

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

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Event: Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Boston Center Field Site Interview with Steven Roebuck, Air Traffic Control Specialist Area C.

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 7045]

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

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

Roebuck has been with the FAA since 1982, and at Boston Center Area C for his entire career. He has spent a detail with Quality Assurance and a detail with training. He was involved in ZBW's GPS project, and with its single site adaptation project. Roebuck noted that Area C itself has both high and low altitudes.

On 9/11 Roebuck was working BoSox 47R, then worked Hampton (where the F15s flew through after the attacks). Roebuck stated that the handling of AA11 from takeoff gave no indication of the impending hijack. He climbed AA11 beyond the noise abatement altitude and up to 14000 ft. He was relieved to take break by Greg Tachini. At that time AA11 was still on frequency and was cleared to climb to FL 230.

He came back from break and was told of the hijack of AA11. He took over Hampton Sector (31 R) which covers south of CT down to Long Island, at mainly FL 230 and above.

Prior to 9/11, Roebuck's experience with Warning Area 105 (Whiskey 105) was that it is mostly reserved for military operations, and it was not unusual to work traffic in and out of the area. Occasionally he would be notified that the area was conducting tests to the national air defense systems. Roebuck noted that in the course of his career he has noted a reduction in the use of Whiskey 105, but that when the military needs it, it is active. Roebuck stated that the relationship between the FAA and the military over his career indicates that years ago the military had "bad radios", which made it difficult for FAA controllers to communicate with military flights. Especially when there were multiple

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branches of the armed services conducting exercises in the warning areas. Overall though Roebuck views the relationship as a good one, and noted that the working relationship between military crews and the controllers is "a good one", considering they operate very busy airspace.

On 9/11 Roebuck remembers the two responding F15s as "coming out" under one flight call sign of Penta 45. Roebuck stated that this is not unusual, and usually the lead aircraft has the call sign. If the fighters split, they are both identified by different call signs. Roebuck noted he does not know if the fighters came out of Otis Air Force Base, and does not know if they departed before or after the AA11 impact. Further, Roebuck noted that the original flight strip for the fighters gave a destination of Kennedy Airport. Roebuck believes that the handoff for the fighters began at Cape Tracon, then went to Cape Sector, then to him at Hampton. He received a call that the F15s received a call to switch communications to Giant Killer. Roebuck's understanding of Giant Killer is that it covers the shore defense for CT, NY, MA, NJ, and VA. The Cape Sector explained that they had spoken to the pilots and told them of the attacks on the WTC. At this point Dean noted the expectation was that the fighters would head directly to New York City airspace. Shortly thereafter the flights were handed off to Hampton frequency and Dean climbed them to FL 290. He asked the pilots if they knew their destination. They did not and needed to delay at the western portion of Whiskey 105. If the pilots of the Penta flight were based at Otis Roebuck had an expectation that they would be familiar with the Whiskey area. When they told Roebuck of the delay he wanted information on the position the pilots would hold. They told him they could not give a specific position, but for him to keep them at a "published hold" in the area. Roebuck asked if they wanted a radial or latitude longitude hold, and the pilots replied that they would maintain themselves. With this lack of information Roebuck was unsure of what the pilots were going to do, and did not know how to clear airspace for their potential course. Roebuck had initially held the expectation that the fighters would tail AA11, but since it had already hit he couldn't predict their next course of action. So Roebuck asked the pilots if they were in contact with "company" (military), and they said they were. Roebuck noted that normally clearing area for fighters is very specific, so this unknown generic hold was extremely unusual. The fighters had an altitude but did not issue an EFC (Expect Further Clearance). Roebuck assumed the purpose of this hold was that if the fighters needed to move rapidly they did not want to be encumbered by an air traffic technicality. When the pilots arrived at Whiskey Roebuck pointed them out to ZNY twice. Roebuck also contacted Giant Killer to ask if they needed communications with the fighters, which they did not, so the pilots remained on Hampton frequency. Then there was the second impact on the WTC. He tried to communicate the "second event" to the pilots calmly. He informed the crews on the Hampton frequency to heighten cockpit security. This was all probably within fifteen minutes. At some point Roebuck asked Penta if it was a flight of two fighters. The Penta leader said they were in communication with Huntress, and the Giant Killer had requested communication. The pilot informed Roebuck their flight needed to proceed "on course". Roebuck asked if they wanted a hold on Kennedy. The Penta leader said he wanted a position directly over New York City. Roebuck worked the fighters over to Calverton, NY, but then the pilots asked for a position overhead New York City. Roebuck cleared them direct to Kennedy as a navigational aid. He checked

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LaGuardia's weather to make sure the pilots could spot Manhattan. Then he cleared them direct to Manhattan. He requested them to take FL 210, which would put them in ZNY airspace. Roebuck didn't know if ZNY Kennedy sector would know that they were coming. Roebuck had both civilian aircraft and fighters to deal with, and Kennedy had traffic at FL 230, so Roebuck climbed the fighters to FL 240. Roebuck received communication from Giant Killer indicating the fighters needed to be worked by Huntress control from that point, and that Huntress needed to communicate with ZNY. When the F15s were east of Kennedy Roebuck was relieved by John Gingrich (?). Roebuck's last communication with the fighters was to put them over to Kennedy's frequency, at which point the fighters were speaking to Huntress.

Roebuck informed Commission staff that "cat tracking" is the term used now when the ATC is informed of a "special interest" flight.

Roebuck noted that his only previous experience with a military scramble was before he was a certified controller there was a scramble out of the Cape Sector when the Russians flew a Bear aircraft along the coast.

Since 9/11 Roebuck noted that the military relationship with the FAA has changed. Roebuck views the ATC responsibility for conducting intercepts to be a much greater priority. This leaves a gray area in the knowledge base of an FAA certified controller. Most FAA controllers are not experienced with the factors governing a fighter in supersonic flight, and this knowledge gap could compromise a controller's ability to successfully vector an intercept fighter to its target. Roebuck believes supersonic flight changes the vertical separation requirement. He is aware that the FAA forbids supersonic over the continental USA, but he is also aware that there are military priorities. Roebuck also informed Commission staff that military flights have their own broadcast mode, and that only the lead fighter will broadcast on the transponder mode C that FAA ATCs monitor. Roebuck noted that the training for an FAA ATC is to keep aircraft separated, whereas the mentality to conduct a successful intercept requires a controller to vector aircraft together. Roebuck sees deliberately bringing airplanes together as a different skill set. And he does not believe FAA ATCs are adequately trained for this.

Roebuck recommends FAA ATCs be trained to conduct intercepts. He noted that control over an intercept depending on time of day and density of air traffic is circumstantial. But if the situation permitted, he stated it would be better for the military to control its own flights. He also stated that FAA personnel should become acquainted with the military lexicon.