

DOCKET NO. SA-516
APPENDIX Z

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT
CAPT. DAVID McCLAIN
MARCH 25, 1999
(79 pages)

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REGARDING THE NATIONAL
TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD'S
INVESTIGATION OF THE ACCIDENT
INVOLVING TWA FLIGHT 800.

10:04 A.M.
March 25, 1999
Charlotte, North Carolina

INTERVIEW

OF

CAPTAIN DAVID MCCLAINE

ORIGINAL



Adams & Holt, inc.
VERBATIM COURT REPORTING SERVICES

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APPEARANCES:

For the National Transportation

Safety Board: Mr. David C. Mayer
Mr. Douglas P. Brazy

For the Federal Aviation

Administration: Mr. Joseph F. Manno

For the Airline

Pilots Association: Capt. James M. Walters

For TWA: Mr. Robert Young

For Boeing Air Safety: Mr. J. Dennis Rodrigues

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This is an interview of David McClaine,
being conducted by the National Transportation Safety Board
before Christine Elminowski, Notary Public, in the Citadel
Room at the Hyatt at South Park, 5501 Carnegie Boulevard,
Charlotte, North Carolina on the 25th day of March, 1999,
beginning at 10:04 A.M.

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1 MR. MAYER: And I wonder if I could talk
2 to about the visibility that evening, if you can
3 remember any details.

4 CAPT. McCLAIN: It was excellent. I put
5 down my report about 40 miles, but it was probably
6 greater than that. You could see a long, long ways,
7 especially it was at dusk. You could see lights in the
8 ground for a long, long ways. I probably -- I was
9 picking up New York and everything when I was over the
10 Sandy Point VOR. And just after that is where I
11 actually picked up TWA 800 lifting off out of JFK, and
12 of course at that time I didn't know it was TWA 800.
13 But it had a real bright light on its left side and I
14 thought it was a little bit off color. I started coming
15 out and turning a little bit going towards its track and
16 I figured it was a heavy going on a North Atlantic
17 route.

18 MR. MAYER: I wonder if I could interrupt
19 you. I'll give you plenty of time, I just want to
20 finish some of the visibility just a little bit and then
21 I'll allow you all the time.

22 CAPT. McCLAIN: It was excellent.

23 MR. MAYER: When you said you were over
24 the Sandy Point VOR, were you saying that you could pick
25 up the lights of New York City?

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1 CAPT. McCLAIN: No, not really. It was
2 pretty constant.

3 MR. BRAZY: I have nothing further.

4 MR. MAYER: Dennis, do you have any of
5 questions?

6 MR. RODRIGUES: Yeah, I've got a number of
7 questions, but I think your statement and answers to
8 your questions may have answered a number of them
9 already, but I'll go through them anyway, just to see
10 what I get here. What was your altitude when you first
11 saw this light on 800?

12 CAPT. McCLAIN: I'm probably going to
13 have to say flight level 240, but I may have started the
14 descent. I would say definitely between 22 and 24,000
15 feet. It was probably closer to 24.

16 MR. RODRIGUES: Okay. And what was your
17 altitude when you saw it explode?

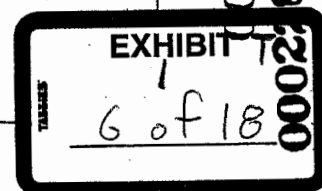
18 CAPT. McCLAIN: About 16,000.

19 MR. RODRIGUES: What do you think 800's
20 altitude was when you first saw it?

21 CAPT. McCLAIN: I said between 16 and
22 17,000 I flicked on the landing light.

23 MR. RODRIGUES: What was 800's altitude
24 when you first -- when you first saw it?

25 CAPT. McCLAIN: Oh, I first saw him I



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1 estimate it to be probably around 2,000 feet. He was
 2 lifting off out of JFK and going straight over the water
 3 and then he started turning northward.

