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MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Event: Monte Belger, former Deputy Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration

Type of event: Interview

✓ Date: November 24, 2003; 9:00 a.m.

Special Access Issues: None

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Team Number: 7

Location: GSA Commission Office

Participants - Non-Commission: Monte Belger

Participants - Commission: Bill Johnstone and John Raidt

Background on September 11, 2001 Belger was serving as acting Deputy Administrator of the FAA

- 1972 -- Started with FAA as a security inspector in Tampa, FL.
- 1975-1978 -- Security staff in FAA Washington HQ
- 1979 -- New England Region Division Manager (Security) in Boston.
- 1980 -- Great Lakes Region Division Manager (Security)
- 1983-84 -- Airports Manager in Chicago
- 1986 -- Deputy Director for Great Lakes
- 1988 -- Associate Administrator for Aviation Standards (including Security)
- 1997-2002 -- Acting Deputy Administrator of FAA
- 2002 -- Short tenure as Acting Administrator of FAA
- 2002 -- Sept. 13 -- Retired
- Currently working for Lockheed Martin

AVSEC Leading up to 9-11

(V)

Belger cited that there were

and
No significant domestic security events for 8-10 years prior to 9-11; no international event affecting U.S. Carriers. It appeared things were working ok. FAA was profiling passengers to counter explosives threat. Leading up to 9-11 primary concern of the public, Congress and the FAA was its focus on congestion, capacity and customer service. FAA had a good security team headed by Admiral Flynn. FAA had much confidence in them.

[U] Weaknesses of the system included performance/detection problems at screening checkpoints—"the inability to detect everything all the time." In retrospect since 9-11, inadequate sharing of intelligence was also a problem.

FAA Security Briefings

[U] FAA ACI produced a daily intelligence briefing (classified). The briefing would be read by Shirley Miller (Belger's assistant). Anything necessary would be called to Belger's attention by Miller. Belger would then pass anything he thought necessary up to the administrator.

[U] In addition, Belger and Garvey had an open door policy. Flynn, and his successor as Associate Director for Civil Aviation Security, Gen. Mike Canavan, could see the Administrator and/or deputy anytime they thought they needed to. He stressed that if there was anything that required action, he would have learned about it.

Prevailing Threat 9-11

[U] ✱ Belger said that the FAA saw aviation threats overseas and the use of explosives as the biggest problem facing AVSEC. He was not aware of any increased threat in the summer of 2001.

[U] Didn't recall seeing the threat assessments from the FAA discussing the increased domestic threat (2001 rulemaking discussing a domestic Bojinka event) and the potential for suicide hijacking (CD-Rom presentation by ACI Pat McDonnell) He did mention that intelligence people tend to try to cover all the bases "as they are apt to do."

Intelligence/Liaisons

[U] Belger said he was unaware of any problems regarding the FAA's liaisons to the IC with respect to their access to intelligence or ability to focus on FAA issues.

[U] ✱ Belger stressed that FAA was dependent on the Intelligence Agencies and the FAA was always worried about whether it was getting the intelligence they needed. He said there was no doubt they had more intelligence on foreign rather than domestic threats. He was ✱ not aware of Usama Bin Laden prior to 9-11.

CAPPS I

Belger stated that the intent of CAPPS was to zero in more precisely on the threat posed by bombers. He indicated that a passenger selected by the CAPPS prescreening system would have to have their bags cleared for explosives. Belger did not seem to be aware that the profiling system prior to CAPPS required that selectees undergo increased checkpoint scrutiny of their person and carry-on belongings. He said that if these indeed

were the case it simply reflected a change in the perceived threat. (He cited James Padgett as the expert on the architecture of CAPPS I).

Checkpoint Screening

(U) Belger said the challenge of checkpoint screening was the constant effort to keep folks alert and give them the best tools/technology to do their job. He stated that getting 100 percent detection would bring the nation's aviation system to a halt. He said the need was to find the "right balance" between detection and keeping the schedule. He said that the civil aviation system is fundamentally built around schedule.

(U) Belger stated his impression that ~~was that~~ ^{Security} the system was slightly improving leading up to 9/11. While FAA data on screening showed some improvement the performance problems were unacceptable. The emphasis was on improving the equipment and training people better. As an example of that emphasis, Belger identified an FAA proposed rule pending in 2001 to certify screeners and increase training requirements. He said that Admiral Flynn pulled back the final rule because he perceived an inability to quantitatively test the system and performance. He wanted to put in place the TIP (Threat Imaging Projection system) first. Belger stressed that better trained, more dedicated individuals would be more likely to detect weapons, but, the U.S. domestic system wasn't designed to detect weapons, which were not prohibited.

