

DOCKET NO. SA-516

APPENDIX T

**NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC**

**INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT
NYANG MAJ. MICHAEL WEISS
JANUARY 11, 1997
(25 pages)**

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BEFORE THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20594

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IN THE MATTER OF TWA FLIGHT :
800; INTERVIEW OF: :
MAJ. MICHAEL WEISS. :
- - - - - X

TAPE TRANSCRIPTION

- The above entitled matter came on for interview pursuant to notice before NORM WIEMEYER, NTSB Official, at the New York Air National Facilities in Westhampton Beach, New York, on January 11, 1997.

1 APPEARANCES:

2

3 NORM WIEMEYER

4 NTSB Official

5

6 TERRY STACEY

7 Trans World Airlines Representative

8

9 LOU BURNS

10 Air Line Pilots Association

11

12 SCOTT METCALF

13 Federal Bureau of Investigation

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15 AL CLEMENS

16 Federal Aviation Administration

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I N D E X

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WITNESS:

MAJ. MICHAEL WEISS/Evaluator Pilot, 102nd Rescue Squadron, Air Force National Guard.

(Tape 2, Side A, first interview.)

(No exhibits were presented or accepted into evidence at or as a result of this interview.)

1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 MR. WIEMEYER: For the purposes of the tape,
3 if you would please identify yourself; give us your
4 full name and spell your last name, please.

5 MAJ. WEISS: My name is Maj. Mike Weiss,
6 W-E-I-S-S.

7 MR. WIEMEYER: And could you give us an
8 address?

9 MAJ. WEISS: I reside at 36 Vale [phonetic
10 sp.] Avenue in E. Quogue, New York.

11 MR. WIEMEYER: Okay. And what is your
12 position with the Air National Guard?

13 MAJ. WEISS: I'm a full-time evaluator pilot
14 here at the -- at the 102nd Rescue Squadron.

15 MR. WIEMEYER: Are you a regular Air Force?
16 Or are you National Guard?

17 MAJ. WEISS: I am AGR green card National
18 Guard Air Force pilot.

19 MR. WIEMEYER: Okay. And what was your
20 involvement surrounding the events of the loss of TWA
21 Flight 800?

22 MAJ. WEISS: We were at a -- a training line.
23 I was an instructor pilot that night. And we were just
24 flying a routine training sortie.

25 MR. WIEMEYER: Okay. Where were you located

1 from this facility?

2 MAJ. WEISS: At the time of the incident?

3 MR. WIEMEYER: Right.

4 MAJ. WEISS: We were approximately on 1-8-0
5 radio at the 12 DME off the Hampton vortex.

6 MR. WIEMEYER: Okay. Where would you put
7 that -- where would that put you from where the
8 incident took place?

9 MAJ. WEISS: Approximately north -- north and
10 east at about 13 miles from the incident.

11 MR. WIEMEYER: Okay. And would you just
12 describe what took place?

13 MAJ. WEISS: Well, we were out in the -- what
14 we call the Jaws Water Training Area at that radio DME
15 that I just described. And we were engaging in rescue
16 patterns simulating survivor in the water. We'd just
17 run our search -- pre-search checklists. We were
18 preparing to basically do several sector searches,
19 followed by some drops of flares and smokes which we
20 simulate as -- as bundles -- rescue bundles and life
21 rafts.

22 And we were doing this at approximately 1,000
23 feet AGL, which is typical for that kind of maneuver.
24 And at this point we're at the heading of about 1-8-0
25 with the Long Island coast directly behind us, and

1 basically facing the ocean into Whiskey 105.

2 And about the 2-quad high position the crew
3 and my's attention was diverted by a -- a flash of
4 light, which we all turned to look at. And we observed
5 a very large fireball cascading from several thousand
6 feet above us and straight down vertically to the ocean
7 surface.

8 It -- we were all astounded. We basically
9 turned to a heading of about 2-3-0 southwest, and
10 proceeded -- that we were configured at 150 knots and
11 about 50 percent flaps -- and proceeded to this -- to
12 this flame of light. And we wanted to find out what in
13 the world that was.

14 And I'm sure in the cockpit we were wondering
15 how thing -- you know, this could possibly be. Perhaps
16 a mid-air. And I believe I notified tower -- the
17 rescue tower here that we were proceeding to some
18 explosion of light out in the ocean, and we would
19 report when we figure out what it is.

