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Four Days in September

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Table of contents

Prologue	3
Foreword	5
Four Days in September	9
Anecdotes	25
Final Reflections	31

Prologue

This booklet has been published to reflect the experiences of the dedicated men and women of Transport Canada during the four days when Canadian airspace was either completely or partially closed following the tragic events of September 11, 2001, in the United States.

Many Transport Canada employees worked night and day during those four days, and long hours throughout the following weeks and months, to respond to the crisis. This booklet records some of their reflections about those four days. It is not intended to provide a comprehensive account of the crisis, but simply to remind us of their professionalism and dedication during a difficult and momentous time.

Foreword

I will never forget that day in September and, I'm sure, neither will you. It began routinely enough, just like it did for most of us.

I was at the Montreal Convention Centre, speaking to the opening of a huge international conference of airport CEOs and managers from around the world.

Just after 9 o'clock someone came up to the podium with a handwritten note about an air accident or tragedy. I wrapped up, got off the stage and only then learned that a plane had crashed into the World Trade Center in New York.

I felt immediately that this was likely an act of terrorism. I've been around in Transport long enough to know that large passenger planes just don't crash into tall buildings. Even in hopeless emergencies, every pilot's instinct is to save lives.

Once the terrorist attacks were confirmed, I knew I had to get back to Ottawa to be at the hub of our country's response to this unprecedented act of terrorism.

Even before I arrived back from Montreal to Transport Canada's headquarters at Place de Ville Tower C, our Situation Centre was making critical, unprecedented decisions. With my approval, we did something no Canadian government had ever done — we essentially shut down our country's entire airspace by ordering aircraft out of the skies, and not allowing any to take off. The



department instructed NAV CANADA to order 270 flights over the Atlantic to turn around and go back to Europe. We had NAV CANADA direct another 224 flights with more than 33,000 passengers to land at Canadian airports.

Over the four-day period when airspace was either completely or partially closed, Transport Canada employees literally worked around the clock to rewrite and implement new safety and security regulations so that we could allow aircraft safely into the skies again.

Meanwhile, the diverted flights that landed in communities across Canada created an unprecedented influx of passengers, particularly in smaller communities like Gander which had never seen so many people

arriving at once. The people in these communities, including Transport Canada employees, worked tirelessly to welcome the unexpected guests. They opened their homes and their hearts in a show of hospitality that was recognized and lauded around the world.

In the days, weeks and months that followed, we took a significant number of other major actions to enhance security, not only in the air transportation system, but in every mode of transportation. We dealt with the financial viability of the airlines and other related issues. Of course, this was in addition to the ongoing work of the department, which by itself takes no small effort.

I can't remember any government department being called on to make so many enormous decisions in such a short period of time.

The job done by the men and women at Transport Canada was nothing short of incredible. Their remarkable dedication and commitment to public service came through time and again.

Transport Canada may have taken the lead, but we needed and got plenty of support. NAV CANADA, airports and air carriers played a key role, as did many federal government departments and agencies who supplied people and expertise to the Situation Centre — the RCMP, Canada Customs and Revenue, CSIS, National Defence, and Citizenship and Immigration, to name a few.

In a matter of hours, the aviation community rallied to successfully manage the most extensive grounding of aircraft in Canada's history. Civic and community organizations, businesses and individual Canadians also mobilized as never before to house, feed and provide moral support to our guests.

Looking back, I wished we could have written down something that would accurately record for our children and their children what this department did during that momentous period. I believe this booklet captures part of that important period in our lives.

I should point out that not all stories and voices are included. Nor is this booklet a minute-by-minute account of the hours, days and weeks following September 11. Rather, it is a snapshot of the experiences of some of the individuals involved.

At the end of the day, my hope is that this publication will help confirm that one of the most important Canadian aspects to the tragedy was the way we responded. We did our jobs. We opened our homes and our hearts to tens of thousands of perfect strangers. And we stood by our American friends.

I want to thank each and every one of you.

*The Honourable David Collette P.C., M.P.
Minister of Transport*

Just Another Day At The Office?

The Environment Canada forecast for September 11 called for sunny skies and seasonably mild temperatures.

A labour dispute between the Government of Canada and the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) had been simmering since July. PSAC called a one-day national strike for the 11th. In downtown Ottawa, Transport Canada was an obvious location for strike action. Tower C of Place de Ville is the head office for Transport Canada and home to thousands of employees. It also happens to be the tallest building in Ottawa. Union members encircled Tower C with a picket line.



