

Flying the Columbine III

A remarkable story appeared in *Look* magazine on August 20, 1957, under the compelling headline, *I Fly the President*. In this carefully written article, Colonel William Draper declared that worry was his business and President Dwight Eisenhower's safety his reward.

Many interesting and intimate precautions were taken by Col. Draper's 33-man team responsible for the *Columbine III* preparatory to, during and after a flight. *Columbine III* is now located in the Presidential Gallery on a secure part of Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. It was President Eisenhower's personal airplane between 1954 and 1961 – a predecessor to today's Air Force One. Mamie Eisenhower christened it *Columbine III* in honor of the official flower of Colorado, her adopted home state, in ceremonies on November 24, 1954. *Columbine III* served as the presidential aircraft until President Eisenhower left office in January 1961. It remained in service transporting government officials and visiting foreign dignitaries throughout the world until it was retired to the museum in 1966.

But back to Col. Draper and his responsibility. Every member of his crew was a specialist and a perfectionist. Aeronautical standards are not sufficiently demanding to satisfy those who fly the President. An oil leak in the *Columbine* would keep the crew up all night. Usually, two tests were considered adequate to check such a repair. Draper took 10.

The then-36-year-old pilot was always available. On a trip, he slept with not one, but two, alarm clocks. Aircraft Commander Draper said: "People often ask me what it's like to have the responsibility of the President's life in my hands. I think it demands a special dedication. Everyone in the crew down to the newest mechanic must have it."

Does that commitment ring a bell? It certainly has application to the work of Life Care, Century Park and Life Care at Home. Every job is important, and every member of the team must be dedicated to the mission entrusted to us. It is, indeed, a heavy responsibility, but it brings great personal and spiritual rewards.

--Beecher Hunter