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**ABSTRACT**

A number of flight accidents in recent years have made the use of helicopters in news coverage controversial. Radio or television reporters are sometimes asked to fly under unsafe conditions simply because competing stations have sent up their reporters. Although pilots have the right to refuse to fly if they feel conditions are dubious, they too may be influenced by journalistic pressures. The National Broadcast Pilots' Association was formed in 1986 and plans soon to initiate flight guidelines that cover (1) specific minimum conditions for flight, (2) enforcement of pilot veto power, (3) mandatory written policies, and (4) withholding story information from pilot. Since any policy decision remains in the hands of executives, 120 news directors were sent questionnaires about the use of helicopters for reporting the news. Responses indicated that executives generally do not perceive a problem in "helicopter journalism" and have little interest in industry-wide guidelines. Only a few stations indicated that they have implemented their own guidelines. The results indicated a number of misconceptions: three news directors insisted that the FAA regulates their use of helicopters, but in fact the FAA is not involved in "helicopter journalism." Others said that guidelines would violate free press rights. Issues raised by this study require further examination, particularly in light of the 10 deaths that occurred in news helicopter crashes during 1986. (Tables of data and a list of 23 references are included.) (AEW)

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GREY AREA IN THE BLUE SKIES

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## Grey Area in the Blue Skies

Is the duty to serve the public worth the potential loss of human life? It may be one of humankind's fundamental questions, but it is a question that does not regularly appear in American journalism. Although the pursuit of journalism has sometimes extracted a human toll in war zones abroad and in certain events at home, the ethics of duty versus mortality seem to appear, at best, at scattered points in time.

Recent events in broadcast journalism suggest that because of the widespread use of helicopters as news gathering tools one such point in time is now. Although helicopters have been fixtures in broadcast news for many years, it appears a new era is currently at hand, arising from a lengthening list of journalistic casualties. In 1979 nine major news helicopter crashes occurred, killing ten people, a figure believed to be a record for news helicopter fatalities in a single year. As if the figures were not disturbing enough, widely publicized accounts of some of the incidents shook the industry. On October 22, a WNBC Radio reporter described on the air her fatal crash into the Hudson River. The National Transportation Safety Board estimates the number of news helicopter crashes this decade on the order of five per year.'

Typically in areas of journalism posing danger, concerns are diminished because of non-journalistic agencies. Military and police agencies, among others, attempt to be specific in keeping reporters out of

"harm's way." This is not turning out to be true in helicopter journalism. The Federal Aviation Administration is active in licensing pilots, rating hardware and coordinating airspace, but it does not make news flying decisions. Those are in the hands of people running radio and television newsrooms. The recent tragedies emphasize the fact that the stakes can be very high.

This exploratory study attempts to show how the application of helicopter journalism can be closely connected to "every day" news judgment factors. Such factors may fail to properly guide activities with potential life-or-death consequences. This is briefly traced historically, as well as in discussion of a current movement in the field toward establishing industry-wide guidelines. From here, the study presents results of a survey of broadcast news decision makers, designed to (1) determine the current direction of helicopter journalism, (2) probe industry concerns and (3) suggest whether guidelines would be supported.

The advent of helicopter journalism marked a step forward in the ability of journalists to inform the public; coverage of events ranging from impending natural disasters to daily traffic snarls illustrates an important public function.<sup>2</sup> Yet, as often happens when journalists take steps to better inform the public, grey areas materialize. In helicopter journalism, the grey area is narrow in scope. It does not embody broad questions about whether helicopter journalism should exist, but rather a single question, posed on a given day, in a given newsroom, of "should we fly?" As will be shown, many factors impinge on this question.

Although narrow in scope, there seems to be a certainty of helicopter journalism; its scale today is great. There is also an inherent

risk and, now, a growing death toll. These combine to make this small grey area loom very large.