20 And initially, the crew was thinking that it
21 was about, maybe, five or 6,000 feet about us and maybe
22 five, six miles away. However, the closer we got we
23 realized that it was much further away -- it turned out
24 to be about 13 miles away.

25 And, like I said, we were watching what

1 seemed to appear to be white. It was very hazy -- it
2 wasn't a hazy. It was a -- the humid haze, with
3 probably maybe 10 miles of visibility. Summer.
4 Relatively clear with some streaky cloud decks around.
5 And there was an orange pinkish cascade of white kind
6 of descending vertically.

7 And then, as we were -- the closer we got we
8 could see black smoke billowing straight up. A very
9 dense black smoke.

10 And, once again, we were trying to figure out
11 what -- what are you -- what this could be. And with
12 all the black smoke maybe we were about five miles at
13 this point. We were thinking maybe it was an oil
14 tanker going into or out of New York harbor, because of
15 the thick, black smoke coming out.

16 And -- but we still at this point didn't know
17 what it was. We weren't really talking to anybody
18 except people in the -- on the crew here. And then as
19 we -- we started -- we approached maybe two miles away
20 our Jolly helicopter who was -- obviously they were
21 shooting an approach here at Kabresky [phonetic sp.].
22 They had witnessed this.

23 They proceeded out to the area. They arrived
24 there -- I don't know -- 30 seconds, a minute before we
25 did. And they were in closer. And they said to stay

1 away; there's still debris falling from the sky over
2 this location.

3 We proceeded probably to maneuver north and
4 west around -- which would be upwind. The winds were
5 pretty light out of the southwest, west. Like I said,
6 it was calm ocean, calm winds. And, you know, at this
7 point I guess the sun had already went below the
8 horizon but there was still enough nautical twilight to
9 visually see fairly well what was going on.

10 And the pilot maneuvered within a mile of the
11 -- of this -- what now appeared to be a burning
12 volcanoish-looking black smoke with flames right there
13 on the surface of the -- of the ocean, which we had all
14 estimated about a football field in size -- and this,
15 you know, calm water all around it.

16 And we maneuvered around that and -- still at
17 this point not knowing what -- what it could be.
18 Except I -- I was thinking more and more of this as an
19 oil tanker because of the black smoke. And we --
20 this -- we got southwest about a mile, three-quarters
21 of a mile and I looked off to the right wing and saw an
22 area about a half mile off the right wing tip of
23 disturbed water; like a whitish block of water in this,
24 you know, aquamarine colored ocean.

25 And I told the left-seater, let's -- let's

1 fly over here. There's something over here doesn't
2 look right. And we flew right over it; probably about
3 500 feet this time. We try to keep some altitude
4 separation between the helicopter and us. And we flew
5 over this whitish area -- like I said, now only about a
6 half mile away.

7 And we flew directly over it. And I looked
8 out and I could see in this whitish area -- this looked
9 like a bunch of disturbed water. From 500 feet I
10 couldn't really discern any -- anything except
11 disturbed water in, like, an oval shape. And there
12 were evacuation slides symmetrically fore and aft on
13 this that were, like, semi-inflated.

14 And at this point it looked to me -- I said,
15 this has got to be a passenger jetliner crash here.
16 And I told the Jolly, I said -- helicopter, I said, get
17 over here. I said, I think we have some -- some
18 jetliner debris. Let's -- let's check this out.

19 And then simultaneously we called Kabresky
20 Tower. And I told -- I think -- I think Frank Murphy
21 [phonetic sp.] was in the tower. I -- I told him to
22 call New York approach; tell them that we're over what
23 appears to be a jetliner crash, and to see if they lost
24 anything. And we also called Coast Guard Moriches and
25 told them exactly the same thing; to get surface

1 vessels out here as soon as possible.

2 Now, we caught -- we saw the flash of light
3 I'm saying about -- 8:00 -- 8:35 local and this is now
4 about 8:40 to 8:45, what I'm describing to you now with
5 the radio calls. And I guess the coast -- the Coast
6 Guard Moriches asked us if we thought there were any
7 survivors. And, of course, we gave them the locations.
8 We had marked everything that we saw in our GPS and our
9 SCNS INS. And we had marked everything.

