

MFR 0406792

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Event: Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Boston Center Field Site Interview with
Richard Beringer

Type of event: Interview

Date: Monday, September 22, 2003

Special Access Issues: None

Prepared by: Geoffrey Brown

Team Number: 8

Location: FAA Boston Air Route Center, Nashua, New Hampshire

Participants - Non-Commission: John R. Donnelly, FAA Senior Attorney [(781) 238
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Participants - Commission: John Azzarello, Miles Kara, Geoffrey Brown

NOTE: Please refer to the recorded interview for a complete account.

Beringer started as an ATC in the Air Force in 1979 and with the FAA as an ATC in 1983. From there he became an Area C Specialist.

Beringer informed Commission staff that prior to 9/11 NORDO aircraft were considered to "eventually come back", and wouldn't be thought of as a hijack. Occasionally it would occur with a commercial airliner, and then an ATC would inform the supervisor, who might then have called the airliner company. There were other techniques at the disposal of an ATC in the pre-9/11 environment. An ATC might attempt to contact other aircraft to check altitude, or to contact the aircraft incase there was something wrong with the ATC equipment. If an aircraft took a serious deviation from course, then it would be considered a higher priority. The priority of a NORDO differed on the type of aircraft. Mostly ATC's did not pay as much attention to privately owned aircraft. When an aircraft was NORDO it was highly uncommon even in the pre-9/11 environment for the aircraft to go more than a sector without some form of communication with the ATC. Beringer noted that for the transponder to turn off and for there to be no radio contact was unusual and would call for a supervisor's attention in pre-9/11, but now is viewed with high suspicion. With the third factor of a serious course deviation Beringer noted that it would be viewed even prior to 9/11 with extreme seriousness.

Beringer considers hijackings pre-9/11 as extremely out of the ordinary, even though they are trained in the basic ATC response on a yearly basis. Beringer believes that multiple situations are practiced in the DynSim and CBI training, and also believes that a situation with the multiple factors that occurred on 9/11 has been practiced.

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On 9/11 Beringer was at the BoSox Sector RA position. This position covers the airspace above 10,000 ft including FL 230. He took AA11 and carried it through westbound after the handoff from Boston Tracon position. Beringer would normally initiate a handoff to the Boston High Sector from there. Beringer remembers a routine handoff from BoSox, and climbed the aircraft towards Athens 38. He then was relieved and went on break.

When Beringer returned both AA11 and UAL175 had hit the WTC, and the air traffic system was about to close.

He heard from his colleagues corroborating information on the flights.

Beringer noted that it was a widely held assumption in ZBW that UAL175 was the second hit on WTC, since it had been reported when it "left" the ATC system.

Pre-9/11 Beringer noted his understanding that it was the supervisor's responsibility to contact the military. Beringer stated there is no need for FAA controllers to contact the military. In the case of 9/11, Beringer would not have known who to contact at the military. He noted also that his ability to vector a fighter for intercept, if a case called for, would be due to his military experience and not from his training with the FAA.

Regarding the fighters in Whiskey Warning Area 105, Beringer was responsible for working them over to Kennedy. Beringer stated that typically ZNY would not work those fighters. Beringer did bring the aircraft over from W105 but did not bring their Otis replacements over. His experience with the military is that they work closely together in upstate New York, but that his experience is more extensive because of his training. He acknowledged that there are sometimes difficulties in dealing with military pilots, but that because of the high performance level of their fighter aircraft they are often very willing to follow a controller's guidance to rapidly change their position. Overall Beringer believes the FAA and military coexist well in their shared airspace. Beringer stated that he has handled fighter aircraft in FAA DynSim training.

Beringer noted that after ATC Zero was declared all aircraft was directed to the nearest airport, and by the time the ZBW building was empty the only aircraft left in the sky were military.

In a 9/11 type event Beringer reiterated that there is not much the ATC system can do short of passing along timely information and vectoring a military aircraft to intercept. He is skeptical though that flight time to an intercept will allow a fighter to make a difference. Beringer stated that the only security would be to make cockpits completely safe from intrusion. But he also noted the threat posed by private aircraft. He also noted that a terrorist with thorough ATC knowledge could develop a much more sophisticated plan.

Beringer was the last ZBW controller to leave the building because he was controlling two military tankers and giving them instructions to get below his 18000 ft ceiling on airspace, at that point they could fly by visuals. One tanker called 23k visual, the other

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got below the 18000 mark.

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