

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Event: Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Eastern Region

Type of event: Interview with Richard J. Ducharme

Date: Wednesday, December 17, 2003

Special Access Issues: ID Check

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Team Number: 8

Location: 1 Aviation Plaza, Jamaica, NY 11434

Participants - Non-Commission: Mary McCartney, McCarthy (Office of Regional Counsel, Eastern Region, FAA – One Aviation Plaza, RM 561, Jamaica, NY 11434: P 718-553-3259, F 718-995-5699)

Participants - Commission: Team 8: John Farmer, John Azzarello, Geoffrey Brown

Note: The majority of this interview was not recorded, per the request of the interviewee.

Background:

Ducharme started with the FAA in 1982 at Logan International Airport. In 1991 he came to the Eastern Region. In 1993 he went to Dulles Airport as the Assistant Air Traffic Manager. In 1995 he went to Philadelphia as the Air Traffic Manager. In 1999 he returned to the Region as Chief of Staff. In 2001 he became Assistant Division Manager, and in 2003 was promoted to Division Manager.

Ducharme is currently Manager (AEA-500) of FAA Eastern Region Air Traffic Division.

On September 11, 2001 (9/11) he was Assistant Air Traffic Division Manager.

Pre 9/11:

Ducharme noted that losing a transponder signal or having a NORDO flight was not completely uncommon prior to 9/11; thus it was not the first time the military authorities had been notified of these factors.

9/11:

Ducharme was in charge of the division since Frank Hatfield was off sight. He received a page informing him of a potential hijack out of Logan Airport. Ron Ruggeri informed him that a twin-engine aircraft had hit the World Trade Center. He called McCormack at ZNY for information on the hijack of AA 11, and McCormack informed him that AA 11

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was on a coast track over the Atlantic. Ducharme realized AA 11 had struck the WTC, and he acted to form the Crisis Command Center.

Ducharme paged Hatfield, who arrived within twenty-five minutes and took control of the "bridge". Ducharme asked Sue Zurlo to record the actions that took place from the CCC. He also set up John McCartney on a field telecom, to help facilitate the shut down of airspace. McCartney checked on all the towers, and wanted an information bridge to the facilities. Louis Ramirez from ZDC called to inform him that their airspace was shutting down. Ducharme noted this was well before the Pentagon was struck.

Ducharme first thought that it was an event like the Egyptian Airlines hijacking. After roughly twenty five minutes Ducharme asked the regional administrator to remove anyone from the room who did not have top secret clearance.

Most of the telecom interaction over the course of the next twenty-four hours dealt directly with denying aircraft flight privileges.

Ducharme noted that there were many requests from different offices to fly helicopters and they denied those requests.

FBI, NYPD, PAPD, FAA Security were all at the Region on 9/11 and during the days following. Most of these agencies Ducharme could only brief when he had the time to, but were not the most helpful. The FBI was looking for the SATORI recording and the voice tapes, but he did not have the authority to release it. When it was cleared as a criminal event, he was able to release the information they requested.

Ducharme also noted that the threatening communication from AA 1 was posted on the FAA intranet after 1 PM the afternoon of the attacks.

United Airlines Flight 175 (UAL 175):

A call had been received by "someone from the back" that there was a possible second hijacking. He remembered the wording "We have another one coming down the river" – referring to UAL 175 traveling low over the Hudson River.

Ducharme was on the telecom, and saw UAL 175 strike the south tower. It was at this point that Ducharme knew definitively that it was not an accident. Some in the room thought it was a replay of the first impact, but Ducharme recognized it had different colors than an American Airlines flight.

AA 77:

Ducharme remembered receiving a call that informed him that John Hendershot, the supervisor at Dulles Approach, had a flight on scope moving towards Washington, D.C. He was advised shortly thereafter that the Pentagon had been hit.

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Ducharme recalled there was confusion over the location of AA 77, and that it contributed to part of the frustration identifying the flight.

Identifying aircraft:

Ducharme noted that estimating speed and size on a primary target is possible if watching Terminal radar (which monitors airspace differently than radar used for Center airspace). The Terminal radar is designed for lower altitude whereas the Center radar is designed for higher altitudes.

Ducharme also noted that at higher altitudes the controller expects to monitor high performance aircraft.

Ducharme noted that they had received a report that a general aviation twin-engine aircraft had struck the WTC, but in regard to the report of a Sikorski helicopter that struck the north tower, Ducharme commented that he is confident there was no Sikorski reported from Eastern Region Air Traffic the afternoon of 9/11.

Threatening communication:

Ducharme noted that the threatening communication from AA 11 heard by ZBW would be difficult for a controller to discern immediately, and gave credit to Pete Zalewski for doing so.

National ATC Zero:

Ducharme noted that it is easier to land all aircraft once departures are stopped. He also noted that redirecting flights to available airports assisted this process.

Conference calls:

The FAA Headquarters telecom had Dave Sprog, Bill Peacock, Bill Buck, David Cannoles, and every Center and TRACON was monitoring that call. He also noted that Colonel Sharon Atkins, the FAA liaison, may have been on this call. Ducharme noted that Cleveland Center and Kansas City joined the conference call, and he was told that Pittsburg Tower was evacuated through this line.

Ducharme commented that Marcus Aurora, who worked on coordinating security matters for the Region on 9/11, built a separate conference call from a separate conference room.

Ducharme noted that one of the difficulties they had on 9/11 was that on the Air Traffic side under his authority his staff spoke in air traffic language, including speaking in Zulu timeframes. Ducharme further noted that there were parties who were involved who were not from the air traffic community that did not understand the language and reported inaccurately to their superiors.

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Ducharme noted that the Air Traffic role on 9/11 was to shut the air traffic system down. But on the FAA Tactical Net requests were coming through for flights to be cleared for passage. They made the decision to leave one person monitoring that line (Marcus Aurora), but for the most part ignored it so they could concentrate on refining accurate information.

Ducharme explained that there is protocol in place for the air traffic side to specifically speak with operational air traffic controllers. On 9/11 Headquarters created one Air Traffic Control telecom with all the regions. This bridge was the one monitored by Ducharme and Hatfield. Ducharme would get approvals directly from Dave Sprog for flights in the days following 9/11. They had Peacock, AT1, on the line. John White, Jack Keys or Linda Shusler were all on this line at one point or another.

He also noted that the confusion that is recorded in the transcripts reviewed by Commission staff does not reflect the conversations and passage of information that occurred on the Headquarters Air Traffic telecom.

Other aircraft:

Ducharme noted that after the National Airspace was shut down, the Region had to handle denying overseas requests for transit. After 48 hours most of the requests he received was for wavers.

Record:

Ducharme noted that the timeline labeled "Chronology of Events" provided to Commission staff by the FAA was compiled through the Region.

Ducharme noted that the lines from the Crisis Command Center were not recorded on 9/11.

Military/ FAA

Ducharme noted that there is greater mutual respect between the military and FAA post 9/11. Ducharme further stated that he would like to have qualified military operation specialists budgeted for. He stated that those positions were cut due to funding constraints on September 2, 1998. Ducharme commented that the MOS went from an important position to non-existent. He further commented that not every facility needs them, but oceanic operations definitely do.

Recommendation:

Ducharme commented that the parochialism between the agencies needs to be bridged. He further commented that many of the agency representatives do not understand air traffic terminology, but do not trust the air traffic staff to inform them of necessary

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information. Thus Ducharme suggested all the intelligence agencies have a dedicated aviation team.

Ducharme has created two "Go teams": each has five on it, and they will operate in rotation. He has cut out all the non-essentials from these teams.

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