10 I had told the radio operation and the
11 navigator to start documenting everything that we see.
12 Go ahead and mark in -- and our command the position
13 and what it was, 'cause it was getting dark and we -- I
14 was worried about losing this -- this entire scene with
15 darkness.

16 But, getting back to the Coast Guard, they
17 said, are there any survivors. And I said, based on,
18 you know, the impact and what I see in the water I said
19 I highly doubt there's any survivors here. I said, get
20 surface vessels out here and try to, you know,
21 consolidate the SAR scene here and pick up whatever's
22 floating in the water.

23 Meantime the Jolly is down in the hover -- I
24 don't know what he's at -- 40 feet, 25 feet. And they
25 could see they said in that area that we had sent them

1 to bodies and debris floating in the water. So, they
2 were basically saying, we're going to be around here
3 looking for survivors.

4 And our -- but at -- at this point we --
5 there wasn't -- there wasn't too much for us to do. We
6 asked the -- the Jolly if they want any -- you know,
7 how they're doing on gas. If you want -- if you want
8 us to refuel you folks. And they said they were fine
9 on gas.

10 And, of course, we were talking with our
11 command post here. And they decided to recall the
12 Jolly back here to Kabresky because we had a more
13 qualified crew back here to perform the nighttime
14 version of the mission. They wanted a -- basically to
15 exchange Fritz Meyer with Mike Noyes, who is NVG night
16 qualified, and also throw on some PJs on board who, you
17 know, could actually dive into the water and pick up
18 any survivors.

19 So, at that point we kind of climbed up a
20 little bit; a couple thousand feet. We asked Tower to
21 keep traffic out of the area until the Coast Guard
22 could come on scene and take the on-scene command role.
23 And probably from about -- I -- I believe I -- I
24 remember seeing a small civilian airplane that I knew
25 it probably some guy just checking out what was going

1 on there. I remember trying -- I told Tower to, see if
2 you can get this guy out of here, and to -- you know,
3 to declare a disaster area. Just keep everybody out.

4 And probably from about 9:00-ish to maybe
5 9:15 we were by ourselves out there. Until I think a
6 -- a Falcon jet -- a Coast Guard Falcon jet from Otis
7 showed up and -- wherever he was based -- up in
8 Massachusetts. And kind of -- we were relaying a lot
9 of this information; you know, what happened, when it
10 happened, give me the coordinates. We were passing all
11 this information to command post, to the -- the Falcon
12 jet, to Coast Guard Moriches, and, of course, back to
13 our command post here.

14 And then I guess we -- I think we climbed up
15 maybe to 3,500 feet to kind of -- just because other --
16 too much other aircraft were getting in the -- in the
17 area. I wasn't sure if there was a Suffolk County
18 police helicopter, but it did seem like there was some
19 more assets in the air. We were told some ships
20 were -- would -- would be on the way from Moriches. It
21 seemed like a lot of fishing vessels were starting to
22 converge on the area.

23 And this -- by this time it was very, very
24 dark. And I remember talking to this -- some -- I -- I
25 can't remember who -- some Coast Guard guy about that

1 we had some flares on board and we can provide
2 illumination, if you want. You know, it'd give you
3 about three to four minutes of -- of illumination over
4 a several square mile area.

5 And initially I believed we dropped maybe six
6 or seven flares -- that's all we had on board. And we
7 -- we pretty much provided a comm leap -- a comm link
8 we were getting lowish on fuel. And I believe we -- we
9 signed off with the Coast Guard at that point and said
10 we're going to back to Kabresky to get more gas and
11 we'll get more flares and -- and just stand by.

12 And at this point we came back here, about
13 10:30 at night and we're met by I guess members of the
14 media, our people, Suffolk County police. And we're --
15 basically told us to stand by. There's going to put
16 max gas on the airplane. They went and got maximum
17 flares that they could find in storage.

18 And then I -- I'm trying to remember if we
19 went back out around midnight. And then we landed at
20 3:30. But we were able to drop about -- a total of 79
21 flares from midnight to about 3:30 to help assist the
22 Coast Guard and the Navy -- whoever was out there with
23 the search/recovery effort.

24 And came in at 3:30 and talked with some FBI
25 folks and a few other officials -- I can't remember

1 right now. And pretty much did that 'til about 5:30 in
2 the morning and then -- then went home. So --

3 MR. WIEMEYER: Okay. Did you formally or
4 informally extend the time that you were orbiting the
5 area out there? Again, you were -- did you assume the
6 role as on-scene commander?

