Aviation Investigation Preliminary Report

Location:	Washington, DC	**Incident Number:**	OPS26LA063
Date & Time:	August 4, 2026, 14:34 Local	**Registration:**	MILITARY - VM1 (A1); N307LH (A2)
Aircraft:	Sikorsky VH3D (A1); YABORA INDUSTRIA AERONAUTICA S ERJ 170-200 LR (A2)	**Injuries:**	N/A (A1); N/A (A2)
Flight Conducted Under:	Armed Forces (A1); Part 121: Air carrier - Scheduled (A2)		

On August 4, 2026, about 1434 eastern daylight time (EDT), Marine One (VM1) a Sikorsky VH-3D, and Envoy Air flight 3742 (ENY3742), an Embraer E-170, were involved in a loss of separation about 2 miles north of Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA), Arlington, Virginia. There were no injuries reported to the passengers or crewmembers on board either aircraft.

VM1 was a military Presidential transport local flight operating under the provisions of Title 14 *Code of Federal Regulations (CFR)* Part 91 from The Ellipse Park, Washington, D.C. ENY3742 was a scheduled domestic passenger flight operating under the provisions of Title 14 *CFR* Part 121 from DCA to Pensacola International Airport (PNS), Pensacola, Florida. At the time of the loss of separation, VM1 had departed The Ellipse when ENY3742 was departing runway 1 and beginning their initial climb. After the loss of separation, VM1 completed their local flight without incident while ENY3742 completed their flight to PNS without incident. Figure 1 below shows key locations and estimated position of both aircraft at FAA's estimated closest proximity.

This information is preliminary and subject to change.

