

GAO

Report to the Chairman, Subcommittee
on Trade, Committee on Ways and
Means, House of Representatives

September 1998

CUSTOMS SERVICE

Aviation Program Missions, Resources, and Performance Measures





United States
General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

General Government Division

B-279957

September 9, 1998

The Honorable Philip M. Crane
Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade
Committee on Ways and Means
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The Customs Service is one of over 50 federal agencies engaged in the effort to control the use of illegal drugs in the United States. Because Customs' mission is basically to ensure that goods and people entering the United States do so in compliance with trade laws, Customs' drug-control role involves prevention, detection, and seizure of drugs being smuggled across the borders. In addition to inspectors at over 300 ports of entry around the country, Customs operates an aviation program that is to (1) detect, track, and assist in the apprehension of nonscheduled aircraft, boats, and vehicles attempting to smuggle drugs into the United States; (2) support U.S. foreign counterdrug operations; and (3) provide law enforcement support to Customs units as well as other federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies.

This report responds to your January 15, 1998, request that we provide information on the Customs Aviation Program. Specifically, this report describes (1) the program's missions and how they have changed since fiscal year 1992, (2) the annual level of resources and activities since fiscal year 1992, and (3) the adequacy of the performance measures Customs uses to judge the results of its aviation program.

Results in Brief

Since the establishment of the Customs Aviation Program in 1969, its basic mandate to use air assets to counter the drug smuggling threat has not changed. Originally, the Customs Aviation Program had two principal missions: (1) border interdiction of drugs being smuggled by plane into the United States and (2) law enforcement support to other Customs' offices as well as other federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies. In 1993, President Clinton instituted a new policy to control drugs coming from South and Central America. Because Customs aircraft were to be used to help carry out this policy, foreign counterdrug operations became a third principal mission for the aviation program. Since then, the program has devoted about 25 percent of its resources to the border interdiction mission, 25 percent to foreign counterdrug operations, and 50 percent to other law enforcement support.

Customs Aviation Program funding decreased from about \$195 million in fiscal year 1992 to about \$135 million in fiscal year 1997—about 31 percent in constant (1992) or inflation-adjusted dollars. While available funds have decreased, operations and maintenance costs per aircraft flight hour have increased. Customs Aviation Program officials said that this increase in costs is one of the reasons they are flying fewer hours each year. From fiscal year 1993 to fiscal year 1997, the total number of flight hours for all missions decreased by over one-third, from about 45,000 hours to about 29,000 hours. The size of Customs' fleet dropped in fiscal year 1994, when Customs took 19 surveillance aircraft out of service because of funding reductions; and the fleet has remained at about 115 since then. The number of Customs Aviation Program onboard personnel has dropped steadily, from a high of 956 in fiscal year 1992 to 745 by the end of fiscal year 1997.

Customs has been using traditional law enforcement performance measures for the aviation program (e.g., number of seizures, weight of drugs seized, number of arrests). These measures, however, are used to track activity, not results or effectiveness. Until 1997, Customs also used an "air threat index" as an indicator of its effectiveness in detecting illegal air traffic. However, Customs has discontinued using this indicator, as well as selected other performance measures, because Customs determined that they were not good measures of results and effectiveness. Recognizing that these measures were not providing adequate insights into whether the program was producing desired results, Customs is developing new performance measures in order to better measure results.

Background

The Customs Aviation Program was established in 1969 to reduce the level of smuggling, increase smugglers' risk and cost, and improve detection and apprehension of drug smuggling by aircraft, boats, and vehicles. The Customs Aviation Program gets its authority from a number of sources. The Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) has designated the Customs Service as the lead federal agency responsible for interdicting the movement of illicit drugs into the United States. In addition, 19 U.S.C. 1590 also provides the specific legal authority under which Customs enforces aviation smuggling laws. Congress provided specific language regarding the operations of the Customs Air Program beginning with Customs fiscal year 1996 appropriation, contained in P.L. 104-52. The provision stated that the program's operations include, among other things, "the interdiction of narcotics and other goods; the provision of support to Customs and other Federal, State, and local agencies in the enforcement or administration of

laws enforced by the Customs Service; and, at the discretion of the Commissioner of Customs, the provision of assistance to Federal, State, and local agencies in other law enforcement and emergency humanitarian efforts.”

The Customs Aviation Program is headed by the Executive Director, Air Interdiction Division, located in Washington, D.C. The Executive Director reports to the Assistant Commissioner, Customs Office of Investigations. Its field headquarters, the Customs National Aviation Center (CNAC), located in Oklahoma City, OK, provides operational, administrative, and logistical control and accountability over all Customs aviation resources. In addition, the aviation program also operates its Domestic Air Interdiction Coordination Center (DAICC) in Riverside, CA, which conducts radar surveillance using various radar sources to identify, intercept, and apprehend suspect aircraft, utilizing Customs or other agencies’ air assets. The aviation program maintains 10 air branches and 10 air units, as shown in appendix I. The ten air units are subcomponents of the branches and report to an air branch chief. The aviation program uses a variety of aircraft such as the P-3 long-range aircraft, the Blackhawk helicopter, and the Citation II, a high-speed, multijet fixed-wing aircraft. A detailed inventory of the Customs air fleet and pictures of selected aircraft are shown in table 3 and figure 5.