7 MAJ. WEISS: We did initially.

8 MR. WIEMEYER: Okay. During that period of
9 time did you have any radio conversations with the Navy
10 P-3?

11 MAJ. WEISS: We may have. I had -- I know I
12 had the radio operation talking with some people who
13 were trying to divide up the radio duties. But I -- I
14 don't know for sure if I was -- if we were, you know,
15 in contact with the P-3.

16 MR. WIEMEYER: Okay. You described seeing
17 this area of disturbed water and then the green one.
18 Where were you from that at -- at the time that you saw
19 that? What -- what were you orbiting at that time?

20 MAJ. WEISS: Well, we were orbiting, like I
21 said, about three-quarters to a mile southwest of the
22 large burning area of dense smoke and flames. So, this
23 thing -- that -- that was on our left wing tip.

24 This area of disturbed water was at our right
25 wing tip. So, perhaps that was a mile or mile and a

1 half from the burning area to this disturbed area of
2 water. I mean about a mile and a half.

3 MR. WIEMEYER: Other than the life rafts, or
4 slides, that you described, do you recall any other
5 specific pieces of debris that you --

6 MAJ. WEISS: Yeah.

7 MR. WIEMEYER: -- could identify?

8 MAJ. WEISS: We also saw -- I remember this
9 now -- a -- after we saw that debris field and we
10 marked it -- we -- with a data marker buoy, there was
11 maybe a half mile due east of that -- this area of
12 disturbed water a -- a life raft. It looked to be
13 about a 20-man life raft. That was inflated.

14 We -- we dropped a flare right next to that.
15 And as the -- we couldn't see anything. This -- this
16 was getting even darker. We could see the -- we could
17 see the life raft. And I remember asking the Jolly to
18 check out, this -- this siting also to see if there's
19 anybody in -- in the -- in the life raft. And they
20 said -- I don't know, I -- obviously, they -- they
21 didn't find anybody.

22 But I remember that was the only other piece
23 of debris that I could discern as -- you know, as
24 something.

25 MR. WIEMEYER: Okay. You didn't see anything

1 that resembled wing tips, or anything along that --

2 MAJ. WEISS: No pieces of the airplane. Just
3 evacuation slides and the life raft.

4 MR. WIEMEYER: In your view of the debris
5 coming down and the fire and all that, can you give me
6 some ideas of color and movement? Things like that.

7 MAJ. WEISS: Well, from what -- what I saw
8 was I would say, orange-pink -- just amazingly wide and
9 long trail of flame. It must've -- 'cause it must've
10 been eight to 10,000 feet in length, I'm -- in
11 retrospect. Just care -- you know, where we were it --
12 it was -- it appeared to us just straight vertical.

13 We had no -- because of our position out
14 there in the water we no -- no parabolic descent
15 pattern. It just seemed to come -- be coming straight
16 down from our position. And, you know, you could
17 almost just see the light -- you know, the light -- the
18 lights kind of illuminate as they were descending. And
19 you could see orange and pink with I guess decks of
20 cloud making it look like it was, you know, moving,
21 flickering all the way down to the surface.

22 MR. WIEMEYER: Did you see anything that
23 could -- you would describe as approaching the area,
24 rather than leaving it prior to the time you saw the
25 fireball? Smoke trails? Vapor trails? Anything --

1 MAJ. WEISS: No.

2 MR. WIEMEYER: -- like that?

3 MAJ. WEISS: No. We -- we had cleared the
4 area 360 when we began our search pattern, which we
5 normally do. And did -- didn't see anything that
6 resembled any -- any smoke trails, or anything else.

7 MR. WIEMEYER: Do you recall any specific --
8 or any -- pose the -- do you recall a boat arriving on
9 the scene shortly after you arrived that would look
10 like a work boat? About a 30 to 40-footer?

11 MAJ. WEISS: Shortly after our aircraft
12 arrived on-scene --

13 MR. WIEMEYER: Right.

14 MAJ. WEISS: -- the incident? No. I
15 don't -- I don't recall -- recall that.

16 I don't recall any boats until it got to well
17 after dark.

18 MR. WIEMEYER: Okay. Did the Coast Guard
19 bring some helicopters down there eventually?

20 MAJ. WEISS: Yeah. I think there were -- I
21 think there were some Dauphins that came in later on.
22 Like I said, probably about 9:30-ish.