Place de Ville, Tower C.

The planned PSAC strike action brought François Marion and his team of staff relations and other human resources managers to Tower C early that morning, around 5:30 a.m. They met to finalize plans for the day ahead. There were ongoing discussions with the union about issues that had arisen, including the entry of employees into the building. “Everything was going well until about 7:30 or 8 o’clock,” Marion says. “Then the picket line hardened and people started having trouble entering the building.”

Anticipating the strike, some Transport Canada staff made a point of getting to work early. People like Jean LeCours, Director of Preventive Security, and Jean Barrette, Director of Security Operations, who was busy poring over a report of a bomb threat at an airport the night before.

Merrill Smith was beginning his second day of on-the-job training in the Communications Group. A veteran of more than 20 years at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Smith had been told that he would find Transport Canada a relatively quiet place where things ran pretty smoothly and he shouldn’t expect any overtime. The irony of that advice would soon become dramatically clear in the long days and weeks ahead.

Diana MacTier, a regional Employee Assistance Program counsellor with Transport

Canada, was busy getting ready to hold an information session to promote a six-week employee course entitled “Preventing Burnout.”

The strike disrupted operations at Transport Canada but it did not completely bring them to a standstill.

Transport Minister David Collenette was in Montreal, delivering a speech to a conference of airport executives from around the world. Then Deputy Minister, Margaret Bloodworth, was one block away from Tower C, at meetings at Industry Canada. Then Associate Deputy Minister, Louis Ranger, was in Montreal with the Minister. The Assistant Deputy Minister for Safety and Security, Bill Elliott, was at a conference in Beijing. A group of Civil Aviation managers was at meetings in Edmonton. And Julie Mah, then Manager, Policy & Consultation, Explosives Detection Systems (EDS) Project, was beginning her day just over an hour’s drive east of Ottawa, in Rigaud, Quebec, where she was participating in a management course.

This air of relative normalcy was punctured at 8:45 a.m., when American Airlines Flight 11 slammed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center in New York.

Eighteen minutes later, a second passenger plane, United Airlines Flight 175, struck the South Tower of the World Trade Center. Two staff relations advisors, Pat McCauley and Eric Daoust, were monitoring the strike from the Situation Centre on the 14th floor. They stared in stunned disbelief at the live pictures being flashed across two giant television screens of the second plane knifing through the South Tower. “You knew that the second plane was not a replay and it wasn’t a movie, although it could have been,” Lyne Landriault, Chief, Staff Relations, recalled later. “We realized then that what had been the obsession of our work lives for quite some time [the labour dispute] suddenly... seemed inconsequential.”

The horrible news spread with lightning speed through Tower C down to the concourse below and the picketers. Once union leaders and members understood the magnitude of the events, they were also obviously shaken. Without hesitation, they immediately stopped the picket lines and went back to work to offer whatever assistance was necessary.

First Impressions

Jean Barrette was still reading a bomb threat report when he glanced up at the pictures on the giant TV screens in the Civil Aviation Contingency Operations centre.

Although the second plane had not struck yet, he knew that this was no accident. Barrette had been in the aviation business for 28 years and his gut told him that in broad daylight and with today's anti-collision equipment, he doubted very much that this was an accident. "My hunch was that it was a terrorist act."

Some of Transport Canada's staff members design disaster scenarios. Prior to September 11, if one of the team had prepared a scenario where suicidal hijackers would crash their planes into tall buildings, it would have seemed inconceivable.

At the training centre in Rigaud, Julie Mah could not believe that a plane had actually flown into the World Trade Center. It was only after turning on CNN in her room during the break that she realized it was all too tragically real.

Janet Luloff, Manager of Security Planning and Legislation, says she will always remem-

ber watching the attack on the second World Trade Center tower, live, in her Director General's office. Thinking back over the years as part of the security team, she instinctively knew that the implications were huge and that if she had time, she would call home and tell her family not to expect to see her for a while.

Janet Luloff knew the implications were huge and that if she had time, she would call home and tell her family not to expect to see her for a while.

Valerie Dufour, Director General of Air Policy, heard the bulletin on her car radio as she was driving to work. Her background is not in emergency response; she is a policy person. But Dufour wanted to help out in any way she could and she just had to get to the Situation Centre.

She would spend 16 to 18 hours a day there for the next several days.

