

MEMO 4017175

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Event: Briefing on the United Airlines System Operations Control Center and Crisis Center

Type: Briefing by SOC staff

Team: 7 and 8

Special Access Issues: None

Date: November 20, 2003

Prepared by: Lisa Sullivan

Participants (non -Commission): Chad McCurdy, Shift Manager Flight Dispatch Operations; Sandy Rogers, Flight Dispatcher ATC Coordinator; Ubie Green, Flight Dispatcher; Mike Barber, Manager of Flight Dispatch Operations; Bill Roy, Director Systems Operations; Jeffrey Ellis, UAL attorney; Michael Feagley, UAL attorney; John Midgett and Steve Sawyer, UAL attorney.

Participants (Commission): Sam Brinkley, Bill Johnstone, John Raidt, Miles Kara, and Lisa Sullivan

Location: United Airlines SOC, Chicago, IL

Background

[U] Hubie Green gave Commission staff a tour of the dispatch floor. He said that organizationally, it operates the same as it did on 9-11. Dispatchers are grouped by geographical area rather than by flight. In comparison (according to the briefers), American Airlines provided its dispatchers with more responsibilities while the approach of United is to focus their efforts on basic flight control matters. There are two dedicated ATC coordinators in contact with Herndon.

[U] The briefing, which followed a tour of United's Operational Control Center and Crisis Center, was attended by the principal operations center employees that were on duty the morning of 9-11. Bill Roy, the Director of Systems Operations, arrived to work at 6:30 a.m. CT that morning. He spent some time discussing the activities of the night before with the managers on duty. When he heard about the first plane that hit the World Trade Center, he was near Rich Miles' desk in the control center. Roy reported to have notified both the CEO and the COO at that time, and then went about activating the Operational Crisis Center. He reported that Andy Studdert, the COO, arrived at the Operational Crisis Center as they were activating it. United crisis centers were also activated in Denver, CO and San Francisco, CA at that time.

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The Day of September 11, 2001 and Flight 175

[U] The staff assigned to the Crisis Center has planned quarterly exercises initiated by corporate security. Typically, these drills are scripted and in response to bioterrorism or an international incident. On 9-11, it took the staff 30 minutes to assemble and fully activate the crisis center. A representative from every division of the corporate structure report to the crisis center and have predetermined specific duties. A phone bridge was set up with the other crisis centers; Studdert communicated with Secretary Mineta and national leaders. Roy said communications to and from the crisis center were not recorded on 9-11. Although the crisis center is equipped with a STU line; no calls were received on it. On the screens, the ASD data was displayed tracking the United flights, initially UAL 175 and subsequently UAL 93; the other screens showed CNN and other news media. On 9-11, the crisis center's checklist of things to do and people to call was manual. Since then, they have automated it.

[U] Mike Barber, a Manager of Flight Dispatch Operations, oversees the dispatch floor. He assists dispatchers with problems such as weather, etc. His primary role/contribution on 9-11 was the timeline he created that the Commission received with United's first response to the Commission's document request. Of the timeline, he said the times (CT) were not absolutely accurate, but the events are in sequential order.

[U] Chad McCurdy was a dispatcher in sector 64 on the morning of 9-11. He was new to United at the time. The sector handled west to east flights (which was predictably quiet, given the time of day the attacks occurred). His primary role that day was to assist Ballinger, the dispatcher handling the sector that had both UAL 175 and UAL 93. He monitored Ballinger's printer that morning, which automatically prints out any ACARS, ATC messages received. Since 9-11, he has been promoted to a Manager of Flight Operations.

[U] Hubie Green was a Flight Dispatch Manager on 9-11. He referred to himself as "a lame duck manager at the time" because of operational restructuring that was going on. His principle role on 9-11 was on the dispatch floor, relaying information from management and CNN to the dispatchers as they communicated with their planes. He tried to focus the dispatchers on the immediate tasks at hand.

[U] Sandy Rogers is a Flight Dispatcher - ATC Coordinator #2 (West Coast; his shift was 7:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.). He was the United Airlines employee at the SOC that had the most contact with the FAA on 9-11. He made the call to FAA Headquarters in Washington, DC to confirm the plane that hit Tower 1 was not a United Airlines plane. Rogers confirmed that the FAA (he did not recollect the official's name that he spoke to at that time) said the plane was not United; it was an American Airlines plane. Following an aviation accident, it was standard operating procedure for Sandy to call Herndon to determine which airline owned the plane. Rogers replied that the call took place shortly before 7:50 a.m. (CT) and lasted only moments. He briefed Roy and Barber on the call immediately thereafter. This call, Roy interjected, triggered him to call the senior

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leadership at United Airlines. "Then, that was when the UA 175 story unfolded," Roy said.

[U] Barber, in turn, tried to send out a page to (approximately) one hundred United personnel notifying them of the American Airlines plane that went into Tower 1. He did this because it is the quickest way to disseminate a message to principle members of the corporation in the event of an aviation accident. He was not sure if any FAA officials were on the recipient list of the page. Having sent the page, the next thing her heard was UAL 175 was missing from the NYC radar.

