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**MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD**

Event: Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) New York Air Route Center (ZNY)

Type of event: Interview of Anthony Palmieri

Date: Wednesday, October 1, 2003

Special Access Issues: None

Prepared by: Geoffrey Brown

Team Number: 8

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

Participants - Non-Commission: Alfred R. Johnson, Jr., FAA Deputy Regional Consul,  
Eastern Region

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

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

Palmieri has been employed by the FAA at ZNY since 1982. During his career he has served as a staff specialist, a temporary supervisor, a traffic management unit (TMU) coordinator, and as an air traffic controller (ATC) in ZNY Area B. During the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 Palmieri was at the RA43, or Radar Associate for Area B Radar 42 position. David Bottiglia was the R42, radar 42, position.

**UAL 175:**

According to Palmieri, United Airlines Flight 175 (UAL 175) was somewhere between Allentown and Stillwater when took the RA42 position.

Palmieri noted to Commission staff that Michael McCormick, the Air Traffic Manager for the facility, was at Area B. Palmieri noted this was the first indication he noticed that there was "something going on". Ivonna Dowis was the Controller in Charge (CIC) for Area B at that point, and she was assigned Palmieri to the RA42 position. Palmieri remembers that he asked Bottiglia more than once for an update on the ongoing situation, but that Bottiglia was too occupied at the radar to take the time to brief Palmieri. Palmieri went through the flight data strips and noticed UAL 175 was not only broadcasting the wrong code, but was also on a "coast" track. In the air traffic system, a coast track is the term to describe the computer projection of the course of an aircraft that the radar is no longer identifying in its radar sweeps. After Palmieri noticed this coast track, Bottiglia informed him that the flight might be an ongoing hijack. From the data Bottiglia assumed that it was UAL 175. Bottiglia also remembered that one of the other ZNY personnel had informed him ZNY was tracking a probable ongoing hijacking that might have been airborne in Kennedy Sector (part of the ZNY airspace).

Palmieri noted to Commission staff that even though he knew there was an ongoing air event, he had very little situational awareness. Further, when he was assigned to the RA42 position he was not aware of the first attack on the World Trade Center (WTC) (American Airlines Flight 11 at roughly 8:46 am strike of the WTC north tower). He further noted that when he was assigned to RA42 UAL 175 had already turned southbound, and was in a position northeast of the Philadelphia area. He was aware of a hijack involving another aircraft, and thus assumed UAL 175 was experiencing a mechanical emergency. Palmieri

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made this assumption since he believed it highly improbable that there were two concurrent hijackings.

Palmieri did not equate specifically AA 11 with the attack on the WTC; but he also did not doubt that the plane that he and Bottiglia were monitoring and that was squawking code "3321" was UAL 175.

**UAL 175 Route:**

Regarding the route of UAL 175, Palmieri explained to Commission staff his recollection as follows:

Regarding the Coast data block of UAL 175, Palmieri explained that the data block is associated to a target, but "floats" on the radar screen roughly an "inch or two" away from the target. Bottiglia and Palmieri were looking at two data feeds: one with the 3321 transponder code, and another with the coast data block. Both feeds were associated with the one airplane UAL 175. Palmieri noted the reason he was confident the 3321 transponder was UAL 175 was from reviewing air traffic strips he knew there were no other like aircraft in the airspace.

Palmieri further explained that in Yardly Sector UAL 175 changed altitudes from 14,000 feet to 20,000 feet. The data block in that sector indicated an "intruder alert" (a limited data block that shows the intruding target, a four digit code and an "I" for "intruder" - this indicates an aircraft has entered airspace and has not received acknowledgement for its travel from the controller of the airspace). Palmieri contacted sector 56 and the sector 56 controller acknowledged he was aware of the passage of the aircraft, and was planning the routes of the airtraffic through sector 56 accordingly. Palmieri then called Liberty South Tracon to inform them, and they acknowledged they were aware of the aircraft associated with code 3321. Tracon informed Palmieri they would coordinate accordingly within their facility. Palmieri did not call the area airport air traffic control towers. He spoke to Kingston sector of Boston Center (ZBW) and asked them to remain monitoring and attempting to contact the aircraft with code 3321, but ZBW informed him they were already in the process of shutting down ZBW airspace.