23 MR. WIEMEYER: Okay. The Guard only had the
24 one helicopter out there?

25 MAJ. WEISS: Right.

1 MR. WIEMEYER: Okay. I don't have any
2 further questions at this time.

3 I'd like to shift and go around the room.

4 MR. BURNS: Lou Burns. I have no questions.

5 MR. WIEMEYER: Okay.

6 MR. CLEMENS: Al Clemens, for the FAA. You
7 say the wind was out of the southwest or west. Down by
8 the condition of the water could you estimate the
9 velocity of the winds?

10 MAJ. WEISS: I -- I think we looked down at
11 the SCNS readout and I -- I'm sure it was less than 10
12 knots.

13 MR. CLEMENS: Less than 10 knots.

14 MAJ. WEISS: We dropped a smoke in the water
15 for our search pattern and it was going straight up.
16 It -- it was very, very light. Light winds.

17 MR. CLEMENS: Any indication of the current
18 in direction?

19 MAJ. WEISS: I -- we didn't have any
20 indication of that.

21 MR. CLEMENS: You say the water was
22 disturbed. How do you mean disturbed? Was it rough,
23 as rough is by wind? Or was it disturbed by something
24 else?

25 MAJ. WEISS: It -- it -- it was -- I don't

1 know what the best way to describe it is. In the
2 aftermath of a -- of a splash; like when you see with
3 -- when they're in the pool. A diver going in through
4 the water and then -- and just the bubbles coming up
5 underneath, and kind of a churned up action underneath.
6 A whitish air bubbles --

7 MR. CLEMENS: Right. Did your aircraft have
8 any contact with a -- any other military -- a P-3?
9 Or --

10 MAJ. WEISS: I guess --

11 MR. CLEMENS: -- like --

12 MAJ. WEISS: I know we were talking with some
13 aircraft -- yeah. I remember the -- the Coast Guard
14 Falcon jet coming in there. And I think we were try --
15 we heard other aircraft, and we were just kind of
16 trying to find out where they were and what altitude.
17 And just kind of deconflict.

18 I know we climbed up above everybody. You
19 know, like I said, about 3,500 feet to stay away. But
20 I -- I do remember the Coast Guard Falcon jets well.
21 And I remember talking with some other call signs.

22 But I -- offhand I -- I don't recall.

23 MR. CLEMENS: The raft and slide that you
24 observed, did they seem to be attached to anything?

25 MAJ. WEISS: No. No, they were just semi-

1 inflated. They appeared to be -- because they were
2 kind of light greenish in color, probably about a foot
3 or two below the surface of the ocean. And they were
4 -- they were inflated, but that would -- you wouldn't
5 call it full inflation. They were just out
6 horizontally prostrate. And they did -- they appear to
7 be, like, semi-inflated.

8 MR. CLEMENS: Was that the same condition of
9 the life raft that you observed at the scene?

10 MAJ. WEISS: That seemed to be more inflated.
11 I've been trying to remember now if a portion of -- of
12 the life raft was inflated and some of it was deflated.
13 But I -- I do recall seeing a life raft.

14 MR. CLEMENS: I have no other questions.
15 Thank you.

16 MR. WIEMEYER: Okay.

17 MR. STACEY: Mike, Terry Stacey, with TWA.
18 Do you have any kind of radar or infrared equipment on
19 the C-130?

20 MAJ. WEISS: We have a weather radar, ANPN-
21 59. But no -- no infrared capability.

22 MR. STACEY: That's all I have. Thank you.

23 MR. WIEMEYER: A couple of follow-ups, if you
24 don't mind, Mike.

25 MAJ. WEISS: Sure.

1 MR. WIEMEYER: Do you have any paper records
2 that remain that were stored and filed? Or anything
3 with regards to geographic locations that were taken
4 from your navigational equipment and GPS, and stuff,
5 during the time that you were on -- out there?

6 MAJ. WEISS: I don't -- I don't know. I
7 don't believe I kept any of my notes. I -- I know I
8 wrote some after action reports the day --

9 MR. WIEMEYER: Uh-huh.

10 MAJ. WEISS: -- after it happened. And then,
11 since then I have written down, you know, detailed
12 notes of -- of my recollections. But as far as that
13 day I don't know if the navigator or radio operation
14 kept any logs.

