



MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Event: Mark Barnik, Operations Supervisor of Area 4, Cleveland Air Traffic Control Center

Type of event: Interview

Date: October 2, 2003

Special Access Issues: None

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Team: 8

Location: Cleveland Center, Lorain, OH

Participants (Non-Commission): Mark Barnik, Operations Supervisor, and Michael McKinley, FAA attorney, Great Lakes Region

Participants (Commission): John Farmer, Dana Hyde, Lisa Sullivan

Background

Before joining the FAA as an Area Supervisor at Cleveland Center in 1983, he was a police man for ten years. He described the position as one that monitors the operations, made sure there was sufficient staffing for each shift, and basically made life easier for the controllers in his area.

Overall, Barnik said that on 9-11, the staff at Cleveland Center didn't experience the confusion that the controllers in Boston felt because they were aware of the situation in New York before encountering UA 93. John Worth was in his section which he described as the ultra high altitude Lorain sector. He said that Dave Liester, who was Worth's D Side that day, told him, "United 93 is not talking but he hears people screaming."

Kim Wernica came into the area and said that AA11 won't be coming through Cleveland Center on its scheduled flight path because it was one of the planes that hit the World Trade Center. According to Barnik, there was some confusion initially as to how that can happen - so he went back and said, "this isn't a joke - AA11 isn't coming" because the controllers would have been looking for it.

He said this information on flight AA11 came almost immediately after it hit. "He saw the strip with the call sign within minute of when it hit." He said he did not know where Kim got the information.

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When the second plane hit, everyone knew it was a terrorist attack. At that time, Cleveland Center did not know "Indy" (Indianapolis) Center had "lost" an aircraft. Barnik didn't remember if he was given the call sign of the flight the moment he learned about the crash.

Their concern at this point was other planes. It was not long after that they began thinking there was another hijack. He told controllers to "let us know if there's anything unusual with the flights in their areas." Of UA 93, he said at first everything was on course but wouldn't respond.

He told John to bring up the frequency so that he could monitor the situation. They were able to tag UA 93 once he turned the transponder off through the use of primary radar. Given the speed at which the planes move and that Lorain sector typically runs east to west, the fact that UA 93 made an abrupt turn back east was seen as a real safety hazard to other flights in the area. The controllers at Cleveland Center had no idea where it was going. At the time, 2-3 planes nearby were diverted to avoid mid-air collision.

Throughout the event, Barnik felt his position was as liaison from the area to the rest of the Center; Asking periodically if Werth had anything new to report.

Barnik does not remember what time Kim told him about the suspected hijacking of a Delta flight. "NORAD said it was confirmed that there was a bomb on board," she told him.

Barnik relayed that the pilot of the Delta Flight 1989 told him (Werth) that his company wanted him on the ground, but there was nothing wrong on his flight. Barnik and others at Cleveland Center thought, "maybe he doesn't know it but the company has a confirmation." Delta flight 1989 landed at Cleveland Airport.

Barnik said Werth knew it was definitely a hijack situation because of the Middle Eastern accent heard over the frequency, and mention of the bomb.

Immediately after hearing that transmission, he told Kim Wernica the Operations Manager, "we have another one."

Barnik reported that UA 93 went into an unauthorized climb, turned north, turned south, then southeast. Once he turned his transponder off, the controllers were able to track the target but not the altitude. Werth asked planes in the vicinity if they could see it. Yes, they confirmed that they could. This enabled Werth to divert the planes from the hijacked plane's new direction.

Barnik added that it was necessary also to sterilize the airspace beneath UA 93 because a bomb detonation at that altitude would cause damage below; this was another dimension of the situation that made it more challenging to deal with from the controllers' perspective.

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At one time, the Center was dealing with both planes. Sandusky (SKY) and Marion sectors handled Delta 1989. The people were getting antsy. He told them, "You are trained for this. Do what you can do. Do your job."

After Delta landed and before UA 93 crashed, the order came down to land the planes regardless of their intended destination.