4 MR. RODRIGUES: And what was 800's
 5 altitude when it exploded?

6 CAPT. McCLAIN: I estimate between 13 and
 7 15,000 feet.

8 MR. RODRIGUES: How far do you feel you
 9 were from 800 when you first saw the light, distance?

10 CAPT. McCLAIN: Oh, boy. I don't know,
 11 maybe 60 miles.

12 MR. RODRIGUES: How far do you feel you
 13 were from 800 when you flashed your landing lights and
 14 when it exploded?

15 CAPT. McCLAIN: Fifteen, nineteen miles,
 16 maybe.

17 MR. RODRIGUES: During the time that you
 18 were descending to 16,000 feet, did you continue to look
 19 at the light more or less continuously?

20 CAPT. McCLAIN: Yes, especially when I was
 21 told I was conflicting traffic. I thought that that was
 22 the traffic we were supposed to be looking at.

23 MR. RODRIGUES: How long do you believe
 24 that you looked at 800 between the time you first saw
 25 the airplane and the time you saw it explode?

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1 really tell.

2 MR. RODRIGUES: Could you describe the
 3 explosion in terms of the movement of lighted objects or
 4 pieces? In other words, did a burning mass continue
 5 along the path of the airplane, did it ascend, did it
 6 descend?

7 CAPT. McCLAIN: Well, all I saw was
 8 basically a big ball like that, nothing came out of it.
 9 And like I said, a fraction of a second later these two
 10 streams of fire came out the bottom up and they came out
 11 together, at the same -- and hit with almost exactly
 12 same time. There wasn't one and then later on another,
 13 exact same time. And I didn't see anything other than
 14 that come out of that ball of fire.

15 MR. RODRIGUES: Okay. So --

16 CAPT. McCLAIN: It was a nice big round,
 17 looked like you see in THE movies, you know, fuel
 18 air --

19 MR. RODRIGUES: Explosion?

20 CAPT. McCLAIN: -- explosion. You know,
 21 yellowish, orangish explosion and nice big round cloud
 22 and (indicating.)

23 MR. RODRIGUES: And the two objects that
 24 came out?

25 CAPT. McCLAIN: They were trailing flames

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1 behind, about 4,000 feet behind, halfway down the water.

2 MR. RODRIGUES: And they were trailing
3 flames behind but there was no -- was there any light
4 going up from --

5 CAPT. McCLAIN: No, no.

6 MR. RODRIGUES: -- from the ball of
7 fire?

8 CAPT. McCLAIN: No. These things, of
9 course for a while they -- while the wings fell, at
10 least I think they're the wings, actually for about
11 4,000 feet they were still connected to that ball. But
12 of course that ball disappeared fairly quickly too.

13 MR. RODRIGUES: So the explosion was at
14 about 13 to 15,000 feet?

15 CAPT. McCLAIN: Uh-huh.

16 MR. RODRIGUES: And there was no -- was
17 there any flaming object or anything that climbed to
18 your altitude, 16 or more?

19 CAPT. McCLAIN: Not that I could see.

20 MR. RODRIGUES: Did you see any explosion
21 after you saw the first one?

22 CAPT. McCLAIN: No.

23 MR. RODRIGUES: Was there any noticeable
24 flight path change before or after --

25 CAPT. McCLAIN: No.

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1 MR. RODRIGUES: -- the explosion?

2 CAPT. McCLAIN: After the explosion I

3 didn't see any flight path at all, it was just --

4 MR. RODRIGUES: Right. But not before as

5 well?

6 CAPT. McCLAIN: No. Before was nice

7 steady flight.

8 MR. RODRIGUES: Was there any noticeable

9 speed change before --

10 CAPT. McCLAIN: Not that I could --

11 MR. RODRIGUES: -- or after? And was

12 there any noticeable -- and I think you answered this

13 already -- any noticeable climbing angle change --

14 CAPT. McCLAIN: Uh-uh.

15 MR. RODRIGUES: -- before or after?

16 CAPT. McCLAIN: None at all.

17 MR. RODRIGUES: That's all I have for the

18 moment.

19 MR. MAYER: Thank you. I appreciate

20 that.

21 MR. WALTERS: You're going to think we're

22 really stupid here because we're going to ask all the

23 same questions over and over, and I apologize for that.

