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MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Event: Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) New York Air Route Center
Type of event: Interview with Evanna Dowis, CIC, Certified Professional Controller
Date: Tuesday, September 30, 2003
Special Access Issues: None
Prepared by: John Azzarello and Geoffrey Brown
Team Number: 8
Location: FAA New York Air Route Center, Ronkonkoma, New York
Participants - Non-Commission: Alfred Johnson, FAA Counsel, Mark A. DiPalma,
President, NATCA ZNY
Participants - Commission: John Azzarello, Miles Kara, Geoffrey Brown

NOTE: Please refer to the tape recording of the interview for a complete account.

Evanna Dowis was hired by the FAA in the fall of 1997. She trained for 2 1/2 years and became a certified professional controller in 1999. Prior to 9/11, she was trained and certified as a controller-in-charge. Prior to working at ZNY, Dowis worked for the U.S. Air Force and the Department of Defense as an Air Traffic Controller ("ATC"). Specifically, she worked as an ATC at Edwin's Air Force Base, California, from 1989 to 1994. Subsequently, Dowis worked at the air traffic control tower at Buckley AFB.

Dowis explained the distinction between an FAA area supervisor and an FAA controller-in-charge ("CIC"). An area supervisor is a full-time position with administrative responsibilities. The area supervisor must evaluate employees as well as oversee the entire operation in his or her assigned area. A controller-in-charge's duties are solely operational.

On the morning of 9/11, Dowis started as a CPC and later became the CIC of Area B when the Area B supervisor left the area. She recalled that she first became aware of air traffic problems when Boston Air Route Center (ZBW) notified Mark Merced, a ZNY CPC assigned to radar Sector 56 (Kennedy VOR 18,000 feet and up), that an aircraft with the call sign "American Airlines 11" (AA 11) had been hijacked. Boston Center reported AA 11 was NORDO (i.e., no radio communications) and had no transponder broadcast (i.e., no "mode C" altitude information). Boston Center attempted to help the controller at Sector 56 gain recognition of the primary target, but it was very difficult for the controller to verify the correct primary target on his scope. Dowis noted that, without any information regarding the altitude of AA 11, the primary target could be registering something at 1,000 feet or 30,000 feet - "it was just a blip". Dowis immediately relayed the information she and Merced received from Boston Center to Bruce Barrett and Pete Mulligan who were working in the OMIC area. They informed her that ZBW had already called them and advised them about AA 11.

Dowis then returned to Area B where she, Merced and Dave Bottiglia, the controller who monitored Sector 42 (the airspace to the west of R56), asked other aircraft to look in the area where AA 11 was believed to be in an effort to identify the altitude and location of AA 11. They were told at least one

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aircraft previously had advised the FAA that AA 11 had been spotted at approximately 29,000 feet. This information may have come from a pilot's TCAS (traffic collision avoidance system). FAA controllers do not have the TCAS system. Dowis advised controllers who worked sectors adjacent to the sector where AA 11 was located that there was a possible hijack at approximately 29,000 feet, and to clear other aircraft from its path. She continued to relay updated information about AA 11 to the TMU desk and the Operations Manager-in-Charge ("OMIC").

United Airlines Flight 175 ("UAL 175") entered sector 42 of New York's airspace, and made radio contact with radar controller Dave Bottiglia who worked the R42 position that day. When UAL 175 entered Bottiglia's sector, its operations were normal. After Bottiglia transmitted a second request over the radio for information about the location of AA 11, the pilot of UAL 175 advised ZNY he had heard threatening communications on his frequency when UAL 175 departed from Boston. It was apparent to Dowis that UAL 175 did not relay this information until Bottiglia (R42) asked about AA 11. In subsequent interviews at ZNY, commission staff was told that the pilot of UAL 175 may have waited until he arrived in New York's airspace and was confident the hijackers of AA 11 could not overhear his communications before he advised ZNY about the hostile transmission. At that point Dowis stated the controllers were intensely focused on AA 11 and where it might be headed.

Subsequently, Dowis says there were reports of ELT signals (i.e., emergency locator transmissions) in the area. Dowis explained that the CIC must report ELT signals to the OMIC with certain exceptions. For example, it is not necessary to report an ELT signal when the pilot advises the FAA controller that he accidentally emitted the ELT signal. Moreover, the FAA will designate certain time periods on selected days wherein pilots are permitted to test the aircrafts' ELT signals. During these time periods allotted for ELT testing, there is an understanding in the aviation industry that the FAA will not report the ELT signals to the appropriate authorities.

Shortly after the initial reports of an ELT in the area, Dave Bottiglia at R42 noticed that UAL 175 went into a coast track (an aircraft goes into coast track when its assigned transponder code is changed by the pilot independent of any action by FAA controllers). Bottiglia advised Dowis that UAL 175 went into a coast track. He further advised Dowis that he had lost radio contact with the pilots of UAL 175. Dowis relayed this information to the OMIC. With regard to UAL 175, the aircraft was assigned transponder code 1443 upon departure. At some point while it was in the airspace designated Sector 42, Bottiglia noticed that UAL 175 changed its transponder code to 3321. Dowis stated she was not certain the aircraft with beacon code 3321 was UAL 175 because much of her attention was focused on the hijacking of AA 11. Nonetheless, she assumed UAL 175 was associated with the beacon code 3321.

