

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

(R)

Event: North Eastern Air Defense Sector (NEADS) field site visit

Type of event: Interview with Bill Aires

Date: Friday, January 23, 2004

Special Access Issues: Clearance check

Prepared by: Geoffrey Brown

Team Number: 8

Location: Commander's Conference Room, Building 102

Participants - Non-Commission: Chief Master Sgt. Edward "Bill" Aires, Michael Chiaparas, Deputy Director for the Contract Disputes Resolution Center, Department of Defense (DoD)

Participants - Commission: Miles Kara, Kevin Shaeffer, Geoffrey Brown

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

Background:

Aires is a 30 year retired Air Force Master Chief. He retired in 1984 and joined NEADS as a National Airspace Manager for the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). He negotiates Letters of Agreement, and negotiates the use of airspace for military training and purposes.

September 11, 2001 (9/11):

Aires notes that on the morning of the terrorist attacks he entered the Battle Cab shortly after 9:20AM. He had an extensive base of experience, and recognized that the communications on the operations floor at NEADS were not being exchanged quickly enough. He noted that controllers in sectors at the FAA were speaking with members of the staff on the operations floor and the information was not reaching the Battle Cab. Aires set up a conference call between different FAA entities and the NEADS Battle Cab at approximately 9:52AM, based on calls back and forth to the FAA Command Center. He believes Boston En Route Center (ZBW), New York En Route Center (ZNY), Washington En Route Center (ZDC), and the National Operations Manager (NOM) at the Command Center. Aires noted that Cleveland Center joined quickly. He clarified that the Tracons did not monitor the line constantly, but would join at points. Once it began from that route, other Centers joined over the next few hours. He does not know when the Washington Operations Center (WOC) joined the call. No military agencies were on the line originally. This initiative was not directed by Base Commander Colonel Marr. This line is now the DEN (Domestic Event Network) line.

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Aires noted that over this conference call there was a "blow by blow" description as planes were clearing the skies.

Aires noted that he does not think any tactical information was passed over that line before all four flights had crashed. He noted that there was some confusion regarding Flight 93, and that they thought there were two crashes and there was a thought that there might have been two airplanes, but both sets of information were related to what he believes was Flight 93.

Aires noted that whatever information was passed from that phone he communicated directly to the Battle Cab staff and Colonel Marr.

On 9/11, if there is a target locked on the Q93 and stops squawking, they can hold the target. But when the calls came from the FAA the planes had already stopped squawking, and it is more difficult to lock onto a target.

Authority For Intercept Operations (AFIO):

Aires noted that the main purpose of NEADS before 9/11 was to look out over the water, and there was a rare occasion for operations over land. AFIO was invented in the early 1960s when there was not nearly as much air traffic.

Aires noted that the AFIO restrictions are more stringent than FAA restrictions for flying VFR. He noted that AFIO could not be operated properly unless over a cap. He also noted that no one in the FAA would have known what AFIO was, and commented that AFIO "has been sitting there collecting dust" until it was changed post 9/11.

The Langley scramble:

Aires noted that there was no target data given in the scramble order for the Langley fighters.

090 for 60:

Aires commented that every airplane that had ever scrambled from Langley AFB in the nine years he had been at NEADS had been scrambled at the 090 for 60 (ninety compass degrees for sixty miles) heading. He noted that he can not comment on what the situational awareness at Langley AFB was, and that it is a very difficult thing in his opinion to move fighters out of the commercial air traffic in that region. Aires noted as well that an FAA computer will not recognize a flight unless a flight plan is entered. Aires explained that once the flight plane is entered the computer assigns a transponder code for the flight to squawk.

Under normal procedures a fighter launched from Langley AFB travels through the airspace of Langley Tower, to Norfolk, to Giant Killer. Aires commented that under normal conditions NEADS will start tracking an aircraft as soon as it is airborne. He can

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not give an opinion on what had happened in the sixty miles the fighters moved east before they were turned on a more direct heading for Washington, D.C.

When Commission staff told Aires they had heard in past interviews that there were communication lapses and difficulties between NEADS and Langley scrambles, Aires replied that the radio communications between Huntress and the Langley fighters were "pretty good" in his experience. He noted that NEADS has a radio relay out of Giant Killer. Commission staff noted to Aires that they have heard otherwise, but Aires said based on his knowledge he would not agree that there are problems.

Regarding active air defense scrambles throughout the country, Aires noted that the flights always launch into FAA control. He noted that the scrambles move out over water so they can enter a military airspace and be controlled by military controllers. He noted that post 9/11 the FAA will control an intercept unless AFIO is declared.

Aires noted that the controllers at Giant Killer had only ever followed a specific format in order to pass the control of a scramble to Huntress. He also noted that both the personnel at Langley and Giant Killer who answered the scramble circuit would not be the same personnel who controlled the fighters.

Aires noted that under normal circumstance he would have expected someone to start "bitching" immediately that the fighters were not on the scramble order 010 heading as soon as was practical. He also noted that the FAA was not practiced in vectoring a "hot" (armed) military aircraft to Washington DC to intercept "anything".

Military exercises with the FAA:

Aires noted that NEADS has worked with individual FAA En Route Centers on exercises, but not with any national FAA entities. Aires noted that all the military exercises would be in special use airspace. He noted that all the FAA would do was control an aircraft until it reached the military airspace.

Order to Engage:

Aires noted that previous to 9/11 the authority given to intercept a commercial airliner with a military flight would have to come from "upwards of the Secretary of Defense."

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