Louis Ranger will never forget the two hours he spent in a van with Minister Collenette, as they rushed from Montreal back to Ottawa. Their driver for the day was Robert Rivard, a Security Inspector

from Transport Canada's Quebec Region. Marie-Hélène Lévesque, Special Assistant to the Minister, was also with them.

Ranger remembers: "Of course we had the radio on, but had not seen the horrible pictures. The Minister was on the phone with the Deputy Minister and with Sue Ronald, his Executive Assistant. I was calling all over the place. So was Marie-Hélène. By the time we had reached Casselman [about 30 minutes east of

Ottawa], most of our cell phone batteries were dead. Maybe that was a good thing. That gave the Minister time to reflect on the situation. By the time we got to Ottawa, he knew what he had to do. And so did I."

The SitCen Shifts Into High Gear

On September 11 and for the following three weeks, the Situation Centre — or SitCen as it's known around Tower C — became the nerve centre for everyone involved in the response to the crisis.

It was the focal point for all decisions and actions taken by Transport Canada and its many partners.

The SitCen opened on the 14th floor of Tower C in the fall of 1994. It's an ultra-modern facility, equipped with state-of-the-art computer hardware and custom software, advanced communications, mapping and audio visual equipment, rows of work stations, and is dominated by two massive projection screens which, when lowered from the ceiling, take up entire window panels and block out the daylight.

The SitCen was designed as a communications centre, capable of coordinating an emergency response to a huge earthquake on the west coast. The quake, which many experts believe is inevitable, hasn't happened. However, the SitCen has been activated many times over the years, including during the ice storm in Ontario



The SitCen quickly became the focal point for decisions and actions.

and Quebec and the Swissair disaster near Peggy's Cove.

On September 11, 2001, it was activated again, only this time in response to a scenario that no one had previously imagined possible.

The SitCen was buzzing with people in no time. People from security, from air policy, and from communications. Several critical departments and agencies quickly had staff in the SitCen to lend support to their Transport Canada colleagues. These included NAV CANADA, National Defence, the RCMP and CSIS. In addition, telephone links were established with key staff in other departments including Citizenship and Immigration Canada, the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency and the Federal Aviation Administration in the United States. A representative from the United States embassy was also on hand to help the two countries coordinate their activities. Even people whose job did not require them to be there insisted on pitching in — people like Tania Lambert and Anouk Landry, two program officers in the Security Awareness Division.

Coordinating the crisis response for Transport Canada was Dr. John Read, who was filling in as the Acting Assistant Deputy Minister for Safety and Security while Bill Elliott was in Beijing, China where he was attending a maritime safety forum.

Read was a logical choice, a cool and decisive public service manager with considerable experience handling emergencies involving dangerous goods.

The early moments after the SitCen was activated were somewhat chaotic. And with good reason. Rumours of further terrorist attacks began proliferating. One had a bomb going off at the Washington Mall; another reported that the State Department had been bombed.

These rumours, along with the constant televised replays of the attacks, helped to feed the atmosphere of growing fear and uncertainty.

With the attack on the Pentagon confirmed and the report of a fourth hijacked plane in the skies over Pennsylvania, the U.S. announced it was sealing off its airspace to all incoming international flights.

A short time later, Minister Collenette ordered all civil aviation traffic in Canada grounded.

For John Read and his response team in the SitCen, this would present just the first of many colossal challenges.

“We had roughly 500 trans-Atlantic flights and 90 trans-Pacific flights heading our way,” Read recalls. “One to two planes entering Canadian airspace every minute. With U.S. airspace shut down, we had to decide what to do with those planes. We had NAV CANADA contact all flights and instruct those with enough fuel to turn back. The

rest would continue flying to North America and would be diverted to airports primarily on Canada’s east coast, starting with Goose Bay. This process took five minutes to complete.”

The impact of these critical decisions was felt across government. In practical terms, these actions instantly generated a new, heavier workload for several departments and agencies, such as Canada Customs and Revenue Agency, National Defence, the RCMP and Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

John Read, for one, can’t say enough about the work ethic and the great contribution of these organizations. “It was truly instructive to see how the other departments and agencies very willingly accepted the roles assigned to them without question, when there was no time to question decisions,” Read recalls. “In my entire career as a public servant, I think this ranks as the finest example of the government working together as a team, as one seamless unit with a common sense of purpose.”

