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MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Event: North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) field site visit
Type of event: Interview with Major Paul Goddard (Canadian Forces), and Ken Merchant
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Prepared by: Geoffrey Brown
Team Number: 8
Location: NORAD Headquarters,
Participants - Non-Commission: Mike Chiapas (DoD), Jean Caron (CF Legal)
Participants - Commission: Team 8: John Azzarello, Geoffrey Brown, John Farmer,
Miles Kara, Kevin Shaeffer

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

Background:

Merchant began as an Air Force officer in 1966. He has worked since 1987 in the NORAD exercise shop, and is currently the Deputy Division Chief for NORAD within J-7. On September 11, 2001 (9/11) he was the Exercise Director within the NORAD Battle Staff tasked with maintaining connectivity with the Battle Commander, General Findley.

At the time the exercise shop was NORAD J-38, and staffed by eight personnel. There was a Lt Col in charge of the branch, and Merchant was responsible for building Command Post exercises. Merchant noted that the CPX and the FPX offices were autonomous, but could share each other's resources if necessary.

Goddard's first contact with NORAD was as a Challenger pilot. In 1996 he began at the Alaska Region of NORAD, and came to NORAD Headquarters in 2000 as the Chief of the live exercises.

Merchant noted that there were two exercises per year on the CPX side, and two on the FPX side. They also ran training if requested for specific staff needs. Merchant explained that they coordinated with the National Military Command Center (NMCC) often since larger commands have more exposure than NORAD. More often than not the NMCC ran conferences, and interjected emergency action messages for NORAD. Their main exercises were Vigilant Guardian and Vigilant Overview.

Various exercises:

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Vigilant Overview was a peace-time exercise during which they would have a country like Russia run an exercise over Canadian airspace, and task the force posture appropriately.

A Vigilant Guardian exercise would be a "full-blown nuclear war" exercise, including bomber response and Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) response. Global Guardian was coordinated with Vigilant Guardian so the combined STRATCOM offensive abilities and the NORAD defensive abilities could be exercised.

Space Command also had an Apollo Guardian exercise running on September 11, 2001 (9/11).

Merchant noted that the NORAD exercises were not based on the Russian exercise, but that it is possible the Russians planned their exercise in response to the NORAD plans.

Hijacks were included in these exercises to exercise transition in Rules of Engagement (ROE).

FDX:

On 9/11 there were two exercises planned: Amalgam Virgo and Amalgam Warrior. The Warrior is similar in nature to Vigilant Guardian, and is a scenario run through as a war game. The primary purpose is to have live assets flying to check on communications connectivity and other technical capabilities and performance. This was more of a sector level exercise than a headquarters exercise. Virgo is when one particular mission set is exercised in as a realistic way of possible. The Virgo exercises began in 2000, the first execution was in June of 2001.

The FDX shop also ran SPADE exercises. Typically a track would be taken out of radar coverage and re-introduced as an unknown track. The scenarios applied were of a wide variety in design.

Intelligence and threat analysis:

On the CPX side intelligence and threat analysis is meant to support the objectives. Merchant noted that NORAD must use Russia in its exercises at the strategic level since no other country poses a great enough threat to NORAD's capabilities and responsibilities; including scenarios in which Chechnya rebels possess and deploy stolen Soviet warheads. Merchant noted that they rely heavily on J-2 for the background for their training scenarios.

As far as emerging threats, Merchant noted that they received scenarios involving crop dusters, Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) and "poor man's cruise missiles". Merchant noted that though the commander stressed that the "cold war is over" and that

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they should develop “more real scenarios”, they still had a concept plan – and that plan still necessitated training for over-water events.

From the FDX perspective, they have the starting basis of an essential task list meant to be exercised over a period of time. The intelligence built for such exercises is only meant to support training objectives.

Pre-9/11 hijack training:

Merchant noted that if the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) determined there was a hijack, they would contact NMCC with a request for a fighter shadow of the hijacked aircraft. NMCC would then contact NORAD to use their aircraft for a covert shadow. NORAD’s direction would be taken specifically from the FAA. Merchant noted that they did not have “national play” on a “mundane” exercise like a hijack, but it would be simulated.

