MFR04016822

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Event: Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) New York Air Route Center Interview with Peter McCloskey

Type of event: Recorded Interview

Date: Tuesday, October 1, 2003

Special Access Issues: None

Prepared by: Miles Kara

Team Number: 8

Location: FAA New York Air Route Center, Rokonkomo, New York

Participants - Non-Commission: Sandy Lane, FAA General Counsel, Mark DePalma, NACTA Representative

Participants - Commission: John Azzarello, Miles Kara, Geoffrey Brown

----

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

Background

McCloskey reported to ZNY on November 2, 1982, and was assigned to Area B. He subsequently worked in the airspace and procedures office, for three and a half years as a traffic management coordinator and is now an air traffic controller in Area D. On 9-11 he was working as a traffic management coordinator in the Traffic Management Unit (TMU).

Events of 9-11

That morning McCloskey was assigned as shift coordinator and arrival director and dealt with flight restrictions and rerouting accomplished at the watch desk. He was at the position throughout the morning

His first notification of unusual air traffic was a phone call from Boston at 0829 EDT, followed by a conference call with Cleveland Center and the FAA Command Center at Herndon. The ZNY and ZBW participants were not actual air traffic control areas, it was all within the traffic management units; it's a hotline that patches all facilities together through the command center:

A target aircraft had shut off its transponder, made a hard left turn near Albany, and wasn't being tracked by ZNY. It appeared that there was also criminal activity and the aircraft was a possible hijacking. He immediately told his supervisor, Pete Mulligan. Everyone at first thought he was kidding, but got serious very quickly. Mulligan called Herndon for more information. McCloskey did not listen to that conversation.

When McCloskey first tried to pull up on the target on a scope he didn't see it; too many primary targets. So had to hone in on a position north and listen for Area B to give more precise information. He called Areas B and C to inform them of the hijack, based on what Boston said--hard left and due south, 180 heading. That path would have entered Sector 56, Area B, or could have entered Sector 34, Area C. The Controller-In-Charge Area B confirmed that UAL175 reported that AA11 passed below his position. That information allowed McCloskey to then track AA11 as a primary target. He didn't have the call sign on his screen, but knew it was AA11 based on the Boston information. Whe he acquired the target it was probably 30 miles north of Kennedy.

Chaos started. McCloskey called Boson backand spoke to the shift coordinator position in traffic management. Everything was handled through the command center. He learned that the hijack wasconfirmed, that Boston Center said they heard something that confirmed a hijack. McCloskey notified Area B that an airplanewas headed their way. He called Washington Center to inform them and called Tracon New York as well.

Determine speed on a primary by the way they track and the actual spacing between the lines on the trail. Can leave up to 5 histories. Can adjust it to none, or anything that's 1-5. Spacing between these histories gives an idea of where going. Radar updates every 12 seconds. 5 histories is a minutes worth of information.

He received a phone call from someone at watch desk about an ELT(Emergency Locator Transmission) in the vicinity of lower Manhattan (NY Tracon). When that report came in the target was gone. Then word came in that something hit the WTC, a small airplane. McCloskey hoped that was true but didn't really have a chance to think. Area B Controller-In-Charge (Ivonna Dowis) came around corner and told him about UAL175 lost.

United 175

McCloskey Immediately brought the airplane up on the radar screen. He found the non-Coast data block based on what Dowis reported about a 3321 beacon code. He told Staff his recall was that since AA11 might have been plane that hit WTC, and that 3321 beacon was headed towards lower Manhattan, there was a major problem.

He called NY TRACON who looked for the 3321 target and picked it up. He told them he thought it was UAL175 and gave a "heads up, here comes another one." Next he hears was the plane crashed, he had no idea where. He immediately hung up since there wasn't anything else to say.

He learned from people in cafeteria who were watching CNN live that another tower had been hit and had no doubt which aircraft had hit which tower. He shared that opinion with Pete Mulligan, "everybody" up front assumed the first one was AA11, but there was no confirmation. But when the United hit, "we didn't need confirmation." Bruce Barrett was at the watch desk during the whole process. He did not know if Mike McCormack was there or not when second plane hit.

