INTERVIEW OF SCOOTER LIBBY
BY
NEWSWEEK MAGAZINE

Q  -- (IN PROGRESS) -- when you were first aware of the first thing and what you were doing and what you were seeing and just walk through it.

MR. LIBBY: Sure. Could we get the ground rules on the tape, just for --

Q  Sure. I'm going to give a draft of this article to Mary Matalin in mid-December for you to review in hopes that you will review it quickly and in good faith, and get it back to me. I'll be sensitive to the security concerns and all that, but you will be able -- you will have -- you won't be surprised and you will have your -- you'll be able to -- it's going to be written as narrative. If I think that you did something interesting or thought something interesting, or said something interesting, you're going to be in the story. You can take yourself out, but I hope you don't.

MR. LIBBY: Okay.

Q  You understand? Cheney is the central character; the Vice President is the central character, but his aides are important, too. And I've interviewed Mrs. Cheney and Condoleezza Rice, and Edelman, and each of them have some moment in there which is revealing of some self-conscious -- (GAP IN TAPE) -- and I'm looking for that.
There's things like, God, I can't believe -- is this real, is this a movie. With Dr. Rice, there's a nice scene at 5:00 p.m. Thursday night; she staggers home and during the changing of the guards ceremony they're playing The National Anthem, and she has her first emotional moment. I mean, those little details are important to a story like this and do convey the feel as well as the fact.

MR. LIBBY: Okay, so by -- what did you say, background, that means what?

Q It means -- I'm not sure how to explain the ground rules in the traditional sense. I'm going to show you the story. If you don't like something in it, you can take it out. You have control over the story. I'm asking you to have good faith about that and not be arbitrary.

MR. LIBBY: And in terms of the -- what Mary or others may find to be classified detail, you're not going to show it to anybody else until you show it to her?

Q No. She gets the story, she distributes it, and then she gets it back to me. Okay?

MR. LIBBY: Okay. I had somebody bring me this time line just so I can keep some of the morning details clear.

Q It helps.

MR. LIBBY: All right, so you just want me to start?

Q Yes.

MR. LIBBY: We had a usual full morning schedule, but I was meeting actually right around the relevant time with my deputy for national security, Eric Edelman. And while we were having a meeting, which I think actually was about the Middle East -- and what was -- our policies with the war in the Middle East -- I had -- we were running late. I had backed up a meeting with Admiral Abbott, who, just ironically, was the person we had picked to be head of our study on homeland defense. And he was in the outer room sort of waiting as this went on.

What I recall is that my assistant, Jenny Mayfield, came into the room and said, you need to turn on the television, because something -- a plane just ran into the World Trade Center. She had heard it not -- she had not been watching TV; someone had been down the corridor, so she didn't get it exactly at the moment it first happened.
And I asked her -- she said it was a small plane, if I recall. And I asked her if anyone was talking about terrorism in the commentary or -- and she said, no. And I told her that -- I said, okay. We had our meeting going on. And I said, that doesn't sound like us. You know, monitor it, and we'll keep going with our meeting.

A few minutes later, she came in and said, you've got to -- I had turned off the TV because it was a serious subject, and we didn't need the distraction. And she came in and said, this is one of the most chilling things I've ever seen. And you really need to -- she just walked over and turned on the TV, which is very unlike her, so I knew it was serious.

And we watched a minute or two, but we were still trying to get through what was a meeting that had to be timely. And there was still no word about anything being directly in our realm of -- the policy issue as opposed to a tragic accident.

She came in a minute later or some short period of time thereafter and said, a second plane hit the World -- the other World Trade Tower. And I immediately said, well, that's us; that's terrorism, and dispatched Eric Edelman to go to down to what he was, I think, overdue for, which was -- trying to finish up a meeting that Condi Rice normally holds about 9:00 a.m.; dispatched him to get down there -- it might have been actually a little bit before, a little bit after it was supposed to begin -- and sent someone off to a guy who was in charge of our terrorism portfolio to go keep track of whether a group had been stood up to deal with this, because it seemed likely to me it would be promptly stood up.

After Eric had left, I dispatched a second -- one of his deputies to go down and assist him, because I wanted to have continued connectivity. I didn't want somebody leaving the room and having the room unattended -- whichever room they were talking about; whether it be Condi's meeting or the other meeting, I wanted to know that I could get people in and out of the meeting. So I sent a second person down.

Q This other meeting -- is this Clark?

MR. LIBBY: This is the Clark meeting, yes; which I don't think I knew existed at that point. I just assumed it was going to be stood up immediately, because that would be the practice. And then, right at almost -- all of this happened within minutes. I tried to get Admiral Abbott in to tell him I thought we were in the middle of one of our -- something he was here for, but not the one he had come in to talk about.

000092
The phone rang. It was the Vice President. He wanted me to come over right away, and this is all within two or three minutes. So I headed across the -- cancelled the cup of coffee that was supposed to coming up to me and headed across the hall to see the Vice President.

