

9/11 Commission files

Daniel Marcus/ Box 1

Air Threat Call

Scanned by Mike Williams of 911myths.com on 27th March 2009



U.S. Department of Justice

Air
Threat
Call

Washington, D.C. 20530

August 22, 2003

Philip Zelikow, Executive Director
National Commission on Terrorist Attacks
Upon the United States
301 7th Street SW, Room 5125
Washington, D.C. 20407

Dear Philip:

I am writing concerning the Commission's request to the Department of Defense for a transcript of the September 11, 2001 air threat conference call. That lengthy document (it is over 180 pages) discusses highly classified and extremely sensitive national security information. It also includes very high level pre-decisional discussions, raising the kinds of deliberative process concerns which have historically required careful analysis within the Executive branch in order to determine how to appropriately accommodate congressional requests for information.

I apologize for the delay in responding to the Commission's request to review this document. We are in the process of consulting with the proper officials concerning an appropriate way to accommodate the Commission's request. I can confirm, however, that we are prepared to have the Chair and Vice Chair of the Commission review the entire document as soon as practicable consistent with the ordinary practice for such review. In the meantime, we will continue to consider your request for further review of the document; it is my expectation that we will soon be in a position to make large portions of the document available to other members of the Commission and a limited number of staff. Consistent with our mutual understanding, with respect to a relatively small subset of the document that discusses particularly sensitive matters, we will need to specify additional conditions for any further review the Commission might seek.

Very truly yours,

Daniel Levin

40.12MB / 476.84MB (8.41%)

Date: Mon, 1 Sep 2003 22:23:11 -0400

From: "" <ckojm@9-11commission.gov>

To: "" <frontoffice@9-11commission.gov>

Subject: US News piece

*Air
Threat
Call*

To All: Found this; did anything show up in Time (I couldn't find it)?

Nation & World 9/8/03

Pieces of the Puzzle

A top-secret conference call on September 11 could shed new light on the terrorist attacks

By Chitra Ragavan and Mark Mazzetti

Not long after American Airlines Flight 11 slammed into the north tower of the World Trade Center, military officials in Washington initiated an "air-threat conference call." Through the course of the day, participants included Vice President Dick Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, and senior officials from the National Security Council (NSC), the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), and the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD). Pentagon officials familiar with the events say the conference call was broadcast over a loudspeaker inside the National Military Command Center at the Pentagon, which Rumsfeld and Gen. Richard Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, were using as an emergency command post.

Back in May, members of the independent commission appointed to examine the September 11 attacks were informed that the conference call had been recorded. But Pentagon officials said that they had yet to transcribe the tapes. The commission's repeated requests over the summer finally resulted in the Pentagon's creating a classified transcript. It was forwarded to the White House on August 6, U.S. News has learned, so that administration officials could conduct an "executive-privilege review," required because of Cheney's participation in the call. The commission has been promised access to the roughly 200-page transcript, sources say. Staff Director Philip Zelikow says the transcript is just a small piece of a mammoth puzzle the commission must put together by next May from thousands of pages of government documents. "We already had the substance," Zelikow says. "This is further detail, further corroboration." Commissioners say they may have to obtain the tapes themselves because the transcript is not time coded, making the task of outlining the exact sequence of events that day cumbersome.

Among the other highly classified materials recently presented to the commission: thousands of pages of transcripts of interrogations of top-tier al Qaeda leaders captured abroad and lower-level operatives held at the U.S. military barracks in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Commissioners hope the transcript of the September 11 conference call is revealing on several fronts. On the morning of the terrorist attacks, NORAD's satellites, operated to detect potential airborne attacks from outside U.S. borders, were unable to monitor the airspace inside the country. The command, buried in a mountain in Colorado Springs, Colo., was dependent on radars operated by the Federal Aviation Administration for information about the four fuel-heavy aircraft hijacked by the terrorists. NORAD even had to rely on FAA satellites to track military jets inside U.S. airspace, officials say. The transcript could help explain why it took the FAA 14 minutes to notify NORAD that American Airlines Flight 77--originally bound for Los Angeles from Washington's Dulles International Airport, but way off course over West Virginia--had been hijacked and was headed back toward Washington. Could the military, in those 14 minutes, have scrambled fighter jets and diverted the plane before it slammed into the Pentagon?

Shoot-down order. The transcript may also shed light on the military's response

<http://kinesis.swishmail.com/webmail/imp/message.php?Horde=4792316dd5a7a79315392b4...> 9/2/03

to President Bush's unprecedented order to shoot down any hijacked civilian airplane. Pentagon sources say Bush communicated the order to Cheney almost immediately after Flight 77 hit the Pentagon and the FAA, for the first time ever, ordered all domestic flights grounded. "There are unanswered questions," says Richard Ben-Veniste, a commission member and former federal prosecutor, as to whether the shoot-down order "had been rehearsed for, whether it had been prepared for, and what measures were in place to protect the Capitol," believed to be the hijackers' original target for Flight 77.

Some of the questions may be raised in the commission's second interim report, due out in about two weeks. The report will offer a substantive summary of the commission's top priorities and offer an updated report card on agency cooperation. In its first interim report in July, the commissioners publicly chastised the Pentagon, FBI, CIA, and other agencies for recalcitrance. "Certainly, cooperation has improved," says Timothy Roemer, a commissioner. "But we're still seeking very critical documents from NORAD, NSC, and CIA."

With Anne Bradley