Helping the other victims[1] of September 11: Gander uses multiple EOCs to deal with 38 diverted flights

By T. Joseph Scanlon

On September 11, 2001, after seeing three hijacked jets turned into missiles and a fourth crash in Pennsylvania, the United States ordered all U.S.-registered aircraft to land at the nearest airport *and* closed its airspace. When the decision was made, hundreds of commercial flights were over the Pacific or Atlantic en route to North America. Some had sufficient fuel to turn back. Most needed a North American airport to take them, and that airport had to be in Canada. The Canadian government, its air traffic control system, and Canadian airports were presented with a *fait accompli*. They had to accept hundreds of aircraft knowing – given what had happened – that one or more of them might be carrying terrorists or be under terrorist control.

Worried about the possibility that some of these jets might attack major Canadian cities, the federal government ordered that they land at smaller communities along Canada's East Coast.

On the East Coast, two factors affected precisely where those jets landed – the jet stream and the weather. The jet stream was far south that day, so most flights made their North American landfall at Newfoundland rather than Labrador. That took them to St. John's, Gander, or Stephenville, Newfoundland, rather than Goose Bay, Labrador. Then a light drizzle and fog hit Newfoundland's West Coast, dropping visibility to a mile at Stephenville. Aircraft heading there had to pull up and land in St. John's or Gander or continue to Halifax, Nova Scotia, or Moncton, New Brunswick. On Canada's West Coast, there was little choice: if the planes were going to land in Canada, for the most part they would have to land in Vancouver.

As a result of all this, two Canadian cities – Halifax and Vancouver – received the most diverted flights on September 11. But when Gander's population – 10,347 – is considered, its intake was proportionally far greater. Gander took in 38 flights and 6,600 passengers, a 63 per cent increase in its population, compared to a two per cent increase in Halifax, less than a third of a one per cent increase for Vancouver. Even including nearby towns – Appleton, Gambo, Glenwood, Lewisporte, and Norris Arm – the Gander area's population is 18,882. That is still a 35 per cent increase.[2]

This article is about how Gander handled that situation. As will be shown, the community activated a number of emergency operations centres (EOCs) – and each ended up managing one aspect of the response. Though the airport was the key, the result was a coordinated system that ran smoothly without any single agency taking charge. This article describes how that system came about, why it worked, and how Gander avoided problems that often occur with multiple EOCs and emergent groups.

Literature

When a commercial flight has a seriously ill or unruly passenger, it notifies its company, and its company calls an airport service company, which makes whatever preparations are necessary. When the plane lands, the problem passenger is unloaded, the fuel tanks – if necessary – topped up, and the plane is on its way. The service company takes care of and pays for local arrangements, then bills the airline. Even when there is a mechanical failure, the process is much the same. The

1. The idea of calling the diverted passengers the 'other victims' was suggested by Henry Quarantelli.
2. Of the 6,600 passengers diverted to Gander, 536 stayed in the Salvation Army and Anglican summer camps, 713 in Lewisporte, 887 in Gambo, 155 in Norris Arm, 542 in Glenwood – a total of 2,833 – and the remaining 3,767 stayed in Gander. In addition to 25 American flights, Sabena, Aer Lingus, Lufthansa, Air Italia, Malev, Air France, British Airways, and Virgin Air all had flights diverted to Gander.

service company arranges a secure area – if the stop is a short one – or transportation and hotels – if the stop is likely to be longer. If necessary, the service company alerts Customs, Immigration, and other agencies. Once again, the service company pays the bills and later bills the airline. No matter what the cause – even severe weather – diversions are not seen as local, regional, or provincial emergencies.

Because diversions are routine, there appears to be no academic literature on the subject.[3] There is some literature on sheltering, but, for the most part, it deals with cases where those being sheltered are from the community itself or from communities nearby – in short, sheltering as a result of evacuations (Scanlon 1994a). Usually, most persons end up with friends, neighbours, or relatives (Dynes and Quarantelli 1980; Smith, Macauley, and associates 1980, p. 344). When 217,000 persons were evacuated from Mississauga, Ontario, after a chemical spill, only about five per cent ended up in shelters (Scanlon with Padgham 1980). That percentage is virtually identical to Xenia, Ohio, after a devastating tornado (Dynes and Quarantelli 1980, p. 344). A University of Toronto study showed that in Mississauga one-quarter of those evacuated stayed within five kilometers [ED.: three miles], 60 per cent within 10 kilometers [six miles], and 95 per cent within 100 kilometers [62 miles] of their homes (Burton, Victor, and Whyte 1981, pp. 9–18). The situation in Gander on September 11 was very different. None of the travellers had friends, neighbours, or relatives but came from hundreds if not thousands of kilometers away.

Two studies about sheltering relate to stranded travellers. The first describes stranded travellers in a rest stop along the Pennsylvania Turnpike in 1958 during a snow emergency. The second looks at travellers stranded when flash floods destroyed 25 bridges along the Trans-Canada Highway in Northern British Columbia (B.C.) in November 1987. But there were only 800 stranded travellers in Pennsylvania, 100 in B.C., both far less than the thousands stranded on September 11 – and in both cases the stranded travellers were in the area by choice, not in a location or even a country they had not intended to visit.

On March 19 and 20, 1958, a severe snowstorm forced approximately 800 travellers to take shelter at a rest stop along the Pennsylvania Turnpike for 24 to 36 hours. The group was heterogeneous except for a rather large group of young, healthy male truck drivers. Even in this brief period, some leaders emerged – and were accepted. Leadership came initially from a physician, but two U.S. Air Force officers and a salesman joined him.

The leaders focused on two things – controlling access to outside communications and making certain everyone knew what sustenance was available and that it was fairly distributed (Disaster Research Group 1958, p. 4; in later references, this study is called the DRG Snowstorm Study). They imposed a few rules. One was a ban of smoking necessitated by the poor ventilation (ibid., p. 12). Two persons were diabetics, and a number had suffered exposure – three physicians, two nurses, and two ambulance drivers, all stranded travellers, handled these (ibid., p. 13). One traveller had died while trying to reach the restaurant in the deep snow. His body was wrapped in blankets and left outside until removed by helicopter. Two Roman Catholic Nuns consoled his spouse.

In 1978, flash floods caused by sudden warm conditions caused severe damage along the Skeena River. Though Terrace was not flooded, water streaming down from the mountains created the breaks along the Trans-Canada Highway and the rail link between Terrace and the interior of Canada. The floods also broke the gas pipeline that provides natural gas to Terrace, the industrial centre of Kitimat, and the coastal town of Prince Rupert. Travellers were stranded all along the highway. One man had a broken neck: he had driven onto a bridge unaware the other end had collapsed. Helicopters rescued him and the other stranded travellers and flew them to Terrace. It would be months before some were able to return and retrieve their cars.