Scope and Methodology

As agreed with your office, we used the approach described in this section to respond to your request. We performed our review at U.S. Customs headquarters; the CNAC in Oklahoma City, OK; the DAICC in Riverside, CA; the Customs Air Branch in Miami, FL; and the Department of Defense’s (DOD) headquarters and DOD’s Southern Command’s headquarters in Miami, FL. We also met with officials at ONDCP, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the U.S. Interdiction Coordinator, and the U.S. Coast Guard.

To determine Customs Aviation Program missions and whether they had changed over time, we interviewed Customs Aviation Program officials and the Assistant Commissioner, Office of Investigations. We also reviewed relevant legislation, executive branch policies and guidance, Customs policies and procedures, the National Drug Control Strategy, and interagency agreements. In addition to these reviews, we interviewed officials at ONDCP, DOD, DEA, and the U.S. Coast Guard.

To determine the Customs Aviation Program's resources and activities for fiscal years 1992 to 1997, we reviewed congressional appropriations to Customs for the program. We examined Customs documents showing staffing, aircraft, and staff support levels for these years. We also reviewed total annual program funding and expenditures by mission. To determine the activities of the aviation program for fiscal years 1992 to 1997, we reviewed expenditures by mission and data on flight hours for fiscal years 1992 through 1997. To determine which aircraft take-off cancellations were related to resource constraints and which were not, we analyzed the reasons for the cancellations. For those cancellations that occurred because an aircraft or aircrew was not available, we categorized as resource dependent. For a small percentage of cancellations (4 percent) we were unable to determine the reason for cancellation. All other cancellations we categorized as not resource dependent. Customs officials agreed with this approach.

To determine the adequacy of the performance measures Customs uses to judge the results of its aviation program efforts, we interviewed officials from Customs and other federal agencies involved in drug control and interdiction and reviewed relevant documents provided by these agencies. We reviewed the ONDCP National Drug Control Strategy and Customs documents showing the results of the aviation program over the past 6 fiscal years. To obtain information on Customs Aviation Program performance measures for its antidrug activities, we interviewed officials responsible for the Customs Aviation Program and reviewed key agency documents such as Customs Aviation Program performance plans developed for implementing the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA) P.L. 103-62. We compared the Customs Aviation Program performance measurement plans with GPRA requirements to determine whether they conform to the principles of the act.

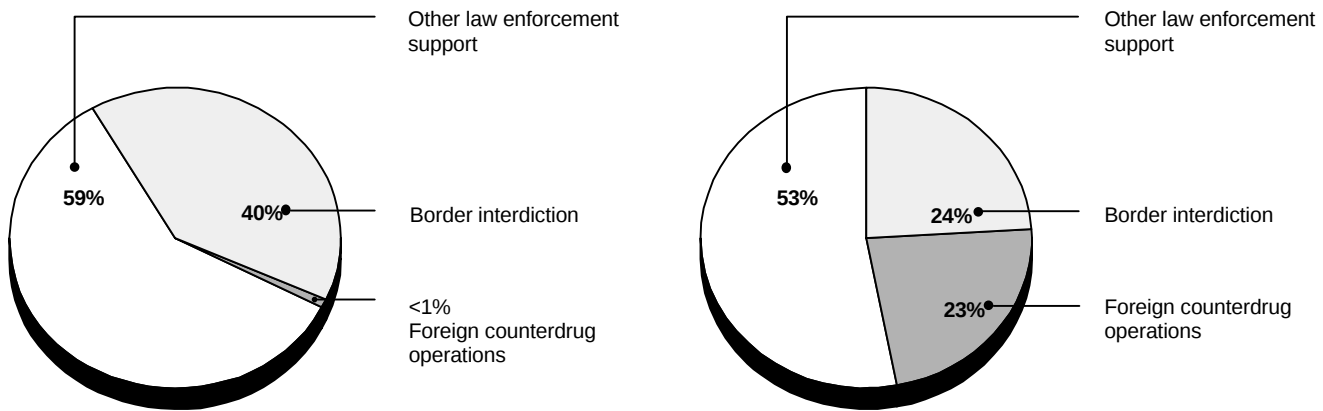
We did our audit work between April and August 1998 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Aviation Program Missions: Border Interdiction, Foreign Counterdrug Operations, and Other Law Enforcement Support

Since the establishment of the Customs Aviation Program in 1969, its basic mandate to use air assets to counter the drug smuggling threat has not changed. The program was established to reduce the level of drug smuggling; increase smugglers' risk and cost; and improve the detection and apprehension of drug smuggling by aircraft, boats, and vehicles. What has changed, however, is the amount of resources spent among the three specific mission areas—border interdiction, foreign counterdrug operations, and other law enforcement support. Program priorities, as measured by the amount of mission flight hours, have shifted from border interdiction to supporting foreign counterdrug operations. The percent of flight hours used to provide support to other law enforcement agencies¹ has decreased slightly. Key events in Customs Aviation Program history are shown in appendix II.

As shown in figure 1, flight hours for the border interdiction mission decreased from about 40 percent of total flight hours in fiscal year 1993 (the earliest year complete data were available) to 24 percent in fiscal year 1997. Flight hours for the foreign counterdrug operations mission increased from less than 1 percent in fiscal year 1993 to 23 percent in fiscal year 1997. During this 5-year period, the other law enforcement support mission decreased slightly from about 59 percent of total mission flight hours to 53 percent.