### Dimensions of the Issue

Helicopters have been part of broadcast news since the 1950s. Radio stations found that "Eye in the Sky" traffic reporting was a good way to serve growing numbers of suburban commuters. One of the pioneers of helicopter journalism in television was KTLA-TV in Los Angeles, whose aerial reporting was criticized for allegedly prolonging the Watts riots in 1965.<sup>3</sup> Helicopters remained a novelty for most stations through the 1960s. In the 1970s, though, expansion in local TV news and the advent of electronic news gathering, triggered rapid growth. Mainly because of broadcast news, the years 1979 and 1980 saw the heaviest influx of helicopter manufacture since the Vietnam War.<sup>4</sup> Today, the number of television and radio stations relying on helicopters is estimated to be in the hundreds.<sup>5</sup> Some stations also use fixed-wing aircraft and jets.

Safety is the single concern, and discussion is guided by a single principle. On any day, in any situation, a risk to human life exists anytime a news helicopter is in the air. As Doug O'Brien, news director of New York's WNBC Radio puts it, "Flying in a helicopter is inherently dangerous."<sup>6</sup> O'Brien has had to deal with two serious news helicopter mishaps, including the October 1986 tragedy. He believes, and many seem to agree, the difficulty is rooted in the understanding and evaluation of the risk.

A good illustration occurred just one month after the WNBC crash. On November 25, despite thick fog, Cincinnati's WKRC Radio elected to perform morning traffic reporting via helicopter and instructed its

crew into the air. Moments after takeoff, the helicopter crashed into a tree, killing reporter Nancy McCormick. WKRC General Manager John Soller indicated the decision to fly was apparently determined by the fact that competing radio stations were airborne that morning.<sup>7</sup>

A somewhat different issue, and one apparently very common, is depicted in the crash of a KREM-TV news helicopter in Spokane, Washington, on May 5, 1985. A crew was sent airborne solely to obtain routine pictures of a road run. Relevant video was easily achieved by ground-based crews. The helicopter became tangled in some aerial guy wires and crashed, killing pilot Cliff Richey and photographer Gary Brown.<sup>8</sup>

Several components of the debate are found in the December 7, 1982, crash of a KOA-TV news helicopter near Denver. During a driving nighttime snow storm, pilot-reporter Karen Key and crew member Larry Zane were killed shortly after being instructed to fly to the scene of a downed airliner. Questions about newsroom judgment arose again when an autopsy showed that prior to flight Key was intoxicated and those in the newsroom may have suspected it. Subsequent news stories revealed that Key had insufficient training, and several KOA staff members had fears of flying with her, only to have those fears rejected by management. Critics speculated that Key, the only female reporter-pilot in the nation at the time, was hired to facilitate station promotion during an intense "news war."<sup>9</sup>

News judgment, competitive forces, complications of nature and the intertwining of news and corporate self interest highlight parts of the issue. What makes the grey area more vexing is that helicopter journalism has few counterparts. It appears caught in a vacuum between aviation and journalism.

As an aviation device, the news helicopter is unlike all others. The FAA is oriented toward transportation, planned aviation from point to point. The news helicopter must respond at a moment's notice to unanticipated developments, and often lots of them. Conditions for flying are equally unanticipated. Reporting news can require an array of aerial acrobatics, in what are considered among the tiniest of aircraft. These tiny craft are usually outfitted with heavy broadcast equipment.

The news helicopter likewise has few parallels as a journalistic device. It has the capability of providing a unique aerial perspective on news events, and doing it live. Helicopters serve as relay devices to electronically linked ground-based crews. Its maneuverability allows crews to be shuttled into remote locations, while its speed and range allow the ferrying of reporters great distances. Still, as noted, helicopters have limitations, and tend to be unlike other news gathering tools which are ever-designed for slickness and portability. Broadcast journalists, who use the tools, often believe they have vast technical ability in covering stories, and are encouraged by management to use it. This attitude can be in conflict with the limits of helicopter capability.