Of great concern were the 224 diverted flights fast approaching Canadian airports. The actions of all those in the SitCen were governed by thoughts such as, ‘what if the terrorist attacks weren’t over?’ ‘Tens of thousands of strangers were about to land on Canadian soil.’ ‘Could it be possible that any of those planes might be hijacked as they neared North America?’ ‘Could they too be turned into destructive missiles?’ Jean LeCours, one of Read’s right-hand aides, called it a “kind of Armageddon scenario.”

Operation Yellow Ribbon

They code-named it Operation Yellow Ribbon. It was the system hastily set up to keep track of the 224 diverted planes and the more than 33,000 displaced passengers on board.

One by one, the planes landed in places with names unfamiliar to many of the unexpected guests — Goose Bay, Gander, and Stephenville, and larger centres such as Moncton, St. John's, Halifax, Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, Calgary and Vancouver. The smaller airports had not been built to accommodate such large numbers of additional aircraft. So the planes were directed away from the terminal buildings and onto the runways where they were stacked up —almost sardine-style.

Jim Drummond, a soft-spoken man who is Chief of Preventive Security Programs, found himself conscripted into Operation Yellow Ribbon when he walked into the SitCen. Drummond still remembers his marching orders as if he received them



Vancouver International Airport handled large amounts of diverted flights and passengers.

yesterday. “I was instructed to get in touch with all the airports where these planes had landed, maintain contact with them and report back to the Deputy Minister every hour.” Drummond says his assignment had its own stresses. “It was difficult dealing with some of the people at the airports,” he says. “They sounded very harried and were obviously very busy and didn’t appreciate being bothered by us for these status reports.”

Although Operation Yellow Ribbon was being coordinated from the Situation Centre on the 14th floor of Tower C in Ottawa, the men and women working in Transport Canada’s regions also bore the burden of this massive security effort. Regional Situation Centres across the country went into high gear as employees worked night and day to help manage the situation as it unfolded, and communities opened their arms to passengers as they arrived.

In Vancouver, Brian Bramah, Regional Director of Security and Emergency Preparedness, recalls in particular how everyone worked together, including processing over 8,500 passengers from the 33 diverted flights which came to Vancouver. “I am proud to be part of an organization that worked so well with other government departments and airport operators. Staff all stepped forward to get the job done as the planes came in,” he says. Bramah also remembers



Some 44 international flights carrying 8,800 passengers were diverted to Halifax International Airport.

that the whole community pulled together too. For example, cruise ships in the port of Vancouver became hotels for passengers who couldn't fly out.

Perhaps the largest impact on Transport Canada's regional operations occurred in Atlantic Canada, as airports there accepted more than half of the diverted flights.

Ozzie Auffrey, Regional Director of Security and Emergency Preparedness in the Atlantic Region, puts the magnitude of the job in stark context. "On September 11, a total of 126 unexpected aircraft suddenly landed in the Atlantic Region, carrying thousands of passengers from all over the world."

Civil Aviation Inspector Garry Noel, who arrived in the small Newfoundland community of Stephenville the day after the terrorist attacks, stayed to help out until the last diverted plane left five days later. "In normal times, the security staff at the Stephenville Airport screens about 37 passengers per day," says Noel. "When I got

there on the 12th, there were more than 1,700 passengers who had landed aboard eight wide-bodied aircraft who had to be screened. That's almost 50 times the usual volume of people passing through the Stephenville Airport."

Tracking where the flights had landed was only one part of this formidable security operation. All passengers were to be confined to their aircraft, assessed and searched. That's tens of thousands of passengers. Every piece of baggage had to be searched and matched against its owner. It was only once this process was completed that passengers were free to leave the planes. For many travellers, it meant being cooped up for 16 hours or more.

Passengers were not allowed off the planes at Halifax International Airport until the evening of September 11th. That morning, 40 international flights were diverted to Halifax carrying about 8,800 passengers. Senior Communications Officer Paul Doucet says that electronic communications complications with the aircraft compounded the wait for the stranded travellers. "Before they could deplane, we needed an accurate head count and so we went from plane to plane to get the tally directly from the crew," Doucet recalls. "The count was necessary to ease the customs clearance bottleneck and to enable local authorities to arrange transportation and accommodation for the passengers."

September 11th was a long day for Doucet — as it was for Transport Canada employ-

ees across the country — and there would be little respite in the days to follow. “I arrived at the airport at about 1:00 p.m. and didn’t leave for home until 3:00 a.m. the next morning. At about 8 a.m., I returned to the airport and a changed world.”

