

Copley native tells of flights with stars

Chopper pilot flies U.S. presidents for 11 years



By Carol Biliczky
Beacon Journal staff writer

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A Copley Township native has capped a career as a pilot for U.S. presidents with a new book.

Gene Boyer's *Inside the President's Helicopter: Reflections of a White House Senior Pilot* recounts almost 11 years shepherding Presidents Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford and sundry dignitaries around the world.

The memoir, fresh off the printing press in December, comes with praise on the publisher's website from Julie Nixon Eisenhower that it is "a story of high adventure, courage and history-making moments."

Now 81 and living in Huntington Beach, Calif., Boyer remembers with minute detail his trajectory from Copley High School to a football scholarship at Ohio University to U.S. Army draftee and on to senior helicopter pilot at the White House.

His career took him to seemingly all quarters of the globe, from Paris to Vietnam to South America. He ferried such notables as Henry Kissinger, Anwar Sadat, King Hussein, Charles de Gaulle, Robert Kennedy and Leonid Brezhnev.

He made 3,000 flights while employed at the White House — 451 with Nixon, 56 with Ford, seven with Johnson, two with Dwight Eisenhower (by then a former president) and some with Ronald Reagan, who later became president.

The role of White House helicopter pilot was fairly fresh when Boyer came on board in 1964. The Secret Service had cleared helicopters as safe and efficient for presidents only seven years before.

The position had an added urgency, as this was the Cold War, when an intercontinental ballistic missile launched from Russia could get to the nation's capital in about 35 minutes.

The responsibility was daunting, even if exciting.

"The president's helicopter must be capable of operating day and night, in adverse weather and all climates worldwide, and be prepared for a variety of threats," Boyer wrote in his prologue.

"If the worst happens, and the president's helicopter is attacked, our best defense is evasion and relocation to the nearest secure facility, such as Air Force One or a Top Secret bunker."

Perhaps his most public mission was to lift Nixon from the White House lawn to Andrews Air Force Base after he resigned on Aug. 9, 1974.

Tears in her eyes, Pat Nixon patted Boyer on the back and thanked him for his years of service as she left the helicopter. Boyer misted up, too, he recalled in a phone interview, as he had flown Nixon three times a week or so for the last five years and had come to view the president as one of his favorite passengers.

As he departed, tears in his own eyes, Nixon asked Boyer to pull himself together. He had 10,000 people to face as he walked the gauntlet from the helicopter to a waiting plane and he didn't want to be seen with tears in his eyes, he explained.

Boyer left the White House the following spring, 1975, and retired from the Army as a lieutenant colonel with 22 years of service. He went on to work in marketing for Hughes Helicopter and the Lockheed Aircraft Service.

For the past 10 years, he has been assembling his memoir with co-writer Jackie Boor. The publisher is Cable Publishing of Brule, Wis.