Got over there, and he was meeting -- there were several people in his room. I think Josh Bolton was in there; one of the communicators; maybe Mary or Karen. Sean O'Keefe I think was there. He was watching -- wanted me to get down and give him sort of -- because the President was away, we had the responsibility for sort of organizing things, and he wanted to make sure that he was well connected. So he dispatched me down to the Sit Room, or the coordinating center, or whatever it was.

I went down there. But when I got down there, there were very few people there. It was still pretty early. And there was one or two people up on the line in the secure video conferencing. And they were starting to set schedules for during the day and work assignments. Dick Clark was there, my staffers were there.

And we had not been there very long -- let me get some other notes here -- hadn't been there very long when I was contacted by the Secret Service to say that the boss was being moved to a secure location, and that I should get to him as fast as possible. There's a continuity program that requires certain staffers to be around him under certain types of emergency conditions.

So I gave some last comments to the people -- my staff in the room and took off to meet up with him. I was actually supposed to be escorted by a Secret Service agent, who was to meet me in the lower lobby of the West Wing. The agent wasn't there, however, and so I was just headed to where I knew we were going to be -- I guess I had been told the location, but, anyway, where we would be headed -- when I ran into Mrs. Cheney.

As best I recall, she was with an agent who was trying to get her -- the agent was a little confused about where she should be. I told him that I thought we should be down in the PEOC. But he somehow had the impression that she was supposed to be in the mess area. So I stood there a while trying to -- I didn't want to leave her up there without getting her down to where she was supposed to be. It was a little bit -- I mean, I had some sense of time urgency because I was aware that there was an incoming plane at this point.

Q Well, there's this whole business about the 47 seconds...
or something when they -- you know, the by the elbow and picked him up, because -- I mean, there is a plane going 500 m: out. That's about a 60-second --

MR. LIBBY: Right. But no one has these situations, and I don't know exactly, or whatever it was and when the tell aware that there was a plane incoming, to find the boss quickly.

Q When they told you to go to t told you there was a plane incoming?

MR. LIBBY: Yes. I somehow knew. what the -- how it came to me, but I su same phone call, because I know I had to get out of there quickly and down to where I was -- down to where the boss was.

Q So you said that the Secret Service agent -- do you remember what you said to him? We've got to --

MR. LIBBY: I said I think we're -- Mrs. Cheney and I are supposed to be in the PEOC. And he was -- he thought we were supposed to be somewhere else. He also -- you know, they have the wires in their ears, and I think he was getting some instructions off of that.

So in any case, it got clarified after some amount of time, and we went down --

Q How much time?

MR. LIBBY: I would say probably a minute or so. Not a great amount of time, except at 500 miles per hour.

Q It felt like -- I mean, you are aware of time urgency as you are having this conversation.

MR. LIBBY: Yes. I'm aware that she would be safer if we could get her down to the PEOC.

Q I mean, could you just order the guy to -- I don't know how the chain of command works on this and who has authority.

MR. LIBBY: I don't know the chain of command, either, but I knew that ordering him would not be -- whether I had the authority or not, it would not work in --

Q It doesn't work anyway. Because if you order them,
or something when they -- you know, the scene where they grab him by the elbow and picked him up, because the air traffic control -- I mean, there is a plane going 500 miles an hour, 10 miles out. That's about a 60-second --

MR. LIBBY: Right. But no one has perfect knowledge in these situations, and I don't know exactly when that 54 seconds ran, or whatever it was and when the time that I was. But I was aware that there was a plane incoming, and that it was important to find the boss quickly.

Q When they told you to go to this continuity drill, they told you there was a plane incoming?

MR. LIBBY: Yes. I somehow knew. I had forgotten exactly what the -- how it came to me, but I suspect it was in the very same phone call, because I know I had to get out of there pretty quickly and down to where I was -- down to where the boss was.

Q So you said that the Secret Service agent -- do you remember what you said to him? We've got to --

MR. LIBBY: I said I think we're -- Mrs. Cheney and I are supposed to be in the PEOC. And he was -- he thought we were supposed to be somewhere else. He also -- you know, they have the wires in their ears, and I think he was getting some instructions off of that.

So in any case, it got clarified after some amount of time, and we went down --

Q How much time?

MR. LIBBY: I would say probably a minute or so. Not a great amount of time, except at 500 miles per hour.

Q It felt like -- I mean, you are aware of time urgency as you are having this conversation.

MR. LIBBY: Yes. I'm aware that she would be safer if we could get her down to the PEOC.

Q I mean, could you just order the guy to -- I don't know how the chain of command works on this and who has authority.

MR. LIBBY: I don't know the chain of command, either, but I knew that ordering him would not be -- whether I had the authority or not, it would not work in --

Q It doesn't work anyway. Because if you order them,
then they resist. He had to hear it in his ear.

