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MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

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(R)

Event: LtGeneral Mike Canavan, former FAA Associate Administrator for Civil Aviation Security (ACS-1)

Type of event: Interview

Date: November 4, 2003

Special Access Issues: None

Prepared by: John Raidt

Team Number: 7

Location: GSA Commission Office

Participants - Non-Commission: Gen. Mike Canavan

Participants - Commission: Sam Brinkley and John Raidt

Background

[U] On 9-11 Canavan served as the Associate Administrator for Civil Aviation Security (ACS1). He came to the FAA in December of 2000 and left in October of 2001. Canavan stated that he served as Assistant Administrator for Civil Aviation Security (the General's title was actually Associate Administrator of Civil Aviation Security). He took the position with the FAA after a long and distinguished career in the U.S. Army.

Security Exercises

[U] Canavan was asked if he recalled a Table Top exercise conducted by the FAA when he first arrived at the FAA in 2000 involving a Fed Ex plane being commandeered by a suicide hijacker. Canavan did not recall such an exercise and shared that it must have been at a pretty low level since he didn't recall.

Canavan said he never participated in Table Top exercises. He said he wanted to because he had done them in other jobs. He recalls having talked to John Flaherty about doing Table Tops.

Intelligence Briefings and Sharing

[~~SSI~~] Canavan said that he recalls that FAA had its own intelligence unit of about 40 people, and that the FAA had liaisons with the FBI and CIA. He said that anything that the IC agencies received that had an aviation element was supposed to come to the FAA

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either through the liaisons or through STU's or computers. During his daily meeting if there were anything of interest in the intelligence arena, his intelligence person would tell him. If it was anything urgent he would get it either to the administrator or the assistant administrator. Canavan said he did not receive a pouch briefing every day.

[U] Canavan said he never really understood what the role was of S-60 (Adm. Jim Underwood in the Department of Transportation Office of Intelligence) but that he would try to keep him in the loop on issues. Canavan said that Underwood spent most of his time trying to get money out of Canavan for his (Underwood's) pet projects. They got along and he knew Underwood was over there, but that was about it.

[U] Canavan said he would ask Underwood for help in getting the department to help push forward the pending rulemaking on screener certification and baggage screening which was "on the two yard line." He and Underwood would try to meet two or three times a month.

[U] Canavan said that he would talk security with Monte Belger, the Deputy Administrator, but that he didn't talk to Garvey about it. She was very busy. If he had an issue he would talk to Monte. There were other things that were more pressing that Garvey was working on such as getting people on airplanes. It was a tough summer for efficiency. They were getting pressure from the Hill about what they were doing to fix problems in efficiency.

[U] Canavan said that when he came to the FAA Garvey wanted him to work closer and be more "user friendly" with the airlines, which he understood, because there was a lot of complaining. Canavan defined "user friendly" as providing the screeners and air carriers with solutions and educating them, not simply finding fault and writing them up for everything. Canavan said he told his agents to reach out more to the airlines to try to help them comply, not merely hammer them. He saw this approach as more conducive to improved security.

[U] He said that some of his agents were frustrated that their fines would be reduced down to very little in the negotiating process. Canavan told them not to be worried about it, because that was out of their control.

[U] Canavan said that he would meet with his FSM's. He could tell who was hands-on and who was hands-off. He told them to push the stature of the screeners to give them more pride and to reward them. He referred to a program at Miami where they brought the screeners to Washington DC to receive recognition they deserved.

Vectors of Security

Prescreening:

~~[SSI]~~ Canavan thought that CAPPS I gave FAA a pretty good idea of who might be a risk to the aircraft based on the profile that had been built over the years. Canavan said that

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CAPPS I was going after explosives because it was among the top two or three threats. The history of bombings was that they would put the explosives in their luggage.

~~[SSI]~~ Canavan said one of the problems with CAPPS was that if an explosive screener opened the bag he or she was supposed to go find the owner, which was difficult and time consuming. He believes there was pressure not to be scrupulous, because having to go find the passenger in order to conduct a proper baggage search was onerous and time consuming and would stop the system. Anything that slowed the system would get pushback from the airlines.