This area around Cleveland works 10 thousand planes a day. There were over a hundred in the sky in Cleveland Center at that time. Planes were starting to line up in the Center. Having landed Delta 1989 at Cleveland Airport because it was a suspected hijack, the airport was closed. ATCs were rerouting planes to Detroit, Toronto, etc. The situation called for creative solutions. It took about a half hour to 45 minutes. HE described it as a "scene out of a bad movie."

When asked, Barnik responded that Operations notified the military. He believed that the Center has a direct line to the military, but he was sure. He speculated that the military was already aware of the situation when the Center talked to military personnel (he was vague on this topic). He recalls telling Rich Reed to call the military because UA 93 was in the area. He did not think it was safe to have fighter pilots follow UA 93. When asked to specify, Barnik thought the conversation took place before Delta 1989 was thought to be a hijack.

Barnik said he contacted United Airlines that day' that was standard procedure. He called the operations desk at and spoke to a guy named John. He told him we needed to get in touch with 93. He said "oh god, not another one." He said we'll try to get a hold of them. Barnik took that to mean an ACARS message would be sent to the plane.

Area 6 handed UA 93 off to area 5 in a verbal communication because he was a primary target and could not be coordinated technically. "Everyone in area 5 knew what was going on" said Barnik (area 5 sits in close proximity to area 6 in the center).

Barnik shared that at the time he was concerned the flight was heading for Pittsburgh because his son works in a tall building there. After it passed over Pittsburgh, he didn't give much thought to where UA 93 was heading.

Immediately after, there was an unauthorized plane that flew over Cleveland Center. "There were a lot of things going on," he said. Barnik could not recall if the Pentagon had been attacked by then or not. By the time all the planes were down he knew the Pentagon had also been hit that morning. He remembers conversations about DC being declared a no-fly zone.

He doesn't know anything about the scrambles out of Toledo and Selfridge. He knew fighters were coming from "all over". There was an understanding that the military was in control of the air space, and that the FAA was talking to them. No one was supposed to be in the air.

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Two controllers and a supervisor stayed behind after they evacuated the center.

He, Joe Ryan, and John Werth stayed at the Center, in addition to a few others. The only other remarkable incident that day revolved around John Ashcroft's plane heading to Washington. The pilot talked to Mark Evans, a Traffic Supervisor, who looked into the possibility of letting the Attorney General's flight into Washington air space. The military said the air space was closed and the plane would "definitely be shot down."

While Evans talked to the military, Ashcroft's pilot stood by. He told the pilot that on "no uncertain terms," he was not allowed through to Washington. Eventually, he got a military escort and landed in DC.

Barnik said most of the pilots he encountered that day cooperated. It was to the credit of the commercial pilots that the controllers were able to bring down the planes so quickly without incident.

How much of a response that day was improvisation? Barnik said that controllers were never trained to handle this type of situation. He thought that 50-60 percent of the people he worked with at the Center had dealt in an emergency situation before, in one way or another. It was not so much a testament to the controllers' ability to improvise as it attested to their level of experience.

Should training change as a result of 9-11? Barnik does not think that's necessary for air traffic controllers. If anything, he gets frustrated with Washington's handling of situations. He thought the order was done to ground planes in a timely manner and with forethought. "It was a phenomenal order that saved a lot of lives. We'll never know how many." He doesn't know who gave the order.

Barnik characterized the controller as the "first line of defense on information" in the event of an aviation crisis. Now, whenever a plane goes "NORDO" (no radio) and changes courses, the military wants immediate notification.

Barnik thought a good change in the system would be for pilots to have cell phones in the cockpit in the event their radios and transponders fail. Securing the cockpit doors and putting video cameras in to monitor the cabin from the cockpit are other suggestions he had.

When the military gets scrambled the fighters are "gung-ho." There are a lot of false alarms. Barnik thinks that NORDO and course deviation is not enough to determine a hijack and order a shoot-down. This is a really busy facility. What the military responsibility is makes him nervous. Escorts are one thing. His concern is that in the initial months following 9-11, there was an overreaction by the national leadership and the military that made him nervous.

Barnik felt that the Command Center in Washington is too influenced by the individual needs of each air carrier.