[U] Roy, Miles, Rogers, and Barber all sat in close proximity to each other; within hearing range. Information was shared between them in real time, as it came in.

[U] McCurdy, whose dispatcher desk is very near Ballenger's, said that Ballinger thought he was missing an airplane, UA 175, at 8:01 a.m. (CT). According to McCurdy, Ballinger attempted to communicate with the plane but got no response, and immediately notified the managers of the dispatch floor. Barber went to Ballinger's desk to discuss the problem of communicating with the plane. He watched CNN's live footage of the second plane hitting tower 2 on the overhead TV as he was walking back to his desk.

[U] Sandy Rogers reported that he had received a call from New York ATC informing him that UAL 175 was NORDO ("no radio"). A call such as this is routine in nature; and under normal circumstances would be no cause for alarm. The call came in, according to Rogers, "seconds, maybe" before tower 2 was hit.

[U] When asked about the technical capabilities of the ASD (airspace situational display) program used by the dispatchers on their monitors to track planes, all United representatives conferred that the program's display refreshes every 60 seconds. If a plane was "squawking" a different code, the United representatives did not believe that would change the appearance of the track on the ASD. For instance, UAL 93, which was out of communication for a longer time than UAL 175, appeared to be "coasting" once the transponder was turned off. Barber did not think at the time that modifying the transponder code would be apparent to dispatchers through the use of ASD.

[U] McCurdy recollected that at the time of the crash into tower 2, the display on Ballenger's monitor still showed UAL 175 at 31,000 ft, having just deviated from the normal flight plan and heading into a big turn back east. The track on Ballenger's ASD was frozen long after it was known the plane had crashed into tower 2.

[U] Hubie Green interjected that the program was designed to maintain a tag on a flight as it moved across the map from center to center. Various code changes would not affect the track as it appeared to the dispatcher. McCurdy said that the ASD provides a rough track of a plane's progress; minute alterations in the flight plan wouldn't be reflected on the dispatchers display because such details only mattered to the pilot and the air traffic controller. "The purpose of the track is to keep the plane out of the path of a thunderstorm," McCurdy said.

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[U] Commission staff told the UAL representatives that in the morning ATC had heard a transmission from AA 11 that "we have planes." The UAL representatives confirmed that they were not told this by ATC. They also confirmed that UAL 175 and AA 11 were on the same frequency that morning. No one at the SOC heard of the message over the frequency, and no one communicated with UAL 175 regarding that unusual message.

[U] In terms of situational awareness, the dispatchers and managers at the SOC that morning were not aware of any communications between ATC and UAL 175; They maintained that ATC "first and foremost" communicated directly with airline pilots, not the dispatchers; and they were unaware that a NY controller asked UAL 175 to move to avoid AAL 11.

[U] **Summary of Facts – Lack of Situational Awareness**

- UAL was not informed of the transmission made by Atta from AAL 11, overheard by ATC and possibly UAL 175.
- UAL was not informed that ATC asked UAL 175 to move out of AAL 11's flight path once it was hijacked.
- UAL was not aware of the UAL 175 transponder code change at 7:46 (CT).
- UAL did not know that UAL 175 was asked to hunt for AAL 11.
- UAL did not know that (according to Miles Kara) at 7:54 (CT), an ATC NY Center controller told Delta 2315 that UAL 175 was a hijacked plane.

[U] The UAL officials present said that, at best, more information earlier on the situation over New York that morning would have allowed dispatchers to get more information to other the pilots in the air.

[U] From a policy standpoint, multiple hijackings were not considered. Had they been aware of the potential for multiple planes being hijacked simultaneously, they might have proceeded differently that morning.

[U] Disseminating information to multiple planes in real time that may be affected by a weather pattern occurs naturally. Security information is handled differently. Dispatchers take into consideration information that may alarm pilots, that may prevent them from functioning as best as possible.

[U] Since 9-11, the number of security issues dealt with everyday has dramatically increased. According to Barber, they do not inform pilots about every issue the dispatchers and managers are made aware of on a daily basis because often potential threats turn out to be false alarms. Making sure all security information is accurate in order to communicate credible information to the pilots in real time would take a great deal of effort and time away from their other job responsibilities.

FBI Investigation

[U] When asked about the FBI's interaction with UAL operations post-9-11; the staff said "they gave them everything" relating to the events of 9-11. Yet, the staff also admitted they had no inventory of all the items the FBI took. In terms of a record of audio recordings of voice communications on 9-11, UAL staff does not believe the managers' phones were recorded at that time.

UAL Notifications to Pilots

[U] UAL staff at the SOC reported they did not receive a notification from ATC or ATA to notify all UAL aircraft of the hijackings. That would have come in the form of an advisory; which was not issued. ATA has never asked UAL to contact all its planes; there was no precedent for it. All transcontinental flights were notified after the first two attacks.

[U] McCurdy said that all notifications to pilots were done at the dispatchers' desks, and were based on information received from Barber or Green or via the electronic message system used by the dispatchers.

[U] In Ed Ballinger's case, McCurdy jumped in to help him get an appropriately worded electronic message to his planes "to beware of cockpit intrusions." Several dispatchers were sending similar messages at the same time.

