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Commission Sensitive

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Event: Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) New York Air Route Center Interview with Mike McCormick , Air Traffic Manager,

Type of event: Recorded Interview

Date: Tuesday, October 1, 2003

Special Access Issues: None

Prepared by: Geoffrey Brown and Miles Kara

Team Number: 8

Location: FAA New York Air Route Center, Rokonkomo, New York

Participants - Non-Commission: Alfred Johnson, FAA General Consul

Participants - Commission: John Azzarello, Miles Kara, Geoffrey Brown

NOTE: Please refer to the interview transcript for a complete account.

Background

McCormick was hired by FAA in February 1982 as an air traffic controller at Philadelphia tower and reached full performance level in May 1984. He proceeded through a series of training, area supervisor and quality assurance assignments and most recently was, in turn, the assistant air traffic manager, and promoted to his current position in 1998.

Responsibilities

An Air Traffic Manager has responsibility for running all center operations and exercising general supervision of 500 employees. Concerning air traffic management, David LeCates is his Deputy. All operations managers and support managers report to LeCates. From the controller up the chain-of-command is: Air Traffic Controller, Operations Supervisor, Operations Manager, LeCates, McCormick. There are 5 Operations Managers, who rotate the duty of OMIC, Operations Manager In Charge. The OMIC has specific responsibility for an entire shift; all the operational guidance and supervision for that shift.

Events of 9-11

On 9-11 the OMIC position was manned by Bruce Barrett. He had overall operational supervision for New York Center for the day shift. Below Barrett are positions interchangeably called Operations Supervisor In Charge (OSIC, or OS) and Controller-In-Charge (CIC) An OSIC is a trained supervisor and has additional disciplinary authorities than does a CIC who is a trained controller acting temporarily in a supervisory

in Area B where the OSIC, Paul Thumser was away [see Thumser interview] and Ivonna Dowis was the CIC.]

Estimated Chronology as recalled by McCormick

At about 0835 EDT he was in his office away from the Sector floor. He received a call from Bruce Barrett, the OMIC, on a private line informing of a possible hijack in Boston Center airspace--Boeing 767, Flight Level 290, Southbound. McCormick immediately went to the operational floor and saw, based on projected path, the aircraft would enter New York Center airspace in Area B. He called LeCates, also on a private line to inform him of the possible hijack.

McCormick proceeded to Area B and observed Paul Thumser and Ivonna Dowis in the middle of the area; both appear to be in charge and aware of AA11. He ascertained that the Watch Desk also knew. He received a page on his text pager "confirmed hijack in progress AAL11, BOS-LAX, last known altitude Flight Level 290, transponder off, target turned southbound after Albany. The Washington Operations Center (WOC).

He received a text message at 0845-0848 EDT from Ron Ruggeri at Eastern Region. McCormick wrote that text down exactly and provided a copy of what he wrote down at the time to Commission Staff. The message confirmed a hijacking

McCormick went to Thumser and Dowis and told them it was a confirmed hijack. He then went to the Watch Desk and spoke to Barrett and Peter Mulligan to give them the same information. Bob Rosenberg, also at the Watch Desk said that he spoke to company (American Airlines) and reported that people had been killed and the hijackers have "knives and bombs". LeCates was not on the floor at the time, but McCormick relayed the information to him at some point.

McCormick did two things in Area B; he told Dowis and Thumser to make sure they were communicating with watch desk and to make sure the watch desk knew to contact the military. Back at the Watch Desk he also asked if the Command Center had been contacted and was told it had. Peter Mulligan said he was in process of contacting the military.

He then went back to Area B and by then LeCates was there. He informed him of the confirmed hijack--knives and bombs, and reiterated to Thumser and Dowis the seriousness of the situation. He also contacted his counterpart at Washington Center, Louis Ramirez, and told him to beware.

McCormick then went to various positions in Area B, a track of AA11(alpha) had been established and they tried to give approx altitudes between three or four radars as people fed information. He called NY TRACON, Bob Birch, to notify him.

McCormick thought AA11 was visually flying along the Hudson River and was descending towards the New York area and that it might attempt to land at Newark.

At that point NY tower, based on a phone call from NY TRACON, said something hit the World Trade Center and relayed that to McCormick. By that time he heard controllers talking loudly about UAL175. All of this was going on at the same time. He told Birch to wait and informed him that there might be another one. At that point he got off the phone and had received no specific information except "large aircraft" on what hit the WTC.

As he was talking with New York TRACON he was also getting reports of an ELT. Two different Sectors told him that. His understanding of getting an ELT signal was that they happened accidentally or there was an accident—the vast majority are false alarms. However they always reacted as if it was an emergency until known otherwise. The reports he received were prior to the first impact of the WTC.