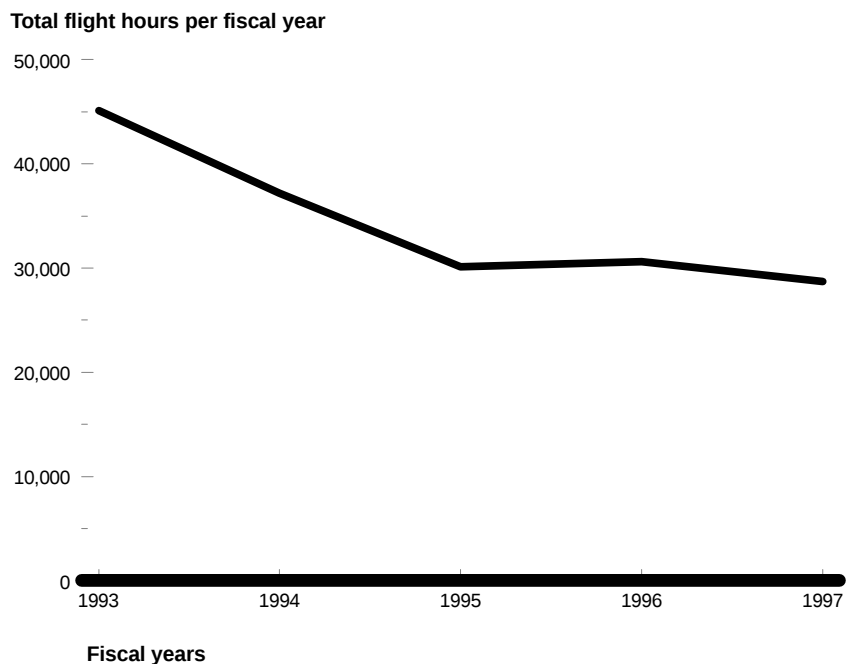
¹While the Customs Aviation Program provides support to other federal, state, and law enforcement agencies, the majority of the support provided is to other Customs' offices.

Figure 1: Flight Hours by Mission**1993****1997**

Source: Customs Aviation Program data.

From fiscal year 1993 to fiscal year 1997, the total number of flight hours for all missions decreased over one-third, from about 45,000 hours to about 29,000 hours, as shown in figure 2.

Figure 2: Total Mission Flight Hours



Source: Customs Aviation Program data.

Border Interdiction

An original mission of the aviation program was aimed at border interdiction to counter the air drug smuggling threat along the Southwest border. By 1965, drug smugglers had turned to private aircraft as an effective means of border penetration. By 1969, major unchallenged drug smuggling routes had been established along the entire southern border of the United States. At that time, Customs owned only one single-engine aircraft. By 1972, Customs had acquired 11 fixed-wing aircraft and 8 helicopters to challenge the increasing drug threat and had established air branches in San Diego, CA; Tucson, AZ; Corpus Christi, TX; and Miami, FL.

In the early 1980s as the air drug smuggling threat decreased along the Southwest border and increased in the Gulf of Mexico and Florida areas, the Customs Aviation Program, along with other Customs units and other law enforcement agencies, began to address the critical drug smuggling problem facing those areas. DOD assets and Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) radar were dedicated in support of the aviation program's border interdiction mission. Navy aircraft were used to detect and notify Customs Service aircrews of suspect drug smuggling targets. In

the mid-1980s, Customs acquired its first P-3 aircraft for long-range surveillance and patrol activity and initiated its deployment of aerostats (i.e., radar mounted on balloons that are tethered to land bases or ships) to provide detection coverage along the southern border of the United States and the Caribbean area.

In 1987, Congress directed the establishment of Command, Control, and Intelligence centers to provide coordinated tactical control among the various agencies for air interdiction. Customs established a center in Richmond Heights, FL, and one in Riverside, CA. In 1994, these centers were consolidated into the DAICC in Riverside, CA.

The border interdiction mission is generally accomplished through a four-step process: (1) using DOD or FAA radar or other means, such as failure to file a flight plan with FAA or detection by patrol aircraft, to detect aircraft that are suspected of drug smuggling; (2) dispatching an interceptor aircraft, such as the high-speed, multijet engine Citation II, to physically locate the suspect aircraft and check the aircraft's registration number through various law enforcement databases to determine whether it has been involved in previous illegal activities; (3) employing tracker aircraft, such as the P-3, to follow the suspect aircraft to its destination; and (4) using a Blackhawk helicopter, which is a military aircraft capable of being staffed with several Customs or other federal, state, or local law enforcement officers, to stop the suspect aircraft when it lands, detain the crew, search the aircraft, and, if appropriate, arrest the suspect(s) for drug smuggling and seize any illegal drugs. As part of its border interdiction mission, Customs aircraft are also deployed to interdict land and marine targets as appropriate.

