

MFR040#20012

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

(R)

Event: Interview of Willie Gripper

Type: Interview

Date: May 5, 2004

Special Access Issues: None

Prepared by: John Raidt

Team: 7

Participants (non-Commission): Willie Gripper, Civil Aviation Security Division Manager at the FAA Northeast Regional Office up until just before 9/11; David Weigand (FAA General Counsel's office).

Participants (Commission): John Raidt and Bill Johnstone

Location: 9/11 Commission's GSA office

Background

[U] Mr. Gripper began working for the FAA in November 1985 as a Civil Aviation Security specialist/Federal Air Marshal stationed at Dallas-Ft. Worth. In 1988, he became a Federal Air Marshal coordinator at the FAA's Southwest Regional Office. In 1989 he was promoted to Supervisor at the Civil Aviation Security Field Office (CASFO) in Eustis, Texas. In 1991, he was promoted to Federal Security Manager at Dallas-Ft. Worth Airport. In 1993, he was promoted to Civil Aviation Security manager at FAA's Chicago CASFO. In 1997, he was promoted to Civil Aviation Security Division Manager at FAA's Northeast Regional Office. He served in this capacity until May 2001 when he was promoted to Deputy Director of Civil Aviation Security Operations at FAA Headquarters. He did not arrive at FAA HQ to take the position of Deputy Director until August of 2001.

[U] On 9/11 Mr. Gripper served as Deputy Director of Civil Aviation Security Operations at FAA Headquarters. In February 2002 he took a corresponding position with the Transportation Security Administration when civil aviation security was transferred to TSA. In September 2002, Mr. Gripper returned to the FAA as Deputy Director of Security and Investigations. Since October 2003 he has served as Deputy Director of Field Operations for FAA security.

Note: On 9/11 the acting Manager of the Civil Aviation Security Division at FAA's Northwest Regional Office who replaced Mr. Gripper was Richard Batts. On 9/11 Mr. Batts was about to be replaced by Rich Stevens.

Security at Boston Logan Airport

[U] Security at Boston Logan was under Mr. Gripper's jurisdiction when he served as Division Manager at the FAA's regional office. Mr. Gripper stated that when he arrived in Boston he felt that the security at Logan was not as strong as at other airports, particularly in the area of access control. He said that checkpoint-screening operations were similar in quality to other airports. Mr. Gripper said that there was a particular emphasis on improving x-ray screening at the checkpoints.

[U] Mr. Gripper stated that he learned that Fox 25 News in Boston had undertaken its own testing of the checkpoints at Logan after the reporter contacted the Public Affairs office at FAA Headquarters. He then met with the reporter and FAA's public affairs officer to review FOX 25's findings. Mr. Gripper stated that he was particularly interested in learning the nature of the tests that the news team had undertaken so he could assess the shortcomings that they found. He said that the team identified the failure of screeners to check bags that contained film shield bags (opaques) that could hide prohibited weapons. The news team also was able to sneak weapons in using a wheelchair, which was not searched properly.

[U] Gripper believed that the screeners should have been able to detect the test objects. In the case of the film shield, the x-ray operator should have required a thorough examination by hand of the opaque object. The wheelchair should not have been exempted from regular screening scrutiny.

[U] Mr. Gripper said that he asked the television station not to air the program because he had concerns that it would identify vulnerabilities to terrorists. (The station did air the program.) Mr. Gripper did not point out to the news crew that the knife they snuck past the checkpoint was technically legal because he did not want to point out that particular systemic vulnerability to terrorists or criminals. He stated that after the report came to his attention but prior to its airing he met with the air carriers and the airport and told them that they had to clean up their act and do what they were supposed to do. In addition, he had the field office inspectors go to Logan every day to test the system throughout the entire month of July. He accomplished this through a regional Special Emphasis Assessment for the entire region, which entailed continuous monitoring. He told the agents to make it well known they were testing continuously because this would keep people on their toes, as well as help respond to likely FOX 25 follow-ups.