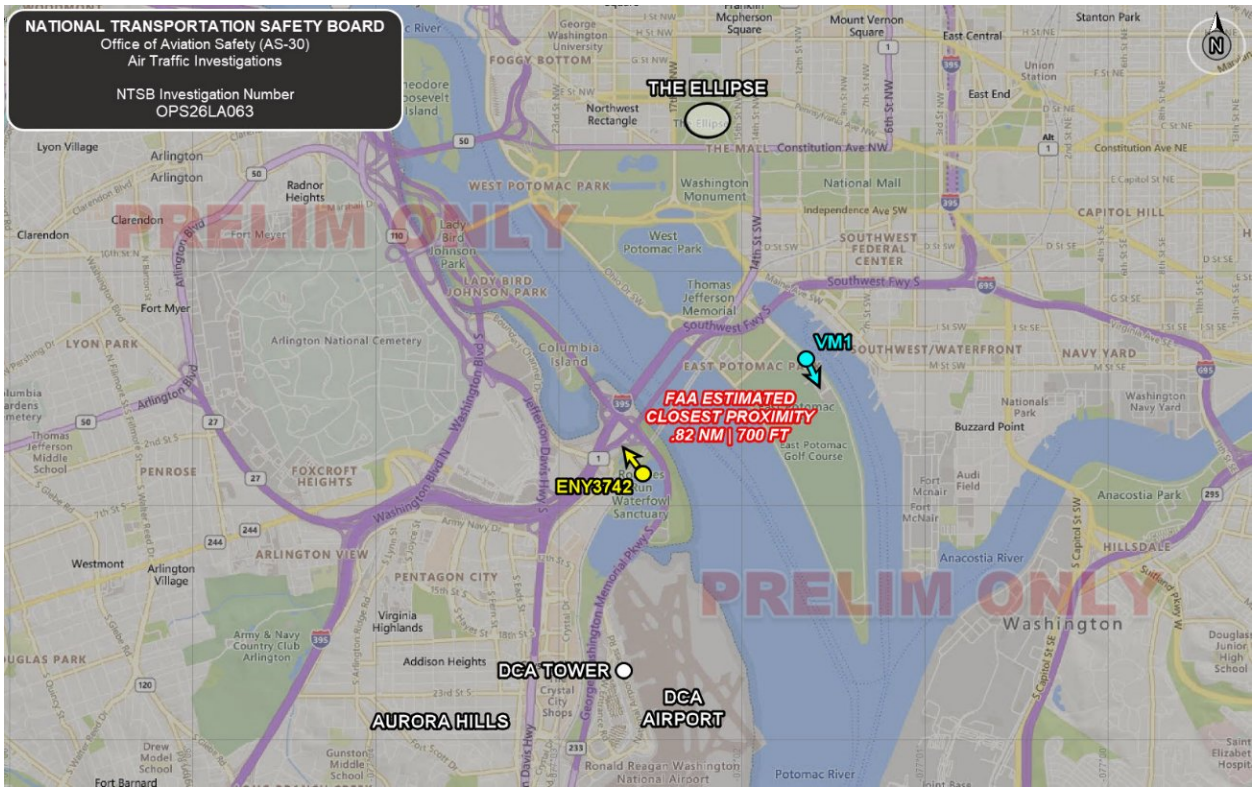

Figure 1. Key locations and estimated position of both aircraft at FAA's estimated closest proximity overlaid onto a street map in Google Earth.

As part of the investigative process, the NTSB invited qualified parties to participate in the investigation. Parties to the investigation include the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Department of the Navy (DON), and Envoy Air Inc. In accordance with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Annex 13, Centro de Investigação e Prevenção de Acidentes Aeronáuticos (CENIPA) of Brazil, representing the State of Design of the Embraer 170 airplane, was notified of the investigation.

Certified air traffic control (ATC) audio recordings and Standard Terminal Automation Replacement System (STARS) radar data were provided by the FAA. Table 1 provides a summary of key communications between the DCA Airport Traffic Control Tower (ATCT) Helicopter Control (HC) and Local Control (LC) controllers and the flight crews of VM1 and ENY3742. The two transmissions in red italics were sourced from a third-party application: *ATC – Live Air Traffic Radio*. According to the disclaimer in their application, ATC audio in their application is sourced from *Enhanced Radar* (a company that builds Artificial Intelligence (AI)-driven systems to transcribe, analyze, and optimize ATC communications and airspace operations) and processed with their Y4-small AI model. These transmissions were not received by FAA ATC radio receivers and were unable to be heard by the DCA ATCT HC or LC controllers. *Note: The HC and LC positions operate on different frequencies and therefore,*

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flightcrews and controllers can only hear what is being transmitted on the frequency they are using – in this case, VM1 was on the HC frequency and ENY3742 was on the LC frequency.

Table 1. Summary of key communications between DCA ATCT (both HC and LC control), and flight crews of VM1 and ENY3742. All times are approximate and in EDT. (Communications in red italics were not able to be heard on FAA ATC frequencies.)

Time	Ident	Communication
1411:38	DCA HC	During a passdown relief briefing that took place between two controllers during position changeover at the HC position, the controller being relieved did advise the relieving controller of pending VIP movement occurring soon.
1431:00	*VM1*	*The flight crew of VM1 attempted to advise the HC controller that they were 3 minutes from liftoff.*
1431:43	*VM1*	*The flight crew of VM1 reattempted contact with the HC controller and queried if they had copied their previous 3 minutes to liftoff call.*
1431:43	UNK	An unintelligible transmission occurred on the HC frequency and the HC controller broadcast an advisory that the transmission was broken and unreadable.
1432:47	DCA LC	The LC controller instructed ENY3742 to line up and wait on runway 1, and advised the flightcrew that there was traffic on approach to the same runway about 4.5 miles out.
1433:57	DCA LC	The LC controller cleared ENY3742 for takeoff from runway 1 and advised the flightcrew that the approach traffic was now 2.25 miles out.
1434:03	VM1	VM1 contacted the HC controller and advised that they were proceeding as briefed. The HC controller queried the crew to confirm that they were proceeding as briefed, to which the crew acknowledged and repeated they were proceeding as briefed.
1434:20	DCA HC	The HC controller acknowledged, provided the altimeter setting of 30.07 and stated “okay, no three minutes roger, proceed as requested”
1434:34	DCA HC	The HC controller advised the flightcrew of VM1 of traffic departing from runway 1 [ENY3742]; the flightcrew of VM1 acknowledged and advised they had visual on the traffic.
1434:57	DCA LC	The LC controller instructed the aircraft that was arriving behind ENY3742, to go around, climb and maintain 3,000 ft and to turn left heading 270°.