In one sense, the B.C. travellers were comparable to the travellers stranded on September 11. Only a handful had medical problems, but they had lost their transportation. But there was one major difference. No one saw these persons as anything but victims. No one thought that some of them might be terrorists. At first, they were put up in hotels, but later most were moved to a college dormitory. Since most had intended to head south to Lower British Columbia by ferry (there is a ferry at Prince Rupert), they had few resources to pay for alternative transportation (Scanlon with Taylor and Jarzab 1978). There is nothing in the study to suggest any leadership patterns emerged.

Three other items have relevance to September 11 and Gander. Two are studies of EOCs – emergency operations centres – and one relates to how Gander dealt with an earlier emergency. An unpublished paper by E. L. Quarantelli notes that, while EOCs are unquestionably of value, they often run into problems, among them overcrowding and the fact that it is not clear who is managing the EOC itself (Quarantelli 1972). He also found that, if an EOC becomes overcrowded there is a tendency for key players to go off

3. A search was made at the Disaster Research Center in Delaware, the Natural Hazards Research and Applications Information Center Information in Colorado, and at the library of the Emergency Management Australia Institute in Victoria. Only one article turned up. It was written after 9/11, and it was not based on research.

and make decisions outside the EOC. Scanlon identified the same problems in an article reviewing EOCs in Canadian incidents (Scanlon 1994b). Both noted the tendency for a number of agencies to have their own operations centre and that this can lead at best to a lack of coordination, at worst to conflict. Scanlon based his findings partly from a study of a fatal air crash that occurred in Gander in 1985. In that study, Carleton University's Emergency Communications Research Unit (ECRU) noted that the response was managed by what amounted to two EOCs, one at the crash site, one in a secure area of the airport (Emergency Communications Research Unit 1985). Once again, this is in sharp contrast to Gander, where there was coordination and consensus and divisions of responsibilities among the various EOCs, not conflict.

Gander's experience

Though Gander is a small town in Central Newfoundland, it is also an airport town – one of the main stopping points for military flights crossing the North Atlantic during the Second World War. It is still an important airport for private jets and visitors to its international transit lounge include persons such as George Bush, Sr., Oprah Winfrey, Tom Cruise, Greg Norman, and Tiger Woods. More significant, it is the first major airport on its side of the North Atlantic and, therefore, receives aircraft that get into trouble on the Great Circle Route. It is also the home of the Area Control Center for air traffic over the Western North Atlantic, monitoring flight separation as aircraft leave North America for Europe each evening and as flights arrive from Europe in the morning hours.

Gander thus sees itself as the aviation crossroads of North America, and its streets are named after aviation pioneers including John Alcock and Lieutenant Arthur Whitten Brown – who made the first nonstop aerial crossing of the Atlantic in 1919. Their feat is overshadowed by attention given to a man who flew the Atlantic eight years later, when it was not so unusual, Charles Lindbergh. There is a Lindbergh Street in Gander and one named after Amelia Earhart. Gander no longer handles regularly scheduled flights of major commercial airlines. It is accustomed to diversions, though not on the scale experienced on September 11.

Gander has had its share of local emergencies:

> On September 18, 1946, a Sabena Belgian aircraft crashed 22 miles southwest of Gander with 44 people on board. It was noon the next day before the wreckage was sighted and it was confirmed that there were 18 survivors. Because of the inaccessibility of the terrain, they did not make it to hospital for two more days, though a physician did treat them at the crash site.
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> On September 5, 1967, a Czechoslovakian airline crashed just past the end of the existing runway. Thirty-four of the 69 passengers survived, though many had to be transported to burn units in Halifax and Montreal.
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> On December 12, 1985, a U.S. charter aircraft crashed almost on takeoff. That took the lives of eight crew and 248 soldiers from the 101st Airborne.[4]

There is a monument to those soldiers at the crash site. There is also a show of appreciation from what was then Czechoslovakia – the Czech pavilion from Expo '67 was taken down and now forms part of the Gander Arts and Culture Centre.

More important, there is also a wealth of experience in Gander because many of those involved in the earlier crashes, especially the one in 1985, are still in town. The town, in other words, because of its history and its experience, has an airport and air crash subculture.[5] The importance of that history showed as soon as people in Gander heard about New York on September 11 – and became glued to CNN. Unlike others who watched in horror, many in Gander realized that their town was likely to be directly affected. Long before the Americans closed their air space, many in Gander began to prepare for the impact of such a shutdown – diversions to Gander. The EOCs at Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Gander, at the James Paton Hospital, at Gander airport, and at Gander town hall were all partially or completely activated prior to the closure of U.S. air space; and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) had already been asked to assist and had responded.

However, the situation that faced those responders on September 11 bore little resemblance to any of the situations described in the literature. The stranded travellers were strangers to Gander and to Newfoundland – many had to be shown a map so they knew where they were – and nothing had happened to them or their aircraft. They had been forced to seek refuge because of something that happened elsewhere and because a foreign government had shut down – without consultation – normal operations. Most important, instead of handling one or two diversions – something it was accustomed to – Gander airport found itself handling dozens of diverted flights and scores of diverted passengers. To do that, it needed assistance from the town, the hospital, the provincial government,

4. ECRU field researchers visited Gander on that occasion and produced a major study of the response to that crash (Emergency Communications Research Unit 1985). The study was also published as an appendix to the crash report by the Canadian Aviation Safety Board.
5. Anderson (1965) identified the concept of a disaster subculture in a study of a 1964 flood in Ohio. Perhaps the clearest description of a subculture can be found in the paper by Wenger and Weller (1973); see also Scanlon (1992a).

the private sector, social services, and voluntary agencies, as well as CFB Gander and the RCMP.

The first response came at CFB Gander, put on alert because of the terrorist threat. It opened its command post and increased perimeter security, though those actions were not connected with the possibility of flights being diverted to Gander. Next came the James Paton hospital: as a result of a call from Emergency Health Services in St. John's, it got ready to set up emergency hospitals.[6] Third to activate was the airport. Three staff members held a short meeting to discuss the possibility that Gander might receive extra flights if U.S. air space were to be closed – a decision not yet made. They decided that the tower would control part of the airport and direct incoming aircraft to appropriate parking spots and that one vehicle and one staff member of airport service staff would be assigned to act as the radio link between the tower and the ground staff. When there were concerns about widespread computer failures at the turn of the century, Gander had prepared to receive scores of aircraft and hold them until computers were again up and running. They had even prepared a parking plan for such an eventuality. Although no one could find that plan, the man who drew it up was one of the three at the meeting, and he recalled it well enough to use it on September 11. Right after that meeting, the airport activated its ECC and notified the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and the base. Both sent liaison officers.

