



**DEPARTMENT OF  
TRANSPORTATION**

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**NEWS**

**OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY**

**WASHINGTON, D. C. 20590**

*Jan. 29, 1970*

Following is a statement by Secretary of Transportation John A. Volpe on the report by the Air Traffic Controller Career Committee:

I have just received the report made by the Air Traffic Controller Career Committee and have been fully briefed by the Committee's Chairman, John Corson, and other Committee members.

The Committee put a great deal of work into this study over recent months and we in the Department, the aviation industry and the general public are very much in their debt.

I have not, of course, had an opportunity to read the entire report but it appears to be both comprehensive and thorough. I'm going to take it home with me tonight and go through it very carefully.

However, on the strength of what I have read and the briefing by the Committee, I am greatly heartened. We have known that it is, unquestionably, going to take time to do the whole job. Nonetheless, I have felt, and the report appears to support, that much can be done in a relatively short time to bring about significant improvements.

I'm thinking particularly of recruiting, training (at all stages of controller development), promotion selection, and automation of operations.

I wish I could snap my fingers and have the whole air traffic control system drop neatly into a perfect arrangement. But, like a hodcarrier climbing a ladder, we reach our goal by climbing steadily and firmly, one step at a time.

Our airport/airways bill, which passed the House by the wide margin of 337 to 6 -- and which I hope will soon gain Senate passage -- will help us immeasurably to bring about the improvements we seek.

(more)

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What comes through clearly in the Committee's report is the need for improvement in communications between controllers and management.

Each of the recommendations in the report, along with other analyses and inputs, will be taken into consideration.

The Federal Aviation Administration has not been sitting idly by, waiting for this report. Jack Shaffer is every bit as concerned about the controllers as I am. The FAA has already taken a number of actions to improve the situation.

For example, at FAA's request, the Civil Service Commission waived its time-in-grade requirements so we could promote 7,699 controllers into a new higher-level Air Traffic Control Specialist classification without their having to sit out prescribed waiting periods.

We are concerned with the problems of the air traffic controllers. We are doing something about it. And we intend to do much more.

1/29/70

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OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20590

January 29, 1970

The Honorable John A. Volpe  
Secretary  
Department of Transportation  
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I transmit herewith a draft of the final report of the Air Traffic Controller Career Committee.

This report presents recommendations as to what needs be done with respect to (a) manning the air traffic system, (b) improving working conditions, (c) bettering the controller's career, and (d) improving employee-management relations. The recommendations are neither novel nor unexpected. They flow directly from the facts we have assembled and the analyses we present.

The need now is for action. The Committee's study, as you know, has received widespread attention among controllers and aviation organizations. A high level of expectation has been developed that the results of this study will be made generally available and that improvements will be effected. Hence, we recommend that you ensure the early and wide distribution of this report.

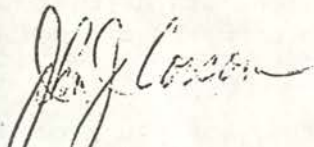
Some recommendations that are presented, if they are accepted, can be implemented immediately. There is an especial need for expeditious consideration of those recommendations designed to resolve the employee-management relations problems which threaten the system. Time will be required to implement other recommendations, or to obtain legislation to permit the implementation of still others. We suggest that, to ensure the action that is needed, you fix promptly responsibility within FAA for evaluating the recommendations that are presented, and that you fix in the Department responsibility for a continuing review of the action taken. If, as individuals, members of this Committee can assist you in the future by appraising the progress made, we will gladly do so.

We have enjoyed this opportunity to serve you and your Department. Our carrying out of the tasks assigned us has been materially facilitated by the generous cooperation of your colleagues -

The Honorable John A. Volpe  
January 29, 1970  
Page two.

Under Secretary James M. Beggs, Assistant Secretary Alan L. Dean, FAA Administrator John H. Shaffer and others. In addition, we have been assisted in large measure by the able staff that you made available to us through contract with Fry Consultants Incorporated and through the loan of departmental staff members. We are especially indebted to Bertrand M. Harding, for his able direction of the staff, and to Ellen Wormser of Fry Consultants and to Edward Curran and Edmund Longen of the Department of Transportation for their assistance in coordinating the staff's efforts.

Respectfully submitted,



John J. Corson  
Chairman, Air Traffic  
Controller Career Committee

Encl.