He informed Birch of the possibility of more hijacks and to not assume everything is over. He thought that was a very good possibility from listening to background conversation and knowing of the problem with UA175. He told Birch there may be another crash into the WTC. That was based in part on the ELT hits before AA11 struck WTC. After reviewing his statement he said the warning to Birch was based on awareness of 175. His estimates of times were based on statements and notes taken that day. The conversation with Bob Birch might have lasted a few minutes.

He thought was that AA11 was going to emergency land at New York. Perhaps bomb went off so that's why it lost all electrical—radio and transponder. He thought inward "airport." That's why he called TRACON. That's when he actually got a report of an aircraft impacting the World Trade Center. He thought 1) it was AA11 and 2) didn't discount the other possibilities. But his first instinct was it was the impact was a hijack and somehow it was deliberately flown into WTC. He based that analysis on the Trade Center bombing in 1993; there was a thought in his mind back to 1993 and that they [terrorists] were trying to take the Trade Center down again. Thus, as Dave Battiglia tried to contact UAL175 with no response he kept thinking it may be another one.

He did not speak externally to anyone other than Birch. He told LeCates to turn on CNN and keep passing information.

He went to Battiglia to figure out the UAL175 issue. Battiglia and Thumser explained it was descending and had begun turning in Eastern PA, the Allentown area. As it was turning toward New Jersey he was thinking this was not good and, according to him was thinking possibly Trade Center at that point. [Staff Note: As early as 0854-0855 EDT] As it completed the second turn he was thinking Trade Center. It would be pointing directly towards New York City, was assuming it was headed towards WTC and was thinking it was headed to the same tower.

In his thinking he had a total of three hits, two on the first tower and one on the second. He was thinking the two ELT reports were from 1) small aircraft reported hitting 2) AA11 did hit and 3) 175 on its way to hit. He thought two had hit same tower and thought 175 was going to hit the other tower.

In summation, based on ELT, reports in media, unverified unknown aircraft general aviation aircraft from upstate New York headed to WTC—that from the controller working New York TRACON, a report of a helicopter lost over New York (later on found inaccurate) he was thinking possibly a small aircraft, possibly another aircraft, possibly yet another aircraft, possibly a 767 all into the towers. He thought it was a coordinated attack.

Other managers reported to the floor. One of the first was Kevin Delaney from Quality Assurance. He told Kevin to go watch CNN so LeCates could come back. Delaney had his portable phone and McCormick told him to call on the phone, not just run back and

forth.

Attempts to Notify Eastern Region

He called his superiors at Eastern Region sometime between 0852 and 0856 EDT to inform them of more than one hijack and another probably hijack (UAL175) headed in. He doesn't remember which administrative people he gave this information to. He was told that no manager was available. He iterated it was an urgent matter and said he needed to speak with a manager immediately and asked not to be put on hold. He was again told no manager were available to talk to him.

Based on what administrative people was saying his was that managers were all busy with AA11. The admin implication was that it was too busy to put his call through. Eastern Region managers were too busy reporting upward regarding AA11. The admin people couldn't break through that wall.

He was trying to reach either Frank Hatfield or Rick DuCharme and asked for them by name. He did not get into specifics, simply saying there was more. He was emphatic that there was more. He tried several times to get through. The call was never completed. Easter Region managers didn't have a mobile phone number that is a cell extension from desk. They don't have that same system McCormick had that allowed him to carry his hard line on his person.

[Staff Note: We pushed McCormick at length on this issue. McCormick is a retired Marine Officer and used to running things—being in command. He demonstrated to us that he was, in fact, in command at New York Center, then and now. We found it odd that McCormick could not find a way to get through and seemed to have given up to administrative barriers. The issue is that he was trying to pass on valuable warning time to Eastern Region which was in direct contact the Port Authority. He was not successful, for whatever the reason.]

Back to the Narrative

It was relayed through LeCates to him that a second aircraft hit the Trade Center. He went to the watch desk and Spoke to Bruce Barrett, Pete Mulligan, and Marty Fournier again, asking about the status of the airports. Bruce said they may want to be ATC zero. [Term for no departures or landings at a particular center or area.] McCormick said to do it and let him know if there was any push back. At ZNY that decision is McCormick's if he is there, otherwise the decision is up to the OMIC. At that point he was reasonably sure in his mind that UAL175 hit the second WTC tower, in his mind that was the third hit, because of the ELTs.

After declaring ATC zero they next needed to think about how to protect the ATC system, the country, and the security of the facility itself. At that point he was thinking there had been three coordinated attacks on a single target. He didn't know if that was an isolated event or not. His ATC thought to get rid of air traffic, the potential weapons.