After a call from the fire chief – someone at the airport called him – the town manager assembled some of those who staff its EOC. Soon the town, the base, the hospital and the airport all had their command posts operating, and they and other agencies – such as the provincial social services agency Human Resources and Employment (HR&E) – began to prepare for a mass invasion. All those EOCs were located and staffed according to well-established plans. The airport Emergency Control Center (ECC), for example, was in a secure area. Its members included not just airport staff but, as planned, representatives from the RCMP and CFB Gander. The town's EOC was in an upstairs committee room at town hall. Its members included not just town staff but also representatives from the James Paton Hospital, the Red Cross, NewTel Communications (telephone), and HR&E. The hospital's EOC was in an area away from normal patient traffic, the one at CFB in a secure area at the base, and the one at NewTel Communications in a secure area at its Gander offices.

Eventually, these various operations centres would each take on specific responsibilities. With RCMP and military assistance, the airport ECC dealt with the unloading of the flights and – along with Customs, Immigration, and other agencies – screened the passengers and cleared them for entry to Canada. The Red Cross assisted by Salvation Army volunteers registered the arrivals. Working with school bus drivers, the fire department looked after transportation. HR&E identified shelters, and the town EOC decided who would go where. The hospital provided health services to all the shelters, and the Salvation Army ran a central food and supply system. Their owners – church or service club members or school staff – ran the shelters. The telephone company provided extra telephones and other services as required.

Landing the aircraft

The first hijacked aircraft crashed into the north tower of the World Trade Center at 10:15 a.m. Gander time. (Gander is an hour and a half ahead of New York and half an hour ahead of Canada's Maritime Provinces.[7]) The second plane hit 18 minutes later at 10:33 a.m. Gander time. The United States Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) shut down U.S. airspace 37 minutes after that second crash – at 11:10 a.m. Gander time. Since the Area Control Center in Gander controls all traffic along the Western North Atlantic, it immediately began to communicate with U.S. aircraft, ordering the captains to land. It also contacted St. John's, Gander, Stephenville, and Goose Bay to see how many aircraft they could handle. Gander said it would handle as many as 50 flights. In fact it handled 38 and did this so efficiently that all landed on runway 22–04 coming straight in, turning off at exit Bravo, and heading to a parking spot.

Once the planes landed and were parked – and this meant using runway 13–31 and other areas as parking spots (13–31 was closed) – the pilots were told that everyone would have to remain on board. For some, that order would last well into the next day. The alternative would have been to allow 6,600 passengers and crew to flood into the terminal. Since it seemed more than possible there were terrorists on some flights, that was impractical. (The airport was also receiving 'delay' orders from the federal government: police and intelligence agencies were frantically reviewing passenger lists to see if there were suspects on any of the diverted aircraft.) The tension was heightened when the tower was unable to establish contact with five aircraft. Ground crews were instructed to plug his headset into

6. There are three 200-bed, fully-equipped emergency hospitals in Newfoundland, one in each part of the province. All three were used on September 11.
7. The unusual half-hour time difference means that all network radio and television programs are announced as, for example, '10 o'clock, 10:30 in Newfoundland.' It has led to the joke: 'The world will end tonight at midnight, 12:30 in Newfoundland.' A look at a globe explains the time difference. Newfoundland stretches well out from the Canadian mainland. From St. John's harbor – St. John's is the capital and is on the East Coast – the nearest point of land is Ireland.

each aircraft and try to reach the captains. That eased the tension: all were on the wrong frequency.

It appears that many if not most pilots did not tell their passengers exactly why they were being diverted until after they landed. One even said there had been a computer malfunction in the control system in New York City. When the first passenger off that aircraft saw CNN, he asked someone what movie it was. Others were more forthcoming:

> Our captain was as upfront as he could be with us from the beginning. After changing course, descending altitude and lowering the landing gear (to expend fuel) he came over the intercom and said: "I have two things to tell you folks, then I have to get back to work. First of all, we have a very healthy airplane. (That was a relief.) And, secondly, there has been an incident in the United States and all U.S. airspace is closed. I have been instructed to land in Gander, Newfoundland. Once we are settled on the ground, I will let you know more." Once we landed and taxied to our position, he came back on the system and told us about the four planes crashing. Within about 30 minutes of landing (I think) he got the Canadian Broadcasting Network, and we listened to that through the night.[8]

A passenger on another plane – flying from Rome to Philadelphia – gave a similar account:

> ... we were told that the Philadelphia airport had been closed and that we would be diverted to Newfoundland, Canada. Some of us believed it was due to bad weather; however, the Captain never really expounded on the reason. I had a window seat and as we approached the runway, I became alarmed because I could see no runway, only water and trees. I said to my husband, "Where are we going to land? There is no runway!" The descent was quick and quite short. Obviously it was because the runway was filled with 37 other planes! Once we landed, the captain came on the loudspeaker and told us the United States had been struck by terrorists and the Twin Tower Buildings in New York were totally destroyed and that there had been two other plane crashes, one at the Pentagon, and one in Pennsylvania. (This plane was headed to Pennsylvania.)

On the ground

On the ground, most of the passengers settled into their seats and tried to make themselves as comfortable as possible, but there were some concerns – diabetic problems and problems with other medication, smoker problems (Nicorettes were supplied), water problems, stress problems, and – on one aircraft – drinking problems. (Two passengers were taken to the police lockup to sober up.) At first, an ambulance responded to each medical call, but eventually the EOC at the James Paton hospital decided to send a team to the airport. Airport staff emptied toilets and provided water and eventually snacks. Every time a captain made a request, steps had to be moved to that aircraft.

In most cases, medication could be identified and supplied, though sometimes prescriptions written in Europe had to be puzzled out. When one passenger's description of his medication could not be understood, airport staff opened the cargo hold and located his baggage. Once the prescription was located, the medication was identified. All medication was cleared by a physician and delivered personally to the passenger. Servicing the planes had to be done by persons with clearance to work airside or persons accompanied by those with passes. That was fine for the volunteer firefighters – they back up the airport fire department – but not for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). There is no RCMP airport detachment, so RCMP had to be accompanied airside. So did the bus drivers who were brought in to move passengers from the parked aircraft to the terminal. The buses also had to be searched and cleared.

While the passengers were waiting, the town was making preparations. Gander has no community social services, so HR&E ran the hunt for shelters. It had previously identified possible shelters for up to 1,500 evacuees (presumably from nearby towns). Now it had to find places for four times that number. Its staff began contacting churches and schools and other facilities not only in Gander but also in nearby towns. It was flooded by calls from scores of local residents willing to assist.

There was, however, a major problem. Members of the Newfoundland Association of Public Employees (NAPE) were on strike. Not only were schools not being fully serviced, but also there were pickets at all schools. The only local transportation – school buses – was not available. The drivers were members of NAPE. Even if a way could be found to transport passengers to schools, they would have to cross picket lines. (Looking after them once they reached the schools was less of a problem: teachers were not on strike.) After some informal contacts – some drivers said they wanted to help – the union decided that the situation was an emergency. It announced that the strike would continue but that strikers would picket only the school board offices. More important, the striking drivers would assist. The drivers would not end their strike but would work for no pay.