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## APPENDIX I

### BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION ON MEMBERS OF THE AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLER CAREER COMMITTEE

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JOHN J. CORSON, Chairman. Chairman of the Board, Fry Consultants, Inc. Consultant to Board Chairman, Urban Coalition and to the President, Carnegie Foundation. Formerly, Director, Bureau of Old Age and Survivors Insurance; Bureau of Employment Security; and U. S. Employment Service; Deputy Director General, UNRRA; member of staff McKinsey & Co., management consultants; Professor of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University. Member, American Society for Public Administration (former president); Trustee, Educational Testing Service.

PETER W. BERNHARD, Member. Co-owner, Installation Specialties, Inc. (electronics manufacturing and installation company). Formerly, Air Traffic Control Specialist, Procedures Section, FAA Eastern Region; air traffic controller, J. F. Kennedy International Airport Tower, New York.

Dr. A. D. CATTERSON, Member. Deputy Director, Medical Research and Operations, NASA Manned Spacecraft Center, Houston, Texas. Formerly, Chief, Flight Medicine Branch and Medical Officer, NASA Manned Spacecraft Center; Chief, Resident Aerospace Medicine, Foundation for Medical Education and Research. Member, Texas Medical Association, Aerospace Medical Association, Houston Academy of Medicine.

Dr. ROBBEN W. FLEMMING, Member. President, University of Michigan. Formerly, Professor of Law, University of Michigan; Professor of Law and Chancellor, University of Wisconsin; Professor of Law, University of Illinois; Professor of Industrial Relations, University of Illinois; industrial arbitrator, Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, American Arbitration Association. Member, Atomic Energy Labor Management Relations Panel; Industrial Relations Research Association; National Academy of Arbitrators.

ARTHUR D. LEWIS, Member. Senior Partner and Chairman, Executive Committee, F. S. Smithers and Co. (investment bank), New York, N. Y. Formerly, President, Eastern Air Lines; Senior Vice President, General Manager, Eastern Air Lines; President, Chief Executive Officer, Hawaiian Air Lines. Member, Board of Regents, University of Hawaii.

JAMES M. MITCHELL, Member. Director, Advanced Study Program, Brookings Institution. Formerly, Commissioner, U. S. Civil Service Commission; Deputy Assistant Secretary for Manpower and Personnel, Department of Defense; Associate Director, National Science Foundation. Member, Board of Trustees, George Washington University; American Society for Public Administration; Public Personnel Administration.

STANLEY H. RUTTENBERG, Member. President, S. H. Ruttenberg Associates, Inc., labor consultants, and Editor, Manpower Information Service, Bureau of National Affairs, Washington, D. C. Formerly, Assistant Secretary of Labor and Manpower Administration, U. S. Department of Labor; Special Assistant to Secretary of Labor; Director, Department of Research, AFL-CIO; Member, Executive Board Industrial Relations Research Association.

BERTRAND M. HARDING, Staff Director. Vice President, Fry Consultants, Inc., Washington, D. C. Formerly, Acting Director, Office of Equal Opportunity; Deputy Director, OEO; Deputy Commissioner, Internal Revenue Service; associated with Atomic Energy Commission and Veterans Administration. Member, American Society for Public Administration.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY  
OF THE  
DRAFT REPORT  
OF THE  
AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLER CAREER COMMITTEE

THE CAREER  
OF THE  
AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLER -  
A COURSE OF ACTION

JANUARY, 1970

## INTRODUCTION

### Background

The air traffic controller career problems that gave rise to the establishment of this Committee have existed since the early Sixties. During the years since then, these problems have been aggravated by the rapid growth in air traffic, delay in the resumption of controller recruitment following its virtual discontinuance between 1963 and 1967, and by the lack of positive efforts to diagnose the personnel needs of the system and to meet them. By mid-1968, these factors had caused acute unrest among the controller work force, unprecedented strife between organized controllers and FAA's management and in two or more instances, the threatened breakdown of a service that is essential to the safe and efficient operation of this Nation's air transport system.

### The Committee's Mandate

Department of Transportation Secretary Volpe appointed, on August 8, 1969, an Air Traffic Controller Career Committee "to inquire into various aspects of the air traffic controller career". The Secretary requested that the inquiry "cover, but not be limited to, employee compensation, work environment, employment practices, training, employee/management relations, organization and direction."

