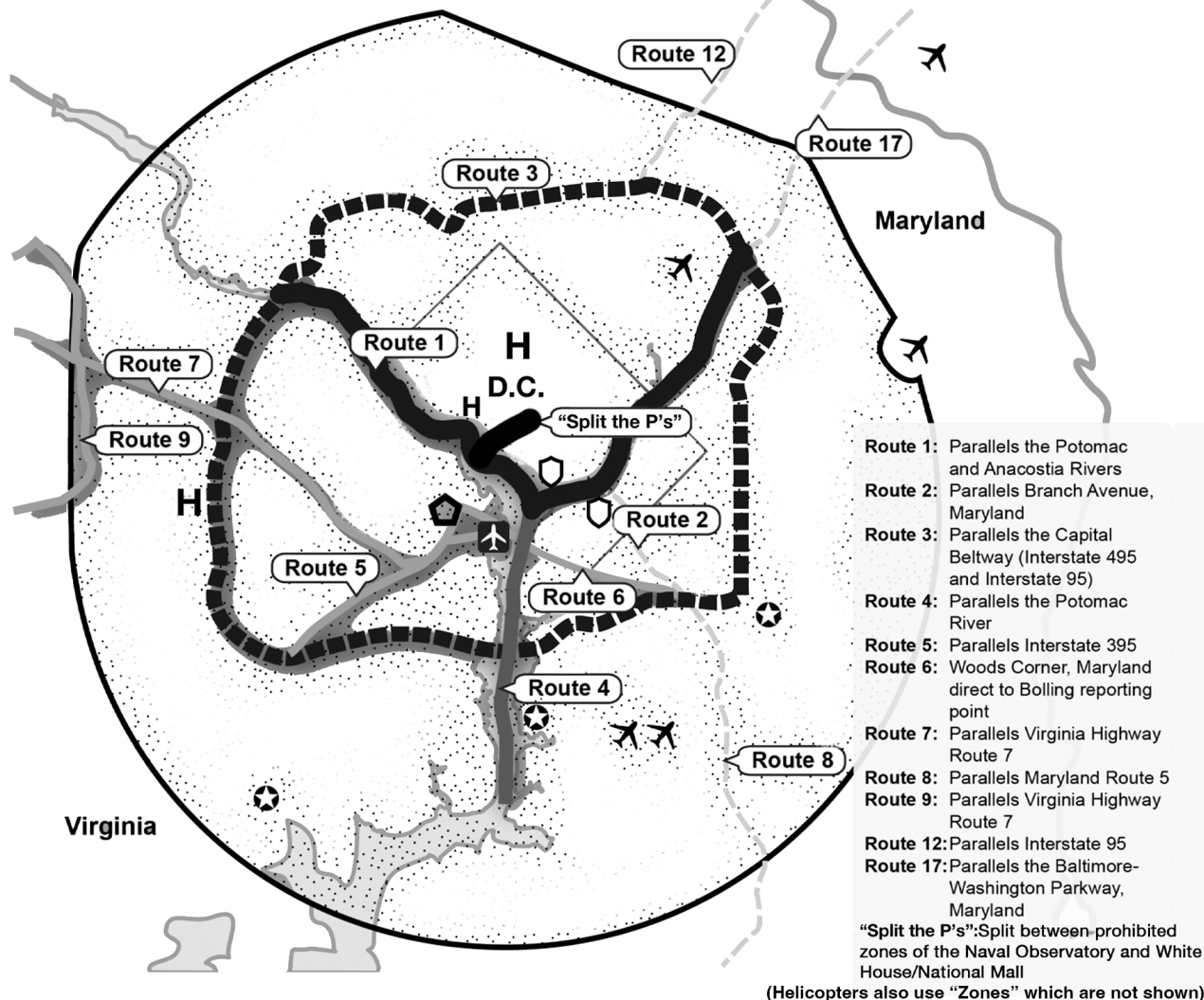
OTHERS

Radiation Sensors

A few notable semi-regular operators include Department of Energy's "nuke sniffer" (popular around election time), FBI's YETI B429's (colorful, but seen flying with drab green FBI black hawks), power line surveyors and the occasional big budget film crew.

Did you know?

An easy way to discern helicopter type is by looking at the number of blades on the main rotor (via photo), the tail fin configuration and the landing gear type. Learn more at CopterSpotter.com



- Route 1: Parallels the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers
 - Route 2: Parallels Branch Avenue, Maryland
 - Route 3: Parallels the Capital Beltway (Interstate 495 and Interstate 95)
 - Route 4: Parallels the Potomac River
 - Route 5: Parallels Interstate 395
 - Route 6: Woods Corner, Maryland direct to Bolling reporting point
 - Route 7: Parallels Virginia Highway Route 7
 - Route 8: Parallels Maryland Route 5
 - Route 9: Parallels Virginia Highway Route 7
 - Route 12: Parallels Interstate 95
 - Route 17: Parallels the Baltimore-Washington Parkway, Maryland
- "Split the P's": Split between prohibited zones of the Naval Observatory and White House/National Mall
- (Helicopters also use "Zones" which are not shown)

Frequency of helicopter routes:

- 1-3 Operators
- 4-6 Operators
- - - 7-9 Operators
- 10-12 Operators
- 13+ Operators

✈ Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport

✈ Other airports

✈ Military airports

⬡ Pentagon

H Hospital

⬡ Police Helipad

⬡ Flight restricted zone (15 miles outside of DCA)

2020 GAO Report

HELICOPTER RADIO

DCA APPROACH (HELICOPTERS): 134.350

HELICOPTER AIR-TO-AIR: 123.025

You can hear the latest aircraft radio at:
-LiveATC.Net (search KDCA)
-Radio.CopterSpotter.com/delta/MM
(replace MM with current month, i.e. 06)



Did you know?

pointing a laser pointer at an aircraft can blind pilots and is a federal crime.

ONLINE FLIGHT TRACKERS

Many online flight trackers omit military flights but even the few that have "unfiltered" data do not receive tracking information from most military helicopters due to a Code of Federal Regulations exemption to mandatory flight transponders for "sensitive government mission for national defense, homeland security, intelligence or law enforcement." We have found this exemption broadly applied to honorary funeral flyovers at Arlington Cemetery, air shows and ballpark flyovers.

These are the flight trackers we recommend:

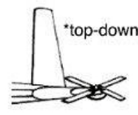






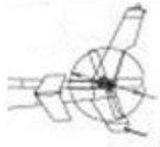

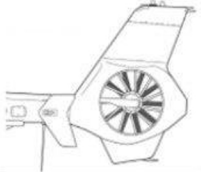
- Globe.ADSBExchange.com
- Globe.TheAirTraffic.com
- Globe.ADSB.fi
- Globe.Airplanes.live
- Globe.ADSB.lol

IDENTIFICATION GUIDE

You can identify most DC area helicopters by three qualities:

1. the landing gear configuration
2. the number of blades on the main rotor (take a photo!)
3. The tail fin configuration

Use the table to the right to try identifying a helicopter yourself!

	2-blades	3-blades	4-blades	5-blades
1 front wheel			Presidential VH92A 	Maryland State Police A139
2 front wheels			Army/National Guard/ DHS/FBI H60	Presidential VH3D
wheels retracted			Coast Guard MH65 	
			DHS S76 	
Skis	Air Force UH1N 	DC Police or DHS AS350	Park Police B412 	PG County Police MD520 
	Park Police or NBC4 B206 		Fairfax County Police or FBI B429 	
	CBS/ FOX/ ABC R66 		Medical EC35 	
			Medical EC45 