At this point Palmieri recalls UAL 175 climbed "a few hundred feet". Since there was a Delta flight traveling in that airspace, Palmieri believes the pilot knew to beware of the collision avoidance system.

Palmieri noted again that he was reluctant to believe UAL 175 was a hijacking, and was looking for an indication that the flight was experiencing an emergency instead. He explained further that he did not realize that UAL 175 was hijacked until after it dropped below the R42 radar and he heard "another" plane had hit the WTC.

Paul Thumser asked Palmieri to call ZNY employees who were not at a position at that time (primarily those people who were on break) to provide additional staffing to positions that were experiencing difficulty. Palmieri noted that Dowis took control of R56, and then after she was called to perform another duty he took over R56. This all occurred during ZNY's shut down of their airspace. Shortly thereafter Palmieri recalls the ZNY TMU informed the operations floor that the nation was assuming a National Ground Control Zero (no non-military flights over national airspace).

**Training:**

Palmieri explained that pre-9/11 an air traffic controller was trained to identify and respond to hijack scenarios in very specific ways. This training included identifying the hijack Code 7500, or using a covert verbal confirmation of the hijack from pilot. He noted that all these indications are from the flight crew itself; the indications are not from observations made by the controllers based on the path or status of a flight. Palmieri noted that a plane with unusual characteristics does imply to an observant controller that there is a problem with the pilot or the airplane, or that there is an emergency situation with passenger; but not that there is an ongoing hijack. In the case of a hijack, Palmieri, as an ATC, is responsible for informing his supervisor. From that point Palmieri believes the supervisor informs the Operations Manager in Charge (OMIC). Palmieri further believes that the OMIC is responsible for informing the military that there is a

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need for a fighter scramble to escort the hijacked aircraft. Palmieri is trained once a year in a Dynamic Simulation (SynSim) machine with hijack simulations.

Palmieri noted that on 9/11 he believed UAL 175 was in an emergency situation. In the case of an emergency he was trained not to bother the flight crew, and to wait for indication of what is happening from pilot.

**Military**

Palmieri commented that the military needs to provide an escort for a hijacked aircraft. He believes prior to 9/11 the military would scramble fighters to monitor a hijacked aircraft; but would not have orders in place to shoot it down. He noted that post 9/11 all ZNY air traffic personnel know that the military has authority to shoot down a hijacked aircraft. The FAA has informed the air traffic personnel to "do whatever" the military tells them to do in that circumstance. Palmieri understands he would be required to control the airspace for a military aircraft if that aircraft entered his airspace in a hijacking scenario. Palmieri postulated that the military action would include an engage and terminate order. Palmieri does believe his training is enough to vector a military aircraft to the hijacked aircraft target.

**Lessons learned:**

Palmieri noted that he is now confident in the FAA's ability to land large amounts of aircraft in a short period of time. Further, he learned that military coordination needs to be timely in air space emergencies. Palmieri noted most controllers now assume the worst and then "back off from there". Procedurally he learned to notify the supervisor immediately. Palmieri knows his supervisor notifies the OMIC, the OMIC notifies the military, the military notifies NORAD, and NORAD assesses the situation, and a possible response.

**Area B conference the morning of 9/11:**

Palmieri noted that after the sector was closed down, the Area B personnel went to complete written and oral statements on their recollection of the attacks. Palmieri believes the purpose of meeting was to record information on the facts of the event, and to allow people to "vent". Palmieri assumed the meeting was at the request of the facility manager. According to Palmieri, Martin Fournier was responsible for the recordings.

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