8. This quote from a passenger, like all other quotes from passengers, was obtained on the understanding that no individual would be identified. I would, however, like to thank the scores of passengers, including some personal friends, who were kind enough to answer my questions.

Although provincial HR&E was identifying what shelters were available, the town determined where to send people. It decided that it would start with locations in Gander then, if necessary, use smaller communities. It also decided that it would try to keep the passengers from each flight together. That would make it easier when they departed. At the request of the airport ECC, the town told hotels to give priority to crew. When some hotels queried this decision – they had already accepted bookings – the town declared, after consulting the airport again, a local state of local emergency and ordered the hotels in writing to cooperate.[9] (Passengers from two flights were sent to a hotel, though many slept on cots.)

The town asked the local Red Cross to take over Registration and Inquiry (R&I). By then, a local Salvation Army officer had realized what was happening, met the mayor, and had been invited to join the town EOC. When the Red Cross needed volunteers to assist with R&I, he passed that request to Army regional headquarters. Soon there were scores of Army volunteers. The Red Cross had registration forms copied and held a short training course to show volunteers how to fill them out. They had considered doing R&I in town, then decided to do it at the airport. With the help of airport staff, tables were set up in the international lounge, where transit passengers wait while a flight is being serviced. No passenger would leave the secure area until he or she was registered and checked against a passport. (The passport check ensured that the registration records would match the Customs forms.) Even while the Red Cross was arranging R&I, the Salvation Army contacted local suppliers and the airport caterers and arranged for hot food to be served as passengers came through the lounge. It also arranged for toiletries.

The town took two other steps. It asked the fire chief to move his department's mobile command van to the airport to manage transportation. (The chief became known humorously as the 'Minister of Transportation.') It asked the fire inspector – the town's emergency planner – to be town liaison to the airport ECC. The town felt it was crucial to have accurate and up-to-date information about which flights were being unloaded and how many passengers were on those flights. By then, the hospital had also established a command center at the airport to take care of the frequent requests for medication or medical assistance. While all this was happening, the passengers – on orders from Transport Canada – were still sitting in their aircraft. Concerned about the possibility that some flights were carrying terrorists, the federal government delayed while it considered how the flights should be handled.

Unloading the passengers

When the airport was ready to start unloading passengers, it began with the flights parked closest to the airport. As passengers came off their planes, they walked through a cordon of soldiers.[10] Once inside, they walked through a footbath set up by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency because of foot-and-mouth disease. Then at tables staffed by RCMP and military personnel, all hand baggage was searched. Then they reached Customs where they were screened and, if necessary, referred to Immigration or Health.

Once they passed this screening – still in the secure area – they were greeted by the tables of hot food and the volunteers who registered them, using pencil and paper. The registration was done by aircraft and by family, and the files were compiled in alphabetical order by flight. The forms from each flight were placed in a box. (The boxes were 'Tim-Bits' boxes supplied by Canada's most popular doughnut shop, Tim Horton's, started by Horton, a former Toronto Maple Leaf hockey player.) Only after the entire flight was checked in were the passengers taken to a school bus shuttle.

Once the bus' destination was known, it was noted on the box for that flight. At that point as well, the fire chief called the assigned shelter to say their passengers were en route. There was one hitch: there were pay phones in the lounge. Passengers started to line up to make calls, delaying the registration process. To stop this, a telephone company employee got the airport to prepare an 'Out of Order' sign and posted in on the phones. That was easier than disconnecting. Because officials were concerned about emotional stress, the airport arranged for clerics to be available in the registration area. They were cautioned only to respond if passengers approached them. Since uniformed Salvation Army personnel were doing registering, upset passengers usually talked to them.

To give the various schools and churches more time to prepare – they were all collecting blankets, mattresses, towels, and other supplies – the town sent the first flight to a Salvation Army summer camp, the second to an Anglican camp. It was just at the end of the camping season, so the camps were still staffed. Passengers were then sent to schools, churches, and service clubs in Gander, then to Appleton, Glenwood, Norris Arm,

9. This decision caused some confusion. When Air Canada tried to book rooms for a diverted flight, it was told that no rooms were available. It continued to Halifax and informed Transport Canada Gander airport was full. Transport Canada queried the Area Control Center, which queried Gander airport, which assured the ACC that it could still handle more aircraft.
10. CFB Gander provided personnel not only for security escorts but also to assist with baggage searches and baggage handling. The base had also provided extensive assistance after the 1985 crash. In 2001, CFB Gander also accommodated U.S. Air Force personnel and passengers from several other flights. Defense cutbacks had left the base with unused accommodations.

Lewisporte, and Gambo.[11] The largest facilities were used for the biggest flights. In some cases passengers signed in again when they reached a shelter, and in all cases they were asked to sign out if they moved. That meant finding a passenger simply involved knowing the name and flight number and contacting the shelter. (The hospital made certain some medically trained person was at every shelter and that pharmacists were available to provide a 24-hour service.)

Although the passengers were allowed to disembark with their hand luggage, it was possible that some had deliberately left objects on the aircraft. RCMP started searching some aircraft, then realized they would not know what to look for. After that, crews were asked to check their own planes.

In the shelters

Once in shelters, passengers had to be accommodated and fed – many churches and private citizens did the cooking – but supplies were needed, and the Salvation Army organised a food centre. At first this was in a citadel, but it was moved to the Community Center. The ice was in, and the rink became what residents called the world's largest walk-in cooler. (The town plan called for the center to be the morgue.) At first, passengers slept on blankets, in sleeping bags, or on air mattresses supplied by another leading Canadian store, Canadian Tire. Then military flights brought in emergency beds and blankets. These were ordered through Emergency Health Services in the provincial capital, St. John's, and then flown in on Hercules aircraft from CFB Trenton. These flights also brought in some extra personnel for Customs and Immigration.

All the shelters had television sets (usually several of them), and these were on continuously. At first, the passengers were glued to the sets, watching the replays of what had happened while they had been flying:

> There were TVs all over the school in which we occupied… We watched with horror when we first were there, but I could not seem to watch the events very much after that, it was too surreal. The TVs were on constantly and we had access to any staff member we wished to speak with. When the TV was on in the cafeteria and the 'Star Spangled Banner' played, we all stood, cried, and felt quite emotional, along with American pride. Even though we were in Canada, you felt a sense of patriotism with *everyone.*

All shelters were given extra phones, and many were able to arrange for email. (One group ran its office in New York by email.) There was also a phone bank set up in downtown Gander outside NewTel Communications. It included email, and there were arrangements for persons to pay after they had made a call. Because the cellphone towers were being overloaded, NewTel brought in an additional cellphone tower and installed it in 14 hours.[12] There were dedicated lines – already in place – linking the key EOCs, and there were radio links. To make certain the outlying towns were in touch, the town arranged for two key contact persons – the Salvation Army captain in Lewisporte and the deputy fire chief in Gambo. Information was relayed through them in both directions.