The attitude has been described at least once as a follow-the-leader mentality that affects judgment.<sup>10</sup> If such an attitude were confined to journalists, the grey area might seem more black and white. However, there is evidence it exists, to some degree, among the pilots, in the course of doing their journalistic jobs.

One of the first notable news helicopter tragedies was that of Francis Gary Powers, the former Air Force U-2 pilot shot down over the Soviet Union in 1960. Investigation of his fatal July 25, 1977, crash

while flying for Los Angeles station KNBC-TV indicated his news helicopter had run out of fuel.<sup>11</sup> On May 27, 1980, near Seattle, a helicopter owned by KIRO-TV collided in mid-air with an airplane operated by KOMO Radio, an incident blamed on twin pilot error.<sup>12</sup> In a January 21, 1986, crash in Minnesota, killing an ABC News crew, a pilot is said to have ignored weather advisories.<sup>13</sup> Denver's KUSA-TV has witnessed two crashes since 1981. A person who once supervised the KUSA newsroom says of the pilot, "He always violated the rules. They eventually had to fire him."<sup>14</sup>

What are "the rules?" The FAA, again, has little to say on these matters. Nor do most local bodies, such as police agencies, which might have a more direct tie with helicopter news organizations in a given locale. The relevant journalistic organization, the Radio-Television News Directors Association, has nothing to say in its code about aerial journalism or safety of news crews, nor has it conducted a comprehensive study of the issue.<sup>15</sup> Safety considerations are likewise not included in the code of ethics of the National Press Photographers Association.<sup>16</sup>

Lacking anything more specific, what appears is a predominant rule of thumb, a sort of unwritten guideline. It is the idea that once a flying decision is made by the newsroom, the pilot has the authority to say "no." The matter ends up one of common sense, especially on the part of the pilot. Numerous news directors surveyed in this study, in commenting on possible industry-wide guidelines, pointed to this as solution. Clearly, the vast majority of pilots may be considered responsible. However, does this really remove the slightest trace of question?

At least in cases cited here, there is indication that pilots may



be influenced by some of the same journalistic forces brought to bear on news-oriented decision makers. As will now be shown, this idea is made even more clear by pilots themselves.

### The Move Toward Guidelines

If guidelines were proposed to deal with helicopter journalism, what would they consist of? In 1986, sixty news helicopter pilots took up this question, ultimately forming the National Broadcast Pilots' Association. One of its goals is to isolate key issues and formulate and circulate written guidelines among the nation's broadcast news organizations.

According to President Leo Galanis, a pilot for KWTW in Oklahoma City, '7

The ethical issue is responsibility. News (people) don't want responsibility. It is too easy for them to say later, "the pilot said go." They've got an easy out. . . . If this is the way it is, then the pilots must act for the industry.

The NBPA plans to have guidelines in final form by late 1987. Some of the items being considered are: '8

\* Specific Minimum Conditions for Flight -- News helicopter assignments automatically would be prohibited without a 500-foot ceiling and one-mile visibility in the day and a 2,000-foot ceiling and five-mile visibility at night.

\* Enforcement of Pilot Veto Power -- Even if minimum conditions prevailed, a pilot could still veto a flying assignment. Such a veto could not be questioned nor would it require explanation.

\* Mandatory Written Policy -- Stations would be required to incorporate safety and procedure instruction in employee manuals, with

such policies to be explained to news personnel upon hiring.

\* Withholding Story Information from Pilot -- A feeling exists that the greatest source of pressure on pilots is journalistic. Under this guideline, news personnel would be prohibited from explaining to the pilot the news value of any helicopter assignment, thus sparing the pilot such consideration in flying decisions. (Radio traffic reporting would be excluded.)

A variety of sources is assisting the NBPA in this work. One source consists of hospitals, which maintain helicopter rescue units. Flight minimums have been established by hospitals, as has the concept of withholding of information. Galanis notes that many hospital pilots are not told about the conditions of patients prior to making a flying decision.

