

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

(R)

Event: Norfolk TRACON visit

Type of event: Recorded Interview and Orientation

Date: Monday, December 01, 2003

Special Access Issues: None

Prepared by: Miles Kara

Team Number: 8

Participants (non-Commission): John Harter, Operations Supervisor

Participants (Commission): Miles Kara, Kevin Shaeffer

Location: Norfolk TRACON

Note: Please refer to the recorded interview for further details.

Background:

Started in 1974 in the Air Force. Hired by the FAA in 1981 and his first facility was Dulles Tower. He reported to Norfolk 1983 as a controller. In 1987 he became a plans and procedures specialist for a year at which time he became a supervisor. He has held several duties including representative to GIANT KILLER. He has been Operational Supervisor continuously for the past 5 years and was performing those duties on 9/11.

As a plans and procedures specialist he participated in writing letters of agreement. His role at GIANT KILLER was as a safety supervisor and control tower examiner. He also participated in writing letters of agreement at GIANT KILLER. He does not recall contact with NEADS while at GIANT KILLER.

Scramble procedures in place have been that way since he can remember and date at least to 1983.

He did listen to the audio tape of the East Feeder radar four or five days prior to this interview. He has also talked to the legal counsel, Mr Weigand. Weigand was not present in Norfolk that day but participated via phone conference.

9/11:

He was on the day shift and came in early. He was the supervisor in charge. First recollection was when Newport News Tower called and said one of the World Trade Center towers was on fire. His TRACON supports Newport News. He reported to either Jerry Bourdeau or Mr. Chafin. They had no role in his actions that day. He was the focal point for TRACON operations. His control room was configured and manned normally. Peninsula and East Feeder positions are opened depending on Langley and Newport News. He thought both were open that morning. If not opened they are combined into the Arrival Radar position.

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Concerning the scramble he recalled that the "162" line, a ring-in/voice-out circuit rang. The ring will be heard throughout the floor; the voice will only be heard at the position that answers. That caught his attention; that usually means something out of the ordinary. The Peninsula Radar took the call, wrote down the details and briefed him. Normally any position that took such a call would write down heading, DME and frequency. He thought that scramble orders normally contained a DME. He recalled the northbound aspect as unusual, normally scrambles proceed east. The northern aspect and uniqueness of the order caused him to task the East Feeder Radar to call Navy Patuxent Advisory to find out about shutting down their warning area. He knew the fighters would proceed through that area if they followed the scramble order. He also noted that GIANT KILLER would not get the initial flight strip but would get a departure strip which would include the beacon code. That is done automatically through the Washington Center computer.

The flight strip came in to flight data from where it was hand carried (short distance) to the appropriate radar position. The flight strip showed 090 for 60. All they could figure out was that someone through secure communications changed the scramble order to which they were not privy. They do not have a secure line. He personally understood that the flight plan was different from the scramble order but did not take steps to change it. He has never done that.

They give active air scrambles priority. The pilots can go where they want, when they want, how they want. If the pilot says he wants to go a certain direction they let him go and do what they can to deal with traffic and with adjacent sectors. He validated that normally Langley tower turns over radar control of the fighters as they are on the ground rolling for takeoff. Air defense fighters do follow runway heading by letter of agreement to 4000 feet at which time Peninsula Radar turns the plane over to East Feeder Radar.

Other than Patuxent Advisory, Harter called no other facilities other than those who would normally be involved, in this case, GIANT KILLER. He doesn't recall if Washington Center was involved. He had no contact with Washington Center, Herndon, or FAA HQ concerning the Langley scramble.

Humans can change the flight plan, i.e. the 090 for 60, at Langley Tower or Peninsula Radar. He recalled no reason that either had to change the flight plan as entered by Langley Tower. The pilot will usually wait for ATC to receive subsequent directions. If he doesn't and just turns he will get all the priority he can be given. He characterized the traffic at that time of day to normally be light to moderate.

Given that the scramble order and the flight plan are different it is his position that he will wait for the pilot to decide. That fact that East Feeder asked the pilot what direction he wanted was initiative not standard procedure. If the pilot had gone north East Feeder would have handed the plane off to Patuxent. If Patuxent was cold the hand off would have gone to either Calvert or Cape Charles Sectors at Washington Center.