MR. LIBBY: I would have only added to confusion, in my view, at the time, to try and change what he was planning to do.

So he quickly got the proper instruction and we all went down towards the PEOC. We ended up meeting him in a corridor where he was on the phone with the President. It's a corridor; more like you would call a tunnel -- corridor and a tunnel sort of arrangement.

Q Excuse me?

MR. LIBBY: It's more like a -- it's not a corridor as in a White House corridor, it was more like an underground sort of corridor.

Q Yes, I mean, there's a sensitive security thing here, but my understanding -- the PEOC is a paneled room with some video screens deep underground.

MR. LIBBY: Correct. Right. And it's on one of the routes to that, that we ran into him. And he was on the phone talking to the President. There was one other person there, and --

Q Is it sort of a holding room?

MR. LIBBY: No, it was just a route, just a place along the way.

Q And he's on what kind of a phone? I mean, is it a mobile phone --

MR. LIBBY: No, it's a phone -- as I recall, it was a phone -- a built-in phone. A phone attached to the wall; a fixture, in real -- terms. So we went -- we left there when he had finished his call and we went straight down to the PEOC. Several staffers there, cookies on the table, sort of --

Q Yes, I heard about the cookies.

MR. LIBBY: The same cookies as every other meeting I've ever been in, in the PEOC. I had a feeling that they were the exact same cookies that they put away --

Q Store-bought cookies.

MR. LIBBY: -- they put away and bring back out. (Laughter.)

Q Before I get there, do you have any sense of what the
President was talking to the Vice President about when you found him talking on the phone? What's the gist of the conversation?

MR. LIBBY: I heard only his half of the conversation at that point. And I can't say that I can quote any of it. I mean, I heard what I --

Q Do you remember the gist of it? Do you remember what they were trying to convey?

MR. LIBBY: It was basically conveying what was happening.

Q And what was happening was, it was an inbound plane?

MR. LIBBY: There was an inbound plane, that the two World Trade Centers had been hit. There were reports he was going down to the PEOC, that the White House -- I think a decision had been made to evacuate; if not then, it was that, it was under discussion. So there were a number of --

Q I guess what I'm fishing for is, is the President being made aware in real time that there is an inbound plane for the White House?

MR. LIBBY: I don't recall specifically. I believe so, but I don't recall. I believe so in the sense that I recall it as being a conversation in which he was updating the President on the situation. And I think I would have remembered if he hadn't updated him on the fact that --

Q Did he have that Cheney laconic voice as he's doing all this?

MR. LIBBY: Yes, he was unflappable; that's right. His agent was there, and --

Q Excuse me, I'm sorry to keep interrupting you, but obviously this is something -- is such a moment of urgency. The Vice President of the United States is in a tunnel someplace talking to the President. There's an incoming plane. He's using his laconic Cheney-esque voice, sort of ticking off the things going on.

MR. LIBBY: That's my recollection.

Q Is he portraying any sign of anxiety, urgency?

MR. LIBBY: No. There is no outward manifestation of that, other than what he was -- he was communicating in very efficient -- in a very efficient manner the status of the situation. In
other words, without being excited or excitable, he was communicating the information quite efficiently, as the situation demanded.

Q Okay, sorry.

MR. LIBBY: Okay. We headed down to the PEOC, and somewhere in this time frame, we -- there is the crash in the Pentagon, and the initial word that comes through was that it might have been a light plane or a helicopter that hit the Pentagon. And that becomes relevant later on.

Q Are you able to connect the Pentagon crash with the report of the incoming plane?

MR. LIBBY: No. Actually, we think it might be a light plane or a helicopter, as opposed to a different -- part of what you will see as we go along in the story is there was -- at one point, there were a number of planes thought that might be hijacked, or actually some reported incorrectly as hijacked.

Q Right.

MR. LIBBY: And what complicated it is, even of the four that we know were hijacked -- and some of them long after they had already crashed or had hit their target, we thought they might still be in the air because we had misinformation about what had hit.

So at this point, the relevance of this is that we were told that it might have been a helicopter that crashed at the Pentagon at the same time we got it was on the side near the helicopter pad. So we had some doubt. I think at one point, we might have heard it was a small plane. So there was confusion about what had hit the Pentagon.

While we were down there, the -- as I recall, the south tower collapsed. And just about that same time, we got a report that there was an inbound plane 80 miles out. So it would have been a little bit after the south tower collapsed, as I recall. It came from the joint operations center, the information. And this was the first instance that I was aware of in which the question of do you wish to engage the plane arose.

As I recall, a -- one of the office -- one of the PEOC staff, someone I didn't know, came into the room, made the presentation to the Vice President that the plane was inbound. I think we were probably all dividing 80 miles by 500 miles per hour to get some sense of what the windows were.
Q And do you remember any debate, discussion -- I mean, obviously this is a momentous and horrific decision for a head of government to -- or, the number two guy in government to order an American airliner shot down. So I'm interested in trying to recreate as best I can -- was there a debate, was there a conversation -- you know, the nature of this decision.