Items dealing with the enforcement of veto power and mandatory policies are being considered because they are already being employed by some stations.

Nonetheless, the pilots did not undertake the effort without points of initial concern, and at least two issues seem at the forefront. One is the contention that pilots are adversely influenced by newsroom competition. Another is the idea that helicopter use is excessive, and that many news assignments actually do not require it.

Both problems were hinted in an informal poll of NBPA pilots in mid 1986.<sup>19</sup> Thirty-three responded. Focusing on non-essential use, three of the survey items dealt with nighttime assignments, something TV pilots have questioned because of inherent lighting problems.<sup>20</sup> Without commenting on news judgments, all responding pilots said they were asked to fly over metropolitan areas at night, while eighty-five percent had assignments over rural areas, where lighting is worse.

The most prominent findings in the poll, however, appear related to the competition question. Almost twenty percent of the pilots said they encounter pressure from management toward flying in adverse conditions. One of the pilots said his superiors get angry when such assignments are turned down. Further, only twenty percent of the pilots felt they were in a situation in which they could talk to competing pilots to gain assistance in making difficult flying decisions.

The NBPA findings suggest that more than "common sense" is at work in news helicopter flying decisions, despite the prevailing view among news directors. Galanis is so disturbed by evidence that assignment editors, producers and reporters are pressuring pilots that more study is planned. He expects the guidelines will make a strong statement. In addition, he feels guidelines must address the problem of intra-pilot competition, possibly through meetings and social activities under the auspices of NBPA groups in individual markets.

The guidelines envisioned would not represent rulemaking as much as general recommendations. They would be little more than the instructions and policies some stations have already drawn up. KWTW, Galanis' station in Oklahoma City, has invested in a 35-page manual for news helicopter operations, complete with pictures of instruments diagrams showing safety zones around rotor blades and charts outlining FAA height and velocity recommendations. The manual makes clear the points at which news people can "dicker" with pilots and those in which arguments would not be tolerated.<sup>21</sup>

Galanis feels many of these parameters may be applied to virtually any helicopter news operation. Written guidelines could influence individual station policy. Still, at least based on the efforts of the NBPA, the goal of guidelines seems to be one of committing to

paper generic recommendations for stations that have not taken the time and expense of examining issues on their own.

As will be shown next, many stations appear to fit that category

#### Survey of News Directors: Methodology

In the end, the fate of any move toward helicopter guidelines is in the hands of the radio and television stations, through their executives. They operate the helicopters, employ the pilots, sense the issues and set policy.

In January 1987, 120 news directors were sent a questionnaire and a letter. Issues were presented broadly, with reference to "safety," "related issues" and "attitudes toward usage." The sample consisted of news directors at each of the network stations in the twenty largest television markets, and news directors at three news-oriented radio stations in the same markets. The radio stations were taken from lists appearing in Television/Radio Age. Separate flights of questionnaires were sent to television and radio news executives.

Stations in these markets were selected for several reasons. It would seem that these markets should feature both the heaviest predominance and longest continuing use of news helicopters. These markets represent all regions of the country, as well as a diversity of geographic factors. In addition, these markets represent a great diversity in central city size, from New York, the largest, to Denver and Tampa, among the smallest. These markets account for forty-four percent of the nation's TV homes.<sup>22</sup>

Helicopter Trends -- Respondents were asked two types of questions. They were asked to indicate the extent to which helicopters are used in daily news operations, based on numbers of times per day

or per week helicopters are called upon. Then, news directors at stations having had helicopter capability for at least five years were asked about changes in usage.

Competitive Pressure/"Non Essential" Use -- Respondents were asked the extent to which news helicopters were needed for competitive survival. In another category they were asked to estimate, using open-ended percentages, amounts of time their helicopter was used for "breaking news, the shuttling of crews to distant places or activities in which the helicopter was essential." Subtracting these figures from 100 provides an indication of amounts of time the helicopter was not really necessary, or "non-essential" use.