A preliminary FAA estimate of the closest proximity between VM1 and ENY3742 determined they were about .82 miles apart laterally and about 700 feet vertically, as shown in figure 2.

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Figure 2. Radar flight tracks of both VM1 and ENY3742 overlaid onto satellite imagery with the FAA estimated closest proximity illustrated (.82 nautical miles (nm) lateral and 700 feet vertical).

Envoy Air Flight 3742 Flightcrew Statements

Postincident statements provided by ENY3742 flightcrew revealed the first officer (FO) was the pilot flying and the captain was the pilot monitoring. Both crewmembers recalled that after takeoff from runway 1, as the aircraft climbed and accelerated, the Terminal Collision Avoidance System (TCAS) announced a traffic advisory (TA) with "Traffic, Traffic." At no time was the TCAS TA target acquired visually by either crewmember. The TCAS TA target symbol remained to the right and below their own-ship symbol the entire time. Both recalled seeing 600 feet of vertical separation being displayed on TCAS as the TA target passed behind their right wing of the own-ship symbol on the display. The captain added that at no time was the TCAS resolution advisory (RA) displayed, announced, or commanded.

DCA Helicopter Frequency Communications

Certified ATC audio recordings revealed that the first attempt to contact DCA ATCT was not received at all, and the second attempt was broken and completely unreadable (to which the controller advised on frequency). The frequency had been working normally and there were no known outages or reports of degradation of this frequency on the day of the event, nor was

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there a history of problems with this frequency according to FAA. As a result of the missed transmissions with VM1 on the day of the incident, FAA technicians from Spectrum Engineering conducted a coverage analysis and determined that there was not adequate line-of-sight to ensure communications between the radio transmitter/receiver sight and The Ellipse, where VM1 was temporarily operating from while construction was ongoing at the White House.

FAA Technical Operations Personnel Interviews

Postincident interviews were conducted with personnel from FAA's technical operations responsible for the ATC radios used at DCA ATCT. Both technicians stated that there had been no documented history of reported problems with the HC frequency and had been no report on the day of the incident until after the incident had occurred. After finding the line-of-sight deficiencies in their coverage analysis done immediately after becoming aware of the problem, the FAA relocated the radios for the HC frequency from their location in a nearby residential neighborhood, to the top of the DCA ATCT.

DCA ATCT Air Traffic Manager Interview

The postincident interview with the air traffic manager (ATM) also revealed that there was no known history of problems with the HC frequency from ATC. The ATM also reported that once the technicians had relocated the radios to the tower, ATC conducted radio checks with two separate Marine Helicopter Squadron One (HMX-1) aircraft located at The Ellipse and in the local vicinity and reported no deficiencies. Additionally, there were no deficiencies noted in communication with other helicopters in communication with DCA ATCT either.

Meeting Between DCA ATCT and HMX-1

DCA ATCT and HMX-1 staff met the week preceding the incident on July 30, 2026. According to the ATM, this was not a regularly scheduled meeting, but rather a meeting that had been requested by HMX-1 to discuss local operations and to express the need for more training flights within the DCA Class B airspace, and ATC wanted to discuss concern with recent reports of their not receiving the required 3 minute to liftoff call from HMX-1 flight crews. At that time, HMX-1 advised that communications "had been spotty," and felt that may have been the reason. It was agreed that they would attempt other means of reaching the tower in situations where they were unable to reach them to provide the 3-minute call (for example, relaying through another aircraft), and on the day of the incident evidence showed they did. After not reaching them on their initial attempt, they had attempted to relay the 3-minute call through the helicopter facility at Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling, which was also unsuccessful.