24 CAPT. McCLAIN: I'm ready for that.

25 MR. WALTERS: I'll try to limit it. You

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1 view of it all the time?

2 CAPT. McCLAIN: Yeah.

3 MR. YOUNG: I guess the second question I
4 have is -- you've already answered that you never
5 actually saw the silhouette of the airplane, in other
6 words you couldn't make out the engines or the nose or
7 anything like that?

8 CAPT. McCLAIN: No.

9 MR. YOUNG: When it did explode though
10 you've already said it was between 13 and 15,000 feet,
11 and this question has been asked but I'd like to
12 reverify and make sure that I've got it clearly in my
13 head. Since you were at or near 16,000 feet leveling
14 off, should any large piece of this explosion, whatever
15 you saw, have zoomed up above the altitude it was at, do
16 you think you would have seen it with the back light?

17 CAPT. McCLAIN: If it would have been
18 illuminated, you know, had flames on it, yes. But if it
19 was just a piece of metal going up, probably not.

20 MR. YOUNG: Would you have though kind of
21 the light behind you from the setting sun from that
22 standpoint?

23 CAPT. McCLAIN: Unless it reflected that
24 light, no, I wouldn't have seen it.

25 MR. YOUNG: At 15 to 19 miles then, in

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1 your recollection, you didn't see any structure or
 2 anything else of this thing zoom up 1,000, 1,500, 3,000
 3 feet?

4 CAPT. McCLAIN: No.

5 MR. YOUNG: So everything, other than the
 6 explosion, expansion itself stayed at the altitude that
 7 you saw?

8 CAPT. McCLAIN: Uh-huh. As far as I saw.

9 MR. YOUNG: Well, I understand. And
 10 again, I want to express our appreciation for you
 11 coming, because you are a very key person as far as
 12 we're concerned because you're the only person that was
 13 looking at it at the time.

14 CAPT. McCLAIN: Well I used to fly on
 15 that flight a lot of times 707 over Saudi Arabia so I've
 16 got a lot of history with it too.

17 MR. YOUNG: A couple other questions. You
 18 were interviewed by the FBI how many times, do you
 19 remember?

20 CAPT. McCLAIN: Immediately the next day
 21 they called up in the morning and asked to come out, and
 22 one agent came out, and she was in our house for
 23 approximately about an hour and a half, and out of that
 24 probably about an hour that pertained to TWA 800
 25 directly. Then later on that night, I guess it was

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1 that I could see anyway. I did look for it, I thought
 2 at first maybe it was a fire or something.

3 MR. RODRIGUES: The off-color light I
 4 think you said came to an end in an explosion, it turned
 5 into an explosion?

6 CAPT. McCLAIN: Uh-huh.

7 MR. RODRIGUES: And the fireball that
 8 resulted from that, what do you see as the motion of
 9 that fireball? Again this has been asked before, but
 10 just to clarify.

11 CAPT. McCLAIN: The explosion just
 12 happened right in front of me there and it disappeared
 13 right there, with the two wings coming out the bottom.
 14 I mean, it didn't fall down to the water at all, it just
 15 disappeared right about the same level.

16 MR. RODRIGUES: By disappear you mean?

17 CAPT. McCLAIN: Burned itself up.

18 MR. RODRIGUES: And there was no light
 19 there and there was just the two descending objects with
 20 light trailing?

21 CAPT. McCLAIN: Uh-huh.

22 MR. RODRIGUES: Any smoke --

23 CAPT. McCLAIN: It stayed there for, you
 24 know, maybe a couple seconds but then was gone.

25 MR. RODRIGUES: Any smoke resulting from

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1 on the FBI and the CIA's analysis of the witness
2 statements?

3 CAPT. McCLAINE: You mean the one where
4 the nose blew off and the airplane flew and one wing
5 came off and another wing came off basically?

6 MR. YOUNG: Well the specific one that the
7 CIA did is that the nose did come off but then the
8 airplane pitches up approximately 2 to 3,000 feet, the
9 carcass I guess is the best way to put it. I'm just
10 curious if you saw that.