Foreign Counterdrug Operations

Customs started its foreign counterdrug operations in 1990. They began in Mexico and Central America with Customs aircraft being utilized to provide early detection of drug trafficking flights and other activities. The foreign counterdrug operations were greatly expanded in November of 1993, when President Clinton signed Presidential Decision Directive 14 (PDD-14), which established a new framework for international drug control efforts. PDD-14 directed an international drug control strategy to assist nations showing the political will to combat drug-trafficking organizations and interdict drug trafficking. Additionally, PDD-14 called for a shift in the focus of cocaine interdiction from the transit zone (i.e., the 2-million square-mile area between the United States and South American borders) to the source zone (i.e., countries where cocaine is produced,

primarily Columbia and Peru). Customs responded to PDD-14 by dedicating increased resources to its foreign counterdrug operations, primarily in South America, and less to border interdiction. These operations primarily support DOD, which is the lead agency for detecting and monitoring drug smuggling aircraft in the source zone countries. Currently, Customs has aircraft and aircrews in Mexico, Central America, and South America performing counterdrug activities.

The Customs Aviation Program supports U.S. foreign counterdrug operations by temporarily assigning aircraft and aircrews from its various air branches and units to Mexico, Central America, and South America. Customs aircraft and aircrews in these operations are used to detect and follow suspect drug trafficking aircraft and, if appropriate, alert host country apprehension forces. Customs aircraft and aircrews are also called upon to fly intelligence-gathering missions in support of U.S. foreign counterdrug activities. The P-3, and the Citation II are used in the foreign counterdrug operations mission.

Other Law Enforcement Support

Another original mission of the Customs Aviation Program was to assist other Customs units, the Department of the Treasury, and other federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies by providing other aviation law enforcement support. By 1996, Customs had acquired 61 aircraft, which are largely dedicated to the law enforcement support mission. In fiscal year 1997, Congress terminated the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) aviation program and directed the Customs Aviation Program to assume ATF's aviation responsibilities. As a result, Customs established aviation units in Sacramento, CA; Kansas City, KS; and Cincinnati, OH, for this new responsibility. Since 1993, support to other law enforcement agencies, which also included emergency humanitarian efforts, have accounted for about one-half of the Customs Aviation Program's activities and seizures. The Customs Aviation Program provides support to other law enforcement agencies by using its aircraft to provide surveillance of ongoing criminal investigations, such as undercover operations or following a suspect vehicle. The Customs Aviation Program primarily uses single-engine, fixed-wing aircraft and small helicopters in its law enforcement support role.

Customs' Aviation Resources and Mission Activities Have Decreased Since Fiscal Year 1992

Between fiscal years 1992 and 1997, the Aviation Program's overall funding, aircraft mission takeoffs, personnel, and number of aircraft have decreased. As a result of these reductions, Customs air branches have reduced their operations.

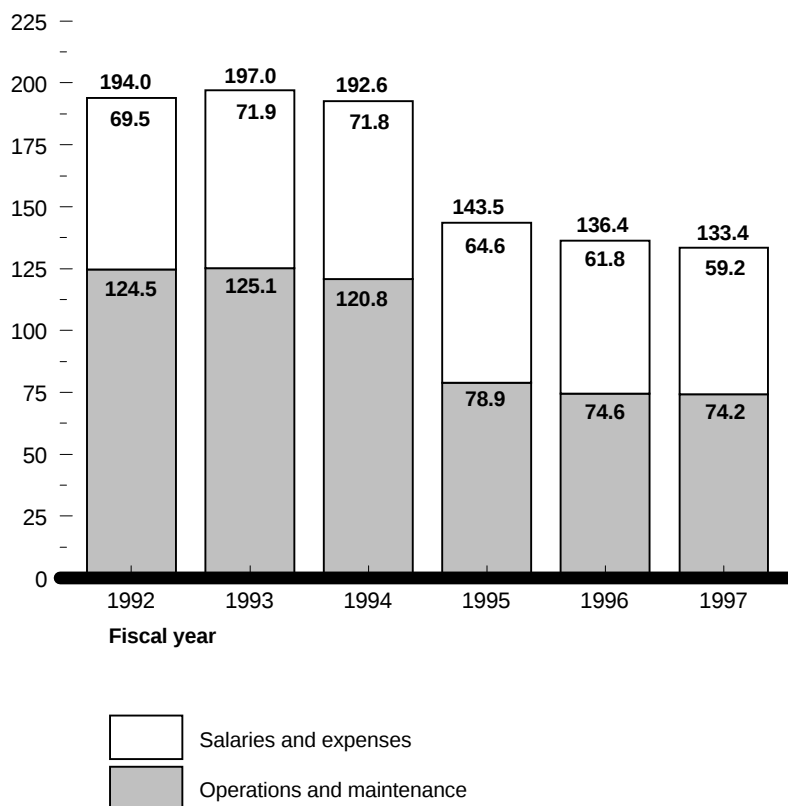
Aviation Program Funding Has Decreased Since Fiscal Year 1992

While Customs' Aviation Program funding increased slightly in fiscal year 1993, overall its budget, excluding capital investments,² decreased between fiscal years 1992 and 1997, as shown in figure 3. In constant or inflation-adjusted dollars, the decrease was 31 percent. The funding level for salaries and expenses, in constant dollars, decreased by about 15 percent. Similarly, funding for operations and maintenance declined by about 40 percent in constant dollars. In fiscal years 1992 through 1994, salaries and expenses comprised just over one-third of the annual program total, compared with just under two-thirds of the total for operations and maintenance. However, in the last 3 fiscal years, salaries and expenses increased to just under half of the total, while operations and maintenance decreased to just over one-half.

