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MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

(R)

Event: Mr. Larry Wansley, Director of Security, American Airlines

Type: Interview

Team: 7

Special Access Issues: None

Date: January 8, 2004

Prepared by: John Raidt

Participants (non-Commission): Larry Wansley; Chris Christensen (Condon & Forsyth), Desmond Barry (Condon & Forsyth), and Doug Cotton (American Airlines general counsel's office)

Participants: John Raidt and Bill Johnstone

Location: American Airlines International Headquarters, Ft. Worth, Texas

**Background**

[U] On September 11, 2001 Mr. Wansley was managing director of Corporate Security for American Airlines. He was hired by American into this position in November of 1992. He remains in this position currently.

[U] From 1990-1992 Wansley was with NFL headquarters as the security manager for the NFL's International league. From 1983-1990 he served as the director of operations for the Dallas Cowboys. From 1973-1983 he was an FBI agent.

**Pre 9-11 Aviation Security at American Airlines**

[U] Wansley said that as managing director of corporate security he had access to the Chairman and senior officers whenever he wanted. He was hired by Bob Crandall. He characterized the support he received on security issues from the Chairmen and senior officers as "good...solid."

[U] Wansley said that AAL was dedicated to doing everything possible to operate the best security system they could. Wansley's predecessor, Homer, was a former FBI agent, and Wansley carried on with his initiatives and philosophy. Wansley didn't have a specific strategic plan or "marching orders." He carried on the tradition established by his predecessor.

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[U] Wansley said that when he was with the NFL he had to provide security for a game in Europe. This required that he do a lot of research, including on the issue of aviation security. He said that American Airline's system (internationally) was modeled after the Israelis and it impressed him a great deal. He believed that AAL's procedures were top notch and he had confidence in its system of screening people and baggage, and for profiling passengers.

[U] When he came on board at AAL he learned that the airline was very committed to the best possible security. He didn't perceive any weaknesses in the system. He perceived AAL's system as very strong.

[U] He said that AAL relied on the government for providing threat assessments, and the standards for security. He said that the FAA was the principal source of the intelligence it received. He noted that FAA received information from the other members of the intelligence community but that the FAA rolled it up and was the air carriers "go to agency."

[U] Wansley said there were times when he would walk out of an FAA briefing and felt there should have been more intelligence information shared by the agency with the carriers. Wansley said he would go to the FBI and others to obtain additional information about threats. It wasn't that he was trying to de-bunk FAA information. He was simply trying to get more data. He said that whatever the FAA told him "was gospel" as far as he was concerned, but it was his responsibility to get as much information as he could.

[U] Wansley said that all of the threat concerns he heard prior to 9-11 were international. AAL was consistently told by the FAA that the problems and threats were overseas. He said that he believes the focus was overseas because that's where the threat really was coming from. He didn't have an opinion that the intelligence agencies were blind to domestic security problems. Wansley never received the impression that the FAA didn't believe it was getting the intelligence and threat information domestically that it needed.

[U] When Wansley started with AAL the airlines received intelligence reporting services from Ackerman and Colombo. Several years ago AAL changed to Pinkerton. He was pleased with the service.

[U] Wansley stated that AAL had a Domestic Security Program that it started in 1999, which it used to improve passenger screening, and other security measures including access control. The program was designed to ensure that AAL was doing everything it could and should be doing; that the screening process was as effective as possible; and that AAL was complying with FAA regulations. They used the program as a learning and teaching tool. They shared findings with local station managers to improve the system. He thought the program was outstanding. It pinpointed issues and problems, and identified individuals who needed more training.

[U] Wansley said the airline's security and "screening" system was based on "deterrence." He doesn't recall any conversations discussing that a committed terrorist could beat the security system if he or she really wanted.

[U] Wansley did not view as problematic that FAA required only that CAPPS selectees have their checked bags examined for explosives, rather than additional screening of their person or carry-on baggage. He said that this reflected the culture's belief that the problem was bombing and sabotage. He said that domestic hijacking wasn't "on the scope" because the whole culture was based on "it's an over there problem."

[U] Wansley also noted that there were always concerns about the potential for discrimination in regard to prescreening programs.

[U] On the issue of domestic hijacking he said that the absence of hijacking resulted in an approach of: "if it ain't broke don't fix it."

[U] Wansley's personal perspective was that in terms of the international threat "don't be surprised by anything" including hijacking...

#### **Use of Aircraft as Weapons**

[U] Wansley said that AAL had no information or any sense that a suicide, terrorist hijacker was an issue domestically. He did not recall receiving a CD Rom presentation from Pat McDonnell in the latter part of 2000 and the beginning of 2001, dealing with the hijacking threat to civil aviation, including domestic suicide hijacking. The presentation was given to air carriers, airports and FAA field people. The presentation was SSI, not classified.

[U] He was not aware of the domestic threat assessment that accompanied FAA's proposed rulemaking in the summer of 2001. He recalled that it was a very lengthy rule-making process, but he didn't participate or involve himself in that process and was unaware of the threat assessments it contained.

[U] It was pointed out to Wansley that the Checkpoint Operations Guide listed items as prohibited, restricted, or permitted. The COG listed two categories of bladed knives: (1) pocket utility knives with less than a 4 inch blade were permitted to be carried on the aircraft; and (2) box cutters, which were not permitted. The COG, however, offered no guidance on how to discern between the two. Wansley said that he was not a party to discussion of what constituted a box cutter as opposed to a small, bladed utility knife. He did say, however, that if there were a question at the checkpoint about what was and wasn't permitted, the supervisor would be called in to make the call.

