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MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

(R)
AMERICAN

Event: Bill Halleck and Peggy Houck

Type: Interview

Date: January 8, 2004

Special Access Issues: None

Prepared by: Bill Johnstone

Team Number: 7

Location: American Airlines Headquarters; Ft. Worth, TX

Participants (non-Commission): Bill Halleck; Peggy Houck; Desmond Barry, Condon & Forsyth, LLP; Christopher Christensen, Condon & Forsyth, LLP; Douglas Cotton, AA Senior Attorney

Participants (Commission): Bill Johnstone; John Raidt

Background

[U] Peggy Houck was hired by AMR (an American Airlines affiliate) in 1991 as a planner for transatlantic flights. In 1994, she moved to the company's NAVDATA division, and in 1996 she was hired as a dispatcher for American. She has been in that position up to the present (including on 9/11).

[U] Bill Halleck was an air traffic controller for 37 years (1959-1996). He served in a variety of ATC (air traffic control) positions (including as a supervisor), generally at high density facilities. He retired as air traffic manager at O'Hare. In July 1996, Halleck was hired by American to be the ATC coordinator. In addition, he served as the American air traffic representative for Dallas/Ft. Worth and O'Hare airports, maintained a desk in the System Operations Center (SOC), and was air traffic advisor to the SOC manager and to the other ATC coordinators. On 9/11, Halleck performed all of these duties, except for being the liaison for O'Hare. Halleck was planning his retirement from American in the months prior to 9/11, and his replacement had arrived for some on-the-job training on September 1, 2001. Halleck completed his retirement on November 1, 2001.

Houck on the Day of September 11, 2001 (Flight 11)

[U] Ms. Houck was at the Transcontinental Flight dispatch desk on 9/11, and was initially responsible for both Flights 11 and 77. As a dispatcher, she would communicate with the

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Air Traffic Control system, the flight crews, American maintenance personnel and sometimes medical staff.

[U] Her work day began as a very routine one, remarkable most for the excellent nationwide weather. Because of the lack of problems (including weather), she had no early contact with the Flight 11 crew, but she reported that this was not unusual under such circumstances.

[U] At 7:20 a.m. Central Time, Ms. Houck was contacted by an American Seattle-Boston flight and told that ATC had asked them to try to contact Flight 11. Houck reported that such communications were routine, and she proceeded to try to reach #11 via the ACARS system. These communications were never acknowledged by the flight.

[U] Some time after her unsuccessful ACARS transmissions, Houck was phoned by SOC Manager Craig Marquis, who informed her of a potential "security breach" on Flight 11. She then tried to "cell call" the flight crew via ARINC (a company that provided back-up communications capability for airborne flights) in San Francisco. At that point (approximately 7:30 Central Time), Houck was moved to another desk where she could "isolate" Flight 11, and focus all her attention on that one flight. Don Robinson took over her regular desk, and other flight assignments.

[U] Once she moved to her new desk, she was informed that ARINC had been unable to reach Flight 11. She also found that the flight had been "locked out" on her console so she immediately contacted Marquis, who quickly got her access. Right after her signal was restored, she noticed that Flight 11 had made a turn to the South. Shortly thereafter, its transponder was turned off, and her ASD screen froze at that point. (Bob Moreno with ATC had informed her that the transponder had been tuned off, and that ATC had lost contact with #11, but he never said anything about receiving suspicious communications from the cockpit.)

[U] Houck thought this was looking like a typical hijacking and Marquis asked her to calculate how far Flight 11 could get with the fuel on board. She was thinking they might be headed to Cuba or Colombia. Sometime thereafter, she was informed that Flight 11 had crashed into the World Trade Center.

Halleck on the Day of September 11, 2001 (Flight 11)

[U] At Halleck's work station, he had two direct lines to Herndon ATC command center as well as a direct line to all ATC en-route centers in the U.S. On 9/11, Halleck's replacement, Bob Dearing, was with him. He was focused on working out a Chicago airport problem and on figuring out the impact on American of proposed new Continental Airlines routes out of Houston. He recalled that the Special Operations (SPO) teleconference with the Herndon ATC command center had taken place at 6:15 a.m. Central Time as usual.

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[U] At some time after the SPO call (Mr. Halleck had trouble recalling any specific times and in some cases even the specific sequence of events on 9/11), Craig Marquis asked Halleck to find out from ATC what was happening with Flight 11. Halleck immediately "punched in" the Boston ATC center but was told "you need to talk to somebody else" about #11. He was then informed that ATC had lost communications with #11, that its transponder was off, that it was below 29,000 feet, that it was southbound rather than westbound, that there may be a problem in the cockpit, and that ATC was trying to find out what was going on. Halleck reported that he placed this call immediately after being contacted by Marquis. (The American Airlines tape of the various 9/11 calls involving Marquis place this communication with Halleck at approximately 11 minutes, 27 seconds into the Marquis-Gonzalez call, which would put the time at about 7:32 a.m. Central Time.)

[U] At some point, and Halleck could not recall exactly when, or if this was before or after the foregoing report, Halleck was told by ATC that the pilot's microphone on #11 had been keyed, and that a controller at the Boston center had heard threatening voices from the cockpit to the effect "do as we say or we will kill you." Furthermore, Halleck was told that ATC had lost the "data tag." Halleck indicated he reported all of this to Marquis. (Based on the Marquis conversation tapes, this may have occurred at 19 minutes, thirty-nine seconds into the Marquis-Gonzalez call, which would place it at about 7:40 Central Time.)

[U] At this point, Halleck recalled thinking that it was a hijacking, but he was "not close" to thinking it a suicide hijacking. Around 7:45 Central Time, he recalled that they (in the SOC) were all waiting to see if anyone was going to call with more information about Flight 11. Finally, he heard a report that it had gone into the World Trade Center. Halleck did not recall any previous mention that a small plane had been the one to crash.

Flight 77

[U] Houck had no awareness of what was going on with respect to Flight 77 until after she became aware that Flight 11 had crashed.

[U] Halleck was asked at some point to call Washington center to inquire about Flight 77. He was told that ATC had lost it while it was westbound approaching Ohio, and that the transponder had been turned off. He later spoke with Dulles Tracon and was informed that it was tracking (via primary signal only) a fast-moving target.

[U] At some point, Halleck was told that United was missing a plane, and he immediately called his counterpart at the United System Operations Center (SOC) but was told that UAL wouldn't confirm the loss. After that, Halleck called Herndon ATC command center and spoke with "Ellen" who reported that "we lost another one." Halleck told her that American personnel thought that #77 may have been the one which hit the second tower at the WTC, but they didn't know how it could have gotten to New York City.

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“Ellen” replied that there was another lost flight and it might not have been #77 that crashed into the WTC.

[U] In conclusion, Halleck reported that the multiple, simultaneous events made it very hard for him to sequence the order of 9/11 happenings.