²Capital investment funds are used primarily to modify existing aircraft or to purchase new aircraft. These funds are not included because they are irregular amounts and would distort the data describing program activities, if included. For example, in fiscal year 1992, the Customs Aviation Program received \$41 million in constant dollars to modify one P-3 aircraft received from the Navy and to purchase seven support helicopters. Customs received \$77.8 million in fiscal year 1997 to modify two additional P-3s received from the Navy and to purchase two additional support helicopters.

Figure 3: Customs Aviation Program Funding

Constant 1992 dollars in millions



Source: Aviation Program appropriations data provided by Customs.

According to Customs officials, these reductions forced the agency in 1994 to reduce its border interdiction response from 24 hours per day to 16 hours per day at four of its air branches. As of August 1998, Miami, FL; Tucson, AZ; and San Angelo, TX; are the only 3 of the 10 air branches that provide 24-hours-per-day coverage. Customs officials told us that the branches work together as a means to compensate, in part, for the reduced coverage each branch provides. Miami air branch officials told us their branch works with the other branches to provide coverage when needed. In addition, Customs officials told us they ended 24-hour maintenance shifts at all the air branches and that only one maintenance crew is available during the day at each air branch.

Customs Aviation Program Mission Takeoffs Have Decreased

As shown in table 1, the total number of aircraft mission takeoffs decreased from about 22,000 in fiscal year 1992 to about 15,000 in fiscal year 1997. The number of times an aircraft did not take off after originally being requested to do so, increased from 1,013 in fiscal year 1992 to 2,076 in fiscal year 1997. This translates into a reduction from a 96 percent take-off rate in fiscal year 1992 to an 88 percent take-off rate in fiscal year 1997.

Table 1: Total Takeoffs and Cancelled Takeoffs During Fiscal Years 1992 Through 1997

Fiscal year	Total requests	Takeoffs	Cancelled takeoffs	Take-off rate percent
1992	22,873	21,860	1,013	96
1993	24,976	23,295	1,681	93
1994	21,422	20,280	1,142	95
1995	17,280	15,805	1,475	91
1996	17,382	15,915	1,467	92
1997	17,322	15,246	2,076	88

Source: Customs Aviation Program data.

Although the take-off rate decreased by 8 percent from fiscal year 1992 to fiscal year 1997, the actual number of cancelled takeoffs more than doubled. We analyzed the cancelled takeoffs for fiscal years 1992 and 1997 as shown in table 2. Most of the increase in the number of cancelled takeoffs was attributable to reasons that did not depend on resources, such as missions being cancelled or postponed by the law enforcement officials originally requesting the flight. However, other cancellations occurred because Customs Aviation Program resources, such as the appropriate aircraft or aircrew for the mission, were not available. For example, in October 1996, the California Riverside Aviation unit near the DAICC was requested to provide backup aviation support to the State Narcotics Task Force on a surveillance mission. However, this support could not be provided by the unit because the Cessna 210 aircraft or aircrew was not available; therefore, the case agent cancelled the backup request. In April 1997, several cancellations occurred because the Miami air branch did not have an aviation interdiction officer available for radar patrol.

Table 2: Analysis of Cancelled Takeoffs During Fiscal Years 1992 and 1997

Fiscal year	Resource dependent		Not resource dependent		Unable to determine		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1992	771	76	186	18	56	6	1,013	100
1997	1,150	56	838	40	88	4	2,076	100

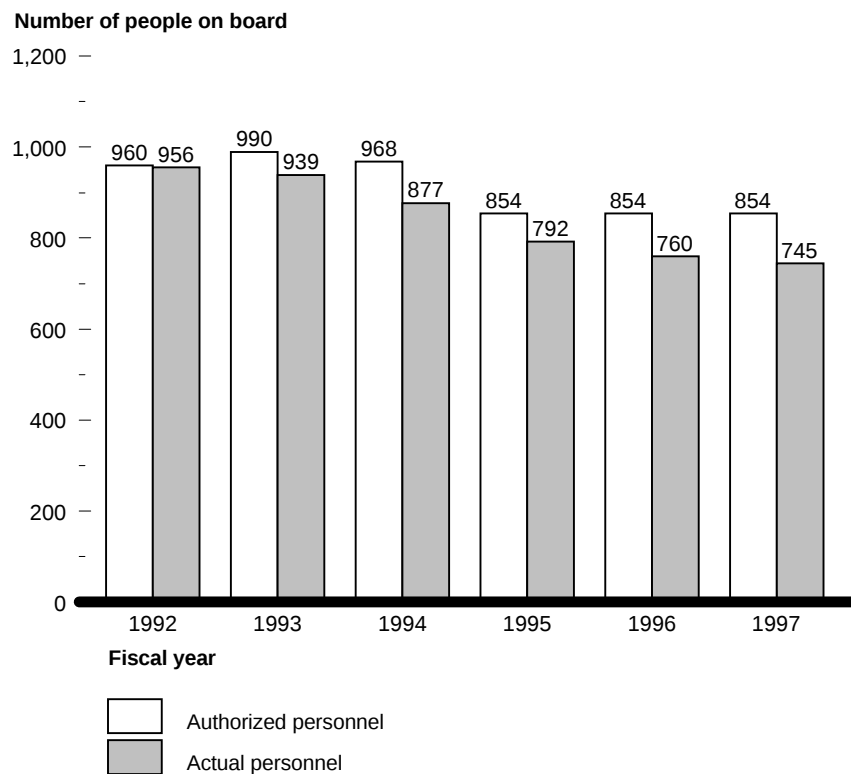
Source: GAO analysis of Customs Aviation Program data.