Needless to say, the totally unfamiliar surroundings and the confusing news reports from the disaster sites in the U.S. caused some emotional moments. In Gander, Civil Aviation Inspector Rick McGregor described the scene as tensions were running high at a meeting to brief crew members on the situation in the U.S. “At one point, a young aircraft commander stood up and began talking to the crews, to explain the gravity of the situation. As he was talking, he kept breaking down in tears. He had lost some friends in the World Trade Center. At that point, the horrible reality set in, everyone calmed down and returned their focus to the situation at hand.”

Across Atlantic Canada, those dark days of September 2001 were partly offset by the many poignant displays of peace and friendship. In the communities that received diverted flights, there were spontaneous acts of generosity and compassion toward the thousands of stunned strangers who had suddenly arrived out of the heavens.

The people of Gander gained an international reputation for gracious hospitality overnight. Normally, the town has a population of about 10,000. As one local resident put it, “On September 11th, we had 38 aircraft with a total of 6,656 people drop by for coffee, then stay for three or four days.”

Gander Mayor Claude Elliott says he’ll forever be proud of how quickly the people of Gander mobilized to reach out to the stranded passengers and make them feel at home. “Even in the beginning... we didn’t know who was on those planes



Diverted planes stacked up at Gander Airport.

and we tried to discourage people from taking them into their homes, but Newfoundlanders being Newfoundlanders, a lot of people didn't listen. They just took them into their homes anyway."

Civil Aviation Inspector Roger Auffrey spent several days during the crisis lending a hand to the thinly-stretched security team in Gander. Auffrey says the genuine generosity that he saw Atlantic Canadians show

perfect strangers has left a rich legacy that will last a long time. "Gander is only one example," he says. "A Web site called www.thankstogander.de was created so the passengers could share their experiences

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with others. The site is still going strong. Many passengers have also returned to Gander to savour Newfoundland and Labrador hospitality again and to renew friendships made during very trying times."

One of the more touching expressions of gratitude came from the German air carrier, Lufthansa. The airline renamed one of its planes *Gander-Halifax*, in recognition of how the two Canadian cities took care of passengers stranded by the

September 11th terrorist attacks. To help celebrate the event, Lufthansa flew 20 people, including airport and municipal staff, to Germany.

Protecting Our Skies

There is no question that September 11 placed enormous demands on the people responding to the crisis. The job of reopening Canadian airspace would be equally, if not more, overwhelming.

Pressure was building to get commercial aviation airborne again. But before the planes could take off, new and enhanced security procedures had to be drafted and put into effect. That responsibility fell to Hal Whiteman, then Director General of Security and Emergency Preparedness, who led a team of experts in rewriting the rulebook for aviation security so that the country's skies would be safe from potential terrorist threats in the future.

The new rules would also be totally different from the package of regulations that governed Canadian airspace before September 11. And they would have to be compatible with the corresponding new regulations being developed by American transportation authorities.

Usually, it takes two years to process one set of new security regulations. The people in the SitCen didn't have two years. The government wanted air traffic resumed in a matter of days. The time lines would have to be compressed significantly, the process would have to become a lot more flexible to get the job done. In the two weeks following September 11, Transport Canada processed ten sets of new security

regulations at a rate of about six hours per regulation.

There were scores of new regulations, including new restrictions on certain items that could no longer be taken on board aircraft.

Jean LeCours remembers hours of debate about whether to ban all knives, including steak knives. "We had a discussion about the definition of a steak knife. Then another discussion about the definition of a plastic steak knife, but not a plastic butter knife."

Usually, it takes two years to process one set of new security regulations. The people in the SitCen didn't have two years.

Read says flexibility was key to getting the job done. He says people kept turning up in the SitCen offering to help and they were flexible enough to step in and do a particular job. "Sometimes, people were mismatched with respect to their status within the department as to who was in charge." Read's favourite example was having a junior assistant requesting assistance from a senior manager from a non-security area of the department who had volunteered to help. The senior manager completed the task and came back and asked if there was anything else that needed to be done.

Who Gave Out The Phone Number?

As if the pace inside the Situation Centre was not frenetic enough, somebody gave out, on national television, the phone number that was being used to answer questions from air operators on the raft of new security enhancements.

The number served several lines and once it was released, it triggered an avalanche of calls. At its peak, there were an estimated 5,000 calls a day. They were coming in so fast they almost overwhelmed the staff. Everyone, it seemed, had a phone glued to each ear.

