

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

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Event: Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Boston Center Interview with Jon Schippani, Operational Supervisor in Charge, Boston Center.

Type of event:

Recorded Interview

Date: Monday, September 22, 2003

Special Access Issues: None

Prepared by: Geoffrey Brown and Miles kara

Team Number: 8

Location: FAA Boston Center, Nashua, New Hampshire

Participants - Non-Commission: Chris Perito, FAA General Consul

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

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

Schippani was supervisor for Area C on 9/11. He had 10 years prior experience as a supervisor, and had 16 years experience as a controller prior to that. There are usually two supervisors in an area, but he was the only one on that day.

He first became aware of AA11 when the 46R Controller, Pete Zalewski, said he had lost contact with an aircraft; they followed up according to the usual handling of a "no radio" (NORDO) aircraft. AA11 became a real concern for Schippani when the transponder signal shut off. Schippani went to Area B, and confirmed that they too had no contact. It was at this point that Pete Zalewski heard what he referred to as "threatening" language with an "Arabic accent" from the cockpit. John assigned Al Miller to sit with Zalewski. They asked another plane in the sky, UAL175, for a visual on AA11, and UAL175 replied that AA11 had an approximate altitude of 28,000 feet.

Until the threatening communication was confirmed, Schippani believed AA11 had experienced severe electrical or mechanical difficulty. Once the threatening conversation had been confirmed, and AA11 took a southbound course, Schippani believed AA11 was hijacked and headed for a landing at Kennedy or Cuba.

Schippani roughly recalled what occurred at the watchdesk. [Staff Note: The watch desk is the hub of activity in the Center.] He remembers Dan Bueno attempted to contact Otis AFB for support, but Schippani did not recall the procedure for request a fighter scramble. He guessed that most likely pre-9/11 protocol for the request should have been from Boston Center to the Regional Operation Command (ROC), and the ROC would process the request. He confirmed that prior to 9/11 his understanding of NORAD/NEADS role in a hijacking scenario was cloudy.

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To get the closest military asset, Schippani noted he would contact Giant Killer out of the Virginia Capes. Giant Killer monitors low to mid altitudes along the east coast. He had an understanding of how to contact them by phone. [Staff Note: Giant Killer performs the Air Traffic Controller function in designated military warning areas over the ocean. It is a Navy organization with its control center at Oceana, Virginia.] Schippani noted that from his experience Otis Air Force Base was an unknown factor, and he would not know how to contact NEADS (North Atlantic Air Defense). Prior to 9/11 Schippani noted that Air Traffic Controllers (ATC) had no input in the coordination over airspace with the military, unless there was an "aircraft transfer". Schippani was aware of the FAA Command Center at Herndon as a resource, but was not sure of its possible function on 9/11, or in a 9/11 type event.

Schippani noted that Boston Center had "good situational awareness" and relayed its information promptly to the ROC and FAA Washington Operations Center (WOC). The lines of communication from the Controller through the Traffic Management Unit to the Operations Manager In Charge (OMIC) were effective, but Schippani noted that all of Boston Center's experience handling aircraft in crisis still did not prepare it for the shock of the 9/11 attacks. Schippani felt that the Air Traffic system reacted as best as it could to handle a complete change in, and then a shut down of the traffic pattern, especially after the New York air space was completely closed and Boston Center was forced to handle all of its users.

Schippani noted that it was a mistake within Boston Center to "key the overhead microphone" so that the full sector could hear the AA11 communications. He believes this contributed to the emotional stress of the Air Traffic Controllers. [Staff Note: Later, Zalewski told staff he did that so that everyone else could experience what he was experiencing and to generate a sense of urgency which he felt did not exist.]

Schippani is highly concerned over nuclear power plants, and their susceptibility to 9/11 attack scenarios.

Regarding the FAA and the military, Schippani stated the relationship was "like oil and water". He expressed some frustration that communication over sharing airspace is often difficult. For example, when thunderstorms threaten the airspace on the eastern coast, the military does not coordinate well with clearing alternate routes for commercial aircraft if they are using the space. Furthermore, even in the post-9/11 environment the coordination necessary for VIP flight is difficult. Schippani did acknowledge that the FAA could do a better job itself. He explained that the military needs large tracks of airspace for mid flight refueling, and that the FAA is reluctant to cooperate.

Regarding coordinating an intercept, Schippani would like to see more drills. He had experienced one scenario when a plane veered too close to a presidential airspace cap in Maine. He thought this scenario was a positive example of the improving FAA/military relationship.