

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Event: North Eastern Air Defense Sector (NEADS) field site visit

Type of event: Interview with Sergeant (Sgt.) Steve Bianchi

Date: Monday, October 27, 2003

Special Access Issues: Clearance check

Prepared by: Geoffrey Brown

Team Number: 8

Location: Commander's Conference Room, Building 102

Participants - Non-Commission: E. Michael Chiaparas, Esq., Deputy Director for the Contract Disputes Resolution Center, Department of Defense (DoD)

Participants - Commission: John Farmer, John Azzarello, Geoffrey Brown

Note: Please refer to the recorded interview for further details.

Background:

Bianchi began with the military in 1967 in Syracuse, New York. In 1993 he began working as a Mission Crew Commander Technician (MCC Tech) at NEADS.

September 11, 2001 (9/11):

Bianchi began his shift at approximately seven in the morning on 9/11. He was scheduled to work as the MCC Tech for both the planned exercise and for NEADS "real word" operations.

Bianchi recalled that the first indication he received that there was something happening was when he heard an announcement that requested Major Nasypany, the Alpha Flight MCC at the time, to report to the operations floor immediately. Bianchi immediately reported to the floor, and was told of the first report of a hijacked aircraft (American Airlines Flight 11 - AA 11). Bianchi informed Commission staff that he referred to the hijack checklist for the response protocol.

Bianchi was responsible for the coordination with the identification section of NEADS (Huntress ID), and passed their information to the MCC (Nasypany). Bianchi informed Commission staff that McCain passed information from the Senior Director Technician (SD Tech) and from incoming telephone calls to the MCC.

Bianchi noted that he personally had no contact with the airline companies on 9/11, and does not believe any of the Huntress ID Techs did either.

Chat log review:

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Commission staff reviewed the chat logs with Bianchi, and he noted the following:

Bianchi noted that there was an indication from the MCC for the Otis ANGB scramble of NORAD Air Defense assets (a flight of two F-15ADFs) to travel at supersonic speed. Bianchi noted that the MCC communicates with fighters through the Senior Director. He also noted that after the first reports of an aircraft impact at the World Trade Center (WTC) the fighters remained vectored towards New York City. Bianchi does not believe anyone noticed that there was a primary target on AA 11 before it struck the WTC [Commission staff noted that McCain claimed he spotted AA 11 moments before it struck the tower].

Bianchi noted that at 1305 GMT Huntress ID received a call from a Federal Aviation Administration employee that informed NEADS that an United Airlines Flight 175 (UAL 175) was hijacked as well. After referencing Commission transcripts, the FAA call that is noted in Bianchi's log at 1305 actually came into NEADS at 1303.

Bianchi noted that at 1309 Langley Air Force Base (Langley AFB) was placed on Battle Stations since NEADS did not know where UAL 175 "was headed". He further noted that there was initial confusion at NEADS as to what aircraft struck the WTC. Regarding UAL 175, which crashed at approximately 9:02:50AM, Bianchi reiterated that NEADS was looking for the aircraft after its impact.

Bianchi noted that he initially wrote in his log that AA 11 crashed into the WTC. Later, after there was confusion as to whether or not AA 11 was still airborne filtered through to NEADS, and there were further reported events and hijacks, he stopped noting the flight number on American Airlines flights.

Reports of AA 11 after 8:46 AM and the Langley scramble:

Bianchi noted that NEADS checked the coastline for an American flight that was headed for Washington. He also noted that NEADS scrambled Langley to look for that aircraft. He noted that the Langley flights were scrambled and directed to hold over Washington, DC. He noted that either the FAA or Giant Killer sent the flights over the coast on a standard departure course. He noted that Nasypany was aggravated by this, and upon discovery ordered the flights to be immediately be placed on course directly towards Washington, D.C.

UAL 93 and Delta 1989:

Bianchi noted to Commission staff that he located UAL 93 at his position, behind the MCC Consuls. He noted that he recalled putting a "Z" line on a flight, but after Commission staff questing could not recall with certainty if the flight he remembers was UAL 93 or Delta Airlines Flight 1989. Bianchi noted to Commission staff that he does not recall any aircraft that were scrambled in response to reports of UAL 93. He believed

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at the time that NEADS was looking for Delta 1989, and that NEADS attempted to find fighter assets in the vicinity of Chicago. Bianchi does not recall successfully finding ready assets. Bianchi noted however that as the day progressed the response from the air asset bases was overwhelmingly supportive.

Training exercises:

Bianchi does not recall any training exercises that were planned to address an air threat to the National Capital Area that involved an intercept of an aircraft after it crossed into national land borders. He did note that wartime scenarios were practiced, and that in these circumstance caps would be established.

Bianchi noted that there were hijack suicide exercises but that those aircraft would be intercepted while over water. Bianchi noted that in these training episodes the suicide bombers were threatening to use a bomb to destroy the aircraft, and that these were not threats on infrastructure. Bianchi noted also that there were simulated exercises that tested authorization procedures to shoot down a hijacked aircraft.

Bianchi noted that Russian commercial airliners had been directed to stay away from military bases and other targets of interest to terrorist organizations.

In hindsight:

Bianchi noted that the lack of commercial telephone lines at NEADS on 9/11 hindered its operations and the flow of communication.

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