Helicopter Concern and Guidelines -- Respondents were asked in open-ended form whether competitive pressures were a concern. Closed questions followed regarding concerns over "non-essential" usage of helicopters and helicopter usage in general. Those saying yes to these questions were asked, in open-ended form, whether guidelines would help.

Respondents were allowed to remain anonymous.

#### News Director Survey: Results

Of the 120 questionnaires, six were returned by the postal service because of incorrect addresses, two out of the television group and four from radio. Respondents returned sixty-six completed questionnaires -- thirty-seven TV responses and twenty-nine radio responses. This provided return rates of sixty-four percent for the television group, fifty-four percent for the radio group and fifty-eight percent overall.

Forty-nine of the respondents identified themselves. At least one

response was received from each of the markets sampled. One hundred percent of the television respondents and eighty-eight percent of the radio respondents had helicopter (aerial) capability. Questionnaires from the three radio stations without such capability were excluded, although three having fixed-wing aircraft were kept. Results are presented in Tables 1-8. Numbers of responses in some questions often do not correspond to the total numbers of questionnaires returned, as the trend question (Table 2) required helicopter capability for five years and the guideline question (Table 8) required an expression of concern about helicopter use. Based on a Chi Square test, some of the tables cannot be considered scientifically significant.

Helicopter Trends -- Two-thirds of the responding radio stations and almost one-half of the TV stations use a news helicopter each day (Table 1). The heavy response among radio stations appears a reflection of the large numbers using helicopters for daily traffic reports. Table 2 shows forty-two percent of TV stations increasing helicopter usage over the past five years, with forty percent decreasing usage. Among the radio stations, the trend seems slightly upward, although roughly half the stations saw no change.

If guidelines are related to the prevalence of news helicopters, figures here would argue in favor of them. Not only is helicopter capability almost universal among responding stations, it appears helicopters are used frequently. If guidelines are related to growth trends, analysis here would not support the argument, although findings do not suggest a marked drop in levels of helicopter use.

TABLE 1: USAGE OF HELICOPTERS

	Television (N=37)	Radio (N=25)
Each Day.....	45%	69%
Once Per Week .....	35%	8%
Every Other Week.....	5%	0%
When Applicable.....	8%	15%
No Response.....	5%	8%

$X^2=4.82$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.05$

"Once Per Week," "Every Other Week" and "When Applicable" were combined in order to obtain minimum cell expected values. "No Response" was excluded in the test.

TABLE 2: FIVE-YEAR TREND

	Television (N=35)	Radio (N=20)
Increased Significantly.....	15%	15%
Increased Somewhat.....	27%	20%
Remained the Same.....	19%	45%
Decreased Somewhat.....	27%	10%
Decreased Significantly.....	13%	5%
No Response.....	0%	5%

$X^2=4.80$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.05$

"Increased Significantly" and "Increased Somewhat" were combined, and "Decreased Somewhat" and "Decreased Significantly" were combined in order to obtain minimum cell expected values. "No Response" was excluded in the test.

Competitive Pressure/"Non Essential" Use -- Results in the competitive survival analysis (Table 3) are striking, and would give strong support for guidelines based on the idea of competitive influence. Eighty-three percent of the television stations and sixty-two percent of the radio stations view helicopters as competitive implements.

In the "non-essential" news analysis (Table 4), results are not scientifically significant, but worthy of note. As such, they do not provide dramatic support for guidelines based on "non-essential" use. Among TV respondents, twenty-two percent claimed to never use helicop-

ters in "non-essential" situations, while more than half said they did it ten percent of the time or less. In the radio category, traffic reporting was considered "essential." With that, more than half the respondents listed "non-essential" use at the ten percent level or less.