Stores like the Co-op and Wal-Mart stayed open 24 hours, but some supplies ran out – there were no flights coming in. In addition, the airport did two crew briefings – an RAF and a U.S.Air Force pilot discussed the flight situation – and crews were taken to meet their passengers, visits that were appreciated. The most asked question, of course, was 'When do we leave?' to which the answer was that was beyond the airport's control.

One passenger who had praised the quiet, calm way her captain dealt with the initial announcements reported:

> This is the same man who would come and see us daily in Gambo, with many from the crew, to keep us updated. They were very concerned for us and always acted in a caring and professional manner.

While leadership emerged among some groups of passengers, it did not in others. Passengers apparently felt that their hosts were doing all that could be done. When leaders emerged, they operated much as the stranded travellers did at the time of the snowstorm in Pennsylvania – seeking consensus, controlling facilities with limited access, asking for needed information:

> I'm not sure how our leaders finished up as leaders, it was, it seemed, a perfectly natural way for things to develop. A Dutch chap called Monty (he got the nickname 'The General') became our spokesman… Others, myself… included, just got drafted into doing the odds and sods of details of daily life, organizing showers, trips, monitoring the phone so no one spent too long on it and everyone got to phone home. Posting emails and phone messages on the notice board, getting laundry done. Ferrying people to houses for showers, meals, etc. We had a singer from Somerset in England who entertained us every night and was very proud of the fact that he didn't sing any song more than once, he sang over 100 songs in four nights… Whatever needed doing, someone was found to do it.
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> I don't recall any leadership emerging from the community of friends that we established. There didn't seem to be a need to be a leader. We were taken care of from a physical standpoint; emotionally

11. Although most passengers stayed with their flight, unescorted children were taken to a home for battered women and looked after separately. Only one flight had to be moved: the health inspector ruled that there were too many persons in one of the Gander schools.
12. The tower had been intended for Newfoundland's West Coast. It was simply temporarily diverted.

> we were all crippled. We had freedom of movement, speech, etc. There was nothing we really needed, however just to get home. We were frightened and upset as much as any other American was during that time. As I stated before, we truly were in shock and having someone feed you and take care of you was all we expected at that time.

The town managed to keep both passengers and those making inquiries informed through the town Web site. The airport at first objected when the town posted the time at which flights were departing, then agreed it could list flights once they left. The Red Cross advertised a phone number that persons could call and identify someone's name and flight. Then, using its card file system – the convenient Tim-Bits boxes – it searched the alphabetical list and told the caller where the person was staying. One woman bypassed that system and called the town EOC. Her son had called her from a pub and had been drinking. The person who answered – the Mayor of Gambo – told her he would take care of it. He recognized the pub from the description, went there, found the young man, and told him, "Your mother's worried about you."

On the whole, however, passengers accepted their fate and expressed their appreciation for those who assisted them:

> Over the next few days the people of Gambo were absolutely magnificent. They did all and everything for us. Fed us. Clothed us. Entertained us. Took us on trips. Allowed us into their homes. They performed way above and beyond the call of duty. David's mother even prepared us 'hot' scones (Americans call them biscuits) and home made strawberry jam and a real pot of tea, when we went to their home for a shower. When we arrived, many people didn't have basic toiletries, razors, soap, toothbrushes, etc. All these, and then some, appeared as if by magic.

One thing that made things easier was the weather. It can be cold and windy and wet in Newfoundland. Power wires are built to a stronger standard because of the high winds. When the flights arrived in mid-September, the weather was superb. Environment Canada records show no precipitation during the five days the passengers were stranded. Only on Sunday as the last planes left did the wind pick up to more than a strong breeze. The daytime temperature was a pleasant 17 to a hot 26 degrees Celsius (that's 62 to 84 Fahrenheit), the night time lows never less than 10 degrees Celsius. (That's at least 50 degrees Fahrenheit.) Airport staff was able to walk around at night in T-shirts. The warm temperatures meant that the stranded passengers – whose luggage was still on their planes – were not uncomfortable without outdoor clothing.

Many passengers simply slept on makeshift beds and waited for their travels to resume, but a few tried to find a way out of Gander. Some tried to book taxis home – the drivers did agree to take them to a ferry for $450 – and several bought a car. However, when a travel agent in Lewisporte started booking some flights, the agent was told to stop, and the crew of the airline concerned brought in to explain to passengers why that could not be done. VIPs – and there were some – kept a low profile. Officials at the airport were surprised to learn later who had been among their guests.

The flights carried 20 dogs and cats and two pigmy chimpanzees en route from Belgium to a zoo in Columbus, Ohio. These were looked after – the dogs and cats got a daily stroll – by staff from Canadian Food Inspection Agency and the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA). The chimp's keeper was allowed to sleep on a couch in the hangar near his charges. The animals survived, but the female chimp lost her fetus, perhaps because of the stress.

Special attention

Inevitably some passengers needed or got special attention. Twenty-nine of the 6,600 passengers had to be taken to the hospital at some time during their stay, and about half were admitted. However, all were able to leave the hospital and board their flight when it left Gander. One went directly from the hospital to the aircraft. There was also one serious health concern. One passenger developed salmonella poisoning. Until it was clear where he had gotten it, all those with him had to be quarantined. They were taken from the Gander Academy to a Salvation Army Camp. Now, instead of being able to wander around town, they were isolated in the bush. They all complained until it was established that the passenger had been ill when he boarded his flight – the food was all right – and that no one else had become ill.

A number of couples were on their honeymoons. When Salvation Army personnel found one couple seeking privacy in a closet, it arranged for them to move to a private home. However, when an Italian honeymoon couple was offered private accommodation, they declined. They preferred to stay with the other passengers. Although some passengers accepted billets in private homes immediately after arrival, once a few hours had passed such offers were refused. Persons preferred to remain with their fellow passengers. When the couple that offered to take the Italian couple showed up to get them, they were refused again, but they ended up with another honeymoon couple.

When a teacher who was helping look after passengers at one school noticed three passengers were not eating, she realized – the man's dress made that easy – that they were Orthodox Jews. She called the airport and arranged for delivery of kosher food. Later she and her husband

invited the Rabbi to stay at their home and arranged for the necessary utensils. When someone called the Rabbi, the teacher's husband told the caller that he was eating. When the caller said that could not be possible, the husband said, "Oh, we keep a kosher kitchen – and we're Catholics."