The Committee, composed of citizens with a combination of relevant experiences - in aviation, aviation medicine, air traffic control, labor relations, and public administration, endeavored to fulfill this mandate in the following ways:



- Face-to-face discussions with approximately 400 controllers and 100 supervisors at about 30 facilities.
- Study of written views of, and extended discussions with, officials of employee and aviation-related organizations as to problems affecting air traffic personnel and of various recommendations as to what actions should be taken.
- Consultation with representatives of the Civil Service Commission, the Bureau of the Budget, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.
- Extensive staff research to provide objective data for Committee consideration.

A succession of Committee meetings was held to consider the views and analyses derived from these many sources in order to formulate the findings and recommendations presented in this report. The Committee believes that there is a clear need for prompt action.

#### The Context within which the Controller Functions

The air traffic controller is an essential and central element in a complex system composed of planes, pilots, air space, airports, facilities and equipment, the Federal Aviation Administration, etc., on which the safe and efficient operation of air transport in the United States rests now and for the immediate future.

Our review indicates that this system has experienced serious shortcomings - particularly during the decade of the Sixties. Recent substantial budget increases and additional financial resources to be made available under the Airport and Airways Development Act hold promise for the future; however, it is our view that the improvement will not materially change the existing system for a number of years. In the meantime, the controller will continue to bear a heavy burden in making an understaffed and underfinanced system work.

#### The Controller's Talents and Role

The Committee is impressed with the fact that air traffic controllers constitute a unique professional group within the Federal

establishment. While many other categories of employees must possess some of the talents, and while many other jobs impose some of the exacting responsibilities, few combine as many demands upon the individual as does the job of the controller.

The successful controller appears to require - at least - the following special talents and aptitudes:

- A highly developed capacity for spatial perception.
- A keenly developed, quick and retentive memory.
- A capacity for articulate and decisive voice communication.
- A capacity for rapid decision making, combined with mature judgment.

There is compelling evidence that many controllers work for varying periods of time under great stress. They are confronted with the necessity of making successive life and death decisions within very short time frames - decisions requiring constant standards of perfection.

The operations schedule in most facilities requires that the personnel work on a 24-hour, multi-shift basis 365 days a year. This schedule adds to the day-in-day-out wear and tear on the individual and to the disruption of normal family and social relationships. The controller is convinced that the job is unique in that he will "burn out" between ages 40-50 and will not be able to continue controlling traffic.

#### MANNING THE AIR TRAFFIC SYSTEM (see pages 12-23)

The Air Traffic Service has been inadequately staffed for at least three years. Recent recruitment has tended to alleviate this dangerous over-all shortage of personnel, but serious deficiencies still exist in important facilities. No significant improvement in the demands made upon the controller will be made until these deficiencies in staffing are corrected. The controller authorization for 1970, plus the 1971 request, will obviously improve existing conditions, but -



- There is general agreement that the methods currently being used for determining personnel needs are inadequate.
- Manpower utilization policies and practices vary greatly among facilities for no evident reasons. This further confuses the issue of the adequacy of staffing.
- Extreme staffing shortages, especially in relation to current authorization of journeymen controllers, exist in several facilities (centers in particular) that serve very substantial volumes of air traffic.
- The shortage of staff is aggravated by the presence in busy facilities of a plethora of untrained developmentals whose training adds substantially to the work load of the journeymen.
- The extremely high attrition rate among those recently recruited (as high as 22% in the center option) further aggravates the staffing shortage.
- The current rate of recruitment offers no assurance that the agency will meet its 1970 hiring goal.
- Recruitment, hiring and assignment processes are designed to meet the needs of individual facilities and regions and are not related to the over-all staffing needs of the system.

#### Recommendations

The immediate actions required to alleviate the serious understaffing of facilities and to provide assurance that the air traffic control system can meet its responsibilities are:

1. Detail fully qualified controllers immediately to those high density facilities in which serious staffing shortages exist.
2. Substantially improve the system by which applicants are attracted to and recruited for the Air Traffic Service in order to increase the number and improve the quality of those hired.
3. Develop as promptly as possible revised methods for determining the staff needed which:

- Are based on more equal distribution of workload,
  - Recognize the environmental and operating characteristics of individual facilities, and
  - Provide adequately for the reduction of presently required overtime, and for training, leave and other non-operational requirements.
4. Develop immediately and initiate as promptly as possible an accelerated qualification training program for individuals now serving as developmental controllers in facilities.
  5. Develop in fact, as well as in theory, a tradition of geographical mobility among controllers to the end that the needs of the system, rather than the personal preferences of the individual, control assignments.
  6. Require that control experience in high density facilities be a pre-requisite for appointment to higher level staff and supervisory positions in the ATS.