Personnel Levels Have Decreased Since Fiscal Year 1992

As shown in figure 4, the Customs Aviation Program's number of authorized personnel decreased by 11 percent between fiscal years 1992 and 1997, from 960 to 854. Also, the program's number of actual personnel decreased by 22 percent, from 956 to 745.

According to Customs officials, the aviation program lost personnel due to budget reductions, a hiring freeze in fiscal years 1993 through 1996, and attrition due to hiring of Customs Aviation Program pilots by commercial airlines. During this time, an average of about three people per month left the aviation program. In fiscal year 1997, the hiring freeze ended and the aviation program began hiring personnel.

Figure 4: Authorized and Actual Numbers of People on Board in the Aviation Program Have Decreased Since Fiscal Year 1992



Source: Customs Aviation Program data.

In fiscal year 1992, Customs implemented a new strategic plan to carry out its aviation program. The plan called for an authorized personnel level of 960, and the program received funding in fiscal year 1992 for this personnel level. However, program officials said that the plan could not be carried out fully because foreign counterdrug operations were added as a principal mission in fiscal year 1994, and the budget was reduced in fiscal year 1995.

Customs Operational Air Fleet Declined From the End of Fiscal Year 1992 Through May 1998

Table 3 shows the total number of aircraft operated by the Customs Aviation Program. The number of aircraft declined about 10 percent between fiscal years 1992 and 1997. Customs officials said that during fiscal years 1993 and 1994, the number of fixed-wing aircraft decreased

from 61 to 38 due to budget reductions. In addition, officials said that as of August 1998, they were unable to operate all of their aircraft because of insufficient funding. For example, four additional high-speed Blackhawk helicopters were being kept in storage because of the high costs of operation. (See figure 5 for pictures of selected aircraft.)

Table 3: Customs Operational Aviation Fleet, Fiscal Years 1992 Through May 1998

Aircraft type	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Citation II	26	26	26	26	26	26	26
P-3	7	8	8	8	8	8	8
Blackhawk	18	16	16	12	12	12	12
Other - fixed-wing	66	61	38	39	43	42	47
Other - helicopter	7	21	23	23	20	23	25
Total	124	132	111	108	109	111	118

Source: Customs Aviation Program data.

Operations and maintenance costs per aircraft flight hour have increased over the last several years. For example, the cost per flight hour in real dollars to operate a P-3 increased from \$2,979 in 1994 to \$3,687 in 1997, for a Blackhawk helicopter the cost increased from \$2,419 to \$3,859, and for the Citation II it increased from \$1,070 to \$1,885. Customs officials said increased costs was one of the reasons they were flying fewer hours per year. The other primary reasons were that trained pilots and other aircrew members were being dedicated to other missions or that aircraft were unavailable because they have been dedicated to another mission or were undergoing extended maintenance.

Figure 5: Selected Customs Aviation Program Aircraft



Customs' fixed-wing aircraft

Above: Citation II

Immediate right: P-3



Source: Customs Aviation Program.



Customs' high-speed helicopter

Above: Blackhawk

Customs' Aviation Program Is Developing New Performance Measures

Customs currently is developing performance measures to more adequately report the results for its aviation program. The Customs Aviation Program uses measures such as seizures and the number of suspect aircraft detected to gauge the results of its efforts. For example, in fiscal year 1997, Customs reported seizing about 22,900 pounds of cocaine and about 9,100 pounds of marijuana. In addition, for their foreign counterdrug operations, Customs reported a track rate of 57 percent in the transit zone. The track rate is the percentage of suspected narcotics trafficking aircraft that were detected and tracked by Customs P-3 aircraft and which were transferred to interdiction or apprehension forces or tracked to the landing and delivery site in the transit zone.

However, these performance measures track activity, not results or effectiveness. Several Customs Aviation Program officials, for example, made this point by noting that it is unclear whether an increase in seizures indicates that Customs has become more effective or that the amount of drug smuggling has increased. We have previously reported that traditional measures, such as the number of seizures, pose problems for measuring the performance of drug interdiction programs.³ We have also recognized that developing sound, results-oriented performance measures and accompanying data is still a difficult and time-consuming task.⁴

Customs has also used other measures, such as an air-threat index, in an attempt to measure the results of its aviation program. The air-threat index used various indicators, such as the number of stolen and/or seized aircraft, to determine the potential threat of air drug smuggling. However, the air-threat index, as well as selected other performance measures, have been discontinued because Customs determined they were not good measures of results and effectiveness. For example, the aircraft seizures indicator took into account only those seizures in which the aircraft was seized, eliminating those events related to smuggling where drugs were seized but for one reason or another, the aircraft was not seized.