11 CAPT. McCLAINE: I think I did, yeah.
12 I've seen a couple of them at least anyhow.

13 MR. YOUNG: Yeah, there are two different
14 ones. But I guess my question is based on the video
15 where the airplane -- the carcass of the airplane --

16 CAPT. McCLAINE: I didn't see it pitch up,
17 no. Everything ended right there at that explosion, as
18 far as I'm concerned.

19 MR. YOUNG: So in your mind the ability of
20 the carcass of that airplane to zoom up 3,000 feet
21 without you --

22 CAPT. McCLAINE: Well, because I saw the
23 wings blow off. If there's nothing to propel it up
24 there, unless the wind lifted it up there, unless that
25 explosion blew the fuselage up there, I can't see that

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1 happening. And plus if it had no nose, I can't see an
2 open space pushing against the wind. I didn't see that
3 happen.

4 MR. YOUNG: We'd be cutting new trails in
5 aerodynamics if we could do that. That was just my
6 question, whether you thought based on what you recall
7 at that time whether you thought that there was a
8 possibility that that thing could have zoomed up without
9 you having seen it or some evidence.

10 CAPT. McCLAIN: I don't think so, no.
11 One was a little more accurate than the other but not a
12 lot.

13 MR. YOUNG: That's all.

14 MR. MAYER: Just to I guess clear some of
15 those questions up. I think that what Bob was just
16 asking and I'm going to ask you, did you see -- let me
17 start again. The explosion occurred at the maximum
18 altitude?

19 CAPT. McCLAIN: As far as I --

20 MR. MAYER: You saw no activity?

21 CAPT. McCLAIN: I didn't see anything go
22 after that. In other words, I can -- magician can pull
23 rabbits out of their hats or whatever, but -- there's a
24 lot of slight of hand or whatever, but I didn't see
25 anything after that explosion. It all ended right

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there.

MR. MAYER: Thank you.

CAPT. McCLAIN: And everything went down.

MR. MAYER: And as things were going down, you said you saw what appeared to be two objects that were falling and I think I heard you characterize them as it appeared that those objects were on opposite sides of the fuselage?

CAPT. McCLAIN: That's correct.

MR. MAYER: Did you ever see the fuselage at the same time you were seeing those two objects?

CAPT. McCLAIN: No, I did not.

MR. MAYER: My last question then is on a completely different vein. TCAS is the Traffic Collision Avoidance System, and I'm wondering if your aircraft was TCAS equipped.

CAPT. McCLAIN: Yes.

MR. MAYER: Were you making use of TCAS?

CAPT. McCLAIN: Yes.

MR. MAYER: At any time that you were observing the landing light that ultimately exploded, did you identify or return on your TCAS display what you thought might be corresponding to the aircraft that was that landing light?

CAPT. McCLAIN: I think we did, but I

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1 MR. YOUNG: How long, just roughly, from
2 the time that the explosion occurred and you remember
3 hearing this Navy airplane talking to New York center?
4 How long would you think that was, roughly?

5 CAPT. McCLAIN: Oh, boy.

6 MR. YOUNG: Well, was it five minutes, ten
7 minutes?

8 CAPT. McCLAIN: At least five minutes.

9 MR. YOUNG: At least five minutes, okay.

10 CAPT. McCLAIN: Probably a little longer,
11 because we had descended and all. Went for a little
12 while at 16,000, we got handed off from Boston to New
13 York ATC and then we went to 16,000 feet and then we
14 were given descent down to 12 and then down to 4 and I
15 think it was out of the -- between 12 and 4 that he came
16 up on the air frequency. Just before we left the air
17 frequency for Maguire, so it was probably closer to ten
18 minutes even.

19 MR. YOUNG: And one more quick question.
20 When you talked to the initial FBI people, the two times
21 they talked to you the first day or so, did any of them
22 indicate to you that they had any aviation experience or
23 did they ask any aviation questions that would indicate
24 to you that they had some technical background that, you
25 know, they knew the front and back of an airplane and

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1 that kind of thing?