MR. LIBBY: Actually -- I recall as soon as the word came in and the question was posed to him, I recall thinking, this is a very interesting moment. And there were numbers of things that somebody might do in response to a question like that. And quite characteristic of Cheney, you know, in about the time it takes a batter to decide to swing, he was ready with the decision.

There was no -- it was very short time frames, as you can see. I know from working with him for a long time the calculations that were going through his head. There's -- we need to get -- the plane has to get over there, there has to be a time for the various options that a plane could go through, inspecting it, shouldering it, whatever. And delay would not be helpful.

But it was clearly a very momentous decision that he was up against, and you could see him weigh it quickly and make his call.

Q You mean, literally, the time it takes for a batter to swing?

MR. LIBBY: About -- to make the decision to swing. It was a quick, very quick decision.

Q And how did he convey it?

MR. LIBBY: Maybe starting from the wind-up. But it was not long. He said yes.

Q One word?

MR. LIBBY: Roughly.

Q I mean, the question is, do you want to engage? Do you want the aircraft to engage the aircraft, or words to that effect? And his answer is yes?

MR. LIBBY: Yes.

Q Now, does "engage" mean -- there are several steps before you actually fire, so --
MR. LIBBY: Correct.

Q -- he's meaning fly up to the aircraft and -- or, what does he mean? What does "yes" convey? What does that mean?

MR. LIBBY: I think I understood the "yes" to mean exactly what you're saying, that these are things that, as a former Secretary of Defense, he knows. And it was not necessary to go through a long discussion of, well, by that, I mean go up, don't fire until you call me back. I mean, he has great faith in the military, and I think understood the processes that the military would go through before they would do something as momentous as firing on a civilian aircraft. His decision was to, in effect, put the plane in the place from which it could take that course, those series of steps.

But all of that was unstated, as I recall.

Q So, then, how does he get the President in the act?

MR. LIBBY: I think the President may already have been in the act. I mean, there were phone calls with the President before and after, and I wouldn't be surprised that there were -- there had already been discussions with the President about getting CAP up. I think the planes were already up; I don't think they were launching, but I'm not sure.

But I'm almost certain that they had already had discussions with the President.

Q So this possibility was contemplated, and the President gave -- delegated the authority to do this to the Vice President?

MR. LIBBY: Well, for this stage of it, that's my recollection, yes. But I wasn't -- as I say, I was not on those phone calls. There were subsequent phone calls immediately thereafter with the President, and my recollection of those calls was that it was not like a brand-new subject, but --

Q Yes. What happened --

MR. LIBBY: I don't recall the details of the conversation, other than that I had the sense this was a follow-on discussion, not an initial discussion. But they're both pretty smart guys with quick brains, so it would not have taken a lot of detail.

The next thing I recall is that a second report that the plane was -- when I say "the next thing," the next notable thing -- there were lots of things going on -- was a report that the plane was 60 miles out. So you can probably do the math and
figure out how far apart, at least the concept was, between those two, although you -- you know.

Q So a couple of minutes.

MR. LIBBY: Yes, although you don't know the report that 60 miles out may have come five minutes later than it should have come, so it's hard to know when exactly things were --

Q Several minutes --

MR. LIBBY: Right. And somewhere right in this time frame, a little later, there was a report I think on CNN that there had been an explosion on Capitol Hill. At least that was the word that circulated.

Q Yes. Mrs. Cheney mentioned this.

MR. LIBBY: Yes. You could, I'm sure, verify that by going back to CNN tapes. But that was the word. Whether we saw it or not, I don't recall. They had -- at different times, CNN was up, or --

Q And the car bomb at the State Department. Now, how confusing is that to have that incoming wrong information? Does that affect the --

MR. LIBBY: Well, it affects a number of things. I mean, first it affects -- you have to worry -- a more immediate threat to Congress or members. If there are car bombs on the street, there are going to be civilians maybe walking down the street who might be endangered. It implies a different level of threat and a multi-faceted attack.

Q I mean, are you believing it when you hear these things?

MR. LIBBY: The first reports are always wrong.

Q And you are consciously thinking first reports are --

MR. LIBBY: Yes. Oh, definitely. That's one of the things that -- you know, I was with him at the Pentagon in the Gulf War, and it doesn't take long to get that principle down. It may be true, it may not be true.

We learned right about that period, if I recall, that one of the hijacked planes was down. But we didn't know which or what. Also at that point, the question came in, too --
Q So you're not checking the 60 -- the hijacked plane with the 60 miles out?