Bottiglia and Dowis then observed UAL 175, now in coast track and associated with transponder code 3321, turn off course. Dowis then informed the OMIC that UAL 175 had deviated significantly from its intended course. As UAL 175 turned eastbound towards New York City, Dowis recalled the OMIC said that fighters had been scrambled. At that time, Dowis believed the fighters mentioned by the OMIC had been scrambled for UAL 175. She continued to observe UAL 175 on the radar screen while other controllers turned other aircraft from the path of UAL 175 to avoid a mid-air collision. Dowis described the atmosphere as quite hectic.

With regard to UAL 175, Dowis stated that "hijack" entered her mind when the aircraft lost radio contact and deviated drastically from its intended course. Dowis commented to Commission staff that prior to 9/11 controllers seemed to lose radio communication with aircraft on a regular basis. However, she noted the loss of contact was usually only for a few seconds. Dowis also commented that occasionally there is a loss of radio contact when the aircraft entered "blind spots" in certain geographic areas. With regard to loss of radio contact, the controllers sometimes ask the pilots to go to backup frequency. Shortly thereafter, the controller calls the aircraft and asks the pilot to "IDENT" - which means that the pilot can hear the ATC, but the ATC can't hear the pilot. When the pilot sends an "IDENT" signal, three bars and a line appear on the controller's scope. Other responses by a controller may include: asking other aircraft if they can communicate with the aircraft in question, asking the OMIC to call the aircraft's company, broadcasting on the guard frequency, and immediately notifying the CIC or area supervisor.

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Dowis explained that the radio frequency changes each time an aircraft enters a new sector. She noted that, at times, pilots get confused when they hear radio frequency changes intended for another plane. Equipment failure (loss of transponder) is not frequent. According to Dowis, an aircraft's loss of transponder rarely occurs. Dowis also commented that an aircraft's deviation from course is unusual and infrequent.

Dowis stated that the loss of both radio communication and transponder in her view would indicate equipment failure and an imminent aircraft crash. Even prior to 9/11, when an aircraft deviates significantly from its course in addition to the loss of radio communication and transponder, Dowis said she would immediately think a hijack had occurred.

With regard to UAL 175, there were two mode three code changes in a short period of time, and it did not take long for her to conclude the plane was probably being hijacked. She recalls she told the OMIC this. She showed him the new transponder code 3321. He had already heard from ZBW that AA 11 was hijacked. Because of the infrequency of hijacks, Dowis commented it was surreal and unbelievable that there could be a second hijack.

Dowis does not believe that ZNY had the situational awareness to definitively identify that the first impact at the WTC was AA 11. She does not think it was confirmed until after the news reported the event correctly. Unlike the uncertainty regarding AA 11, Dowis was confident that UAL 175 was the airplane that hit the WTC. As she tracked the aircraft she thought it was going to crash into New York City. Her assumption that UAL 175 struck the WTC was not confirmed until approximately thirty to sixty minutes after she was relieved of her duty.

Dowis commented that based on past ATC experience it was an institutional assumption that hijacked aircraft would land and make demands. Controllers, according to Dowis, are specifically taught to look for the 7500 hijack code, and to inform their CIC or area supervisor. They are also taught to monitor the hijacked aircraft and provide sufficient separation for other aircraft. The controller is also supposed to be discreet with the pilot. According to Dowis, there was an assumption before 9/11 that the airline pilot was flying the plane and not the terrorist. Dowis' experience with the FAA, military and DoD all included some form of yearly hijack response training. Training would include computer based instruction and a review of procedures and rules. All the training scenarios Dowis had experienced involved the hijack of only one airplane.

Dowis described the procedure for FAA notification of a hijack to the military as follows. The ATC should notify the CIC or area supervisor regarding a hijack. The CIC or area supervisor is responsible for notifying the OMIC. The OMIC, in turn, notifies the military.

Dowis noted that there have already been changes at ZNY since 9/11. There are now military blocks/caps over airspace. She also believes the OMIC has a direct line to the military. Memorandums issued on a regular basis instruct controllers to be constantly aware of current procedures.

With regard to the relationship between the FAA and the military over the division of airspace, Dowis stated that the military for the most part gets what it needs from the FAA. She acknowledged that the military can make an ATC's job harder, but the military's requests are accommodated quickly in today's world.

With regard to AA11, Dowis is not aware of any reports within FAA or the military that AA 11 may have been airborne after 8:46 EDT. Dowis stated the controllers had accurate and timely situational awareness that UAL 175 hit the WTC because the transponder code 3321 associated with UAL 175 allowed them to track altitude as the aircraft descended. The altitude information was not available for AA11. This factor contributed to the lack of situational awareness.

Dowis stated the Area B personnel probably would have concluded UAL 175 was hijacked absent any awareness of that AA 11 had been hijacked. Dowis does not know if the ROC, the FAA headquarters or if Herndon Command Center were notified as events surrounding UAL 175 developed.