Loss of Standard Separation

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The FAA reported the preliminary estimated closest proximity between VM1 and ENY3742 as about .82 nm laterally and 700 feet vertically. This would meet the required minimum radar separation as set forth in FAA Order JO 7110.65BB, Air Traffic Control, paragraph 7-9-4, which required 1.5 nm lateral or 500 feet vertical separation within Class B airspace, between a VFR aircraft and any aircraft weighing more than 19,000 pounds or any turbojet aircraft. The NTSB is still reviewing all sources of surveillance data to calculate and confirm closest proximity. Additionally, in accordance with the letter of agreement (LOA) between HMX-1 and Washington, DC area ATC facilities, aircraft operations with the President on board require flightcrews to contact DCA ATCT on 134.35 (HC frequency) 3 minutes prior to departure, and according to the LOA between DCA ATCT and PCT TRACON, DCA would stop all departures once the 3-minute call was received. In this incident, after attempting to contact DCA ATCT at least twice, they ultimately departed and were then able to reach DCA ATCT when the helicopter reached an altitude that provided adequate line-of sight communications. Having received no 3-minute call, the LC controller had cleared ENY3742 for takeoff and the airplane was becoming airborne simultaneously as VM1 established communications with the tower. The current altimeter setting and traffic advisory were provided to VM1, to which the crew immediately reported visual contact with the traffic.

The NTSB's incident investigation is ongoing.

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information (A1)

Aircraft Make:	Sikorsky	**Registration:**	MILITARY - VM1
Model/Series:	VH3D	**Aircraft Category:**	Helicopter
Amateur Built:			
Operator:	US MILITARY	**Operating Certificate(s) Held:**	Other operator of large aircraft
Operator Designator Code:			

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Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information (A2)

Aircraft Make:	YABORA INDUSTRIA AERONAUTICA S	**Registration:**	N307LH
Model/Series:	ERJ 170-200 LR	**Aircraft Category:**	Airplane
Amateur Built:			
Operator:	AMERICAN AIRLINES INC	**Operating Certificate(s) Held:**	Flag carrier (121)
Operator Designator Code:			

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	VMC	**Condition of Light:**	
Observation Facility, Elevation:	KDCA,13 ft msl	**Observation Time:**	14:00 Local
Distance from Accident Site:	2 Nautical Miles	**Temperature/Dew Point:**	31°C /19°C
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Few / 5000 ft AGL	**Wind Speed/Gusts, Direction:**	7 knots / None, 90°
Lowest Ceiling:		**Visibility:**	10 miles
Altimeter Setting:	30.08 inches Hg	**Type of Flight Plan Filed:**	NONE (A1); IFR (A2)
Departure Point:	Washington, DC (A1); Washington, DC (A2)	**Destination:**	Washington, DC (A1); Pensacola, FL (PNS) (A2)

Wreckage and Impact Information (A1)

Crew Injuries:	N/A	**Aircraft Damage:**	None
Passenger Injuries:		**Aircraft Fire:**	None
Ground Injuries:	N/A	**Aircraft Explosion:**	None
Total Injuries:	N/A	**Latitude, Longitude:**	38.885564,-77.053639

Wreckage and Impact Information (A2)

Crew Injuries:	N/A	**Aircraft Damage:**	None
Passenger Injuries:		**Aircraft Fire:**	None
Ground Injuries:	N/A	**Aircraft Explosion:**	None
Total Injuries:	N/A	**Latitude, Longitude:**	38.885564,-77.053639

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Soper, Brian
Additional Participating Persons:	Ed Delehant; Envoy Airlines (PC); Irving, TX Heidi Kemner; FAA - AVP (PC); Washington, DC Erik Carroll; FAA - SIRG; Washington, DC
Investigation Class:	Class 3
Note:	The NTSB did not travel to the scene of this incident.

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