2 CAPT. McCLAIN: No. The one that actually
3 came out and interviewed me, she was actually fairly new
4 to the Charlotte area. And so that's why I say that
5 interview was for about an hour half, actually about an
6 hour was on the airplane and then she asked a couple of
7 questions about the local area. And I had to give her
8 directions on how to get up to our house and everything,
9 which of course isn't uncommon. But she I don't think
10 had -- I think she got transferred down from New Jersey
11 or something like that and -- but I think they asked me
12 pertinent questions but I don't think they had any
13 aviation experience, no.

14 MR. YOUNG: Okay.

15 MR. WALTERS: Did you ever receive a copy
16 of any of the statements that they --

17 CAPT. McCLAIN: From the FBI?

18 MR. WALTERS: Yes.

19 CAPT. McCLAIN: No, never.

20 MR. WALTERS: So you never saw what they
21 put down in relation to what you said --

22 CAPT. McCLAIN: No.

23 MR. WALTERS: -- and corrected it or
24 confirmed it or anything?

25 CAPT. McCLAIN: No.

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TWA 800 Explosion Report

Flt. No. BBE 507 07/17/96 Eastwind Airlines Destination: KTTN
B-737-200 N221US O/O Time: 1951/2010L O/I time:2101/2103L
Capt: D. McClaine #203 F/O: V. Fuschetti 215 Domicile: GSO

Occurrence Location: Occurrence Time: Wx Conditions:
Hampton 236 Radial 20 DME About 2030 Local High Cirrus Clouds. Dusk. 40 vis.

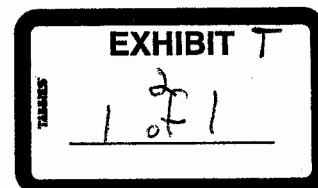
Report: Flying over the Sandy Point VOR we asked for the 247 Radial off Sandy Point to intercept the Hampton 236 Radial (V-139), and were denied because of traffic. So we proceeded to Hampton as we were filed and on the way were told to descend from FL 240 to FL 200. Just prior to the descent; I spotted TWA 800 which appeared to have either one landing light ON, or two very close together ON. It was a very bright light and was moving somewhat toward us, but still crossing our path from right to left. The light was a little off color for a landing light so at first I thought it might be a fire, but didn't see any smoke trail which should have still been visible at the time if there were one. So I passed it off as a landing light from a very large aircraft such as a B-747 which appeared to be just out of JFK. It was definitely the brightest light in the sky.

Just as we were about to level off at FL200 we were told to descend to 16,000 MSL with a good rate through FL180. Passing through FL 180 we turned over Hampton to intercept the 236 Radial. Passing 17,000 feet I flicked ON my left inboard landing light to signal the other aircraft, (TWA 800) that I had him in sight. The aircraft appeared then to be slightly left of our 12:00 position (about on the Hampton 236 Radial) and at about 15,000-13,000 feet MSL at about 15-19 DME. As I flicked on the light the other aircraft exploded into a very large ball of flames. Almost immediately two flaming objects, with flames trailing about 4000 feet behind them, fell out of the bottom of the ball of flame. It was too dark to identify any objects or see any debris. (I thought the objects to be the wings, which were full of fuel.)

I immediately called BOS ATC and reported an inflight explosion out over the water, I stated this twice but didn't get an immediate reply. ATC then issued a couple of instructions to at least two other aircraft, routine messages. Then another aircraft; Lufthansa, I think, reported that there was indeed an inflight explosion and gave a position report off JFK. I then came back and stated that the explosion and column of smoke was on the Hampton 236 Radial at 20 DME; which at this time was right where we were. The smoke column was just to our left side. Another couple of aircraft came up and also reported seeing fire falling into the sea. ATC then started a short roll call. My First Officer then said to me that he thought it was TWA 800. ATC called TWA 800 a couple of times with no reply. I then said to ATC, "I think that's them." He replied, "I think you're right." I then said, "God Bless them."