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TABLE 3: HELICOPTER FOR COMPETITIVE SURVIVAL

	Television (N=37)	Radio (N=26)
To a Great Extent.....	37%	27%
Somewhat of a Factor.....	46%	35%
Not a Factor.....	11%	12%
No Response.....	6%	27%

$X^2=4.45$ ,  $df=2$ , nsd

"No Response" was excluded in the test.

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TABLE 4: "NON ESSENTIAL NEWS"

	Television (N=37)	Radio (N=26)
0 Percent of the Time.....	22%	23%
1-10 Percent of the Time.....	43%	31%
11-20 Percent of the Time.....	24%	12%
21-30 Percent of the Time.....	8%	15%
More Than 31 Percent of Time..	3%	15%
No Response.....	0%	4%

$X^2=5.14$ ,  $df=3$ , nsd

"11-20," "21-30" and "More Than 31" were combined in order to obtain minimum cell expected values. "No Response" was excluded in the test.

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Helicopter Concern and Guidelines -- The final four analyses examine feelings and possible decision-making attitudes among the news executives. These tables are not scientifically significant, although results point in a coherent direction. Results suggests no prominent concern among the news directors regarding helicopter news usage. Among those who did note concern, support for the establishment of guidelines was mixed. In the open-ended question about competitive concerns (Table 5), only twenty-seven percent of the TV respondents



and thirty-four percent of the radio respondents noted concern. Thirty percent of the TV respondents expressed concern about "non-essential" use of helicopters (Table 6), while only sixteen percent of radio respondents expressed this view. The general question of helicopter concerns (Table 7), provided another difference in TV and radio results; a slight majority of radio respondents said they were concerned, while the corresponding level of concern among TV respondents was forty-two percent. This evidence, although not making a case for or against guidelines, suggests a low level of potential receptiveness.

In the direct question on guidelines, involving those indicating concern, (Table 8), a slight majority of TV respondents favored guidelines, while a two-thirds of radio respondents said they were opposed. When TV and radio responses are combined, the support rate is forty-three percent. When related to the total sample, support for guidelines drops to a level of twenty-one percent.

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TABLE 5: CONCERN ABOUT HELICOPTER AND COMPETITION

	Television (N=37)	Radio (N=26)
Yes.....	27%	34%
No.....	49%	27%
No Response.....	24%	39%
	$X^2=1.60, df=1, nsd$	

"No Response" was excluded in the test.

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TABLE 6: CONCERN ABOUT HELICOPTER AND "NON ESSENTIAL" USE

	Television (N=37)	Radio (N=26)
Yes.....	30%	16%
No.....	62%	80%
No Response.....	8%	4%
	$X^2=1.80, df=1, nsd$	

"No Response" was excluded in the test.

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 TABLE 7: CONCERN ABOUT HELICOPTER USE IN GENERAL
 

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	Television (N=37)	Radio (N=26)
Yes.....	42%	52%
No.....	55%	44%
No Response.....	3%	4%

$X^2=1.08$ ,  $df=1$ , nsd

"No Response" was excluded in the test.

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 TABLE 8: DO YOU FEEL GUIDELINES WOULD HELP?
 

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	Television (N=17)	Radio (N=13)
Yes.....	53%	31%
No.....	47%	69%
No Response.....	0%	0%

$X^2=.55$ ,  $df=1$ , nsd

"No Response" was excluded in the test.

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### Discussion

Critical examination of helicopter issues will not intensify unless broadcast journalism feels a need. Broadcast pilots emphasize such a need but feel broad concern is lacking. These data appear to back them up.

A turning point in the study appears to be the finding that news directors, in general, do not perceive a problem in helicopter journalism. Although varying levels of concern are evident, there is no groundswell of distress nor widespread interest in industry-wide guidelines. Indeed, a number of news executives close to past helicopter crashes, including those at WNBC Radio, WJR Radio in Detroit and KMGH-TV in Denver, were specific in their rejection of guidelines.