He had Barrett and LeCates get all supervisors and managers into a "round up" at the watch desk to inform them of information known so far. He made the decision to elevate physical security at New York Center, to not let anyone in or out. All visitors were escorted off the premises. And he started delegating—Barrett, air traffic; Bruce's assistant, John Azzerone, physical security; Paul Ferril, in charge of personnel.

At 0904 EDT Bob Felser, Military Operations Specialist informed him the military had scrambled and they wanted to know current location of their target. It seemed to McCormick that they were asking about 175. Felser said something like ""fighters in air." McCormick told him it was too late.

At that time he received a phone call from Ed McCannan, (phonetic) Manager, Syracuse Tower; a hub of responsibility for many areas. Somebody had told him to call McCormick and he vented that he couldn't get through to Region He, McCannan, was not hearing back from any appropriate person about what was going on and asked McCormick to get on the National Telcon.

McCormick went to his conference room and dialed in on speaker. David Canoles was there from headquarters, a high ranking administrative official within air traffic. The AT 01 on 9-11 was Bill Peacock, head of air traffic for the nation. He reported directly to the administrator. [Staff Note: Bill Peacock was stuck in Texas that day and was not present at Headquarters.]

McCormick reported to Canoles everything that had happened up to that point. That was probably around 0915 or 0925, he recalled.. Probably 915. Told him of events as best known as well as possibilities. Shortly after that people on Telcon started talking of another missing aircraft. Look for primary. Said Dave, you know where that's headed for? He said yeah. We've got the widows down we'll be safe. Heard fast moving primary east bound to dc. Started counting down miles to white house. 5 4 3 2 1 and heard aircraft turning away. Thought white house too small, and then thought it would hit capital, and shortly thereafter it hit pentagon. Didn't expect that. They may have given call sign or company of aircraft on Telcon. No one on that Telcon thought it was AA11. They thought it was a craft from out west they had lost track on . Right about same time of pentagon hit Cleveland center got on telcon. Gave call sign and beacon code and last known position and said it was heading eastbound. McCormack called out to the Barrett and area c and gave beacon code and call sign and told them to look for it incase it was incoming. Immediately said yeah track Pittsburgh headed eastbound. At that point shortly thereafter they said had lost target.

During telcon no mention of shoot down. His assumption was that it was a controlled flight into the ground deliberately crashed. Made assumption based on rapid loss of altitude. Based thought on air 90.

Shown documents:

Had never seen the air piracy documents prior or post 9/11.

Had seen SSI document shown. There documents are not marked sensitive.****

Aware of a process in existence of coordinating with military in case of hijack. Knew person would be out of Washington. The process followed at ZNY - events taking place too quickly to go through the process that had been set up. Always good to have parallel forms of communication going on at all times. Wanted to make sure everyone had same or similar info to make decisions. Made attempt in interest of expediency to give them information so they would be prepared to have orders. That way military would gain situational awareness quicker. Does not know what the policy was intended to address. Process would be time and resource intensive, and thus would have a natural delay.

Aware of one off the coast of Africa that was not deliberate and aware of Egyptian 990 that was deliberately flown into north Atlantic. Prior to 9/11 personal natural assumption would not be to think that a 9/11 event would happen.

Quicker get any assistance, military or otherwise, is better. In a situation where the circumstance is for there to be a landing in Cuba, etc intent, then time is critical, but might be less critical than in 9/11 scenario.

Prior 9/11 had direct line capability to NEADS. When spoke of military priority to Paul and Ivonna, thought OMIC would make call on how to contact NEADS, direct or commercial line. Was not aware that Boston had already called. AMIS - unknown. Military radar has alt on primary? Knows they can do that, does not know where they can do that. At one point during event Filsner said it was tough to get the number.

Procedures are much more defined now to contact military.

Thumser and scramble McGuire comment - took it as an emotional reaction to events. Said to no one in particular. Knew there were no fighters or tactical capabilities. Were not on hot pads or anything like that.

Was aware that on 9/11 ac did not have air defense capability for at least a year or two. Bradley in ct capability for air defense? No. Knew they needed tactical air defense fighters out of New England.

Spoke with region after and informed them that in between hijacking had knowledge that WTC would be hit again. Understands that it was emotions that existed in those short minutes. But also informed them that a better system needs to be in place. Now there is one. Thought that perhaps someone could have been contacted through them to warn people at WTC. But knows no warning would have changed events.

Shortly after phone with New York tracon and as walked to Dave's display to see track of aircraft was when he realized the WTC was still threatened.

Pre 9/11 role of roc? They would then phone out information to the appropriate parties. Assume WOC, appropriate air traffic division, flight standards, security things like that.