[U] Rogers said that they knew collectively that multiple events were occurring throughout the system.

[U] When they saw the second plane go in on CNN, instinctively Barber thought it was UAL 175, but they did not a positive identification right away. Because the scene caused much disturbance on the dispatch floor, Barber told the staff to stay at their desks and focus on their jobs. Barber noted that his log stated that at 8:20 a.m. (CT) UAL 175 was confirmed.

[U] Rogers sent a message to the dispatchers on the floor, "additional hijacks are in progress – you should notify your flights."

[U] Commission staff requested a sample of ACARS messages sent between 7:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m. that morning from dispatchers to their respective planes.

[U] Commission staff asked them when they were aware that phone calls had been made from the airplanes. UAL staff said the Crisis Center knew later in the day that a call had been made from the flight. The SOC floor did not get that information.

[U] Rich Miles got a call from a SAMC operator out in San Francisco about a call received from a hijacked flight moments before UAL 175 went into the building.

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[U] Barber remembers talking soon after tower 2 was hit to Craig Parfitt from American Airlines. The gist of it was, "whose plane is whose?" At that time, Parfitt thought both were American Airlines' planes but Barber was confident the second one was UAL 175. The more CNN slowed down the tape and enlarged the image of the second plane, the more certain they were it was a United jet in tower 2 because it was not the shiny metallic color of American Airlines' jets.

UAL 93

[U] The UAL staff found nothing unusual, and had no new information to volunteer about UAL 93's 40-minute delay taking off from Newark that morning.

At 8:21 a.m. (CT) - Ballinger got a "pirep" (pilot report) from UAL 93 that was routine.

At 8:24 a.m. (CT) - Ballinger and McCurdy sent the message to beware of cockpit intrusions to UAL 93, among others.

8:26 a.m. (CT) - UAL 93 confirms last message.

8:28 a.m. (CT), - a request for engineering data was sent to UAL 93. Ballenger did not get a report back from the plane.

8:30 a.m. (CT) - McCurdy reported that they started to focus on UAL 93 at.

8:31 a.m. (CT) - UAL 93 confirmed receipt of the message.

8:32 a.m. (CT) - ATC Cleveland Center informed UAL SOC that UAL 93 was NORDDO.

8:33 a.m. (CT) - Between 8:30-50 a.m. (CT), UAL stopped all the departures.

At 8:50 a.m. (CT) - they began to land all the flights.

[U] McCurdy thought they determined UAL 93 was hijacked before the turn, due to the lack of communication from the pilot.

[U] UAL 93 had asked the dispatcher to confirm the message about the cockpit door.

[U] None of the UAL representatives present had heard about the "bomb on board" transmission over the ATC frequency from UAL 93.

[U] Ballinger and McCurdy kept track of all the planes that were sent messages and their responses.

[U] The normal procedure in a crisis situation is to isolate the plane in question and move the handling of the plane to the crisis center and off the floor so as not to disrupt operations in the rest of the system. The SOC ran into a problem in trying to "lock-out"

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UAL 93 that morning, because UAL 175 was already locked out. They had never tried to lock out two planes at the same time before. It took a while, technically, to turn control of the plane over to the crisis center.

[U] By the time they put the ASD on UAL 93 in the Crisis Center it had just finished its turn and was heading back east.

[U] The staff at the SOC thought UAL 93 was heading to DC. They contacted Herndon to tell them that they had lost operational control of the airplane and for them to advise the military.

[U] Twenty minutes after the plane was off course, Rich Miles informed Barber that he received a call from the SAMC Star fix operator that a UAL 93 flight attendant reporting a knife was being held to someone's throat on board.

[U] In terms of UAL 93, a significant amount of time elapsed between its hijack and UAL 175. With regard to whether there was anything else that could have been done to facilitate communication with that pilot, other than the messages he confirmed receiving, Barber indicated that any additional information received by the SOC regarding hijackings would have been communicated to the pilots. However the UAL staff thought that on 9-11, the ultimate decision makers were the pilots and the controllers.

[U] After the hijackings, the dispatchers were most concerned about getting all the planes on the ground safely rather than reverse screening the passengers.

[U] Roy admitted that he is hesitant to say they would have stopped planes from taking off, on their own, prior to the groundstop, even if they were given more information. They most likely would have held planes.

[U] McCurdy added that the cockpit messages were sent to planes on the ground as well. It is always the pilot's discretion on whether or not it is safe to fly.

Recommendations

[U] McCurdy: Security training – dispatchers receive briefings on security, but they are very general and are not recurrent.

[U] Roy: The SDs and ICs did not make an impact; he does not remember the FAA Intel Division's presentation on threats prior to 9-11.

[U] There needs to be more importance placed on security. Government needs to brief the industry and the significant personnel on what the intelligence is saying. Communications seem to be the key factor. Between the airlines, more information could be shared on noncompetitive issues such as security.

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[U] "For instance, United bought tasers thinking they would be a good idea to have in the cockpit and FAA can't get their act together and pass the necessary rule."

[U] (NOTE: Commission wants to get all recorded communications from the SOC that day.)