Customs Aviation Program officials said that, given their limited success with earlier efforts to measure program results, Customs is currently revising its performance measures. Customs Aviation Program officials told us that one of the primary obstacles to developing meaningful performance measures is that much of the program's success depends on the actions of other federal departments and state and local law enforcement agencies, as well as the cooperation of foreign government law enforcement agencies. The officials said the measures they are developing also need to be more consistent with GPRA, which seeks to shift the focus of federal management and decisionmaking away from concentrating on the activities performed to a focus on the results of those activities that are undertaken. Consequently, Customs is developing a performance measure that quantifies the increase in the cost of doing business for a drug smuggler as a result of Customs Aviation Program activity.

³Drug Interdiction Funding Continues to Increase but Program Effectiveness Is Unknown (GAO/GGD 91-10, Dec. 11, 1990).

⁴Executive Guide: Effectively Implementing the Government Performance and Results Act (GAO/GGD 96-118, June 1, 1996).

Customs is also now developing a performance measure to judge the change in a drug smuggler's behavior. This would be an assessment of Customs' success in forcing the drug trafficker to change the routes and/or methods used for smuggling drugs into the U.S. Customs officials said that these new measures will be part of their fiscal year 2000 budget request.

Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report for comment to the Secretary of the Treasury and the Commissioner of Customs. On August 6, 1998, we met with the Acting Executive Director of the Customs Aviation Program and members of his staff who provided oral comments for Treasury and Customs. These officials concurred with our draft report and provided some technical comments, which we incorporated where appropriate.

As agreed with your staff, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this report until 10 days from the date of this letter. At that time, we will send copies of this report to the Ranking Minority Member of your Subcommittee, the Chairmen and Ranking Minority Members of other congressional committees with jurisdiction over the Customs Service, the Secretary of the Treasury, and the Commissioner of Customs. We will also make copies available to others upon request. The major contributors to this report are listed in appendix III. If you or your staff have any questions on this report, please call me on (202) 512-8777.



Norman J. Rabkin
Director, Administration
of Justice Issues

Contents

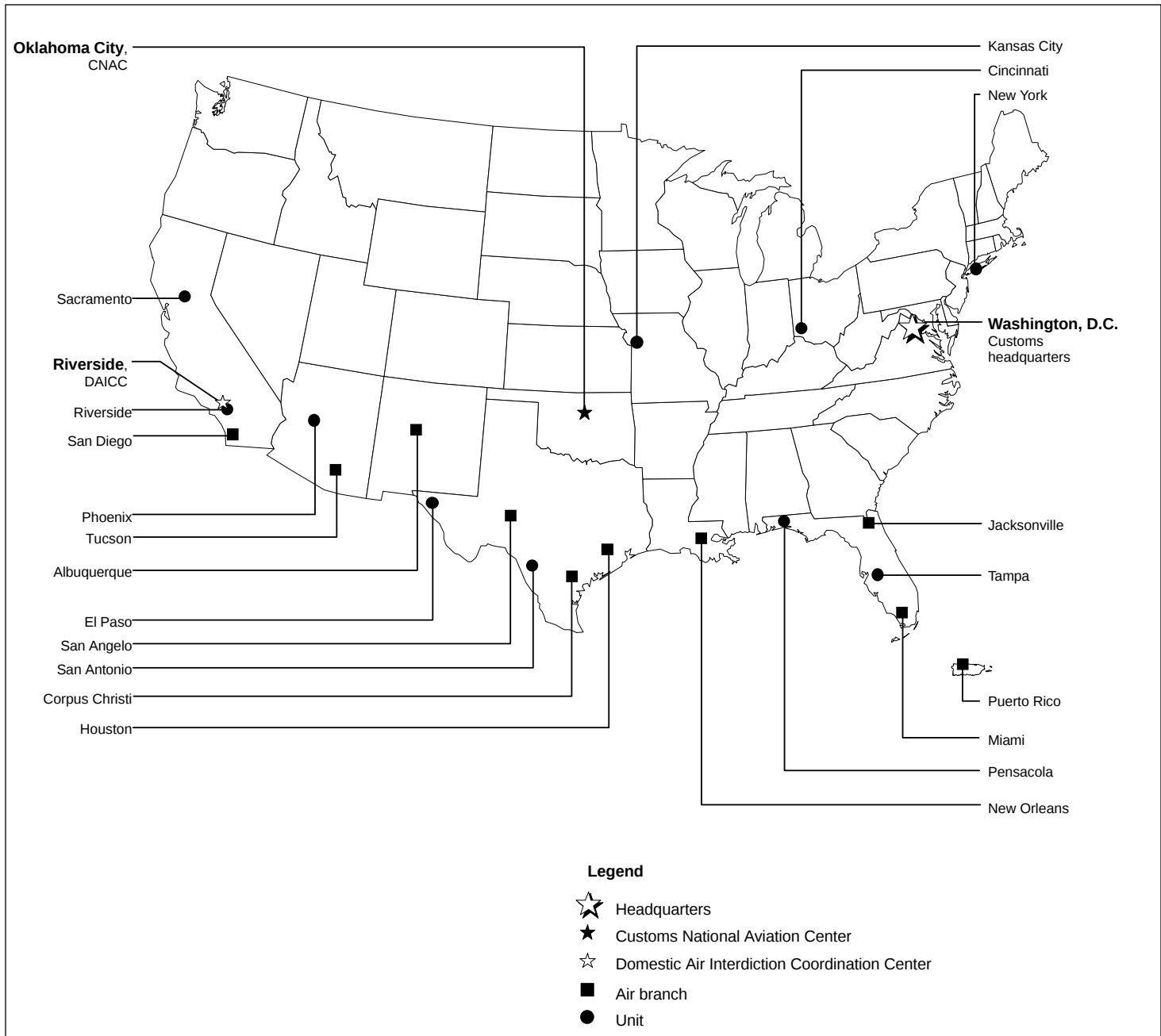
Letter		1
Appendix I Location of Customs Aviation Program Facilities		22
Appendix II Customs Aviation Program History		23
Appendix III Major Contributors to This Report		24
Tables		
	Table 1: Total Takeoffs and Cancelled Takeoffs During Fiscal Years 1992 Through 1997	12
	Table 2: Analysis of Cancelled Takeoffs During Fiscal Years 1992 and 1997	13
	Table 3: Customs Operational Aviation Fleet, Fiscal Years 1992 Through May 1998	15
Figures		
	Figure 1: Flight Hours By Mission	6
	Figure 2: Total Mission Flight Hours	7
	Figure 3: Customs Aviation Program Funding	11
	Figure 4: Authorized and Actual Numbers of People on Board in the Aviation Program Have Decreased Since Fiscal Year 1992	14
	Figure 5: Selected Customs Aviation Program Aircraft	16