When a Hungarian woman could not leave with her flight because her daughter had an infected ear, Gander firefighters arranged a hotel room for her (the rooms were now available) and paid for the tickets when the infection cleared up. (They had gotten to know the woman because the Malev flight from Budapest had been billeted at the fire hall.) When firefighters learned a couple had a missing son, a firefighter who had been at Ground Zero, they sent a young firefighter to talk to them.

Although most passengers declined the offer of private accommodation, many did accept the offer to have laundry done or to visit someone's home for a shower. One man was astonished when a Salvation Army officer told him to go ahead – the door was open. He could not believe there were communities where everyone was so trusting they could leave their homes unlocked and welcome strangers into their homes while they were busy elsewhere. The most common complaint was that it was difficult to go for a walk: someone would always stop and offer a lift. There was some local entertainment. Some passengers went on a boat trip. Most experimented with Newfoundland food and drink, and some tried the local custom of kissing a codfish:

> A few of us actually became honoree Newfies by kissing the codfish, drinking the rum, and saying the words. Personally, I preferred drinking the rum to kissing the fish.

Departure

Getting the passengers out of Gander proved more complicated than handling their arrival. For one thing, the aircraft could only be moved under their own power. That presented three problems. First, the U.S. initially opened its air space only to U.S.-registered aircraft. That meant that these flights were free to leave but could get out only if non-U.S. planes were out of their way.[13] Second, some planes refused to start: it was unusual for so many aircraft to be parked so long with their motors off. Third, on one occasion, the pilot was not available. When the airport called him to inform him he could get ready to leave, he confessed that he had not expected to leave so quickly. He had been drinking. His plane was finally moved when another pilot from the same airline agreed to assist. There was also a lot of work involved cleaning out the planes: international regulations require all food be removed and incinerated.

After varying instructions, the airport was told that the planes could leave without checking the luggage, provided that all passengers were on board. If even one passenger was missing, all baggage had to be taken off and identified. (In some aircraft, baggage for a single passenger could be spotted, but in other cases every bag had to be taken out of the hold and each bag inspected.) To avoid this, local authorities launched a frantic last minute hunt sometimes for one or two passengers. One passenger had to be brought back from a moose hunt. In another case, the RCMP went pub to pub looking for a missing passenger. They finally found him at a house party. He was startled when police told him he was wanted – until they explained he was the last passenger on his flight. One pilot asked if he could take off if all the baggage was unloaded and left in Newfoundland. He was told yes, and after he checked with his company that was done. A few days later, his airline sent a plane to pick up the baggage.

Under new security rules, airport personnel had to search every outgoing passenger and crew member. That process was slow because of limited staff resources. It was slowed as well by the fact that new security directives meant that some items – such as nail scissors – were no longer allowed. Items seized were put in a cardboard box that was then sealed and put into the cargo hold. Gander has only eight women who are licensed to screen baggage – but the security directives insisted that they alone do that. Eventually the directive was changed so that RCMP could assist. The pressure was relieved when Air Canada flew in additional licensed screeners from Toronto. (That was when domestic flights started moving again.) During the process, the passengers also had something new to look at – an RCMP officer in full dress Red Serge. One of the officers had received permission to wear dress uniform after incoming passengers had asked him where the 'Mounties' were. He replied that he was a Mountie, but the person insisted, "I mean a Red Mountie." He felt the presence of his red uniform would make persons feel more comfortable, and that appeared to be true. The same positive reaction was noticed in Stephenville when persons wearing Red Cross vests greeted the passengers.

The biggest problems – and the few major disputes – arose when passengers discovered that their flight was returning to Europe. That satisfied a few Europeans who were anxious to return home. It did not satisfy Americans on European aircraft. They wanted to get home. On one flight, the passengers learned that their plane was going to Milan rather than Newark only after boarding. Three revolted. It took a lengthy discussion including an intervention by a psychologist before all agreed to stay on board. The flight returned to Italy, then turned around and flew back to the U.S. The pilot

13. The pilots of all aircraft were given a new, confidential code number that would identify them when they entered U.S. airspace.

radioed the Area Control Center to say hello when he passed over with the same passengers.

There was a more serious revolt when some passengers on an Air France flight decided to charter a bus to Port Aux Basques, to pick up a ferry to North Sydney, Nova Scotia. Airport authorities told them that they were free to travel on their own but without their luggage. (Any luggage removed from the aircraft would have to be screened and searched, and the facilities and staff to do this were limited.) The debate became quite heated, partly because an airport official tried to point out that they would probably get to the U.S. faster by flying back to Europe and then back to the U.S. than by traveling by bus and ferry. (His statement was accurate but did not seem that way to the exasperated travellers.) The passengers cooled off later when the senior officer from CFB Gander reminded them about New York City and pointed out that the airport authorities had to follow security directives. He promised he would have their baggage searched by military personnel and made available. Nevertheless, the flight was delayed while all baggage was identified.

Security problems

The requirement that baggage be removed when a passenger was not on the aircraft and the new security rules were only one of the security issues that arose in Gander. There were also problems with different agencies receiving new directives at different times. On occasion, officials would call Gander about a change in security rules only to be told a newer one had replaced the directive they were quoting. The problem seemed to be that the directives came originally from Transport Canada, which sent them to its own personnel, then to other agencies.

At one point, airport authorities agreed to let a passenger change planes. (The passenger had been flying to the U.S. but had received bad news and now wanted to go back to England.) The pilot of a London-bound aircraft agreed to take the passenger, and airline staff wrote out a new ticket by hand. The passenger was cleared by Canadian authorities, boarded, and headed home. Her plane was scarcely off the ground when a new security directive insisted no passengers change flights. Another passenger – for whom similar arrangements had been made – had to be taken off her aircraft by the RCMP.

RCMP, with help from the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), checked out a number of passengers. They were able to find them easily because of the efficient registration system. There were a few alarums:

- Police received a number of tips from crew and passengers about persons who, to them, seemed suspicious. All were meticulously checked out. None proved valid.
- Some passengers at a shelter passed the word that some passengers appeared suspicious and were talking among themselves in a suspicious way in an Arabic language. It turned out those passengers were from the Middle East and were worried that the other passengers might attack them because of the terrorist attacks. They were discussing what they could do. The situation was defused when their concerns were explained.
- The Area Control Center reported that four men had tried to gain entry. It turned out the men were pilots who had often talked to the ACC as they flew overheard but had never actually seen it. They had decided to call in and say hello. They left immediately when a security person informed them they could not enter.

The biggest flap, however, occurred when passengers at the Roman Catholic parish hall in Gambo wrote thank you notes on a bristle board. One said, "Yahoo, Osama Bin Laden." The pilot demanded the RCMP do something. A constable brought the board to the RCMP offices, and police went to the airport to ask who had written that message. A man explained that he had been so well treated in Gambo that he wanted to acknowledge the man who had made the visit possible – Osama Bin Laden! He had not intended to upset anyone. When the pilot refused to allow the man on board, he offered to fly handcuffed. Satisfied no harm was intended, the RCMP persuaded the pilot to allow the man on board. If he had not boarded, all the passengers would have had to identify their luggage.