MR. LIBBY: We didn't know. Is it the 60-mile-per-hour -- is it the plane 60 miles out, or is it some other plane? We didn't know. We just heard one of the planes was down. We also heard -- the question came up about that time, should he evacuate. And this was the first time it came up. It came up a couple of times that morning. I believe the question at this point was posed by Dr. Edelman, Eric Edelman, my deputy. But it was raised again later by Condi Rice, the National Security Advisor.

And in each instance that it came up, the boss's reaction was the same, that again, it was one of those -- you could see him go through the chain of logic. And the President was clearly in a safe place at that point. He was not in Washington, in any case. And being headed to his airplane or in his airplane; I have forgotten the exact -- where the exact timing was. And we were better connected where we were at that time than we would be if we were en route to a helicopter or up in a helicopter or in a car.

So he made the decision to stay at the post.

Q Did he articulate the reasons for it, or did he just say -- it's -- so many other people have mentioned connectivity.

MR. LIBBY: He articulated at that point that we had good comms where we were, and it would be better than when we were on the move.

Q Good --

MR. LIBBY: Good communications?

Q Is that the word "comms"?

MR. LIBBY: Comms.

Q Did he use that word?

MR. LIBBY: I don't know. I think probably not. That's probably my slang.

Q Now, this is a -- may get into a security issue, but in the PEOC, presumably he would be safe, even if a plane did hit the Pentagon, he would physically survive that.

MR. LIBBY: You mean the White House?
Q Yes.

MR. LIBBY: I don't know the answer to that; you'll have to talk to security types.

Q But it's a consideration, it seems to me.

MR. LIBBY: It is; but again, I think the conclusion was that, given that the President was safe, it was the more reasonable --

Q He was expendable?

MR. LIBBY: Well, I think that was -- it's not said, but I think his thinking was that he could do more good for more people by staying where he was than he could by moving.

We also learned right around that time that Air Force Two was going to get or had gotten protection from air assets.

Q When is the famous -- I don't want to get out of sequence here, but the name threat against Air Force Two? When does that arise?

MR. LIBBY: It was this sort of mid-morning period when so much was happening. I don't recall exactly what it was. I heard that in the room, at the same time as other people.

Q I've never quite heard the language on this, maybe because they don't want me to hear what the code name is. But do you remember -- there's some indication that there is a name threat, or a code name threat. I'm not sure.

MR. LIBBY: I heard that at the time. What I recall is, I recall him talking -- I'm pretty sure I recall him talking with the President on the phone and saying, you know, there's been a threat to Air Force Two --

Q Air Force One.

MR. LIBBY: I'm sorry, Air Force One, right. And you should -- and then they had discussions about how to divert him to a safe spot.

Q Had the decision been made -- had the decision been made before that threat about who -- where he should go and his whereabouts and all that?

MR. LIBBY: I believe these decisions were made -- when we
say "before that time," you mean, before the morning?

Q Before the threat. I'm trying to get the sequence of the decision for him to go to Louisiana, and then to Offutt.

MR. LIBBY: I think it was immediately planned that he should move from his location. And I think Barks -- what was it Barksdale, Louisiana --

Q Barksdale, yes.

MR. LIBBY: Was a logical place for the first stop. I think -- my recollection, if I had to say, was that the threat to Air Force One came in while he was in the air, en route to Barksdale. But I could be wrong; a lot was going on.

Sometimes within -- shortly after that, we got word that there was a third plane inbound. I guess the word we got was that there was a plane inbound, and it was only five miles out. And he was again asked whether they should engage -- again, consistent with prior practice, he instructed them to engage.

Q Now, the story, the words actually Mrs. Cheney wrote down were, he said "take it out."

MR. LIBBY: I don't recall those words. I recall "engage." I haven't seen her notes.

Q It has some specific meaning, obviously, because if he was hearing five miles, you might not have the same time to go look in the window, fly around. I mean, five miles is 30 seconds.

MR. LIBBY: Five miles is quick; there's no question about it. I don't know that -- I don't recall him saying "take it out," I recall him saying, yes, engage. But he may have. And partly -- you know, in my other life I'm an attorney, and I've gone through lots of witness interviews. People translate things in their head as to what it means and replace it; and I don't know whether I translated or she did, or she did, or he said both, or I heard one and she heard one.

Q Yes. I don't have to resolve it. I mean, I can have different recollections.

MR. LIBBY: We also heard right around then that a plane had crashed near Camp David; which, now, if you put together the rumors we're hearing, you've got the two crashes in the World Trade Towers, the crash of a helicopter or a light plane or something else at the Pentagon and an explosion at the Capitol,
and a crash near Camp David, it sounds like a pretty widespread effort at decapitation. And also a threat to Air Force One.

Q So what are you -- even though you've been schooled not to believe first threat, are you thinking they really are trying to kill us here? Decapitate, to use the Cold War term?

MR. LIBBY: Well, they were clearly trying to kill -- they were clearly ruthless; they had just knocked down --

Q I don't mean just ruthless, though, but I mean, aiming at the head of government.