#### THE CONTROLLER'S CAREER

##### Perceptions of the Controller

Based upon the Committee's extensive discussions with controllers, their supervisors, and the employee organizations which represent them, we conclude that the FAA is confronted with a highly disaffected work force. The major items of complaint are:

- Working conditions are unsatisfactory and place an excessive burden on the controller - ranging from poor equipment to inadequate relief from particularly stressful position assignments.
- Not enough staff, and particularly fully trained staff, to meet the demands of the system.
- Too stringent policies on approval of Familiarization (FAM) trips.



- Too much differential in compensation between high and low density facilities (according to controllers at low density facilities).
- Not enough differential in compensation between high and low density facilities (according to controllers at high density facilities).
- Inadequate training - both at entry and in order to maintain proficiency. Controllers also complain of the lack of good supervisory training programs.
- Inadequate provision for reassignment, retraining, or early retirement for controllers who "burn out" - typically between 40 and 50 years of age.

The above views of controllers and their organizational representatives were also discussed, on several occasions, with representatives of FAA management.

Working Conditions (see pages 26-38).

The Committee found much justification for the numerous criticisms of working conditions. The major problems are that:

- The secluded nature of many of the facilities limit direct contact with the "real world" of aviation, resulting in controller dissatisfaction;
- The physical environment in most of the older terminals and flight service stations leaves much to be desired;
- Control equipment is inadequate both in terms of quality and quantity, and
- Management policies affecting working conditions are in need of examination and reappraisal.

The Committee recommends that the FAA:

1. Reduce the time that controllers are required to spend on operational positions - particularly those involving heavy traffic. This reduction should be accomplished by limiting consecutive hours on positions and total hours per day in operational duties, more liberal annual leave policies and

greater use of FAM trips.

2. Undertake with controllers and their employee organizations negotiations designed to lengthen the interval between shift rotations. Simultaneously, undertake an intensive, system-wide study of the physiological effects of alternative shift rotation practices.
3. Re-evaluate the nature and quality of annual medical examinations of controllers.
4. Improve the quality and quantity of existing facilities and equipment.
5. Undertake a thorough study of the man-machine relationships involved in the controller's exercise of his duties.

Selection (see pages 38-50)

The selection process is fundamental to the development of a viable controller organization. Both the individual and the agency have a great stake in the efficiency of this portion of the personnel process. Many inadequacies were found in the existing system, including:

- Failure to attract an adequate number of applicants and to inform adequately those who are attracted about their potential career.
- Failure to differentiate between those candidates best suited for service in either centers, terminals, or stations.
- Granting of undue weight to prior experience which is of doubtful relevance.
- The inadequacy of present instruments used - i.e., written tests, interview, etc.
- The lack of reliable objective measures of the proficiency of a controller, thus inhibiting the evaluation and improvement of its selection processes.

The Committee recommends the following:

1. Improve the hiring bulletin to the end that it more adequately describes the occupation.



2. Inaugurate a "pre-hiring" orientation program for applicants in order to further test the individual's capacity for and interest in the occupation.
3. Initiate an intensive analysis of the differential talents required for the three controller options in order to refine selection criteria for each.
4. Reconstruct the written test to include tests of other required skills and examine the present rules governing the types of experience deemed qualifying for employment.
5. Either through the examination process, or by special legislation, eliminate the large number of present hires above age 30.
6. Reduce the "wash-out" rate at the FAA Academy through additional coaching and observation.
7. Improve the interview process by better selection and training of interviewers and development of more standardized guidelines for the interview process.
8. Re-appraise all selection processes to assure that they seek out, and do not discriminate against, minority groups.
9. Develop more systematic and objective means for the evaluation of the proficiency of the controller on the job.
10. Detail fully qualified controllers immediately to those high density facilities in which serious staffing shortages exist.

Controller Training (see pages 50-64)

As in the case of controller selection, both the individual and FAA have a substantial stake in the processes by which FAA develops controller capabilities. The Committee examined the FAA controller training activities at the FAA Academy and at facilities and found:

- There are currently about 5,000 recently recruited controllers in the training - or developmental - pipeline. It is anticipated that another 4,000 might be added during the current fiscal year.
- The FAA Academy is greatly over-crowded as a consequence of recent recruitment efforts. An evening - night shift is anticipated.