15 I would say -- I think the radio operator
16 would probably -- would've had a log.

17 MR. WIEMEYER: But does the Guard require
18 that you file any kind of a report -- an incident
19 report, or whatever you call it, within your
20 organization?

21 MAJ. WEISS: Well, we would -- if -- if it
22 affected our aircraft we would. We have a variety of
23 forms to fill out; i.e., I do recall typing something
24 up on my E-mail and then downloading it. And I -- I
25 believe we -- we sent it off, either in the -- I think

1 the Guard or somebody down at Air Combat Command.
2 Or -- I'd have to research it.

3 But I -- I -- we did write down a report of
4 what we did and what had happened. And we sent it off
5 a day or two after the --

6 MR. WIEMEYER: Like a mission report or
7 something --

8 MAJ. WEISS: Yeah.

9 MR. WIEMEYER: -- like that?

10 MAJ. WEISS: Yeah.

11 MR. WIEMEYER: Would you mind trying to
12 retrieve that for us when you get an opportunity? I'll
13 give you a way to --

14 MAJ. WEISS: Sure.

15 MR. WIEMEYER: -- to reach me.

16 I don't have any further questions. I
17 certainly appreciate your assistance on this.

18 Does anybody else have anything else before
19 we shut down?

20 (No response.)

21 MR. WIEMEYER: Thank you very much, sir.

22 MAJ. WEISS: Okay. Thank you.

23 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded [no
24 time noted.])

25

To: D HILL@CC@106RG, D CANNET@DO@106RG
T ELEFTERION@DO@106RG, K GOELDNER@DO@106RG
R LANDSIEDEL@DO@106RG, R STACK@DO@106RG

Bcc:
From: M WEISS@DO@106RG
Subject: TWA FLT 800
Date: Friday, July 19, 1996 7:30:15 EDT
Attach:
Certify: N
Forwarded by: M WEISS@DO@106RG

Forwarded to: SMTP[<mackenzd@cads-1.littlerock.af.mil>]
cc:
Forwarded date: Friday, January 10, 1997 10:18:35 EST
Comments by: M WEISS@DO@106RG
Comments:

I finally got this E-mail high on the "to-do" list. I know you wanted some info concerning our units participation in TWA 800. This tragedy does not want to go away. In fact, our crew has another meeting with the NTSB this week.

I'm forwarding you one of my original after-action reports as well as giving you some additional background. On that particular evening, we were scheduled for a typical night profile: accomplish one or two NVG low level routes; one route to a NVG refueling with an H-60 and one to a CARP SATB-P op. In addition, we would squeeze in some max efforts and rescue events in the allotted 3 hour sortie. We took off from Gabreski (KFOK) Airport at 2000L and since it still light (being the middle of the summer) we began the profile with a PJ HALO deployment overhead the field at 8000 MSL. The weather was relatively clear with scattered decks to 10000 MSL and a hazy humid 15 miles of visibility. I was the IP in the right seat as our left seater (Col Stratemeier) was non-current for several rescue events. Following the drop at 2020L, we proceeded to our water training area (approx. 15 nm SE of Gabreski) to due a navigator search pattern on the SCNS followed by a pilot directed simulated MA 1/2 pattern and delivery into the ocean. The MA-1/2 kit is either a 5 bundle 7-man or 20-man life raft and survival equipment all tied together with four 210 ft lengths of cord. The crew had reach the center /datum point of the search and had just completed the pre-search and rescue airdrop checklist around 2035L. The aircraft was on a 180 heading approx 12 MN's south of the HTO VORTAC facing the W-105 area with the southern Long Island coast directly behind us. At that moment, our attention was diverted by a large flash of light from the 1 o'clock high position. We all looked to observe a huge blazing fire-ball descending from well above us to the ocean surface several miles away. We turned to a heading of 230 and proceeded directly to this still descending long vertical trail of flaming orange-pink light perhaps 6000 ft long. WE were already configured with flaps 50% and 150 KIAS for the search pattern and we continued in this configuration to the light to which we initially estimated as 5 nm away. We wondered what we were witnessing; was it a mid-air between 2 aircraft? a meteor? a burning piece of satellite space debris. As we proceeded closer to this spectacle which now appeared further than 5 nm (we now know it was 13 miles from our initial landing) we could see tremendous amounts of dense black smoke emanating from the ocean surface and rising perhaps 2000 ft MSL while intermixed with the orange-pink flame trail still higher than that (the original flame trail must have exceeded 8000-10000 ft in length). At this point I was thinking that maybe a large oil freighter going into or out of NY harbor had blown to