(U) He agreed that the system was designed to stop crazies and criminals, but not the dedicated terrorist.

Resource Allocation

(U) Belger state ~~the security~~ ^{of that} resource allocation decisions were driven by Admiral Flynn, and factored in improved intelligence in the 1990's and the vulnerability assessments. Belger wasn't aware of the application of any risk management tools in determining resource allocation, but again this was Flynn's responsibility. ^{for security} ^{then}

Fines/penalties on Carriers for screening failures

(U) Belger cited his ^{previous work} ^{ICATA} experience in the security program, including ^{on} the issue of fines. He stated that the purpose of fines is compliance & enforcement. Compliance is the overriding goal. Fines are a good way to get the regulated party's attention. He cited the use of fines as an effective attention getting tool dealing with issues of pilot performance. The fines got their attention. Belger noted that as a security specialist he followed the fines that he assessed through to the final determination, which was useful in understanding how and what happened. He said he didn't have the sense that other FAA security enforcement personnel engaged in that same practice. Belger said that the final settlements which were often lower than the original fine did not concern him. He found publicity to be more effective than financial penalties.

about compliance failures

(U) Belger could not recall an instance in which the FAA threatened to de-certify an air carrier because of security violations. He did, however, recall that the FAA had closed certain poorly-performing screening checkpoints.

Common Strategy

(U) Belger stated that while the common strategy against hijacking had been update a couple of times, it was not designed to counter a 9/11 scenario. He didn't recall how the scenarios to which the common strategy was to respond were planned or developed. Obviously post 9-11 it had to be re-thought and replaced. He perceives that we still have the need to make sure that all parties are aware of what they are supposed to do in the event of an emergency.

FAM

(U) Belger stated that the FAM program was allowed to wither because it was a lower priority in an environment where resources were constrained. He stated that at the time, people didn't think there was a serious domestic threat, citing the absence of a serious domestic aviation security event in the 10 years leading up to 9-11. He saw some of the language citing domestic threat in ACI as "throw ins."

Cockpit Doors

(U) Belger said doors were supposed to be locked-in in flight. He was not aware of any serious look at issues regarding the cockpit door from a security perspective. It was a flight safety standards issue. An impregnable door can be a safety concern in the even of decompression. He said that the safety issues regarding the engineering of the door are startlingly complex. And that the FAR certification folks did a marvelous job of minimizing the safety implications and the increased safety risk of secure cockpit doors. Belger stated that before 9-11, the systems wouldn't have made the trade-off of increased "security" for minimized "safety." In the post 9-11 environment, it made more sense. On that point, Belger iterated that FAA decision-making is always about the trade-offs among safety, security and efficiency.

w/ hardened cockpit door

to make the trade off

Safety vs. Security

(U) Belger stated that security didn't come to FAA until 1971 and the promulgation of the first security regulations. Congress made the FAA the lead agency for security because of the "safety" implications of responding to in-flight emergencies and contingencies.

(U) Belger disputed the accuracy of the NRC assertion that the FAA didn't take the same approach to security as it did safety. He said that safety standards are more precise and quantifiable, ~~that was impossible~~ to apply to security because of the human factors. In safety you weren't trying to detect an enemy. Security was more "subjective." He said that in general industry paid more attention to safety than security concerns because the former was much more prevalent.

but it was not

He regarded it as impossible

Here some measure

involved in security

Cockpit Keys

~~SSA~~ Belger agreed that it wasn't a good idea to have one key fits all, but it wasn't seen as a significant risk pre 9-11. He wasn't sure if he was aware that one key fit all cockpits prior to 9-11.

The Day of 9-11

(U) Belger was attending a meeting in Air Traffic Control ~~that~~ ^{on} morning. When he returned to his office, his assistant Shirley Miller told him that a plane had crashed into the World Trade Center and she took him to the operations center (prior to the second strike).

✓(U) He spent a few minutes trying to figure out who knew what, and started to set up the security phone net with the ATC folks. His initial belief was that the plane was a general aviation aircraft, not a commercial plane. He said the atmosphere in the building was "chaotic but organized."

(U) At some point he was told that ATC had picked-up threatening transmissions from a commercial flight, but wasn't sure whether he learned that before or after the second plane hit the WTC.

(U) He remembers talking to Jane Garvey on the phone who was on her way from Secretary Mineta's office to the FAA operations center. He was on the phone with Mineta's Chief of Staff John Flaherty when the second plane hit the WTC. He returned to the Operations Center to take Charge.

