

MEP0401722D

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Event: Rich Miles, UAL Manager of Station Operations Control

Type: Interview

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Special Access Issues: None

Teams: 7 and 8

Date: November 21, 2003

Participants (non-Commission): Rich Miles; Jeff Ellis, UAL Attorney; Mike Feagley, UAL Attorney

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

Location: UAL World Headquarters SOC, Chicago, IL

The Day of September 11, 2001

[U] Miles sat adjacent to Mike Barber and flight dispatch operations in the rear of the System Operations Control (SOC) room. On 9/11/01, he started his workday at 6:30 AM Central Time by relieving the previous SOC manager. He recalled that the weather was good and no major issues were anticipated. He remembered going over to the controllers' area, and then returning to his work area, where Bill Roy was located. At time the SOC had some TV screens that hung from the ceiling so SOC workers could keep in touch with what was going on. Someone in his area called out and Miles looked up at the CNN footage of the World Trade Center (WTC) tower being struck by the first aircraft. Prior to that, he had no indications of any problems.

[U] Miles recalled that at that point, there were a lot of "what is it?" questions in the center. Attendance in the room started increasing. Shortly after that, he heard a reference to an American Airlines 757 being in trouble, possibly from the Air Traffic Control (ATC) side of the room, but the information definitely came from within the SOC and not from a phone call. There was discussion over what to do, including starting up the crisis center and someone (Knouts?) went in there and started turning on computers and other equipment.

UAL Flight 175

[U] Miles next received a call from the SAMC manager (he could not remember who it was that day) informing Miles that they had received a call on the STAR-FIX

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maintenance line that reported a hijacking. Miles first responded that it was an American flight, but the manager reiterated that the call came from UAL 175. He recollects that this call was placed from San Francisco shortly before the second tower was hit. He knew that the call had already been concluded when the manager from the SAMC reported. Miles also recalled that one of the calls he received that morning prior to the crashes indicated that the crew was already dead, but he was not sure if this was in reference to Flight 175 or Flight 93.

[U] Upon getting the hijacking reported, Miles first repeated it out loud for Bill Roy to hear, and Roy then got on the phone to Andy Studdert, while Miles called Rich Davis and began activating the Crisis Center. At that time the manual call list was distributed by clipboards to people to make calls to those people who were needed in the Crisis Center.

[U] Miles did not receive any reports from the ATC system about communications with Flight 175 (including loss of radar). (He reported that typically, he would receive relevant information from the ATC system, but he didn't receive any on 9/11.) The "Unimatic" lockout procedure was instituted on Flight 175 information (sometime between 8:00 and 8:30 AM Central Time). Then Miles sent out an advisory to stations within the company, under Studdert's name, that something had happened and that the crisis center was opened. This may have been after the second WTC Tower was hit. By then, there were many people congregating in that room, and since the phone number of Miles' position was widely published within the company, it started ringing and never stopped.

[U] After the second crash, Miles recalled receiving many phone reports of other incidents (including explosions at National Airport and LaGuardia, and a 757 being down in Crystal City). Much of the information turned out to be false but he kept taking the calls assuming the reports may have been true. Miles didn't recall if it was a "gut feeling" or some other reason but he felt at the time of the second strike that it was UA 175 because it was already reported to him that it had been a hijack.

[U] The Crisis Center then made the determination that UA 175 was the second plane to hit the WTC and took over the handling of the incident. Miles stayed at his workstation throughout the day. At that point, they began to divert all of their airplanes to the closest airports and asked the controllers and routers to keep track of where the planes were landing.

UAL Flight 93

[U] Miles believes that the first awareness of a problem with UA 93 came in the Crisis Center, where they were viewing Aircraft Situation Displays and saw the plane turn around. Miles started focusing on UA 93 after receiving a call (between 8:30 and 9:00 AM Central Time, but most likely around 8:45) from the SAMC that was similar to the earlier call in reporting that they had gotten a call from UA 93 indicating that the flight had been hijacked. The SAMC manager asked, "what if we get other calls - what do we tell them?" Miles recalled that his reply was "oh my God; tell them the authorities are

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aware of it and try and get as much information as you can." As soon as he hung up with SAMC, he passed the information on to the Crisis Center.

[U] Miles then sent another advisory reminding the United stations about proper security procedures and informing them that departures were to be held up. He tried to lock out Flight 93 but ran into a problem because the computer system was not set up to deal with two such procedures at the same time. Miles recalled that a fair amount of time was consumed with fixing that problem.

[U] At this point, communication around the SOC had become "problematic" according to Miles, because of the large number of people in the room. He used both runners and phone calls to send information into the Crisis Center.

[U] Miles noted that he had been trained as a Ground Security Coordinator, and he deliberately made his advisories outside of the SOC and Crisis Center relatively vague because they were going out to a large group, which probably included dispatchers.

[U] Miles continued to get a high volume of calls, especially on reports from the east coast. Around 9 AM Central Time, he received a call from the Airphone company that they were receiving calls from passengers on UAL 93 reporting that a hijack was in progress. He asked if they had made contact with the FBI and they said yes. Miles does not recall any specifics (such as on weapons and tactics) being provided by the Air phone caller, but he felt comfortable knowing that the FBI was involved. (He reported that GTE Airphone calls do not have to go through operators, but go directly to the number called.)

ACARS and ATC Reporting on Hijacked Flights

[U] With respect to codes on ACARS messages, Miles reported that JFK FO is flight operations; CHIDD 68 is probably Ed Ballinger's desk, and CHIALL is everybody in dispatch. He stated that Flight Operations can send their own ACARS to flights without going through the dispatcher.

[U] While his experience and expectation was that ATC would communicate to him and to the SOC about "strange" or unusual communications from the cockpit, but he could not recall any such communications on 9/11 and he got no relevant information about the hijackings from that source. He added that ATC routinely communicates hourly throughout the system.

[U] Miles did recall hearing from some source a reference to knives being at the throat of a pilot, and bombs being present but he didn't remember on which plane. He never heard anything about how the hijackers got through the door into the cockpits.

Grounding of Flights

[U] After the reports on UAL 93, he got calls from stations seeking information about other flights and about what was going on. There was confusion at all stations.

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He recalled dealing with the station manager in Anchorage, AK about an ATC/military issue there but the rest of his morning was spent on how to address the grounding of aircraft and its effect on scheduling. Initially, United cancelled flights through 1 PM Central Time, but this was subsequently extended to the rest of the day, and later to all of the next day as well. Miles indicated that while UAL had “tools” for taking down “chunks” of the schedule, it was never designed to take everything out and that posed problems for their computer system.

[U] Miles did not recall any discussions of reverse screening of de-planing passengers from the grounded flights, or of off-loading of cargo. Many of the stations weren’t sure how to go about handling the sheer volume of people who were disembarking.

Closing Comments

[U] Thinking back to that day, Miles expressed embarrassment that his recollection isn’t better. He thinks of that day every sunny day he drives to work. Now, everyone is very attentive to all facets of security. There are more frequent updates through the TSA. Everyone is more focused.

[U] Miles indicated that the emotional aspect is high and that can obscure the reality of the situation and increase fear.

[U] In Miles’ view the security at United is much “smarter” now in dealing with intelligence and in being more aware.

[U] Miles felt that the situation in the SOC on 9/11 was “chaotic” and in retrospect, he would like for it to have been better organized. He wishes he would have “chased people (who didn’t need to be in the room) out quicker.”