It seems there are many good reasons. Above all is the safety record of helicopter journalism in general; despite negative publicity, performance has been exemplary, especially considering total air

hours and conditions of flight. Regarding guidelines, four of the respondents maintained they would fail because some stations would eventually violate them. Another recurring contention was the idea that idiosyncrasies in individual markets would preclude a boilerplate solution. Four respondents commented on that possibility directly.

Elsewhere in the survey questions, other points were raised. Two news executives rejected guidelines, saying they would resist any outside effort to set policy in their newsrooms, one saying it violated free press rights. Several respondents argued that the use of news helicopters may be on the verge of decline. Two felt the promotional hoopla about helicopters has long passed. Five of the television respondents related that satellite news gathering has reduced the logistics and timing problems of covering events in distant locations. SNG is now limited to a relative handful of stations, but as it expands, it could reduce helicopter usage.

However, future direction of helicopter journalism was discussed in a much different light by two news directors at NBC-owned radio stations. As a result of the WNBC crash, the network has temporarily grounded all of its helicopter radio operations and is strongly considering terminating them. Related to this is another factor, not described by any of the respondents, but opened up by Galanis and the pilots. That has to do with an expected increase in insurance rates brought about by the recent crashes. These factors are noteworthy. While possibly part of an anti-guideline rationale, they nonetheless argue the opposite way, toward the need for industry-wide examination. Otherwise, helicopters may be taken away from journalism altogether.

There may indeed be impelling reasons why a majority of news directors do not see value in this discussion. The study, however, began on the premise that helicopter journalism does not embody broad questions, but rather a narrow one. In spite of the rising casualty rate, respondents tend to see the present situation as adequate. Does this mean that all reasonable doubt is removed?

The study indicates it does not. This is shown in the responses of the small number of news executives who did favor guidelines. Jim Hale of WHK-WMMS Radio in Cleveland states that FAA regulations are not specific. Bob Reichblum of WJLA-TV in Washington points to prevalent misuse and danger. Mark Young of WJBK-TV in Detroit feels "some pilots blatantly disobey instructions from officials." Bob Salsberg of WBZ Radio in Boston is concerned about the "non essential" use issue. John G. Rodman of WEEI Radio in Boston sees ambiguity in weather-related flying conditions.

A good case for guidelines, at least within the scope of this study, is found in responses from Dianne Fukami of KPIX-TV and Darrel R. Compton of KRON-TV. both in San Francisco. Stations there have implemented a series of market-wide guidelines, taking in some of the ideas previously discussed. Both noted intense competitive influences and, in this setting, Compton declares, "it's been a great help."

Nevertheless, what may be the best supporting case here is something completely different. It has to do with a startling level of misconception regarding fundamental points, reflected in the questionnaire. Three news directors flatly stated that FAA regulations guide their use of helicopters. Another said that industry-wide guidelines on news helicopter safety standards are "on the books," while another said there are too many guidelines on helicopters

already. Meanwhile, six of the news directors responded to the effect that "common sense" was guideline enough. The noted regulations and guidelines do not seem to exist, and "common sense" is precisely the concept rousing the animosity of their pilots. Galanis sees the management attitude as one of gross oversimplification,<sup>23</sup>

The FAA guidelines are vague. In all cases the pilot by himself makes the final decision. If the pilot doesn't fly for three or four days there is pressure from the station. It puts the pilot in a bad position. He says to himself, "They told me if I didn't go I'd be fired."

Galanis says news directors are poorly informed on helicopter matters, but he does not blame them. To him, the central problem is inadequate communication among pilots, news directors and day-to-day journalists. Indeed, he sees the guidelines being drawn up by the NBPA as an informational device. "We're not out to create rules and regulations," he says, "just something we can go by."