Screening checkpoint:

[U] Canavan said that he would saw results from Red Teams after he had been there for a few months. He stated that he had the Red Teams brief the Security Directors of the air carriers to point out what they were finding in their assessments and that he would share some ideas of how to fix the system. He would also share best practices on all aspects of security with the field.

[U] Canavan said that the x-ray detection function was about [REDACTED] on a good day. He stressed that he would tell the air carriers that the better they paid their people and the more incentives they provided to screeners, the better that checkpoint screening performance would be. He found that in cases where screeners received better pay and incentives for their work, they were over 90 percent effective which was good. He pointed out that you can never get to 100 percent detection but that anything over 90 percent was pretty good.

[U] Canavan said that improved screeners pay would reduce turnover so you didn't have some "newby" conducting the screening. He stressed that in the final analysis the only answer to the screening effectiveness issue is technology because "there aren't too many" people who can do this day-in and day-out. Canavan said that he manned an x-ray screen one time and he got bored, because it was like running laps.

[U] Canavan said that the FAA's lab in Atlantic City was working on developing the checkpoint technology of the future. He stressed that they were working to make the CTX machines smaller and more effective. He used to tell his people that one day when you walked up to the counter you would walk through two poles that would x-ray and sniff you without you even knowing. Technology would reduce the human factors which are error-prone.

[U] He said that the benefit of rulemaking to impose screening company certification pending prior to 9/11 is that it would have allowed the FAA to fire the screening company (because of the certification).

Common Strategy:

~~[SSI]~~ Canavan agreed that pre 9-11 we didn't have hardened cockpit doors or a domestic air marshal program, which required that we relied on the common strategy to protect the aircraft.

~~[SSI]~~ Canavan stated that a terrorist didn't need a box cutter to hijack a plane. You could hold a ball point pen to a flight attendant's throat and tell the pilot to open the door and they would open it because that was the strategy—to get the plane on the ground somewhere and negotiate it out. The idea was to cooperate, get the plane on the ground and go from there and hopefully it will turn out all right.

~~[SSI]~~ Canavan remembered that there had been an effort to seek hardening of cockpit doors but that the air carriers did not want this change because it added weight and cost money. He said that the security benefit he envisioned by the change would be to keep someone from shooting through the door and to keep people out of the cockpit. He indicated that rules required the pilot to keep the cockpit door closed and locked. By hardening it you could protect it better (even though it went against the common strategy). Canavan said that even though he and his people talked about reinforcing cockpit doors, the issue was already decided by the time he got there and that the air carriers just weren't going to accept it.

Strategic Plan:

[U] Canavan said that when he took over as ACS 1 in December, in January he and his top people got together and wrote a five-year strategic plan for aviation security. He said that to his knowledge it was the first one that had ever been written. It included objectives and tasks. Canavan said that when he went on the road, which he did a lot, he would give two briefings. The first was on the strategic plan. The second was on leadership. During the big weekly meeting he had, everyone would have to say where he or she stood on the tasks associated with the strategic plan.

Aircraft as Weapons:

[U] Canavan does not remember talking a lot about aircraft as weapons. He said that, historically, hijacking did not involve using aircraft as weapons. He said that he didn't feel like we had won the hijacking battle. His biggest fear was that

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[U] To pull off 9-11 Canavan said that the terrorists had to train as pilots, maintain operational security, commandeer large aircraft, and coordinate all the flights to happen in close proximity. He doesn't believe the terrorists would try to bring prohibited items

through the checkpoint because it would jeopardize the entire plot unnecessarily. He doesn't consider the plot a screening failure. He's not sure the FBI sufficiently examined the people working at the airport who could have planted weapons. Canavan said that they didn't discuss the need for a great domestic air marshal program because the threat was overseas. He cited the fact that there had been no hijackings in quite some time and those that had occurred happened overseas.