smithereens. We approached what now appeared to be a football field size area of dense burning smoke and flames rising above a serene ocean surface. It was very neat and compact almost like a volcano erupting from a small point below the ocean surface. At about a distance of 2 nm's, we got a radio

call from Jolly 14, our H-60 helicopter who we would refuel later that night. Jolly 14 was shooting a practice ILS approach to runway 23 at Gabreski and had seen the explosion of light. They broke off the approach and proceeded to the scene and arrived at the burning smoke field about 30 seconds prior to us. The Jolly pilot warned us to watch out for falling debris which apparently was still descending from altitude from his vantage point. We then maneuvered to about 3/4 of a mile upwind and around the smoke field to the west. The local time was approx 2040L and the civil twilight was fast coming to a end although we still had sufficient light to observe with detail. About 1/2 mile southwest with the smoke filed on the left wingtip, I observed an separate small area of disturbed whitish water in the calm aqua ocean at the 2 o'clock position 1/2 mile away and directed the aircraft over there to make an ID. At 500 MSL we observed a compact area of disturbed water with 2 sets of semi-inflated (salt water activated?) evacuation slides symmetrically floating fore and aft of this oval shaped area of whitish water. At this point the light bulb turned on that this was in-fact a civilian jet liner crash. We told the Jolly to check this out. Jolly 14 came over in a hover and could see debris and bodies floating on the surface. We immediately notified Gabreski Airport of our revelation and asked them to notify NY Approach of the situation and declare the area a disaster area to keep unauthorized civilian planes away from the SAR scene. We also called Coast Guard Moriches and told them to send out search vessels ASAP. We would act as the on-scene commander until relieved by the Coast Guard. They asked if there were any survivors and based on the Jolly hovering 40 ft over the crash site and viewing the carnage, I answered probably not and that we would mark and consolidate the SAR scene as it was now almost completely dark so that search vessels could proceed with accurate locations to start picking up the floating debris and bodies. We spent the next hour using the GPS and SCNS to mark sightings. We dropped floatable data marker buoys to float along with the current to help the Coast Guard/Navy search throughout the night. We orbited on scene, provided com-link with a variety of flying assets to ground agencies and dropped illumination flares for several hours to assist to surface vessels in their recovery operations. In the final analysis, we were able to use our combat rescue skills and equipment to effect one of worst civilian SAR operations in recent memory. Our efforts allowed the Navy to successful locate the vast majority of the aircraft wreckage and the passengers of TWA 800.

----- [Original Message] -----

Gentlemen,

As supervisors, I thought you might like to know of the outstanding performance displayed by the crew members of KING 74 the evening of this unfortunate tragic event. The crew consisted of the following guardsmen: Flight Engineer TSgt Mike Spindler (18 crew day), Loadmaster SSgt Tony Ramos (18 crew day), Radio Operator SSgt Charlie Ramirez (18 crew day) Navigator Capt Charles Palmer (16 crew day) as well as Col Stratemeier and myself. This routine training line to get Col Strat recurrent turned into one of the most amazing missions of our careers. The mission consisted of 2 sorties totaling 4.4 hrs (felt like 14 hrs) of flying time. Over the course of the evening, KING 74 dropped 1 Data Marker Buoy, 1 MK-6, approx 89 illumination flares and provided SAR location and command and control between the Coast Guard, surface vessels, airborne assets and our Command Post. The professionalism of our guardsmen was outstanding especially during the initial hour of the SAR event. Their willingness to extend their crew days to assist the SAR effort was noteworthy. I think medal consideration for these guardsmen is an option. Sgt Ramirez efforts to assist the loadmaster

in deploying all those flares was physically demanding and beyond his normal duties. At least special Commander recognition would be called for. One final note: the professionalism of the whole 106th was incredible as people poured in all night long (some after performing their normal work day) to assist the launch of aircraft and crews throughout the night. My hat is off to them.