MR. LIBBY: Clearly, they had an intent to kill. Clearly, they had -- we had information that one or more planes were aimed at Washington, including the one that had actually hit the Pentagon. So I had no doubt that if they could hit the White House, it would be a logical target for them.

The explosions around the Congress, around the Capitol, whether true or not, fit with that pattern, as did a crash near Camp David, if that were the case. So I think the better way to think of it is, it's -- what is going through your head is to try to keep all of the pieces up, put into place on the puzzle those that have been verified; we had seen some of this. And keep mental question marks over those that had not yet been confirmed.

So we had confirmed because we had seen the two strikes on the World Trade Tower, we had confirmed something had hit the Pentagon, and the rest have question marks around them, but seemed to form -- could form part of a pattern that you couldn't ignore.

Q Are you in any way consciously calling on either your training as a lawyer in a conscience sense, and/or your training as a government official in other crises -- Gulf War or whatever -- I mean, is there any self-consciousness about calling on these past experiences, or is it just an innate process? I'm just curious about your state of mind.

MR. LIBBY: Mostly, you're trying to sort through the options and consider what questions or advice, what questions to pose for your principal in order to help him, or what advice to give him that might help through the situation. Trying to think of what real-time activities might actually be helpful by way of protecting people or saving lives or getting better prepared for defense.

Q And are you giving any advice on that score?
MR. LIBBY: We went through -- there were certain issues along -- during the course of the day. On the state of mind, I think I would say that I'm aware that this is very real. This is not an exercise. These things are happening and demand real-time responses.

Q Because you guys go through so many war games. I mean, you must be the veteran of a lot of exercises of war games.

MR. LIBBY: Well, I've been through lots of war games. War games generally tend to be different. They're not like people out in the forest with paint balls. They're more people sitting around a table, going through the moves in a war game that traditionally policy players play, are endless time frames and --

Q I'm just trying to -- you're thinking this is real, this is not an exercise. I'm trying to relate that to -- you know, are you comparing it to an exercise?

MR. LIBBY: No. And I don't know that I ever really thought those words, other than sort of knowing that --

Q I don't mean to belabor this; I'm just looking for mental context.

MR. LIBBY: Right about this time, we learn that the plane that was five miles out has dropped below 500 feet and can't be found; it's missing. It makes for an interesting -- I mean, you know, you sort of look at your watch and think, hmm, five miles out, 500 miles per hour. Tick, tick, tick, sort of.

Somewhere a little later in the morning, we start debating public statements and what might be said, who might say it --

Q Excuse me. Was there any resolution to -- okay, it's 500 feet, can't be found. Is there any -- does anybody ever say, wrong, wrong, false alarm, false -- no resolution to it?

MR. LIBBY: No. It's a little bit like The Scarlet Pimpernel. It drops below the radar screen and it's just continually hovering in your imagination; you don't know where it is or what happens to it. I mean, eventually there's a resolution, but -- presume we didn't stay down there very long. But there was other confusion as to -- was it a helicopter, was it -- you know, what was it that was coming in that -- you know, first reports are always wrong, so.

There was a discussion about where he might go next. The Vice President, as a former secretary of defense, is very familiar with a lot of our installations. I think suggested
Omaha as a place with very good communications. I think Dr. Rice confirmed that would be a good idea. There was some discussion with the President. I don't think it was a natural decision for the President not to come back. You know, I wasn't on the line, but my sense of one end of the phone call was, that the Vice President was suggesting that it would be more prudent for the moment, given the various threats and the fact there were still a lot of missing elements.

He, very early on, focused on the planes. And we had reports -- right around this time, we knew that there were at least six planes that might be hijacked. And then there was the possibility of this sort of helicopter that never emerged. But there were still maybe 200 planes in the air. The FAA had done an amazing job. Early on, there was an instruction given, get everybody down. And they had done an amazing job of getting, I think, 2,000 planes out of the air in a very short period of time.

But at this point, there were still a couple hundred planes in the air, as relayed to us. Norm Mineta was there relaying this information over from -- from the phone.

Q I gather Mineta's talking and the Vice President is actually writing down tail numbers on a yellow pad?

MR. LIBBY: Yes. We both started to take notes of what were the plane numbers and what had we decided when -- where. And this is in part where the confusion came in about what had hit the Pentagon, because we still had that plane as missing for a while. No one had quite determined what had happened to United Airlines 93. It was hard to figure out, well, which plane went down near Camp David. We later got a report there was one down near the Pennsylvania border; that one proved to be accurate as times went on.

But at one point, there were at least six named planes, and we had the numbers of six planes that we thought might be hijacked. I think one of them was a smaller plane, but not one of the main airlines, but a commuter-type regional jet.

And then we heard somewhere before noon we heard that there were three planes over the Atlantic that might be hijacked.

Q Separate from the six named planes?