There were hundreds of media calls, asking about new security enhancements and plans to reopen airspace. There were calls from concerned members of the public, wondering about the location and condition of grounded friends and family members.

Some calls were of the bizarre breed, like the 20 or so from angry dog owners who were told that the initial ban on air cargo meant that they would not be permitted to fly their animals to a dog show in London, Ontario.

Perhaps the most off-beat call of all was fielded by communications officer Peter Coyles. He remembers speaking to an elderly woman who suggested that all passengers show up for their flights naked so they would not be able to conceal weapons.

There was also a very tender moment when a call came in for Jean LeCours. LeCours had two phones going at the same time and couldn't take the call. So, Valerie Dufour took it instead. LeCours' wife was on the other end of the line. September 11 was his wedding anniversary. Dufour slipped the message to her colleague. "It's your wife. She just wants you to know she loves you."

Coping With Crisis

One of the more interesting subtexts to the story about the fallout from September 11 was the emotional and psychological impact the disaster was having on the people responding to it.

Inside the SitCen, they were too focused on managing a crisis to indulge their emotions. So, what happens to those emotions? “They get parked,” says John Read. “Because from the moment we walked in there, we were busy.”

Jean LeCours likens it to the “fog of war.” “I have seen TV coverage of September 11 subsequently and it’s like I’m watching it for the first time because we were too busy to watch TV.”

Valerie Dufour has a similar take. “We were just dealing with stuff. I think people are ‘copers’. I’ve had my share of crises in life and I know that when you are busy just trying to cope, you can’t be busy indulging your own personal emotions at the same time.”

Then Deputy Minister Margaret Bloodworth remembers asking someone to turn off the

TV during the first week or two when the shocking images from New York were being played over and over. “I can’t afford to watch this, can’t afford to let yourself be drawn into this huge tragedy. There was too much to do to let it affect you but you can not escape that forever.”

Away from the SitCen and away from Tower C, some people were able to feel the emotional aftershocks.

“...when you are busy just trying to cope, you can’t be busy indulging your own personal emotions at the same time.”

— Valerie Dufour

Communications officer Karyn Curtis felt physically drained when she got home around midnight after a full day on the 11th in the SitCen. She was out like a light. She

got up at 5:00 a.m., made herself a coffee, turned on CNN and opened the paper. The paper had a photo of people holding hands, 100 floors up in the Twin Towers, and jumping to their deaths to avoid being burned to death. That’s when the full scale of the terrorist attacks sunk in for Curtis. “I thou-

ght that could have been anyone, it could have been us and our building, it could have been my brother or somebody I know. I just lost it, I simply dissolved. I sat on my sofa and cried for about 20 minutes. Then I went off to work and another day in the SitCen.”

The implications of September 11 came to Jim Drummond in a haunting kind of way as he was heading home the day after the attacks. The drive takes him by

Ottawa International Airport. On that particular day, Drummond was paying more attention to the sounds of the airport than he had done before. “I never really noticed the noise before, but I sure noticed the quiet,” he remembers. “Nothing was flying, everything was shut down. It was truly eerie.”

Good Samaritans in the SitCen



Decisions made in the SitCen included granting clearance for humanitarian flights.

Among the tens of thousands of foreign nationals who suddenly found themselves stranded in Canada on September 11, Pat Ryan had an urgent need to get back home to the United States.

For Ryan, home was Chicago, where he served as head of a company whose operations include providing grief counsellors after air tragedies. Ryan's second largest office was in New York, at Two World Trade Center, which was home to approximately 1,200 employees. On September 11, his company lost 200 employees.

On the day the terrorists struck, Ryan was in Deer Lake, Newfoundland, and although he had a company plane, he could not get out. With North American airspace sealed off, any unauthorized flight would run the risk of being shot down.

A company executive managed to get through to the Situation Centre on the 14th floor of the Transport Canada building. He explained the situation and appealed for clearance so that the plane could fly Pat Ryan from Deer Lake to Sarnia, and then on to Chicago.

Dale Lahey, Superintendent of Aviation Operations, remembers taking the call. He got off the phone and went up to John Read, who was directing the SitCen's response to the crisis. "I need approval [to let this plane take off]," Lahey said, explaining that Ryan and his team were among the best grief counsellors for aviation accidents in the world. "I think this is a really important case."

Under new emergency measures, Transport Canada was permitting a limited reopening of airspace for certain circumstances, including humanitarian reasons. John Read was told of the company's role in providing grief counselling after air tragedies. To the decision makers in the SitCen, Pat Ryan certainly qualified for humanitarian treatment and clearance was granted.