The RCMP did not have to worry about crime. There was not a single incident of robbery, theft, or any other crime during the entire time the diverted passengers were in Gander. No visitor or local resident had to be arrested or charged with anything. The nearest incident involved a brawl at a bar. The RCMP found one of those involved was one of the two passengers removed from one of the diverted aircraft. However, he not been the cause of the brawl but an effective peacemaker. But he was inebriated, and his flight was almost ready to leave. The RCMP sobered him up by pouring coffee into him, found him some sunglasses, told him to stay away from alcohol, and got him on board.

These various delays – one passenger missing, some passengers refusing to fly, a security problem – meant that it was difficult to predict how long it would take a flight to depart and, thus, when the next set of passengers could leave for the airport. That created headaches for the fire chief – who was managing transportation – and for the town – which was trying to advise shelters when passengers could start on their way. But the major problems were at the shelters. If a flight was delayed they sometimes had to schedule an extra meal or even provide an additional night's

accommodation. They also had to notify the Salvation Army that more supplies might be required. Since the departures continued around the clock, passengers were not sure whether it was worth trying to get some sleep or whether they should wait for the call to board the buses. All of this meant that once again there had to be very good coordination between the airport EOC – which was deciding the order of departure – the town – which was notifying the various shelters when their flight was to leave – and the fire chief, who was making sure the buses were at a shelter when passengers were scheduled to depart. Each time there was an unexpected delay, the whole system had to pause until the problem was resolved.

Aftermath

Just before the last diverted flight left Gander at 6:20 p.m. on Sunday – more than five days after the first one arrived – airport staff posed with its crew to celebrate the end of the road. However, there was still a lot to do.

All the schools had to be cleaned and made ready for classes the following day. (Classes were suspended while the passengers were in Gander.) This proved no problem in outlying communities that were cleaned on the weekend, but the work ground to a halt in Gander Monday morning (the day after the last flight left) when NAPE put the picket lines back up. Workers from a number of unionized plants refused to cross the picket lines. The Salvation Army conducted some delicate negotiations with the union before volunteers were allowed across the picket lines so the schools could be cleaned.

The litters brought in by CF Hercules aircraft also needed cleaning and no one wanted to pay for that. They were finally returned as they were. There was linen, much of it donated, to wash – the hospital did that free of charge. There was food left over: it was given to food banks. There were many donated items not reclaimed. There was overtime to be calculated – except for the school bus drivers. They worked without pay, then went back on the picket lines. The Salvation Army used its own funds to pay some local merchants who had provided supplies for the shelters. This was done because some small merchants were running into a serious cash flow problem and would have been in financial straits in they had not been paid immediately. The Army was reimbursed when it submitted its accounts to the municipality, which sent them to the province.

The postincident debriefings left most officials satisfied, though there were a few concerns. One was that some persons had worked too many hours. This was, perhaps, inevitable in a small town with limited resources, but it did lead to short tempers and to some passenger irritation. Another concern was that senior fire personnel had taken on major jobs – as liaison between the town and the airport, in charge of transportation, and assisting with airport security. (Because the firefighters as airport backup had clearances, they could escort others in the secure area of the airport.) There would have been serious personnel problems if the firefighters had had another emergency. In previous studies, this has been referred to as the 'two hat' problem, the situation, not uncommon in smaller communities, when one person has several functions – and all are important in an emergency.[14] There were a few information breakdowns. For example, the hospital and the town had not been aware that the military flights would simply dump the pallets containing litters on the tarmac and leave them there. They assumed that local military personnel would deliver them to the shelters.

Why system worked

The literature on emergency response shows that it is not uncommon for existing emergency agencies to establish their own command posts and for conflict to arise among those posts. It also shows that, when emergent groups take over specific functions, they tend to come into conflict with the existing agencies, though – as Scanlon's study of the Canadian ice storm shows – this does not need to happen if the existing organisations blend in the newcomers and their function (Scanlon 1999). How did it happen that there was so little conflict in Newfoundland and that the various operations centres worked so well together? There appear to be a number of reasons.

The first is that the events of September 11 gripped Canadians just as they gripped Americans. As was the case in the wake of the Kennedy assassination, news of the terrorist attacks spread at incredibly high speed – and the reaction was shock, horror, and sympathy. The residents of Gander – as in other towns – were anxious to do anything possible to assist the diverted passengers, the 'other victims' of September 11. The residents saw the diverted passengers as homeless victims, persons not responsible for their misfortune. They wanted to help.

The second is that Gander is an airport town. Its economy is largely dependent on the prosperity of the airport and on the existence of the Area Control Center. Most persons in town are aware of the economic situation at the airport. They were also aware that the closing of U.S. airspace would impact Gander. They

14. In Petawawa, ambulance drivers were also auxiliary police, and professional firefighters from CFB Petawawa were also town volunteers. When ambulance, police, and both fire departments were needed for a train derailment and toxic spill, the so-called 'two hat' problem was identified (Scanlon et al. 1985).

were already preparing their response before U.S. airspace was closed.

Third, Gander has significant emergency experience – and that experience is tied to the airport-related incidents. Equally important, most local persons who were involved on September 11 were around for at least one of the previous incidents. That was true for the staff at the airport, the town, the fire department, and the hospital, though not so true of for the RCMP and not true for the base.

Fourth, many of the various players had plans and their staff was familiar with those plans. That was true of the base, the town, and the hospital, and it was especially true of the airport. It activates its ECC – if only briefly – each time an incoming aircraft reports an onboard emergency.

Fifth, Newfoundland consists of a number of small, separated communities strong across more than 1,000 kilometers [621 miles] of highway. Many in those communities come from even more isolated communities, communities where there is only annual or biannual contact with a supply ship. They are used to coping on their own.

Sixth, Gander is a small community where virtually everyone knows everyone else. Even those who rotate in often have roots in the community. The latest RCMP detachment commander, for example, grew up in Gander, and his family stills live there.

Seventh, the airport realized immediately that the magnitude of the event made it impossible for it to be handled as usual. During the response to the 1985 crash, the town was not invited to the airport EOC, and, when the deputy mayor became a participant, she was not made welcome. This time, the airport welcomed the support of the town, and, in turn, the town welcomed the support of various emergent groups. They were allowed to work unhindered by direction from any EOC. In fact, the only time outsiders got involved in shelter management was when the salmonella was identified and the Lufthansa passengers were moved from Gander Academy.