MR. LIBBY: Separate from the six, right.

Q Did the six include the four -- the tail numbers of the four that actually did it? So it was four plus two?
MR. LIBBY: Yes. And during the course of the morning, we eliminated the other two. But as I say, we still weren't sure what had happened to 93. So there was a question, and we weren't quite clear had hit the Pentagon right away.

Q So three planes over the Atlantic around noon time?

MR. LIBBY: Right. There was also a report sometime during the morning that eight large trucks were seen headed to a military base; the implication being that they might be some sort of a convoy truck bomb of some sort.

Q Do you remember which base?

MR. LIBBY: I do.

Q But you're not going to tell me. When was that report?

MR. LIBBY: Again, before noon. So, this bit that I've been discussing recently is all sort of between 11:00 a.m. and noon, somewhere in that time frame. Somewhere early afternoon, we heard that KAL -- the KAL flight had been hijacked, incoming from over the Pacific. And as I recall, we had been told that the transponder had actually -- you know, there's a code and it had squawked out that it was hijacked.

During this period, I guess I should have mentioned, I was trying to find out when we heard that a plane was down, I was trying to find out whether or not the plane down had been shot at -- you know, why did it go down. Because of the momentousness of the decision you were discussing, I was concerned to learn whether or not we had in fact shot down one of these planes.

Q And the answer was --

MR. LIBBY: At first, there was no answer. No one knew. Eventually, we got confirmation that we hadn't shot at anything. But I think that didn't come in until early afternoon. So at least in my mind, I was uncertain -- you could have said that by that point, if we had, we would have known, and I think that's probably true. I was looking for confirmation. I think by noon -- by early afternoon, maybe even by noon, it was pretty clear we hadn't heard. I thought we would have heard right away. But it was an open issue as to whether or not we had shot anything down.

The other -- another issue that we tried to get started on was, how did they get these planes? Because it would be clear that we would want to get the system back up and running very quickly. And, therefore, in the midst of all of the defense, it
seemed worthwhile to try and immediately try and get people working on how did these planes come to be hijacked nearly simultaneously. Is there -- for two reasons: One, there might be perpetrators. If there was ground assistance -- a couple of them from Boston -- you know, if there were ground assistants, you would want to put the net around the area as quickly as you could. But also, it was clear you would want to get the system up and running again as soon as possible. And the sooner you started on how, you would have a better sense of how you would get confidence to start again.

So we tried to get that going I would guess in around the noon hour, somewhere in there.

Q In any of the time, are you communicating with the command center over at the FBI? Are they part of it? Is it all FAA input?

MR. LIBBY: There were secure video conferences that went on during this time, and different players were on. There was one, I recall, with Secretary Rumsfeld. He actually had been out to the site. He had left his secure space; to his credit, gone out into the field, around the side of the building, trying to help people.

And we had a report from him, which I actually never doubted, that he saw -- he had seen a piece of an airplane on the ground. And so, when the discussion was, is it a helicopter, he gave some confirmation that, no, it looked to him like part of an airplane. So from that point, began to think more seriously that it wouldn't be a -- it was not a helicopter.

Somewhere early afternoon, we got reports that the CO2 level in the room was too high; there were too many people there. The rooms were quite crowded; they weren't meant to have that many people in them. And they had to take corrective measures, which they took. But my minimal science informs me, or misinforms me, as the case may be, that excess CO2 is one of the things that affects thinking -- is not a very good thing to have at a moment like that.

So I went off and found the person in charge of the PEOC and tried to get a couple of people addressing the problem and reduce the numbers in the immediate area.

Q And did they?

MR. LIBBY: Yes. There were other details. There was a photographer down there with his jacket permanently askew from his cameras and a number of -- any sign of any crisis, there were
a number of, you know, a number of important people sitting around with nothing to do, which is, itself, an oddity to see busy people with sort of knowing the best thing to do was to sit there and -- (laughter.)

During the course of the morning, my deputy -- we moved to a different defense level. My deputy suggested to me that we should call the Russians. And we went over and suggested it to Dr. Rice. She immediately understood the importance of it and I think ratcheted it up to calling Putin. We were suggesting, I think, something on a defense level.

Q She said she was a --(TAPE FLIPPED OVER)--

MR. LIBBY: -- diffuse it and be cooperative.

Q I was just saying -- he was relating to Mr. Libby that Condoleezza Rice said to me that she was encouraged when Putin cancelled the military exercise, called off a military exercise as sort of a sign of good faith and to try to diffuse the situation.

MR. LIBBY: Somewhere in this early afternoon period, we learned that the object that hit the Pentagon was traveling at -- in excess of 300 miles per hour, which, among other things, ruled out the helicopter theory, probably ruled out most small planes. And I think it was in this early afternoon period that we were fairly certain that it was -- I guess the American Airlines 77 that had hit -- that also -- again, that helped on the checklist of trying to locate and tie down the planes.