(U) Belger recalled that Boston and New York Centers started imposing ground stops on commercial aircraft. He said this was a very good decision, though the scenario had never been practiced and some would say they didn't have the authority to make such a decision unilaterally. In that regard, Belger said he is glad FAA personnel didn't follow all the rules/regulations in place (such as ~~with contacting~~ ^{and p w/ each} NORAD)

(U) With regard to phone communications from the FAA's Operations Center, Belger said there were two levels. (He did not know if either was recorded). The first was the Primary Net that involved all the key players: FAA, FBI, ATC, DoD etc. in an open net to talk strategically.

(U) The second was the tactical net which was a lower level and used for tasking and implementation ^{with FAA}

(U) Around 9:20 EDT he remembers discussion about a national ground stop (i.e. no take-offs)—Herndon was making the same decisions about this independently. Meanwhile the FAA was still trying to figure out which aircraft hit the WTC. While he hadn't talked with the carriers by that time, he believes Garvey had been in touch with them.

(U) Between 9:20-9:45 there were many confusing reports about various aircraft being unaccounted for. He heard of a crash on the Indiana/Kentucky border that was thought to be AAL 77. By this point he believes he talked with Bob Baker at ~~AAL~~ and Russ Chew at ~~United~~. Jane talked to Don Carty.

(U) ^{AAL} Belger doesn't recall any discussion that morning about the need to contact aircraft in the air about securing their cockpits, even though they were considering an order to land all planes.

(U) With regard to the Primary Net, Belger said he believes that Lee Longmire was in charge. He had the impression that the military was on the line at some point and had assumed that the proper contacts had been made. He had no knowledge about the problem that Lee Longmire shared with the Commission that the NMCC was supposed to be on the Net but was in fact absent for some undetermined length of time. Belger wasn't aware of the NORAD response until after AAL 77 crashed (he subsequently learned that Boston and New York Centers had called NORAD earlier)

(U) Belger was told about UAL 93 after it crashed. He stressed that everyone was very confused about which aircraft hit the Pentagon. UAL and AAL weren't sure what planes hit where. He said that the carriers were searching for information from the FAA not providing it. It took a long time to confirm what aircraft hit the Pentagon.

(U) Belger believes that the "hijack coordinator" would have been the senior security person present who was Lee Longmire. (SEE FAA PROTOCOL ON "Hijack Coordinator).

(U) Belger learned of the crash into the Pentagon shortly after it happened. He and Garvey got on the phone with Norm Mineta who decided to bring everything down (around 9:45) which was implemented. Belger continued to monitor the system as it executed this order. All aircraft were down and the system grounded by 12:15.

Weapons and Tactics

(U) Belger said it was his understanding the box cutters were the weapons used by the hijackers and that they "stormed" the cockpits. He doesn't remember anything about "knives." He said that his understanding was derived from news accounts, but that he's still not sure what weapons were used.

(U) Belger said that he did not remember seeing any executive summaries about the events of the day, and did not recall any discussion about the possible use of "guns." He does remember some discussion about UAL 93 and the presence of a bomb as per ATC.

(U) Belger does remember speculation that the weapons must have been planted for the hijackers, because the security folks didn't believe that the hijackers could have succeeded in getting through four different checkpoint operations with weapons. Belger stated that he was not aware of any evidence to give credence to the notion that weapons were planted or that an "insider" participated.

Post Closure of the National Air Space

(U) Belger stated that once the NAS was closed and all planes had been grounded, there was no standard operating procedure to guide the response. He turned his attention to coordinating with the air carriers where everyone's aircraft was located—including the numerous aircraft in Canada. He had many discussions with Canadian authorities regarding how to handle people/customs. He recalls trying to figure out what decisions needed to be made to re-start the system.

(U) Belger does not recall any discussion of screening the aircraft, passenger manifests, or passengers coming off the grounded flights to determine if there were other plots.

With regard to notifying flights in the air about what was happening at the WTC, Belger said they were worried about panic among passengers. He was not concerned that pilots or ATC would panic about what was going on. Belger thinks that the air carriers did put a warning to their aircraft. In retrospect, he believes it would not have been a bad thing for FAA to make sure that all aircraft knew what was going on so that they could secure their cockpits.

Centers of Activity at the FAA on 9-11

(U) Belger agreed that there were five centers of activity at the FAA on 9-11.