Eighth, and most important, the various operations centres were dealing with separate concerns. They each carved out an area of responsibility and stuck to it. There was no significant overlapping responsibility. The airport ECC, for example, made all the decisions about unloading and loading and about what flights would leave when. The others accepted that and adjusted to those decisions as required. Similarly, HR&E identified what places would be used as shelters – and the town stayed out of that – but HR&E did not get involved in deciding what flights would be sent to what shelters. The various command posts needed to keep in touch with each other – shared information is crucial to an effective response – but their decisions could be made independently. This cooperative acceptance also occurred on a smaller level. For example, when a teacher went to assist setting up the high school, she was surprised when the computers were unplugged and pack away. However, she made no comment. But when she returned to her own school, she saw to it that all the computers were made available to the passengers.

If this had not happened and all the players had tried to work from one EOC, there would have been significant overcrowding and a tendency – as noted by Quarantelli and by Scanlon – for key players to leave the EOC and make decisions independently. Even if one assumes that the various shelter managers would not have become part of an EOC, there were at least 31 players involved in the response in Gander: seven federal agencies – Customs, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Immigration, Health Canada, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police,[15] and Canadian Forces Base Gander; eight from the private sector – the area control center, the airport, the tower, the service company, the fuel company, the food service company, NewTel Communications, and the baggage screeners; three voluntary agencies – the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), Red Cross, and Salvation Army; two provincial agencies – HR&E and Health; six players associated with local or regional government or community services – the town, the hospital, ambulance, the school board, the fire department, and the arena; three political leaders – the mayors of Gander, Gambo, and Lewisporte; and at least four other significant participants – the school bus drivers, the Newfoundland Association of Public Employees and the key persons in Gambo and Lewisporte, the deputy fire chief of Gambo, and the Salvation Army Captain in Lewisporte. The situation could have become comparable to that described in Scanlon's study of the Nanticoke tire fire and his subsequent observations on official convergence (Scanlon 1992b, p. 5; Fritz and Mathewson 1957).

In short, the effectiveness of the response in Gander came from the fact that it was managed by a number of EOCs, each of them handling a particular task. The airport ECC decided what services should be provided to a plane parked on the tarmac and when and how an aircraft should be unloaded. It also controlled departure times. The fire department EOC, working from the mobile command van at the airport, managed transportation. The hospital EOC kept track of health services and remained linked, through the ambulance

15. In eight Canadian provinces including Newfoundland, the RCMP wear three hats: they are the local, provincial, and federal police. They were wearing all three during the response to 9/11.

radio, to the medical service post at the airport. The Province of Newfoundland, through Human Resources Development (HR&E), identified shelters that were available and how many persons each shelter could handle. The town EOC decided where passengers should be sent and passed that information along to the fire chief at the airport. The town EOC also handled communications between the town and the various shelters in Gander and – through the Salvation Army captain in Lewisporte and the deputy fire chief in Gambo – with communications to the shelters in those communities.

There was also an EOC at Canadian Forces Base Gander that kept in touch with the National Defence command system and with its liaison personnel in the airport ECC. And there was a command post at NewTel Communications that, working with the town, kept in touch with the telephone and other services needed at the airport and in the various shelters. Finally, the Salvation Army had what amounted to a command post at its regional headquarters. From there it coordinated the central food service run out of the community center.

Airport the key

The airport ECC was still the key. Its decisions about which flight was unloaded and when a flight would leave affected every other response. But the airport was not free to act as it chose. For one thing, its decisions were influenced by security directives flowing in from Newfoundland's capital, St. John's, from various regional headquarters, and from the federal capital, Ottawa. For another, sometimes its plans were thwarted by the fact a pilot had been drinking or an aircraft would not start, or, more likely, some passengers did not show up or did show up and refused to leave. Often, its ability to get a flight off the ground promptly was determined by whether a shelter or the RCMP could locate a missing passenger or by the ability of its staff to persuade a passenger that it was best to get or stay on board. It had to be in continual touch with these agencies and the town to be certain the passengers would arrive as required.

The town EOC was next most important. Based on information from the airport ECC, it had to make certain that transportation was available when a flight was called and that the shelter knew it was next in line – and that had to be coordinated with the fire command post at the airport and, in turn, with the drivers. The town also needed to keep the shelters and the Salvation Army informed about probable schedules so food was on hand if an extra meal was needed and so shelter managers knew if they would be open for another night. That affected the volunteers who agreed to assist with cleaning up. Their services could not be used until a shelter was emptied. Finally it affected the hospital. Its staff was keeping a careful eye on a handful of patients, trying to make certain their health would allow them to join their flight when it was called.

All this meant that it was crucial to have good communications and effective liaison among the various EOCs and command posts. That is why the town's early decision to send the fire inspector to the airport was so important. While communications is important, liaison is, perhaps, even more important. Because the inspector was in on the discussions, he could convey to the town EOC not only the import of what was happening but the underlying tone. He, for example, could explain why the airport was becoming frustrated at its inability to get flights off on schedule because one passenger failed to show or was delayed or because a few passengers decided at the last minute they did not want to board their aircraft. He could also make sure the airport was aware of the town's concerns. Similarly, the HR&E person and the NewTel person at the town EOC kept information flowing back and forth between their organisations and the town.

It is true that some places described as EOCs might better be described as command posts or support locations since their function was to assist others. This was certainly true of the fire mobile command post at the airport that handled transportation requests relayed to it from the airport ECC (when passengers had to be unloaded or loaded) and from the town EOC (when passengers had to be moved from the airport to a shelter or from a shelter to the airport). However, it was not so true of the EOC at the hospital (which made medical decisions on its own) or at NewTel Communications (which serviced the various facilities but also took its own initiatives.) It was certainly not true of the EOC at CFB Gander, which, though it responded to the needs of the airport, also had its own concerns about base security during a period of heightened tension. And it was clearly not true of either the airport ECC or the town EOC. Both were full-fledged EOCs handling major problems and coordinating the response of a number of agencies. Gander's response to the other victims of 9/11, therefore, is a model of how divided responsibilities can be an affective way of managing an unexpected emergency.

Finally, there was something else at work in Gander: the fact that the victims – having seen the visuals from New York City – were grateful to be alive and thankful for anything that was done for them. Most were also overwhelmed by the compelling generosity of the local residents and anxious to do anything to avoid offending their hosts. In fact, it was only some time after the stranded travellers had left that the local residents began to swap stories about who had been in their midst. Their guests had included senior executives of the Rockefeller Foundation (the Foundation donated new computers to the Lakewood school), a distinguished

Dutch artist, and a world-renowned fashion designer, plus one of the senior U.S. military officers involved in counterterrorism. All had quietly accepted their fate. Werner Baldessarini, the chairman of Hugo Boss, had even stayed with his fellow passengers after a private jet had been sent to pick him up. After sampling the underwear in Wal-Mart however, Baldessarini did gratefully accept some underwear brought to him personally by a storekeeper in St. John's who drove all the way to Gander to look after his distinguished guest. The story is told in Jim Defede's touching book after Gander and 9/11, The Day the World Came to Town (Defede 2002).

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