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Event: Interview with Lt Col Mark E. Stuart, USAF, Intelligence Officer, Northeast Air Defense Sector (NEADS)

(U) Type of Event: Unrecorded interview

(U) Date: October 30, 2003

(FOUO) Special Access Issues: None

(U) Prepared by Miles Kara

(U) Team number: 8

(U) Location: Headquarters, NEADS, Rome, NY

(FOUO) Participants Non-Commission: Capt Daniel L. Warnock, USAF, Legal Officer

(FOUO) Participants – Commission: Miles Kara, John Farmer, John Azzarello, Geoff Brown

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Background.

(FOUO) Lieutenant Colonel Stuart entered service in 1983 and was active duty Air Force until 1995 when he transferred to the Air Force Reserve. He has been at the Northeast Air Defense Sector (NEADS) since that time. Among his several tours, he was assigned to the Air Support Operations Center in Saudi Arabia during Desert Shield/Desert Storm. His substantive intelligence background is Russian air analysis and he served a tour in that capacity at Langley AFB from 1986-1990. Stuart spoke from bulletized notes on a single piece of paper he had prepared prior to the interview.

Major Points: (Classified Information is in Red)**The Threat.**

1. ~~(S/RELCAN)~~ On 9-11 Lt Col Stuart was on duty in the Battle Cab, assisted by Major Edick, because of the ongoing Russian Strategic Aviation exercise. The Russians had filed a NOTAM that they intended to fly through the GIUK gap (Greenland, Iceland, United Kingdom), south of Iceland over the North Atlantic, an event that coincided with ongoing U. S. command post exercise activity. The Battle Cab was manned that morning to participate in U. S. exercise VIGILANT GUARDIAN. Stuart was not there to support the U. S. exercise, but to monitor events in the Russian exercise, the first time in 10 years that the Russian Bear aircraft were flying the GIUK gap route. Russia had also forward deployed assets to its Arctic bases and the U. S. was "leaning forward" as a result. For example, the alert fighters at Otis [and Langley] were armed with extra fuel and missiles that morning. [Staff Note: Anecdotally, from conversations at both NEADS and

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Langley, Staff was told that the increased alert configuration reduced the maximum speed the fighters could achieve to 1.1-1.2 Mach]

2. **(FOUO)** Stuart said that for his 9-11 daily threat briefing there "was zero" intelligence available concerning any increase in the terrorist threat level. In reference to his notes he said that a briefing as late as September 9, 2001, contained nothing on the terrorist threat. Also in reference to notes he said that the last Usama bin Ladin CONR threat briefing was July 14, 2001, as part of the increased threat warning during summer 2001. That increased threat level was briefed at NEADS.

Events of 9/11.

1. **(FOUO) Battle Cab.** According to Stuart "a lot of trainees" were in the Battle Cab positions because this was an opportunity to observe the Russian exercise. The FO (Fighter Officer) position was probably occupied by Lt Col Brian Daniels. Lt Col Ian Sanderson was a trainee at that position. Stuart did not recall anyone sitting at the DO (Director of Operations) position. [Staff Note: The DO, Lt Col McNeely was in Texas that day and could not return.] Lt Col Daniels may have been filling both positions. Maj Dawne Deskins was sitting the ACWO (Air Control Warning Officer) position and had access to a radar scope. Colonel Marr was the Battle Commander that day. Stuart thought that the FAA representative, Culbertson, was present, as was a NEADS GS-13 staff officer who handled FAA coordination, Mr. Ayres.
2. **(Commission Sensitive in Blue) Events.**
 - a. Around 0730 EDT, Stuart talked to both CONR and NORAD to obtain an update on the "real world" and the Russian exercise. He recalled talking to a Major Deltoro at First Air Force and recalled "talking" to NORAD on the chat log and with CONR on the red phone [classified line]. No change in the terrorist threat warning was passed to him during those conversations or prior to the first hijack.
 - b. He called the FBI SIOC to report the first hijack. The SIOC had no information to pass that could shed light on the nature of the American Air 11 hijacking. He was handed off to two or three individuals. He explained what was happening and asked for law enforcement information—they had nothing. He recalled one person at the other end of the line saying, "oh shit, I have to go," and then hanging up. Stuart made that call with his personal credit card, but does not have the bill any longer. He thought the time was around 0848 EDT.
 - c. He then called the Air Force desk at the NMJIC (National Military Joint Intelligence Center). The NMJIC had no additional relevant information. He then called Major Deltoro and First Air Force had no further information.
 - d. Stuart advised Colonel Marr of his efforts and directed Maj Edick to search SIPRNET (Secret Internet Protocol Router Network) for any available information. Maj Edick found none that morning or afternoon.
 - e. The sum total of information Stuart received on 9-11 concerning the terrorist threat was zero.
 - f. He watched the Pentagon "hit" on the ACWO scope with Major Deskins. She was explaining to him what they were seeing. He believes they saw the last few radar returns on the primary only target that impacted the Pentagon. [Staff Note:

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In a later interview Major Deskins confirmed that she thought she picked up AA77 after it had begun its 360 degree turn and had it on the scope for a few radar returns.]

- g. When the UA93 incident began to unfold it was Stuart's professional judgment that the plane was going to strike the Sears Tower in Chicago and he passed that judgment to Colonel Marr. That was the only time that morning that Stuart made a judgment call on any of the events as they unfolded. After UA93 turned Stuart and other NEADS people knew it was headed to D. C.
- h. Stuart was standing next to Colonel Marr when General Arnold, CONR, gave Marr the authority to engage aircraft with force to shoot down an airliner. The call came into the Battle Cab on the red (secure) switch. Stuart did not recall the time. According to Stuart's recall, Colonel Marr received a call from General Eberhart or General Arnold, who in turn had the Vice President on the line. Eberhart and the Vice President wanted to know if NEADS shot down UAL 93. Col Marr said, "no."
- i. Stuart recalled the SAOC (Sector Air Operations Center) floor trying to find AA11, without success. He also recalled that there seemed to be an early pattern—Boston to Los Angeles flights.