- On-the-job training at facilities is characterized by non-standardized course material and proficiency requirements and by instructional staffs which too often appear to have minimal training for their role; radar training at the centers is not sufficiently standardized or undertaken at an early enough point in the process.
- Training programs directed at maintaining journeyman proficiency and developing supervisory and management capabilities are virtually non-existent.

The Committee recommends that FAA:

1. Revise the basic training schedule and curriculum for both centers and terminals to the end that the training period is shortened and made more relevant to the occupational requirements.
2. Establish a new and more rigorous proficiency training program for journeymen controllers.
3. Revise and emphasize supervisory and management training programs for present and potential supervisory personnel.
4. Provide greater capacity for training through simulation devices.
5. Develop the teaching qualifications of the FAA training staffs.

Compensating Controllers (see pages 64-78)

The pay system under which controllers are compensated is obviously an important element in any total picture of the career. The Committee found that although the pay structure is generally in line with comparable occupations within the Federal structure, many inequities exist as between individuals within facilities and as between facilities, and that there is unwarranted "compression" of salaries at the supervisory level in many facilities.

The Committee recommends that FAA:

1. Provide a monetary attraction for employment in certain high density/high cost-of-living facilities by special pay rates. Authority for this arrangement probably exists in current Civil Service law.



2. Revise - and make more realistic - the criteria under which facilities are rated and individuals are graded.
3. Seek legislation that will provide FAA with more "supergrades" or will allow authority to place all upper management FAA positions in an "excepted" status and thereby create higher salary levels for high density facility chiefs, reducing grade compression at these locations.

Career Progression (see pages 78-85)

The opportunity to progress - occupationally and financially - is a key requisite for the members of a satisfied and productive work force. It is also a vitally important consideration, if management is to maintain a constant source of qualified candidates for its most important and demanding positions. The Committee found that:

- The essential characteristic of the present system is that the employee is recruited for - and remains within - a particular facility.
- This tendency toward a largely immobile work force is particularly harmful to the higher density/high cost-of-living facilities. In fact, there are a number of disincentives for transfer to these less desirable locations.
- There appears to be no national program designed to identify and develop a supervisory managerial infrastructure.

The Committee recommends that the FAA:

1. Formulate a career development plan that will provide a systematic national program for progressively responsible assignments of controllers. Such a system should culminate, for the most talented controllers, in assignment to the most difficult positions.
2. Develop various incentives which will attract the most talented controllers to the most difficult assignments and provide means to relieve him of these arduous duties after a reasonable period of time.

3. Establish an "ATS Managerial Training Corps" designed to provide a carefully selected and trained cadre of managerial talent.

Alternative Employment or Retirement (see pages 86-94)

A major cause of dissatisfaction among controllers is the widely held belief that they are confronted with the prospect of an early "burn out", after which they will be unable to continue in their chosen profession and will have few, if any, alternative means of maintaining their economic status. The Committee found little fully documented evidence to support or deny the early "burn out" theory, but there is supporting evidence that indicates that the profession is "stressful" and that controllers do, in fact, incur disability at an earlier age than the non-controller employees of FAA. The Committee recommends that the FAA:

1. Provide exacting annual proficiency examinations for all controllers and promptly remove those unable to meet acceptable standards.
2. Provide a counseling and training program designed to place in alternative positions, those controllers who can no longer safely and effectively control air traffic.
3. Make necessary arrangements for selected controllers to take courses from the United States Armed Forces Institute, of the Department of Defense.
4. Seek legislation to provide an "early retirement" provision for those controllers who have experienced high density duty and who cannot be retrained or reassigned to less arduous tasks.

Employee/Management Relations (see pages 98-111)

The Committee found that employee/management relations within FAA are in a state of extensive disarray, due to ineffective internal communications, to failure on the part of FAA management to understand and accept the role of employee organizations, and to ill-considered and intemperate attacks on FAA



management by certain employee unions. The Committee recommends that the FAA:

1. Re-evaluate and revise existing communication policies, and procedures in order to build a more effective interchange between FAA management and employees.
2. Take full advantage of the opportunity afforded by the new Executive Order (11491) on labor/management relations to revise its practices on dealing with labor unions.
3. Reconsider its position regarding the appropriate bargaining unit(s) for controllers.
4. Centralize authority for dealing with employee organizations on national issues, while decentralizing responsibility for handling local problems.

Needed Information and Research (see pages 94-97)

The Committee found that there is insufficient research and analysis relevant to all aspects of the controllers' career, and recommends additional emphasis on and coordination of this vital aspect of FAA's management responsibility.