The study leaves much open for further pursuit. Several news directors said a key aspect of the issue is ownership, the idea that outright ownership of a helicopter is preferable to rental agreements. Indeed, the survey indicates that seventy-five percent of the television stations and eighty percent of the radio stations relied on rentals. It might also be worthwhile to probe differences in TV and radio orientations toward helicopters. At present, the NBPA is not seeking members among radio pilots. Such differences were hinted in many of the results, including the question on concern about "non essential" uses. Far more TV respondents than radio respondents expressed concern, some writing on the questionnaire they did not feel all radio traffic reporting was essential. Based on the survey, radio news directors would disagree.

Beyond this, it appears that many specific issues related here, such as competitive influences, news flying decision making, the promotional yield of helicopter journalism and newsroom communication could kindle extensive discussion individually. This might especially be true in the immediate future, with the NBPA working to heighten concern. A number of other considerations turned up, including dangers posed by helicopters to people on the ground and newsroom budget factors. They seem points for further research.

Issues raised in this study really only involve a small number of journalists, in a very unique news gathering situation. Yet, as unique as they might be, they touch one of the deepest planes of discussion, that dealing with the potential loss of life. News organizations seldom see their daily duties in this light. Nevertheless, the ten people who died in news helicopter crashes in 1986 suggests this may be a valid perspective.

It seems safe to conclude that such discussion would be useful. It is an issue of journalism, and no one consulted in this study sees it any other way. As one of the radio news directors stated, "We have met the enemy and it is us."

It is useful as a way to advance journalism. Useful because worthwhile examination may save a life.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Ted Lopatkiewicz, National Transportation Safety Board, Washington, D.C. Telephone interview, Feb. 17, 1987.

<sup>2</sup> See Joan Williams, "Live at Five/Tornado in Action on KARE Television," RTNDA Communicator, Dec., 1986.

<sup>3</sup> Harry J. Skornia. Television and the News: A Critical Appraisal. Palo Alto: Pacific Books, 1968, p. 37.

<sup>4</sup> Richard D. Yoakam and Charles F. Cremer, ENG: Television News and the New Technology. New York: Random House, p. 302.

<sup>5</sup> Lopatkiewicz.

<sup>6</sup> Doug O'Brien, News Director, WNBC Radio, New York, New York. Personal letter, Jan. 29, 1987.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Van Sant, CBS Evening News, Dec. 5, 1986, taken from RTNDA Intercom, Jan., 1987.

<sup>8</sup> New York Times, May 6, 1985, p. 40.

<sup>9</sup> Accounts are taken from Jack Taylor, "Pilot Apparently Lacked Experience She Had Claimed," Denver Post, Dec. 9, 1982; Clark Secrest, "TV Executives Deny Competition Played Part in Tragic Crash," Denver Post, Dec. 10, 1982; Time Magazine, Dec. 27, 1982.

<sup>10</sup> Secrest.

<sup>11</sup> New York Times, July 26, 1977, p. 17.

<sup>12</sup> New York Times, May 28, 1980, p. 13.

<sup>13</sup> New York Times, Jan. 22, 1986, p. 12.

<sup>14</sup> John Haralson, former Executive Producer, KUSA-TV, Denver, Colorado. Telephone interview, Jan. 17, 1987.

<sup>15</sup> Ernie Schultz, President, Radio-Television News Directors Association, Washington, D.C. and Vernon Stone, research coordinator for RTNDA. Telephone interviews, Feb. 16, 1987.

<sup>16</sup> Yoakam and Cremer, p. 335.

<sup>17</sup> Leo Galanis, President, National Broadcast Pilots Association, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Telephone interview, Feb. 16, 1987.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> National Broadcast Pilots Association, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, Survey of broadcast news pilots, June, 1986.

<sup>20</sup> Leo Galanis, "Helicopter Aerials -- A Pilot's View," News Photographer, Dec. 1985.

<sup>21</sup> KWTV, Oklahoma City, KWTV-9 Helicopter Operations, manual for news employees, 1986.

<sup>22</sup> Broadcast Yearbook 1986, Washington, D.C., Broadcasting Publications, Inc., 1985.

<sup>23</sup> Galanis interview.