Rulemaking

[U] Canavan was asked to address the high domestic threat level noted in the screener certification rulemaking. He said that a draconian scenario was not necessary to get the rule through. He wasn't sure if the threat level was actually what the FAA said it was but that it didn't matter because his focus was on getting the rule through. The details of how to do it didn't concern him. He wanted to lower the boom on the screening companies because of their poor performance that was why they were pursuing the rulemaking. He said that he wanted the ability to fire the screening companies because the air carriers hired the lowest bidder.

[U] Canavan said that the security people at FAA were frustrated at how slow the rulemaking process was and that the measures they advocated were killed by lobbyists. He said that he doesn't remember Secretary Mineta ever telling him not to move forward with something Canavan thought needed to be done.

[U] Canavan expressed frustration with an effort by L-3 Corporation to get the government to buy poor-performing explosive detection systems. He said this effort was aided by staffers who wrote into law a requirement that for every single Invision purchased, the government would have to purchase an L-3 device which was "criminal."

[U] He said that in terms of hardened cockpit doors, hardened containers and the screening rules, the air carriers would either delay or kill the reform.

IC Liaisons

[U] Canavan doesn't remember hearing any problems about the ability of FAA's liaisons with the IC to obtain the access and information they needed. He said he talked personally to Cofer Black and Dale Watson and told them just to give FAA everything that had anything to do with aviation. They agreed to do so. Canavan said he took it on "good faith" that this was what was happening. He said he told his liaisons to be aggressive, walk the halls and find out what they could. He said he didn't feel like he had any blind spots domestically compared to internationally. He stressed that he knew the IC leadership from his years as an Army General.

Canavan mentioned the ACS "road show" that the FAA gave to air carriers detailing the heightened threat in the summer of 2001, which he said, was well received.

TSA

~~[SSI]~~ Canavan said he wonders that now that the federal government has taken over the screening function "who is regulating the regulators." He agrees with arming of pilots because it is the last, final measure to protect the aircraft, if people crash through the door.

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General Aviation

~~[SSI]~~ He said that that while it's not a huge threat, it's out there and we should impose prudent security measures at small GA airports, particularly in the area of credentialing to be sure that people getting on the airplane are who they say they are.

Mission of the AVSEC system

[U] Canavan agreed with Irish Flynn that the system was built for the crazies and criminals, but not really terrorists who could always find a way to defeat the system if they really wanted to.

Veil of Mystery

[U] Canavan believes that we need to keep secret just how good screening technology is to keep terrorists guessing. He agreed that we should make it tougher for terrorists to observe checkpoint operations in order to learn how it functions, including its vulnerabilities, and that "randomness" should be built into the system.

[U] Canavan noted that most terrorists are young, and that not too many older people get involved in these activities.

Recommendations

[U] Canavan suggested that any operational changes (like the addition of flights) require an analysis of the impact on security (security impact statement).

[U] Canavan said that the airline CEO's were elated when Mineta told them that the federal government would be taking over screening.

[U] Canavan said there should be one person in charge of security at airports. He suggested that it ought to be the airport manager, as is the case in Europe.

[U] He said the important aspect with checkpoints is to make sure screeners, whether TSA or not, have a career track. Training should be flexible to ensure that people can be trained to address emerging new threats. We should get the best technology possible.

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[U] Canavan said that with respect to personnel, accountability is very important. He supports Red Teams because they give the system an honest look.

~~[SSI]~~ He said we need a good study on which to base the number of federal air marshals we really need. He likes computer-based training, which he found to be effective. He supports increasing the number of bomb-sniffing dogs.

[U] Canavan liked the idea of requiring air carrier's corporate boards to have a security committee, like they have audit committees and compensation committees etc.

[SSI] He also believes the flight attendants should be trained in defensive tactics.

[U] He said we should be careful of how FAM's respond to drunks so they do not expose themselves prematurely to the real terrorists on board.

[U] Canavan stressed that we need to focus on immigration and customs which is part of the problem as well.

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