Contents

Abbreviations

ATF	Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms
CNAC	Customs National Aviation Center
DAICC	Domestic Air Interdiction Coordination Center
DEA	Drug Enforcement Administration
DOD	Department of Defense
FAA	Federal Aviation Administration
GPRA	Government Performance and Results Act
ONDCP	Office of National Drug Control Policy
PDD	Presidential Decision Directive
USIC	United States Interdiction Coordinator

Location of Customs Aviation Program Facilities



Source: Customs Aviation Program data.

Customs Aviation Program History

Major objectives	Time period	Key events
Focus was directed on the U.S. southern border, Gulf of Mexico, and south Florida	Late 1960s	▶ Drug smugglers used private aircraft and established unchallenged smuggling routes along the entire U.S. southern border.
	1969	▶ Aviation program was established and its principal mission was border interdiction.
	Late 1970s early 1980s	▶ Smuggling threat shifted from the southern border to the Gulf of Mexico and south Florida.
	1988	▶ Command, Control, Communications, and Intelligence Center West became operational.
	1990	▶ Counterdrug operations began in Mexico with two Citations. Customs National Aviation Center, the program's operational headquarters, was established in Oklahoma City.
	1991	▶ Foreign counterdrug operations in South America began.
	1992 - 1997	▶ Overall program funding and personnel decreased. Other law enforcement support accounted for about half of the aviation program's flight hour activities.
Focus shifts to foreign counterdrug operations	1993	▶ PDD-14 established a new framework for international drug control efforts.
	1993 - 1996	▶ Hiring freeze in effect.
	1993 - 1997	▶ Flight hours shifted from border interdiction to foreign counterdrug operations and other law enforcement support.
	1994	▶ Increased number of P-3 and Citation aircraft were dedicated to the program's South American operations. Twenty-four-hour maintenance of aircraft ended at all branches.
	1994 - 1995	▶ Domestic border interdiction response was reduced from 24 hours per day to 16 hours per day at four air branches.
	1998	▶ Aviation program was developing Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) measures that program officials say will more accurately measure effectiveness.

Source: Customs Aviation Program data.

Major Contributors to This Report

General Government Division, Washington, D.C.	Weldon McPhail, Assistant Director David Alexander, Senior Social Science Analyst Michael Little, Communications Analyst
Los Angeles Field Office	Samuel Van Wagner, Evaluator-in-Charge Lisa Shibata, Evaluator
Office of General Counsel	Jan Montgomery, Assistant General Counsel

Ordering Information

The first copy of each GAO report and testimony is free. Additional copies are \$2 each. Orders should be sent to the following address, accompanied by a check or money order made out to the Superintendent of Documents, when necessary. VISA and MasterCard credit cards are accepted, also. Orders for 100 or more copies to be mailed to a single address are discounted 25 percent.

Orders by mail:

**U.S. General Accounting Office
P.O. Box 37050
Washington, DC 20013**

or visit:

**Room 1100
700 4th St. NW (corner of 4th and G Sts. NW)
U.S. General Accounting Office
Washington, DC**

**Orders may also be placed by calling (202) 512-6000
or by using fax number (202) 512-6061, or TDD (202) 512-2537.**

Each day, GAO issues a list of newly available reports and testimony. To receive facsimile copies of the daily list or any list from the past 30 days, please call (202) 512-6000 using a touchtone phone. A recorded menu will provide information on how to obtain these lists.

For information on how to access GAO reports on the INTERNET, send an e-mail message with "info" in the body to:

info@www.gao.gov

or visit GAO's World Wide Web Home Page at:

<http://www.gao.gov>

**Bulk Rate
Postage & Fees Paid
GAO
Permit No. G100**

Address Correction Requested