Just over a week after September 11, Dale Lahey received a moving letter from the company. It was a thank-you note that read in part:

"It was your thoughtfulness and understanding of our situation, and your timely response which enabled Mr. Ryan to reach Sarnia, then Chicago, to take control of our command center. When a company, as ours, experiences a tragedy like we did, you always want your leader at home on the ground and in control. You and your team helped make that possible and for that we are truly thankful."

One of Lahey's colleagues in the SitCen, Judy Rutherford, perhaps summed up this episode best. "There are things like this that went on that made us feel good, made us feel like we were making an important difference in the lives of some people far away."

This is Not a Test!

September 11, 2001 was Doug Mein's first day back after a summer on leave. The Director of Air Navigation Services and Airspace was in Edmonton, at a conference with other civil aviation executives.

From the shower in his hotel room, Mein heard his cell phone begin to ring and ring. He towelled off and checked his messages. Eight in all. His first thought was that a Canadian flight must have gone down somewhere; only something like that would have prompted such a flurry of calls.

After a few phone calls, he understood what had happened.

Mein rushed downstairs to a hastily convened meeting with his colleagues. On the way into the room, he felt as if he were walking into a wake. Sombre faces, no one exchanging pleasantries.

Transport Canada made arrangements to get Mein and his colleagues back to Ottawa as quickly as possible. A Cessna Citation 550 was flown into Edmonton from Yellowknife, and then took off heading directly for Ottawa.

An air navigation services veteran, Mein sat in the jumpseat for the flight back. He put on the headset and listened to the air traffic control, or ATC, frequencies. He was struck by something he had never heard coming out of the ether before — utter silence. During the entire flight, he heard only one other aircraft on the radio, a United Airlines flight out of Tokyo's Narita Airport on approach into Calgary.

Flying over Canada, listening to the empty airwaves, Mein felt the silence was surreal; it was as if the last people on Earth were on board this tiny Cessna Citation. Between Edmonton and Ottawa, the flight crew tested the radio four times, to see if it was working. The silence was eerie.

Then, over Yorkton, Saskatchewan, something happened that Mein never expected to hear in his life: an ESCAT call shattered the silence over the radio. ESCAT stands for Emergency Security Control of Air Traffic. With that call, Mein and his travelling companions knew that NORAD had taken control of the skies over North America.

Doug Mein had trained and practiced in his field to issue these calls in the event of war, but he had never really expected to deliver or even hear the real thing — particularly in peacetime. Yet, flying over Saskatchewan, the call had come. NORAD had been placed on high alert. This was not a test.

Flying over Canada, listening to the empty airwaves, Mein felt the silence was surreal.

Stranded Far From Home

Jim Marriott believes that everything he learned and experienced since January 1986 — when he joined the security team at Transport Canada — had prepared him professionally for the events of September 11 and its shocking aftermath.

He signed on a few months after the 1985 Air India bombing, the worst disaster in Canadian aviation history. When he joined security, Marriott knew that he had chosen a career path that would lead him through the wrenching wake of Air India. In the years that followed, he would find himself having to address other threats to transportation security such as threats arising from the Gulf War.

But for all his experience and crisis management training, nothing could prepare Marriott for the sense of frustration he would feel on September 11 and the days that followed. While the terrorist attacks were taking place over New York, Washington and Pennsylvania, he was in Arundel, England, attending a meeting of the European Civil Aviation Conference.

He heard the terrible news from an American colleague, also an aviation security expert, who took a call on his cell phone. “I’ve known the man for 15 or 16 years and I have never heard this tone of voice or seen his face turn grey so fast,” Marriott recalls. “I think that we all knew that the worst had happened.”

His instincts told him this was huge, momentous and that he should be on the first plane out of Heathrow and back in the Situation Centre in Ottawa, where he could put all those years of training and preparation to good use. He knew that if he were back in the SitCen, he could contribute to “building a package of rules” that would allow aircraft safely into the skies again.

The problem was, nothing was flying to North America. Jim Marriott was grounded in London. “I felt useless, absolutely useless,” he says. “You know you’ve got something to offer the system, you know you’ve got a role to play in public safety and security, you know the tools at your disposal and you feel connected to the event. But you can’t do anything with it.”