F/O Fuschetti and I then quickly discussed orbiting the sight or whatever action we could take. Since ATC made no request we decided to continue on to Trenton because of the darkness below, passengers on board and our fuel state. We were then handed off to New York ATC and told to descend to 12,000 feet with following descents to 4000 feet. During the descent to 4000 feet a Navy plane called New York for vectors to the scene so he could help out. We told him it was on the Hampton 236 radial at 20DME and offered our help to New York. We were then switched over to McGuire ATC for our approach into Trenton. The rest of the evening went uneventful. I did call Eastwind Dispatch at Trenton to report the explosion and at Greensboro once more called and spoke to the Dispatcher and the Director of Operations for Eastwind Airlines.

Prior to the explosion I did not see any missile, air to air or ground to air, as I have seen in the press. I did mention this to my F/O just after the explosion. I still think it was a landing light I saw that was ON the other the aircraft, (TWA 800) but can't rule out that it may have been an engine or wing fire due to the color of the light and its brightness. I'm not that familiar with a B-747 landing lights.



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I hereby certify that the following is a true transcription of the recorded conversations pertaining to the subject aircraft accident involving TWA800:

Ellen E. Fitzgerald

Ellen E. Fitzgerald
Quality Assurance Technician
Boston ARTCC

0019		
0019:25	VVAT450	boston good evening navy alfa tango four five zero with you two zero zero
0019:30	R32	navy alfa tango four fifty boston center roger
0019:34	VVAT450	and ma'am do you have our request
0019:37	R32	affirmative
0019:39	VVAT450	thanks
0020		
0020:04	R32	*(okay) navy alfa tango four fifty i'm gonna be unable to do direct to bergh here to ah cut you right across the kennedy departure track and ah *(in event) you have no transponder i need to leave you on airways until you get into the until you get into the warning area
0020:17	VVAT450	and alfa tango four five zero roger we understand we'll stay with the airways
0020:21	R32	roger

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0031:38 JEX18 ah i think that was one five thousand for jet express
eighteen is that correct

0031:41 R32 that's correct thank you

0031:50 BBE507 we just saw an explosion out here stinger bee five oh
seven

0031:57 R32 stinger bee five oh seven i'm sorry i missed it ah you're
out of eighteen did you say something else

0032:01 BBE507 ah we just saw an explosion up ahead of us here
*(somewhere's about) about sixteen thousand feet or
something like that it just went down — in the water

0032:10 AZA609 alitalia six oh nine confirms just ahead of us

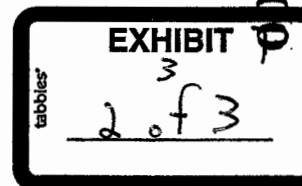
0032:17 R32 t w a nine hundred for higher contact boston now on ah
one two four point five two

0032:22 TWA900 two four five two t w a nine hundred

0032:24 R32 thank you

0032:25 VIR009 boston virgin zero zero nine I can confirm that out of
my nine ah three my nine o'clock position we just had
an exp it looked like an explosion out there about five
miles away six miles away

0032:36 R32 virgin zero zero nine i'm sorry your transmissions
broken up *(what'd you say)



0033:27 AZA609 boston center six zero nine

0033:31 R32 alitalia six oh nine contact boston now on ah one two
four point five two

0033:36 AZA609 one two four point five two and just for your information
sir we are just overhead the explosion right overhead
at this time now a hundred and three miles from j f k it's
about forty eight miles from *(j a p) on the one zero two
radial

0033:48 BBE507 and center for stinger bee ah five oh seven we are
directly over the site with that airplane or whatever it
was just exploded and went into the water

0033:56 UNKN i have eighteen or nineteen miles from the two thirty six
radial off ah hampton

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0034:01 R32 roger that thank you very much sir we're investigating
that right now t w a eight hundred center t w a eight
zero zero if you hear center ident

0034:11 AZA609 and six oh nine could you say again the frequency
please

0034:14 R32 virgin nine one two five point seven good day

0034:20 R32 jet express ah eighteen descend and maintain one one
thousand expedite down

0034:24 JEX18 expedite to one one ah jet express eighteen

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