Exercises and Hijackings. [Staff Note: Stuart was extremely responsive on this issue and clearly came prepared to talk about the subject.]

- 1. (FOUO) Documents on his hard drive will substantiate that on March 24, 1999 Stuart drafted a briefing on the threat of terrorist use of aircraft to crash into buildings. He briefed, over time in 1999, 2000 and 2001 the logical progression that linked hijackings to the use of explosives in vehicles [probable reference to Embassy bombings] and then, logically, to the use of aircraft.
- 2. (FOUO) He recalled briefing his scenario at annual intelligence conferences at both CONR and NORAD. At CONR the receiving official was Col Tom Glenn, now retired; at NORAD it was the J2, Navy Captain Kuhn. [Staff Note. The Joint Inquiry staff was twice briefed by Captain Michael Kuhn in his position as the Deputy to MG Dayton, Defense HUMINT Service. At one of those briefings Captain Kuhn said that his previous tour of duty was at HQ NORAD as the J2. During the period 1980-1983 then Lieutenant Kuhn worked for then LTC Miles Kara at IPAC (Intelligence Center Pacific) as one of two lead analysts on the Iran-Iraq War. The other analyst was then Army Captain Jeff Kimmons, most recently General Franks' J2 at CENTCOM and currently MG Kimmons, the Commanding Officer, United States Army Intelligence and Security Command.]
- 3. (FOUO) Specifically, Stuart said we should ask Col Glenn what happened to Lt Col Stuart's concerns on terrorist activity, e. g. using planes as weapons.
- 4. (FOUO) In 2000 he recalled making a recommendation to NORAD to speak to the national law enforcement agencies to better coordinate intelligence information.
- 5. (FOUO) Hijacking scenarios that he conceived were primarily personal views; there was no substantive intelligence. He based his analysis on the boldness of past terrorist actions. He recalled discussing his analyses with his counterparts at the Southeast Air

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Defense Sector (SEADS), Maj Clegg, and at the Western Air Defense Sector (WADS), Lt Col Schauer (phonetic, Stuart wasn't sure).

6. (FOUO) In all cases he briefed that a hijacking would originate overseas, inbound to the U.S. He never imagined it could happen inside the U.S. Stuart thought that security vulnerabilities overseas made it far more likely that hijackings would come from without. He never imagined multiple hijackings in any scenario.
7. (FOUO) He envisioned terrorists taking over planes and piloting them at the last possible moment as they crashed.
8. (FOUO) He mentioned specifically an August 4, 2001 RICE exercise on the NEADS operations floor; he has a briefing for that on his computer. [Staff Note: NEADS personnel contacted constantly referred to "rices," near daily exercises each morning at the Sector level. At NEADS the series was called FERTILE RICE.] There are two other FERTILE variants at NEADS—FERTILE SPADES, dealing with live targets, and FERTILE SPADES, dealing with simulated targets.

Other Points of Interest

1. (FOUO) Weapons Free Zone. In Stuart's view, that term meant that any aircraft that entered such a specified zone was subject to being engaged and shot down.
2. (FOUO) The FBI never visited NEADS post 9-11 to obtain information, according to Stuart's recall. He recalled that the Air Force OSI (Office of Special Investigations) did give him a call.
3. (FOUO) Authorization for Intercept Operations (AFIO). Stuart's only comment was to recommend that we ask Lt Col McNeely (the Director of Operations) his post 9-11 views on AFIO. [Stuart's reference here is to the difficulty the military has doing the FAA ATC mission.]
4. (FOUO) Intelligence is better today, but it could be better, according to Stuart. Post 9-11 NEADS worked with the NRC (Nuclear Regulatory Commission) to get a list of sites and telephone numbers in the NEADS area of responsibility. They also looked at protecting other critical infrastructure sites, e. g. sporting events, concerts, and other large outdoor events. They are also assessing the vulnerability of other targets such as chemical plants.
5. (FOUO) As of 9-11 Stuart did not have a SCIF (Sensitive Compartment Information Facility) NEADS itself operated at the SECRET NOFORN level on 9-11. Stuart had the disclosure authority to release NOFORN information to Canadian forces at NEADS and routinely did so. He did have access to a SCIF at Rome Laboratory [nearly next door] and could use their facility to go above the SECRET NOFORN level on 9-11. Rome Laboratory had a JWICS (Joint Worldwide Intelligence Communication System) link. The NEADS SCIF was activated sometime in 2000 and the process to establish it begun prior to 9-11 was accelerated.

Recommendations

1. (FOUO) Stuart recommends that TTIC (Terrorist Threat Intelligence Center?) and other intelligence sources be linked on a national basis. [Staff Note: Implicit here is also the capability for air defense to make that link RELCAN because of the NORAD continental mission.] Stuart is insistent that intelligence "can't be a hierarchical struggle any more,"

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it must be web-based. What are needed are SECRET and SECRET RELCAN chat circuits. He provided the math that should drive events—three minutes equals 21 miles and on a good day a scramble is completed in 7-10 minutes.

2. (FOUO) NEADS sees very little U.S. law enforcement information because of the way the FBI conducts its business. That paradigm has to change. The military still must “pull teeth” to get information from U.S. law enforcement side of the world. Specifically, he heard about the arrest of the Buffalo terrorist cell from the news.
3. (FOUO) He does not directly receive CIA warning reports at his level; they are filtered. He does not receive TTIC information directly.

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