Marriott spent the next few days at the U.S. embassy in London, monitoring the world’s response to September 11 and staying in touch with his security colleagues back home. Marriott finally did make it out of London and back to the SitCen. It took some time but on Friday morning — three days after the terrorists struck — he arrived at Heathrow to catch a flight home. For Marriott and his team, the coming months would bring many long and intense days at the office.



A Korean plane approaches Whitehorse Airport.

Whitehorse Tower, This is NORAD Calling

Whitehorse air traffic control specialist Dave White was glued to his television on the morning of September 11, trying to absorb the horrific events in New York and Washington just before heading off to work. As he watched, he reflected on the isolation of this northern community and his own sense of remoteness from all the activity down south.

That was about to change, and fast.

Soon after he got to work, White received a call from NORAD informing him that two Korean Airlines flights — one filled with passengers, the other loaded with cargo, both 747s — were headed to Whitehorse Airport and they were being escorted in by a pair of CF-18 fighter jets. In the maze of confusing rumours that day, there were indications that one of the Korean planes might have been hijacked.

Within 30 minutes of receiving the call from NORAD, the Korean planes were on the ground and taxied to a stop — as far away from the terminal as possible.

To suggest that Whitehorse had never seen such high drama and excitement would be an understatement. Nevertheless, White says the response to the crisis could not have been more orderly — everybody knew exactly what to do. He especially credits the RCMP for taking control of the situation. Police officers took up positions on the tarmac; snipers were on the roof of the terminal building. It was a good hour before they began letting people off the planes. The crew members were the first to deplane. The men were asked to open their shirts and keep their hands in the air, so they could be searched for weapons. The passengers followed.

It all went so calmly. However, there were more than a few jangled nerves inside the airport. A resource management supervisor, Marilyn Seaman, admitted being scared for the first time in her eight years at Whitehorse Airport.

A very different story was playing out in the city of Whitehorse itself. The downtown core was being evacuated. Schools were let out for the day. There was a traffic jam in the heart of town.

It took several hours to sort things out, but in the end, there had been no hijacking — just an unsettling communications mix-up at a very inopportune moment. Once the threat was defused, the passengers were quickly taken in as guests of the people of Whitehorse.

While the people of Whitehorse may always feel a bit isolated, September 11 will remind them just how connected they were to the outside world that late summer day.

Final Reflections

Being part of Transport Canada’s response to September 11 means different things to different people.

For Maria Pagliarello, Director of National Air Services Policy, it was a rewarding eye-opener to get out of her usual group and work with colleagues she had never known. “The way Transport Canada came together as one was unbelievable,” she says.

“Life’s too short — go ahead, use the good dishes.”

— *Jean LeCours*

Others pointed to the spirit of teamwork and partnership that was forged with other departments and agencies — both in Canada and the United States — which willingly stepped in to play critical but supporting roles.

Julie Mah, who worked on the Explosives Detection Systems Project, feels a strong sense of pride in being a public servant,

and particularly in seeing the tangible results of her work. “It feels good knowing that if I go through an airport and I see explosives detection equipment there, I played a part in putting it there. I had a hand in protecting you, your family and other members of the public.”

Perhaps the most enduring legacy of Transport Canada’s role one year ago is the enormous pride it instilled in its public servants — people who had a job to do but ended up doing extraordinary things in extraordinary circumstances.

It’s also a story about the tremendous dedication and sacrifice by those public servants. There are too many examples to mention of people who gave up home and family for days on end and pushed their physical limits.

A couple of months after the tragedy, there was a “take your kids to work” day. Janet Luloff’s daughter was part of a group of Grade 9 students who came to Tower C with their parents. The then Associate Deputy Minister, Louis Ranger, who was filling in for the Deputy Minister, used



the opportunity to tell the teenagers about Transport Canada's response to September 11 and explain why they hadn't seen much of their parents in the last couple of months. "He told them [the children] that their parents had been doing a very important job in handling this crisis," Luloff recalls. "I'll never forget the look of rapt attention on our kids' faces when they heard Louis lavishing such praise on their parents. I'll always be grateful for that, as it helped my daughter understand the importance of our work and why I had not been home much."

It may be fitting to leave the last word on the meaning of September 11 to security veteran Jean LeCours. In the days and weeks after the attacks, LeCours was reminding anyone who would listen about how some people keep their fine dinnerware locked away in some china cabinet, just waiting for "that special occasion."

LeCours told them September 11 has given him a brand new outlook on this habit. "Life's too short — go ahead, use the good dishes."