Right around this time, we learned that there was another international flight that might be hijacked. And when we first got word, we got word that it was only 30 minutes or-so outside of U.S. airspace.

Q This is beyond the KAL flight?

MR. LIBBY: Right. This is yet another one. The KAL flight was eventually escorted safely down, and eventually responded -- initially, I think we heard it didn't, but then it did respond and was diverted to a safe spot.

The international flight, which I think was from like Madrid to Philadelphia, we heard was half an hour out of our airspace. Again, I think it was one of those ones where there was an actual report that it was showing hijacking through some electronic signal. It turned out that I think it was only 35 minutes out of Spanish airspace, not out of our airspace. But first reports are always wrong.
Q Did you ever find out how it was that you were hearing that they've toggled the hijack switch? I mean, how could it be that? I'm just curious -- how does that happen? How does that happen?

MR. LIBBY: I don't know. You have to talk to the FAA. In some cases -- well, I'll let you talk to the FAA.

Somewhere in the afternoon, we got certain confirmation to confirm hypotheses, as I mentioned before, that we hadn't actually shot at anything, that what went down had gone down on its own and -- when we first learned that it had gone down, I remember the Vice President turned to me and said, I suspect there was an act of heroism on that plane.

Q Yes.

MR. LIBBY: Midafternoon, we had an NSC meeting. You know, talked to the President and talked to the main principals. Dr. Rice was on the call, the CIA Director was on the call, the Secretary of Defense was on the call and some supporting personnel. Dr. Rice, of course, was with us.

And those conversations went through what could be happening and how it would be happening.

Q By then, did you have a fairly clear idea?

MR. LIBBY: We were gathering. How much more can I --

Q Excuse me?

MR. LIBBY: Can I get out of here soon?

Q Yes, you can. You're done. You're basically done, I think. I mean, did anything else momentous happen that day that sticks in your mind?

MR. LIBBY: I remember hearing later in the day that were 1,000 bodies at Ellis Island. And during the course of the day, we got reports that there were 55,000 people that work in the World Trade Center; I think that came over the television first, probably.

Q A thousand bodies at Ellis Island, you heard? This is just a misreport that they had somehow --

MR. LIBBY: I don't know. I had never found out if it was a misreport or a real report. I would guess that it's a misreport;
that I don't think there ever were. But we got the word.

Q So you were aware -- the death tolls.

MR. LIBBY: If you looked at the buildings and figured, well, it was a quarter of the way down one tower and a third the way down the other tower, I assume that at least the people above it never got out, and you do the math, multiply by 55,000, and you get some large number. So we were quite concerned.

Q Is there any talk on the first day about going after bin Laden?

MR. LIBBY: There was talk during the first day that I think a keen sense from everyone that we have been attacked, that this is a question now of self defense, that the attack was serious, and we started immediately to gather evidence as to what might be the source of it. There's no question that since it was the World Trade Center, al Qaeda was on the list and there was other reasons from reporting to think perhaps al Qaeda was responsible.

One of the more remarkable things to me was how early on the President saw not just the threat, but the opportunities, a chance for worldwide cooperation in a battle against terrorism.

Q You mean, that day, the first day?

MR. LIBBY: That very first day. Remarkable leadership. An opportunity for a new level of cooperation with Russia, for example, right from the very start.

Q With Russia?

MR. LIBBY: Right. And you know, you've got Don Rumsfeld, Colin Powell, Dick Cheney, George Bush around the table, you get -- and some very creative -- these are not slow people; they have very fast ideas about understanding the magnitude of it and understanding what the American people needed and understanding what the national defense required.

Q We had heard by that night that there had been some kind of intercept that linked bin Laden and al Qaeda to this. So you knew by the night of the 12th from intelligence that you were dealing with bin Laden? Yes?

MR. LIBBY: Let me take that one for referral back to people who can say whether I can or can't say something like that.

Q Yes. I'm going to say it in the story from our own reporting. We printed this in Newsweek. I mean, we did a special
issue that night and printed it. So I'm going to say it in the story.

Can you give me any more flavor of the looking forward part? Russia can help here? That's good news?

MR. LIBBY: I think a very strong sense that what we needed was a forceful response that required -- I think there was a great deal of looking forward as to how you might begin to define the countries or groups that might have been responsible for something like this, and that terrorism is a problem that needs to be dealt with.

Q Did this "with us or against us" notion show up as early as the first day? Those who harbor, people who commit terror -- did he use those words? He used those words that first night.

MR. LIBBY: I think states supporting terrorism were understood to be a target; target in the sense of were understood to be part of the problem and had to be dealt with and not ignored -- was understood that first day. But I would have to go back and look at that.

Q Okay, good. We're going to get bin Laden before Saturday night? Newsweek question. This week question.

MR. LIBBY: Why? You have --

Q I have to write -- get --

END