Goddard noted that the FAA generated a “Twin Star” hijack exercise in 1995. They invited NORAD to participate since a real commercial airliner was to be shadowed by a fighter intercept. Goddard’s understanding is that it involved the entire FAA system, as well as the NMCC.

AV02:

Goddard explained that for AV02, to be held in the summer of 2002, the exercise included a real airplane and a role play of terrorists in the cockpit. He explained that participation of the agencies varied, and he does not recall which agencies were “full play” or which were response cell.

Goddard noted that it followed the typical guidelines and steps to create an exercise, including participation in a concept development conference. He explained that the CNO for AV02 occurred later than normal, and he believes it appeared post-9/11. Goddard noted that the CPC was in the initial run, and the ICP was atypical.

The goal for AV02 was to take the Twin Star model and change it to a thorough NORAD exercise with all the proper procedures and protocols run. Goddard categorized that they were attempting to exercise the current procedures, including FAA’s procedures and conference capabilities, and wanted to take a track from Alaska to the Continental United States (CONUS), with an emphasis on fighter handoff issues. The situation built involved new oil drilling in Alaska and a terrorist group called Greenfist which threatened that they had a Weapon of Mass Destruction (WMD) on board an aircraft with the intent to put political pressure on stopping the drilling. The WMD factor was included so the Nuclear/Biological/Chemical (NBC) response personnel could be involved and begin modeling and planning for the possible release of a WMD (a secondary training element to the exercise).

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Goddard recalls that pre-9/11 there was no vision of ROE escalation being involved in the exercise design. The technical aspects to be exercised were mid-air fueling and fighter wing handoffs. The Battle Staff element involved inter-agency cooperation and planning. The initial planning was to decide who theoretically would be involved in a hijack – including the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), the FAA, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as a participant in the FAA conference. The planning did was not specific enough to identify a FAA hijack coordinator.

“Anti-airborne terrorism and WMD” was an adjustment to the scenario put in place post-9/11.

Merchant noted he had not specifically been involved in an exercise that trained protecting the National Capital Area (NCA). There were no training exercises for Combat Air Patrols (CAPs) over CONUS regions.

Goddard noted that they had threats but never threats with the clear intent for a 9/11 type hijacker/suicide scenario. There were exercise planners that thought of such contingencies, but they had to put in the training necessities. Goddard explained that the planners developed scenarios are not necessarily linked to real-possible threats, and that the scenarios thought of for NORAD exercises do not translate into real-world intelligence threat assessments.

Exercises on Record with Commission staff:

Vigilant Guargian '99 was conducted in October of 1998. From Goddard's perspective, procedurally NORAD would not be able to make the decision to fire upon the aircraft. It was only designed to “push the players”, but it was not considered to be based on a threat. This applies to all “out of the box” training scenarios. Goddard and Merchant both agreed that it is a serious misrepresentation to think that the scenario was built on any type of intelligence.

Regarding Fencing Indian '00, Merchant commented that it is an Alaskan Region built exercise, not full NORAD integrated, so he has “no visibility” on the exercise. Merchant commented that the Sectors and the Region have their own exercise program designed to exercise their own Battle Staff. Merchant is responsible specifically for training at the NORAD level. The two can be cooperative, but the shops are clearly separated.

Goddard commented that from a live perspective the exercises were built upon Sector and Region responsibilities. They go through a five year planning cycle. Based on the missions they were required to do, it was logical to plan in that manner. FAA would be involved to the point of de-conflicting airspace, but no further.

Drug mission:

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Merchant commented that NORAD had a large drug mission which was at the request of the Coast Guard and/or Customs. They were concerned with narco-terrorism in the intelligence shops, so in that case exercises were built off of actual intelligence.

Steve Nolte was involved in the Twin Star FAA exercise, and is currently at NORAD. He has retired and works part-time with J-33.

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