He does not recall HUNTRESS calling Norfolk asked where its planes were. He recalls that the flight of three was unusual and that the third man has to squawk a specific code which he did not. The trail was also well back from the flight lead.

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He summarized his scramble handling procedure to be: come off of runway eight, climb to altitude as quickly as can, put on heading as quickly as can, and hand off to the next controlling entity as quickly as can.

He recalled no northbound scrambles prior to 9/11. All went to the east to go after Russian Bears or for drug interdiction. He has not seen a scramble to the west and hasn't seen one to the southwest in a long time.

He doesn't recall the absence of a target designation in the scramble order that day. His priority that day was the second set of information he received, the flight plan.

AFIO. He didn't recall it as of 9/11. There is something out now. Quad 7777s means nothing to him.

He was not on a telecom with Eastern Region or any other FAA facility on 9/11. He had an individual call from Washington Center asking how many airplanes he could take on the ground.

Their TRACON altitude is max 23,000 east, 16,000 northwest, and roughly a 40 mile radius with allowance for Oceana on the south and east.

He was shown the 1994 LOA re scramble procedures. Concerning Norfolk, he summarized that the first thing they do is give Langley Tower the release and take the fighters to 4000 feet and then expedite their desired vector and then turn them over to the next controlling entity. He will always default to the FIDO system because that is the latest information. There can be an up to eight minute time period before the scramble order and the flight plan. He doesn't know what transpired in between. Unless someone calls with an over ride or the pilot makes a request he will not change the flight plan. If the pilot asked for a direction it would have taken 30 seconds to get the flight data system changed. In practice, he would have let him go immediately and handed him off manually. Manual handoffs are made a lot in the Norfolk area because of the abundance of military facilities. Manual handoffs have been around as long as he has been in air traffic. Anyone can do that.

Back to 090 for 60. If it were 070 for 60 the route would be into Washington Center space. The 090 for 60 puts them past the 75 30 line, the edge of Norfolk airspace and direct into GIANT KILLER space and not either Washington Center or Oceana. He believes the 090 for 60 has been around for "years." It is an airspace convenience that allows for a direct handoff to GIANT KILLER. A direct route flight strip would contain the entry: LFI...Harkum, DCA...LFI. The only near foolproof entry would have been a "stereo" or canned entry.

Harter summed up: "along the way...there was always someone there to break the chain, the chain never got broken." Harter made that statement to staff having relistened to the tapes prior to the staff visit. The history prior to 9/11 was to the east or to the southeast for drug interdiction or cold war issues.

He didn't think they could have done anything different, given the information they had. If Langley had given Norfolk TRACON additional information, that is where the chain could have been broken. That was Harter's answer to the question what could have been done differently that day at his facility.

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He did not agree with the Langley position that it was more efficient to enter a flight plan known to be acceptable to the system than to enter something different. That is an operator issue. An operator knowing what he/she was doing would have been able to correctly enter a unique flight plan. He believed that Giant Killer would have deferred to what Norfolk had in the flight season over what was in the scramble order. Giant Killer took the scramble flight because it was handed off by TRACON. He doesn't think the scramble entered the equation. GIANT KILLER would have defaulted to the LOA and would have worked to hand the flight off to HUNTRESS.

He did not recall any other call from HUNTRESS other than the scramble order itself. He did not recall participated in any FAA national level conference calls; he does not get involved in a lot of telcons at TRACON level.

There is no TMU position at Norfolk TRACON. Harter was the Operations Supervisor and the Traffic Management specialist on 9/11.

He recommended that all LOA be reviewed every two years. His other recommendation would be education, for example on use of the FIDO (Flight Data Input/Output terminal). You can always tell when new personnel come on at Langley Tower, for example.

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Team Number: 8

Participants (non-Commission): Michael Strother, East Feeder Radar Controller on 9/11;

Observer – Dave Weigand via telephone from Rockville, MD and Steve Wylinski,

NACDA representative

Participants - Commission: Miles Kara, Kevin Shaeffer

Location: Norfolk TRACON

Note: Please refer to the recorded interview for further details.