Intelligence

[U] Mr. Gripper stated that he received an intelligence briefing in late June. The airport and air carriers in Boston also received the briefing from FAA's Office of Civil Aviation Security Intelligence. It was a CD-ROM presentation provided by Pat McDonnell. Based on the information that Gripper received he was told that the system needed to be on-guard against a possible hijack attempt that summer. Mr. Gripper said that FAA put

the airports/air carriers on notice through the issuance of Information Circulars describing the threat.

[U] Mr. Gripper stated that the CASFO and Federal Security Manager (FSM) handled most of the day-to-day communications with the airports and air carriers. He directed them to make sure that the FAA's Security Directives and Information Circulars were received and understood by regulated parties. He said that the FSM at Logan, Steve Luongo would hand-deliver the SD's and IC's to the airport and air carriers to make sure they got the message.

[U] Mr. Gripper stated that he was aware of al Qaeda and Usama Bin Laden prior to 9/11. He also knew that there were terrorist cells operating in the Boston area and the region at large. He learned this mainly from monthly meetings of the Law Enforcement Group. These meetings, hosted by the FBI, were attended by various federal law enforcement agencies including the FBI, DEA, INS, Customs, etc. Mr. Gripper said that there was not a lot of detail about terrorist activity provided at the meetings. He indicated that he and the Special Agent in Charge of the FBI's Boston Field Office had a good relationship and he was confident that if there were any security threats or problems specific to the airport or aviation he would have been informed about them. From these meetings he did learn that Hezbollah was the primary terrorist group present in the Boston area.

August 6th Presidential Daily Brief (PDB)

[U] Mr. Gripper was not aware that "training consistent with hijacking" as reported in the President's Daily Brief had been taking place. Mr. Gripper said upon learning reports of the PDB he did wonder why authorities on the front lines of civil aviation security such as himself weren't getting this relevant information. Mr. Gripper said that he wasn't even made aware by the FBI that Resam's target in the millennium plot was an airport until April of 2001 when he attended a conference in Seattle. He was deeply perturbed that FAA hadn't been informed of this fact. His expectation was that the FAA's intelligence division would receive such reports and would then pass them on to the regional and local security offices.

Suspicious Activities

[U] Mr. Gripper stated that the Massachusetts State Police (MSP) detail assigned to Logan would receive any reports of suspicious activities and incidents. He said that the FAA maintained a good relationship with MSP and expected to hear from them regarding any security issues. Mr. Gripper also said that in 2000 FAA established a security summary database to record and track security incidents. Mr. Gripper did not recall any suspicious incidents at Logan pre 9/11 that indicated terrorist interest or surveillance.

Computer Assisted Passenger Prescreening System (CAPPS)

[~~SSI~~] Mr. Gripper said that when the CAPPS was automated it removed the customer service representative from the process of determining who would be selected for

additional security screening. He said that even as of 9/11 selectees were supposed to have their carry-on bags, and checked luggage undergo secondary screening as per the Air Carrier Standard Security Program and relevant Security Directives. He said that carry-on bags were supposed to be trace detected for explosives and hand searched for prohibited items.

Random and Continuous searches of carry-on bags

~~[SSI]~~ Mr. Gripper stated that air carriers were required to continuously hand search carry-on bags at the checkpoints, regardless of whether they were owned by a selectee or not. He stated that this requirement was very difficult to enforce because it slowed getting passengers to their aircraft. He further stated that air carriers attempted to subvert the requirement by only checking bags that were easy to search such as computer cases.

Joint Vulnerability Assessments

[U] Mr. Gripper agreed with the view that the Joint Vulnerability Assessments were simply a checklist of items, without any regulatory teeth. He concurred that if a security measure or infrastructure were important enough to appear on a security checklist, it should be required under the airport standard security program. He also stated that localized threat assessments were supposed to be a part of the JVA's but they weren't done.

Closed Circuit Television

~~[SSI]~~ Mr. Gripper stated that Closed Circuit television coverage at checkpoints was helpful in reconstructing what happened at checkpoints. Most of the systems were covert, and he never heard an argument that they were a helpful means of scaring off terrorists or had a deterrent value. He said most of the systems were installed in lieu of having to have a police presence at the checkpoints—a requirement that carriers didn't like. (Gripper was personally involved in the deployment of such equipment at the Dallas-Ft. Worth Airport, which served as one of the pioneers in this field.)