- 1) Washington Operations Center (WOC). 10th floor. (Dave Canoles would know if the phones in the center were recorded).
- 2) Office of the Administrator/Deputy Administrator (Garvey & Belger) (He knows the phones weren't recorded).
- 3) ACI watch – 3rd floor (Claudio Manno would know if the phones were recorded)
- 4) ATC communications hub – 10th floor ([redacted] and Jeff Griffiths)
- 5) ACS Security Operations—3rd Floor

9/11
Working-level
Employee

(U) Belger stated that if anyone was in contact with the military it would have been ATC or the WOC.

(U) Radar Tracking

Belger confirmed that the FAA didn't have primary radar in certain sectors – after 9-11 he became aware of the impact of this on tracking AAL 77.

Garvey Role

- (U) Belger said he spend almost the entire day with Garvey, except when she went down to console people in the lobby later in the day—which he saw as an appropriate thing to do. Belger said that his leadership role on 9-11 evolved and was a reaction rather than a pre-planned procedure. He stressed that Garvey was making decisions along with him. And that it is his nature to take charge. He has no reservations about her role on that day, and never heard anything negative. Belger said he thinks “we did a pretty good job” of keeping things in the office under control. He said that Garvey spent more time talking with the airlines than he did.

*(U) Belger
about the
emergency
protocol*

After Action Report

- (U) Belger stated that there was no formal, consolidated after action report on 9-11, and in retrospect this could have been done better. He was never asked to write a statement about what happened on 9/11 from his perspective. He remembers continuous discussions with ATC about specific measures such as better coordination with DoD which was done within days. He said that FAA knew that the FBI was investigating and that leadership instructed everyone to give the FBI everything. This was followed by the Joint Intelligence Committee investigation.

Table Top Exercises

- (U) Belger remembers that FAA did conduct various table-top exercises over the years to practice emergency response—mostly via telephone. He said that some of the scenarios involved security issues (not just safety), and the system would do communications checks to ensure that communications could be established quickly and effectively in the emergency response mode. While Belger recalls that a hijack scenario was practiced, he doesn't remember a scenario involving the use of aircraft as a weapon.

Pre 9-11 Context

- (U) Belger stated that from the spring of 2000 through the summer of 2001, the focus of the civil aviation system was on capacity, congestion, delays. He cited news reports, hearings and White House interest. In the spring of 2000 the FAA was engaged in an effort to be more collaborative with the airlines on issues such as weather, system operations etc. During this period there was significant attention being paid to the Passenger Bill of Rights as well.
- (U) Belger indicated that the DOT has a consumer hotline (under the auspices of the counsel's office). The system tracks delays, customer complaints, etc. It should give a good indication about what the general public was concerned about with respect to aviation.
- (U) Belger stated that “not a day went by” that delays weren't priorities for Belger and Garvey. Domestic security seemed in-hand. Flynn was very well-respected. While

- (U) Canavan had a great reputation – he wasn't as knowledgeable as Flynn. He didn't have a grasp of the FAA system. Belger said he didn't recall Canavan expressing any discomfort with the manner in which the aviation security system was functioning. Canavan's priorities were the same as everyone else's: international threat; 107/108 rulemaking, bombings.

Recommendations

- (U) --The Common Strategy, for better or worse, was well understood before 9/11. Belger believes there were clear roles and no confusion as to roles. He doesn't believe that is the case today. TSA; FAA; DoD et. al. need to put together protocols and practice scenarios, to be sure everyone knows what they are supposed to do and to drill on their respective roles. TSA should retain lead role for in-air hijackings (FAA and TSA did an exercise in November 2002 on hijack coordination).
- (U) --CAPPS II or some type of capability to further identify the bad guys is absolutely needed. We will never get 100% detection so we are better off knowing who the people are (threats). "The good guy with a knife is not a threat. The bad guy with bare hands is a threat."
- (U) --Intelligence sharing—We need a better idea of those who are entering the country. The fact that so many hijackers were here so long is "astounding." We need a common database from which to work.
- (U) Statements made by Monte Belger in his 9/25/03 hearing before the Government Affairs Committee that were read to him during the interview:
- (U) "We ordered the evacuation of every airport terminal for the airports to be inspected. Every aircraft was fully inspected before any passenger was allowed to board."
- (U) "It is very possible that those items (i.e. hijacker weapons) did not go through the screening checkpoint...I think there was a newspaper report that after they did a thorough overhaul of one of the canceled flights, they found one of the box cutters or paper cutters in one of the seat cushion of the planes, and there is no telling whether a passenger brought it on board it was planted at this point."
- (U) "One of the problems we had in getting (the Screener Certification) rule out sooner was that there was no real objective way to test the screeners other than to test objects that our inspectors use, which really is not a good real-world way to test."