Background:

Controller for 16 years, started with the US Air Force. Worked at Newport News Tower and has been at Norfolk TRACON/Tower since January 1998. His time is equally divided among all positions in both TRACON and Tower. East Feeder air space extends from the surface to flight level 230. Handoffs on eastbound aircraft are handed off by Peninsula Radar. In his experience he handled perhaps a dozen scrambles, always to the east.

9/11:

He had not personally observed events that occurred in New York prior to handling the Langley scramble. He was aware that something unusual was happening and that both WTC towers had been hit.

Langley Scramble:

Following is in reference to a copy of the transcript. He did not hear the actual scramble order, but did hear the ring. He was aware that a scramble was in progress. William Casson, the Peninsula Radar controller apparently handed him the flight strip since only one strip was found and Casson's handwriting was on the strip.

He acknowledged that he asked what heading the pilot would like. He isn't sure why he did that except to say that any time those guys come off, wherever they are going, we need to have clean airspace. Whatever they want is what we give them. If the pilot wanted to go somewhere else than as specified in the flight plan Strother had the authority to grant that request. He doesn't think he would have entered a new flight plan in the system he would have coordinated manually with whoever he needed to work with to clear air space.

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He made the handover to GIANT KILLER. They asked for radar and he switched the flight over and called back later to make sure GIANT KILLER had HUNTRESS' frequency. They did. It is an automated handoff. He entered a "V" on his console, hit enter and it flashed to GIANT KILLER. The terminology on the screen is something that GIANT KILLER would immediately recognize.

He did not recall anyone, anywhere, raising concern that the flight was headed east despite what the scramble order said. He did not hear the scramble order and wasn't aware of the north vector in that order.

He was the one that called Patuxent at John Harter's request to check on the status of the restricted area. At East Feeder position he routinely talked to Cape Charles and Norfolk High (Irons) sectors at Washington Center.

His personal position on scrambles was that they had priority and he would do what was needed to facilitate their progress, to include authorizing the pilot to go where he wanted to go.

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Participants - Commission: Miles Kara, Kevin Shaeffer

Observer – Dave Weigand via telephone from Rockville, MD

Note: Please refer to the recorded interview for further details.

Background:

Controller since May of 1982, and a couple years prior to that with the military. He has been at Norfolk TRACON/Tower since 1991. He was working the 9-5 shift that day and was assigned to Peninsula position that morning. Norfolk handles the radar for both Newport News and Langley Tower and releases IFR aircraft into the National Airspace System. At TRACON he had the ability to detect primary targets, that switch is always on.

9/11:

He was aware that there was a crash into a building in New York, what kind of crash he did not know. He had not seen events on television. He took the call from HUNTRESS on the scramble line. He recalled the order contained a heading, 010, and altitude and a frequency. After that the flight strip came out with different information, 090 for 60. Langley tower called for release and he released the aircraft, gained comms with the pilot and tried to release the flight to East Peninsula. There was some initial confusion and the pilot came back to him on his frequency and he limited the flight to 23K feet, the limit for Norfolk TRACON.

He was given the opportunity to review the transcript of his conversations with the Quit flight. He acknowledged that he and the pilot exchanged information about the 090 for 60 heading. He recalled no other conversation with the pilot about that heading. He personally didn't question the situation. He had the flight strip and the pilot statement. Had the pilot asked to go 010 he would have let him go immediately. He would not have amended the flight plan; he would have accomplished manual coordination.

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Prior to 9/11 he had worked quit a few scrambles, more than he can remember, perhaps monthly or quarterly, not something that happened every day. He could not recall if the heading was always 090 for 60. He did know that they would come off on runway heading, 080. He would take them on that heading to flight level 4000 and then hand them off.

He confirmed that he was the only one who heard the verbal scramble on the 162 line. His normal procedure was to then notify his supervisor that there was a scramble. He would also notify East Feeder position. The flight plan then follows. The post scramble order call advising of a three-ship formation would have come to him. The addition of a third plane did not make his job more difficult.

Hypothetically, if the pilot had turned on his own to the north he would have worked to facilitate that action, not work to get the pilot back on flight plan path. He may have called the supervisor to help call other facilities. He would have worked to hold the pilot below flight lever 230 in Norfolk TRACON air space.

In his experience he was not aware that they ever had the target component of scramble orders.