Official protocol to request military assistance? Center, roc, WOC, same time notifying various eastern region elements, WOC would have own guide, hijack coordinator, then at that level would start coordination with military. Then someone through Herndon would call ZNY and the military cell in Herndon would coordinate.

Now, direct communication systems with CONOR, with NEADS, dens (which is monitored), then based upon that info would develop coordination. Additionally have combat air patrols and different times and direct coordination with those patrols. And then air defense communication with a zone out of Washington center. Additionally have hot phones to NEADS or CONOR on separate phones. Or they can call ZNY directly.

Every year as part of refresher program have training on procedures for hijack. Does not know if there were every multiple hijack scenario testing. Prior 9/11 no awareness of faa/military/dod exercises here at ZNY. Thought believes there have been some at Kennedy that were simulated as hijack on ground at airport. No knowledge of one with

an airborne aircraft.

No knowledge of a major power loss in an aircraft.

Herndon - prior 9/11 no knowledge of Herndon's role. Now they are plugged into command center.

Produce log of 9/11. Don't know who asked him to do that might have been Ron regerie who drafted.

Shows chronology of events document:

Guess it would be developed in eastern region air traffic. Based on how the id facilities and the short cuts they used. Unique to this timeline at top "Richard Knowles" reference. Data radar dump AA11 McCormack confirmed hit. Maybe had already pulled NTap (national track __ program) or SATORI. Simultaneous loss of radio and radar considered to be an aircraft accident (8020) unless otherwise confirmed. "Maybe not AA11 into WTC per McCormack" (935) - what was actually relayed "maybe not **just** AA11 into WTC" as said on telcon. Thought possible small aircraft, general aviation, and 175. Guessing eastern region did notes. No knowledge of Richard Knowles or Richard Nolan. Speculation on what's read on timeline.

For record of timeline from ZNY and commission received final version of timeline from McCormack.

Area B controller sequester issue

There was too much for him to handle alone. So he delegated to Bob Ott the responsibility for looking after people involved with the hijacked aircraft, particularly the personnel in Area B.

McCormick wanted them to be brought together to get an employee assistance program counselor here, a nurse from medical. One controller offered the name of an Episcopal priest and McCormick gave permission for him and for two psychologists or psychiatrists to enter the facility.

McCormick told Kevin Delaney to get verbal statements, knowing that high level law enforcement would be calling. They set up a tape recorder so that people could talk in the open on what they saw and experienced.. In his mind that gave employees the chance to support each other and to get a record if authorities came that night or within the hour.

No law authority ever came to New York Center. McCormick fully expected for some authority to come quickly. He didn't reach out himself to the FBI and didn't tell headquarters or region [that no one had come].

The union did express some concern about the procedures but only if information had to be given out that day. That would have been a non-standard procedure. It was Mark Depalma, the union facility representative that expressed concern.

At a couple times that day McCormick went to the room to check on staff. He has never seen or listened to the tape. There was general controller concern about having to go through the taping. They didn't want to put things in a formal way that would be used in

an investigation. There was also some worry about who would receive the tape. They were reassured that the tape would not be used for disciplinary purposes. It was strictly to be used for law enforcement personnel.

Some Specific Questions. Was it taped one at a time or in general groups? Probably both. Were others present? FAA nurse, contract employee assistant counselor, two psychologists, and Episcopal priest, a couple management officials, supervisors involved, controllers involved.

Commission staff informed McCormack that we had asked his staff if they would object to our reviewing the tape, and that McCormack's staff for most part had no objection. Only objection was from Kevin Delaney. Commission staff informed McCormick staff that Delaney said that he destroyed the tape without ever reviewing it.

McCormick first discovered tape was no longer available when George Leonard couldn't find it. Employees had asked about the tape in order to review it to prepare for the visit by the Commission Staff. George Leonard asked the Quality Assurance manager, Marty Fournier, and Quality Assurance specialist George Tracy to locate the tape.

Fournier did a complete search but did not find it. McCormick and Lecates checked the safe, it wasn't there. Delaney told McCormick after Delaney's Commission interview that he "destroyed" the tape.

[That could mean it was recycled. Commission Staff Did not follow up on what Delaney meant by "destroyed"]. McCormick was glad to know that there was information on its loss. He had not followed up on the search in detail. It was absolutely Kevin Delaney's call on whether or not to destroy tape. It is encouraged for all that is extraneous to be gotten rid of. As materiel is incorporated into personal statements it is destroyed.

McCormick thinks Delaney said and meant "destroy". If Delaney had destroyed the tape it would have been over a year ago when an accident package was completed. The tape would be destroyed. Items that are in the formal file or package there is a chain of custody log.

McCormick believes that no copies of the tape were made and that the tape has been irrevocably lost.

Delaney was not in the building on the day of this interview to discuss the matter. McCormack will follow up on it.