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MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

(R)

Event: Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Boston Center Field Site Interview with John Hartling

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 Air Route Center, Nashua, New Hampshire

Participants - Non-Commission: John R. Donnelly, FAA Senior Attorney [(781) 238 7045]

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

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

Hartling has been an Air Traffic Controller (ATC) with the FAA since 1981. Prior to that he was an ATC with the Air Force.

On 9/11 Hartling first became aware of AA11 when Athens Sector 38 forced AA11 onto his radar. It had last reported an altitude of FL 290, and hadn't reached Kingston Sector yet. The data block for AA11 had no altitude confirmed since FL 290, and AA11 was moving in excess of 500 knots. Hartling admits that he did not take AA11 too seriously at first, since his main concern was keeping aircraft out of the possible path depicted by the primary-only return from AA11. He was handling departures out of Bradley (Hartford, CN), and put a US Air flight above AA11 in an attempt to get an altitude estimate. The US Air flight was unable to get a visual and Hartling then asked UAL175, who was able to get a visual and an estimate of FL 270 to FL 290.

It was at this point that Hartling heard his supervisor in the background mention threatening communications from the cockpit of AA11.

Hartling does not remember a single time in his years with the FAA, nor in his time with the military, in which he controlled an aircraft with no radio communications, no transponder and was seriously off course. He remembers the AA11 sequence as "losing" radio at 0814EDT, while in the control of radar position 47R, then being passed to radar position 46R. AA11 remained in Athens Sector for a "good amount of time", then passed into Kingston Sector. He acknowledged that whenever there was a problem with a flight, the first step a controller takes is to notify the supervisor for the area.

He turned UAL175 35 degrees right to put the flight back on course after deviating it to

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check on AA11. He notes that it was unnecessary to do this since UAL175 could have been changed to a northern route to LAX, but he felt it best to put the flight back on its scheduled route. He kept UAL175 at FL 310, and was aware that this combination of a turn and FL 310 would keep UAL175 safe considering AA11's unpredictable altitude.

The floor for his sector is 16,800 feet, so if AA11 passed below this it would slide into "Coast" mode. Since AA11 was not below this level, Hartling could estimate a safe zone to keep his planes in. Hartling kept his supervisor, Ron McQwin (?) for Area F, and William (Bo) Dean, Hartling's RA, notified. Hartling does not remember when AA11 was officially termed a "hijack", but he knows the supervisors had constant information as to the factors contributing to AA11's situation from the ATC perspective.

Hartling did not personally become involved in the military notification of the hijack, and believes it was the watch desk supervisors who were involved. He noted that calling Otis Air Force Base was a logical step.

Regarding cross-country flight course, Hartling informed Commission staff that the routes taken by AA11 and UA175 on 9/11 were in no way predictable. One was scheduled to take a northern route, and the other a southern route. Even these routes can be modified on any given day to allow for developing weather conditions. It is usually a "company" (airline company) decision as to which route on of their flights may take, and Hartling believes much of this decision is based on the amount of fuel a particular route necessitates.

Hartling does believe ZBW had good situational awareness that it was AA11 that hit the WTC, since when Steve Smalls came in from the break room to inform the center of the hit, he said "THAT airplane" hit the WTC.

Hartling does not believe the response to the hijack could have been quick enough to make a difference. He noted that the air space caps around nuclear facilities should be monitored and addressed with more thought. Hartling does not believe a response to a "cap break" around a nuclear site could be quick enough to make a difference. Hartling noted that past ATC training scenarios for hijack situations did not take into account the possibility of simultaneous multi-plane hijackings. Nor are has he been involved in a training scenario that would include no "hint" from the pilot of the cockpit compromise. Hartling further noted that the AA11 characteristic of descent and slowing from its rapid pace are not real signals of a hijack.

Hartling's main point regarding the 9/11 attacks is that the attacks were out of the FAA "box". His worry is that even though the example of 9/11 is being used today to prepare for future events, the next terrorist attack on US soil may again be "out the box" created by the 9/11 attacks. He does note that the FAA is more aware of the threat now, and has implemented new procedures. Unfortunately, for the ATC, Hartling notes that there is very little that can be done except to track and attempt to communicate with the aircraft.

Regarding the military, Hartling has had contact with military flights on a regular basis at

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the pilot to controller level, but has no knowledge of the relationship at the managerial level. Before 9/11 Hartling did not have much knowledge though on the warning areas and hot areas monitored by the military, and learned much later from 9/11 that Otis could deploy defensive strike fighters. Prior to 9/11 Hartling has no "intercept" training with the military, and was aware that NORAD controls much of the highest altitude airspace. He has had even more contact with military aircraft post-9/11 since military fighters are often running escort for VIP flights. Hartling does not think extensive FAA controller/military training is necessary since he is confident an FAA controller is able to vector an aircraft to a target, and can "break up" flights of between four to six aircraft. Hartling does note that part of his comfortable mindset regarding working with military flights does stem from his training as a controller in the Air Force.

Regarding what worked well on 9/11, Hartling notes that the grounding of airborne flights was a complex endeavor for the ATC system, and that the fact that there were no accidents should not be overlooked. He also notes that it was a positive sign in the ATC community that all ATC centers were able to take definitive control over the airborne flights and over the flights waiting to depart. Hartling noted that without this acknowledgement of FAA authority over the skyways, there may have been serious incidents beyond those of the actual terrorist attacks on 9/11.

Hartling noted that the 9/11 hijackers must have calculated the GPS coordinates of the WTC, and this led them to know when to descend and how to guide the planes to their targets.

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