



MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Event: Cape TRACON Interviews: Tim Spence, Cape TRACON Operational Supervisor

Type of event: Interview

Date: Tuesday, September 30, 2003

Special Access Issues: None

Prepared by: Geoffrey Brown

Team Number: 8

Location: Otis Air Force Base, FAA Cape TRACON building

Participants - Non-Commission: Steve Walsh

Participants - Commission: John Azzarello, Geoffrey Brown

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

Background:

Spence is identified as K90 on the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) transcripts provided to Commission staff.

Spence began his employment with the FAA as an Air Traffic Control Specialist in 1984. He began in Mesa, Arizona. From there he worked in Oakland, CA and after that in Las Vegas, Nevada. From Nevada he went to New York at Kennedy Tower and was assigned to equipment evaluations. Since 1999 he has been an Operational Supervisor at Cape TRACON. In November of 2003, Spence transfers to an FAA facility in Northern California as an Operations Supervisor.

As an operations supervisor Spence has responsibilities for labor management, and he maintains shift rotation.

Cape TRACON controls airspace up to 10,000 feet. This airspace is between Providence, Boston and "the Islands" (Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard).

K90 as a position is recorded on site in digital voice recording format. There may be recordings at the military areas, but since Spence made many of his calls on 9/11 from a commercial phone those communications were not recorded.

Cape TRACON is located roughly 150 to 200 meters from Otis Air Force Base (Otis AFB).

September 11, 2001 (9/11):

According to Spence, on 9/11 the Traffic Management Unit from Boston Air Route Traffic Center (ZBW) contacted Spence and asked him to scramble air defense fighters to respond to a probable hijack. Spence commented to Commission staff that this is not the typical responsibility of an Operations

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Supervisor with the FAA. He immediately called the Air Traffic Tower at Otis AFB to inform them of the situation.

Commission staff questioned Spence in conjunction with a transcript from his position provided by the FAA. Spence explained that during the five minute lapse in his recorded communications in the FAA transcript he "made as many calls as possible". Spence started his calls with Otis Tower, for "if nothing else" to give them a "heads up" and to receive information on who to call next to help facilitate ZBW's request. The telephone number Otis Tower gave Spence was for either the Otis AFB Base Operations or for the "SoF (Supervisor of Flying) Desk" at the Base Operations desk. Spence explained that the SoF is the aviation section of the Operations Desk. Spence called the Base Operations and acknowledged he had no authority to authorize a fighter scramble, but advised Otis AFB to prepare to receive an order since it was "probably on its way." He received the number for NEADS from the Otis AFB, "from either Base Operations or from the SoF desk". Spence does not remember who gave him the number. By the time he got in touch with NEADS they had already been contacted by ZBW. Spence wanted to get the order officially sent as soon as possible.

Spence does not remember the exact details of who he spoke with on 9/11. He stated he may have been given a second number from the Tower but does not recall directly. He does not remember who he talked to at the Otis AFB Operations Desk. Spence had been to Otis AFB before 9/11, so he knew as long as he got a hold of one of personnel at the base the urgency of his message would be passed to the right personnel. The general discussion he had with them was an introduction of his position, the relay of the information of a hijack from ZBW, and a request for information on how to get a fighter scramble. Spence postulated to Commission staff that Otis AFB may have just received a call themselves regarding the situation; but he is not sure. They may have given him their supervisor, but he does not remember for certain. Then he finally spoke with NEADS. These calls were made between 8:36 and 8:40/41 that morning.

Since 8:41 is the end of his discussion with NEADS, he believes the fighters were scrambled at that point. He spoke with a male military personnel at NEADS who gave his position and name. Almost immediately thereafter, within a minute, he received information that the scramble at Otis AFB was ordered. The 8:41 call alerted TRACON that Otis had received its orders. The call was out of Giant Killer. According to Spence, this is often called an "active scramble", but on 9/11 they used the term "battle stations" so the FAA knew of the seriousness of the event. All parties acknowledged with their initials. Spence does not know who Giant Killer is, despite controlling the warning areas off the coast. Spence does not distinguish Giant Killer from Huntress.

Spence commented that there was confusion, especially since the Base Operations standard operating procedure was to contact the Centers with information. It was unusual for the Centers to contact TRACON for information. Normally the FAA receives the call from the military for a scramble, but this time it went the other way around, and then the official order came back down from the military.

According to Spence, most of the time the military does not differentiate that a scramble is or is not for exercise when informing Cape TRACON. On 9/11, Spence called Dan Bueno at TMU ZBW to let him know of the F15 flight with the callsign PANTA.

Spence noted that information from the Tower went to PANTA that Huntress would control the flights, and the flights were assigned a flight heading of 280. This information was shared by Huntress and with Cape TRACON, so Cape TRACON knew to clear the flight path.

Spence offered that the Panta pilot may have been at the SoF desk when Spence made the call to Otis AFB; this may account for why the pilot had some degree of warning.

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Spence is certain that the fighters were airborne when he received word that the WTC had been hit. He also commented that there were numerous scrambles from Otis AFB after the time period covered by the transcripts used in the interview. At that point Spence was highly involved in clearing the airspace covered by Cape TRACON in accordance with the National Air Traffic Zero that was declared. Notification to close airspace came to Cape TRACON via ZBW. Spence noted to Commission staff that instrument aircraft were requesting clearance to arrive and to depart. He was able to facilitate the air space orders that restricted these flights once the first message informed him that no one was allowed to transfer through New York Airspace; after that the national system was shut down. Spence commented that part of his job as a supervisor was to tactfully tell pilots that under national security interest they had to land their aircraft. Some of the controllers and the pilots questioned the order and were reluctant to believe what was happening.

The evening of 9/11 Spence and Steven Walsh, another Cape TRACON employee, spent several hours creating transcripts of the recorded conversations from the morning. He immediately sent that rough draft "up the chain". Spence also wrote an email of the account to Quality Assurance (QA) at the Eastern ROC on the "Friday or the Saturday after the 11th".

Procedure prior to 9/11:

Spence informed Commission staff that he had never been involved in a hijacking response prior to 9/11. For anything on the terminal environment level that would need some response – that would need "system involvement" – he would immediately call the ZBW Watch Desk. The Center then disseminates the information. His next procedural step would be to inform the FAA Eastern Regional Operations Center (ROC). As far as Washington Operations Center (WOC) and Herndon Command are concerned regarding the flow of information, he would expect the WOC to disseminate the information nationally. Spence noted that he would want to alert the local authorities first in the case of a local event.

In terms of requesting and receiving military assistance, Spence's first point of contact would be ZBW's military operations specialist (MOS).

On 9/11 Spence was unaware of other military bases with air defense capabilities besides Otis AFB.

Post 9/11:

The QA person at Cape TRACON is now Dawn Wright. On 9/11 the position was held by Dawn Field. Spence does not believe information was collected by the QA office at Cape TRACON regarding their response to the attacks.

Spence commented that most of the post-9/11 new procedures at Cape TRACON only reiterate the same information flow that existed prior to 9/11. Spence would call ZBW first, and then cover his local information flow responsibilities. Spence qualified this by stating that he would prioritize by the dictates of the individual situation. He noted that he might call NEADS directly on the number that is kept in the Operations Supervisor rolodex.

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