Military Assistance

Boston Center did not mention that military assistance had been scrambled for AA11. H e was not aware of the procedures to obtain military assistance for a hijack. Air traffic procedures would be to render any assistance asked for by the pilot and notify supervisor.

He had no knowledge of what supervisors do in hijack situations. His knowledge is based specifically on the role of the controller. There is no separate training to man a position at the Traffic Management Unit (TMU). Everyone in TMU is a controller.

Additional Points

Pre-9/11 they had computer-based instruction and classroom instruction in air traffic procedures, to include hijacking scenarios. Post 9/11: hijack procedures received no real change instructions. Would still do whatever is necessary to accommodate aircraft, and notify supervisor. Prior 9/11 - as ATC would detect a hijack by 7500, by verbal or by the code word.

He thought all communications with the Command Center Herndon, ZBW and the outside hard line to NY Tracon were recorded.

McCloskey was shown Chapter 7: 76.4 - never received training regarding contacting the military by the book. He was not aware of any military assistance requested with either AA11 or UAL175.

It is virtually impossible to detect a hijack without the pilot telling you since so many other things are taking place. Personally, if they are going off course, he is "going to ask " - "do you realize you are off course?" He has not received any training to be more aware in a formal sense. FAA has provided mandatory briefing items to be read and initialed. But as a controller there really isn't anything to be done to make you more aware. He was shown N7110.332. Didn't recall it.

McCloskey was not really familiar with the Northeast Air Defense Sector and what role it played. Prior to 9/11 he had never participated in any joint FAA/military exercise. Not post either. No idea of military ROE on hijacks. Unaware of escort and engage order officially, but assumes they have that authority now. FAA could have a role in vectoring military aircraft to target. After 9/11 military and FAA had a lot of "knee jerk" reactions. A lot of general aviation pilots strayed into prohibited areas post 9/11, and this involved military scrambles, which went smoothly. After 9/11 there was a NEADS hotline in the TMU. NEADS would ask "do you deem it necessary to scramble?"

He made the phone call that put NY at ATC zero. After UAL175 hit the second tower, they were stunned for a second. He spoke with Pete Mulligan urging him to stop traffic. Pete gave the instruction to do so. He advised Wanda at the Command Center that ZNY was going to ATC zero, immediately.

UAL175 and AA11 were out of the normal equation--changes code, no radio, serious course deviation. He could think of various problems that might be involved, but because of the hard left turn would think something very serious going on. In the position AA11 made that hard turn he might think he had a problem and was turning to land in Philadelphia. Pre9/11 McCloskey would not have thought hijack. He would have thought some kind of mechanical electrical error since there was no notification, covert or overt from pilot.

McCloskey didn't give any verbal statements that day. He had no knowledge of the morning's meeting. There is an internal turf war; controllers don't like traffic management since they perceived the position to be useless.

He made a statement for the UAL175 accident package, but was never asked for a statement on AA11.

Rebirth of AA11

He had heard of that possibility. No one knew for sure, so they continued to try and track where both AA11 and UA 175 were. There was no confirmation that they were the ones that had hit the towers. An effort was made at the watch desk to learn from NY towers that had a view of the WTC. They kept looking for a fast moving primary in that vicinity. Only way to get confirmation was a reliable visual report. ELT went off in lower Manhattan. Don't know in hindsight if anyone saw AA11 was first impact. Can look back at the primary data to see when the plane actually stopped. From Herndon or FAA headquarters all calls went to either Bruce Barrett and Pete Mulligan.

He did not hear any rumors of AA11 hitting the Pentagon. When he heard about it he thought the lost plane over Indy was the one that struck the Pentagon. McCloskey never thought AA 11 had gone that much further south.

Recommendations

He would disassemble the Command Center at Herndon. "They're useless." Controllers cannot "control" hijacks. 9-11 was a nightmare for controllers, they can only watch. Military options are limited. IF a hijacker was headed towards a nuclear plant, perhaps better to shoot down? That was way outside the duty of the controllers. . FAA has to coordinate with the fighter aircraft but Herndon should not be involved. Any decision making should be made facility to facility. Such procedures worked much better before there was a Command Center.