Choice of Logan for 9/11 hijackings

[U] Mr. Gripper believes that the hijackers chose Logan because it was in close proximity to New York.

Boston CASFO

[U] Mr. Gripper responded to concerns expressed to the commission about the Boston CASFO as follows:

- 1) [U] Concerns about the hiring of Mary Carol Turano as CASFO manager because she allegedly lacked the necessary experience: Mr. Gripper indicated that Ms. Turano did have some aviation security experience, but that he hired her to be a

manager, not a special agent or inspections officer. He also stated that FAA HQ concurred in the decision. FAA HQ set no requirement or guidance requiring that the candidate have a particular level of experience. He did not see her hiring as unusual.

- 2) [U] Concerns about morale problems at the Boston CASFO: Mr. Gripper said that he believes morale problems existed at the facility before either he or Mary Carol Turano were hired. He believes that he was perceived as a "hard butt" because the Boston CASFO wasn't doing what it was supposed to be doing and he was brought in to help fix the problems.
- 3) [U] Concerns about serious backlog of enforcement actions: Mr. Gripper said that such backlogs were a system-wide problem. There were huge backlogs when he got to Boston and he worked to get them down.

[U] He stated that in 2000 he worked to get an assessment of all New England Airports in order to get a picture of where everyone stood in regard to security. He said that in the past such assessments took too long and delayed the ability of FAA to take remedial action. He wanted a snap shot to be conducted early in the year so that they could get about the business of fixing the problems. He said that the Boston CASFO did not believe the project could be done in the time allotted and there was some controversy about the initiative. Mr. Gripper stated that the assessments for Logan and Portland airports were well done. He said that he wanted to get the assessments done expeditiously and thoroughly in order to start fixing problems, not just "get them over with."

Enforcement at Logan

[U] Gripper stated that it was a constant effort to explain to people that the air carriers, not the airports, were responsible for the security checkpoints. He said that both the air carrier and airport were assessed fines for their security violations. He believes that Logan was average in meeting its security requirements. He stated that FAA's Enforcement Information System has all the data on fines.

[U] He indicated that the FAA did suggest joint testing of security at Logan including checkpoints but that Logan did not want to do it. He remembers that the Security Director at Logan wanted to test checkpoints independently. He knew that the air carriers would object. He stated that FAA Headquarters objected to allowing Logan to conduct such testing.

[~~SSI~~] Mr. Gripper knew that as of September 11, metal detectors weren't set-up to detect knives.

After Action Report

[U] Mr. Gripper wanted to conduct an after-action report to see what happened on 9/11, how and why it happened and how the system responded, in order to help determine what immediate changes were needed. He did not receive the necessary cooperation to

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undertake the study, perhaps because there was so much else going on. Specifically, he requested that an evaluation staff be created to do the after action analysis. This request was denied, perhaps because of resource constraints.

Follow-up

[~~SSI~~] Mr. Gripper said that he would get back to the commission to confirm information he provided on the following issues.

- 1) CAPPs consequences as of 9/11, including whether selectees were subject to secondary searches of their person and carry-on bags.
- 2) Whether manual profiling prior to 9/11 included hand-searches of carry-on baggage
- 3) Whether random/continuous security examination of carry-on bags involved hand searches looking for prohibited items or explosive trace detection.

Information for the 9-11 Commission

Question: What were the procedures for persons designated as a selectee prior to September 11, 2001? Specifically, did their carry-on items receive additional inspection?

Only checked baggage of the selectee was given additional inspection prior to September 11, 2001. Checked baggage was submitted for EDS or ETD inspection, physically searched or positive passenger bag match. Carry-on baggage went through the normal passenger screening process.

Question: What were the procedures for persons designated as a selectee after September 11, 2001? Specifically, did their carry-on items receive additional inspection?

9/11 Closed by Statute

Question: What were the Security Directive requirements for continuous search of passengers? If trace was present could the hand search be omitted?

I recall the security directive (SD) requiring a continuous search of carry-on at the passenger screening checkpoint. I cannot locate that directive or any information that indicates ETD could have been used in lieu of the continuous search requirement.

Willie J. Gripper Jr. 5/28

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