[U] Wansley agreed that federal rules about what constituted a prohibited weapon were vague. He said the development of the COG was a lengthy process as they tried to figure

out what the FAA meant by the regulations. He said the FAA was involved in the development of the COG. He said that the effort was "earnest" to responsibly define what would be prohibited.

[U] Wansley stated that when hand-wanding a passenger, the checkpoint screener must identify the item that alarmed the magnetometer, not merely hand-wand the passenger and then approve the passenger to proceed if the hand-wand doesn't alarm.

[U] Wansley stated that if he were told by a screener that a selectee was carrying a four-inch knife, and that the screener was suspicious, he would tell the screener to have a conversation with the passenger to find out more, and substantiate your suspicions. Wansley said you would have to have "a pretty good reason" to restrict the item, if the book says it is ok, because you are bordering on a very touchy situation. The bottom line as far as he is concerned is that if a screener doesn't feel right about the situation, the screener should call upon the supervisor for help.

[U] Each morning, at 7:45 am (central time) AAL conducted an operational conference call to discuss what happened with the airline in the past 24 hours and what they expected to happen in the coming day. After the call Wansley, Ahern, Tommy McFall (managing director of safety) and Mr. Hotard (corporate communication) would remain in Vice Chairman Bob Baker's office to discuss any follow-up items.

## 9-11

[U] On 9-11 Wansley was walking into Baker's office for the morning phone call (7:45 am) and the secretary told Wansley that "we have a hijacking." He called the SOC but they didn't have much information. Wansley then called Danny Defenbaugh who was the Special Agent in Charge of the FBI's Dallas Field Office. Wansley informed Defenbaugh about the hijacking with the little information that he had which was that Flight 11 had been hijacked. Defenbaugh did not know anything about it. Defenbaugh told Wansley to hold and got a couple of other people together which Wansley said "started the ball rolling."

[U] While he was on the call with Defenbaugh in Baker's office, he heard the shriek of someone who was in the conference room and saw the footage of the plane going in to the WTC. He remembers the commentator said that it was a small airplane. He told Defenbaugh to turn on the TV to see what was going on. Wansley said he did not connect the hijacking with the incident at WTC because the commentator said that it was a small airplane.

[U] While they were watching the WTC story on TV, Defenbaugh told Wansley that he was sending a team of agents to AAL headquarters. As they were talking on the phone and watching the events related to the WTC on TV, they watched the second jet hit the WTC. Wansley said that his knees got weak and he immediately felt that the first one was probably American #11. Defenbaugh told him "the game has just changed." Wansley said he was on the phone with Defenbaugh for nearly one hour.

[U] Wansley said that it wasn't until a little later, in the SOC, that he heard confirmation that the first jet was AAL #11.

[U] AAL established an FBI office in the command center. They also had an FBI team operating out of Wansley's office "downstairs." Wansley's department and staff worked with the team to get whatever information the FBI required.

[U] After his call with Defenbaugh, Wansley went to his office briefly and then went over to the SOCC, sometime prior to 9:00 a.m. Shortly after he arrived at the SOCC he heard Gerard Arpey give the order for American to get its planes on the ground.

[U] After arriving at the SOCC he made sure his department was staffed and organized. At this point, someone told him that Craig Marquis had talked with the flight attendant on AAL #11, so Wansley went to the SOC to talk with Craig about that call. For the next couple of hours he interviewed Craig and Nydia Gonzales about their phone conversations. Wansley had Nydia replay the tape of her call with Betty Ong. While engaged in those discussions, he kept a handle on what was going on upstairs. After his discussions with Marquis/Gonzales were concluded, he focused on helping the FBI get situated.

[U] He doesn't remember when he heard that American 77 had crashed or that United had two planes hijacked, but it was sometime while he was in the process of talking with Craig and Nydia.

[U] Wansley said that "everyone" was going through manifests, including, those of flights that were still in the air. He recalls talking with the FBI about concerns of other plots, and he said there was interest in reviewing manifests for that purpose. Wansley said the scene was quite chaotic with a lot of multi-tasking going on. He didn't specifically recall any discussion of reverse screening passengers deplaning from grounded flights on 9/11. Given the logistics of such an operation, he said reverse screening would have been impossible.

[U] He doesn't have any information regarding the weapons and tactics used by the hijackers other than what he received from accounts of the phone call from Betty Ong. He did not hear any information related to the use of a gun or a shooting.

[U] On 9-11, Wansley's primary function was to serve as a liaison to the FBI. He received a commendation from the FBI on his efforts.

#### **Information from the ATC**

[U] Wansley does not remember hearing anything after the first WTC tower was hit that AAL 11 might not have been the plane that crashed into the WTC or that ATC was tracking what it believed to be AAL 11 on radar.

[U] Wansley said that the SOC had the authority to shut down AAL's operations. Wansley said he feels comfortable that a recommendation by him over a security issue would be taken seriously. Wansley received no information that ATC had received suspicious transmissions from the cockpit of AAL 11, and that those transmissions suggested that other "planes" were involved in the plot. Wansley said that if FAA had such information the FAA absolutely owed that information to the air carriers. He would be astonished that the FBI didn't have that information.

[U] If Wansley had received such information on the morning of 9-11, all the key players at the airline would have been notified and a decision on response would have been rendered.

### **Recommendations**

[U] Carriers have to rely on government for information. There should be a more efficient method for sharing this information. He believes the carriers could better handle security if they had a better understanding of the threat information. There shouldn't be constraints on the government sharing information with "cleared" air carrier employees. Perhaps an industry core group could be established for receiving such information.