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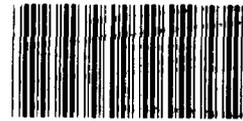
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REPORT BY THE U.S.

General Accounting Office

FAA Is Making Air Traffic Control Procedures At New Orleans International Airport More Efficient

Problems in air traffic control procedures and airspace allocations at the New Orleans International Airport result in increased coordination and workload for the air traffic controllers, according to the Federal Aviation Administration's southwest region. In GAO's opinion, labor relations between the control tower's management and the air traffic controllers are poor.



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FAA is making changes, scheduled to be effective by March 15, 1981, to improve air traffic control efficiency in the New Orleans area. FAA southwest region officials have also agreed to thoroughly review the labor relations situation and take whatever corrective actions are necessary.



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COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

B-202027

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United States Senate

The Honorable Russell B. Long
United States Senate

The Honorable Lindy Boggs
House of Representatives

The Honorable Robert Livingston
House of Representatives

The Honorable Gillis Long
House of Representatives

The Honorable Henson Moore
House of Representatives

The Honorable Billy Tauzin
House of Representatives

This report discusses a series of allegations we were requested to examine concerning air traffic control problems at the Federal Aviation Administration's control tower at the New Orleans International Airport. The allegations were made by the Federal air traffic controllers at that facility. The report also discusses the labor relations climate at the control tower.

As requested, we did not obtain written agency comments. However, we reviewed the report's contents with FAA southwest region officials and FAA's New Orleans International Airport control tower management as well as with a representative of the controllers. Their comments are included in the report where appropriate.

As arranged with your offices, we are sending copies of this report to the Director, Office of Management and Budget; the Secretary, Department of Transportation; the

B-202027

Administrator, Federal Aviation Administration; the
Director, Southwest Region, Federal Aviation Administra-
tion; and other interested parties.

Henry Eschwege

Henry Eschwege
Director

D I G E S T

Seven members of the Louisiana congressional delegation asked GAO to evaluate a series of allegations about air traffic control operations at the New Orleans International Airport submitted to it by the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA's) air traffic controllers there. GAO was also asked to examine labor-management relations at the FAA facility.

AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL PROCEDURES
ARE BEING IMPROVED

According to FAA's southwest region, FAA's air traffic control procedures and airspace allocations at the New Orleans International Airport have problems that result in increased coordination and workload for the air traffic controllers. For example, the procedures used to control aircraft arriving at and departing from the airport require that controllers be in more extensive contact with one another than is desirable while guiding aircraft. To reduce the level of contact, the facility has designated specific airspace for use by arriving aircraft.

Changes are being proposed to handle traffic more efficiently. Most of these changes are scheduled to become effective by March 15, 1981.

LABOR-MANAGEMENT RELATIONS
TO BE REVIEWED

In GAO's opinion, relations in New Orleans between the FAA management and the controllers are poor. There is a long history of labor-management problems at the facility.

Labor-management relations have seriously deteriorated during the past year--almost to the point of a complete communications impasse.

GAO observed that:

- Controllers fear using an internal FAA system to report unsatisfactory conditions because they feel management will retaliate with adverse actions. Management views these reports as embarrassing personal attacks rather than as useful tools to improve operations.
- Controllers are filing grievances asking for punitive actions against supervisors.
- Management's response to the controllers' allegations gives little credence to their concerns and takes the position that since the controllers had participated in the development of the facility's air traffic control procedures, they must now live with them.

FAA decertified, demoted, and transferred one of the New Orleans controllers because it concluded that he could not consistently apply required air traffic control procedures. This action was a rallying force for controllers at the facility and was instrumental in initiating the allegations. It also polarized the two sides on practically all issues at the facility. A February 3, 1981, arbitration decision found that FAA had not provided this controller the appropriate type and required amount of remedial training. The arbitrator directed FAA to reinstate the controller and offer him a reasonable amount of training which may be necessary for recertification.

Poor relations are evidenced by the diametrically opposed views held by the controllers, who describe communications as poor, and facility management, which believes they are satisfactory. The adverse action taken against the one controller has affected communications by leading to the en masse resignation of the controllers from a technical advisory committee designed to provide controller participation in the development of local air traffic operational plans and procedures.

GAO believes the assistance of FAA's southwest region will be needed to help the facility management and the controller's settle their disputes, and that improving labor-management relations will require efforts by both labor and management. FAA's southwest region has agreed to thoroughly review the labor relations situation at the New Orleans International Airport control tower and take whatever corrective actions are necessary.

FAA southwest region officials told GAO that the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization must also work to improve relations with facility management, which could include encouraging controllers to rejoin the technical advisory committee from which they resigned en masse and requesting the assistance of the organization's regional representative in conjunction with FAA southwest region efforts to improve relations.



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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|--------|--|
| FAA | Federal Aviation Administration |
| FATTAC | Facilities Air Traffic Technical Advisory Committee |
| GAO | General Accounting Office |
| ILS | instrument landing system |
| LMR | labor-management relations |
| NOTAM | notice to airmen |
| PATCO | Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization |
| STARS | standard terminal arrival routes |
| TCA | terminal control area |
| UCR | unsatisfactory condition report |
| UHF | ultra high frequency |
| VHF | very high frequency |

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In a July 31, 1980, letter seven members of the Louisiana congressional delegation requested that we review alleged operating problems raised by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) air traffic controllers at the New Orleans International Airport. The controllers believe that some of the air traffic control procedures in use at New Orleans are unsafe and that they are harassed by the local FAA management. They characterized labor-management relations (LMR) as poor.

NEW ORLEANS INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT: DESCRIPTION AND CHARACTERISTICS

Scheduled international and domestic air service to and from the New Orleans area is provided by the New Orleans International Airport at Moisant Field. The area is also served by several other airports, the largest of which is Lakefront Airport. Figure 1-1 shows Moisant Field, other airports in the area, and the major geographical features of the New Orleans area.

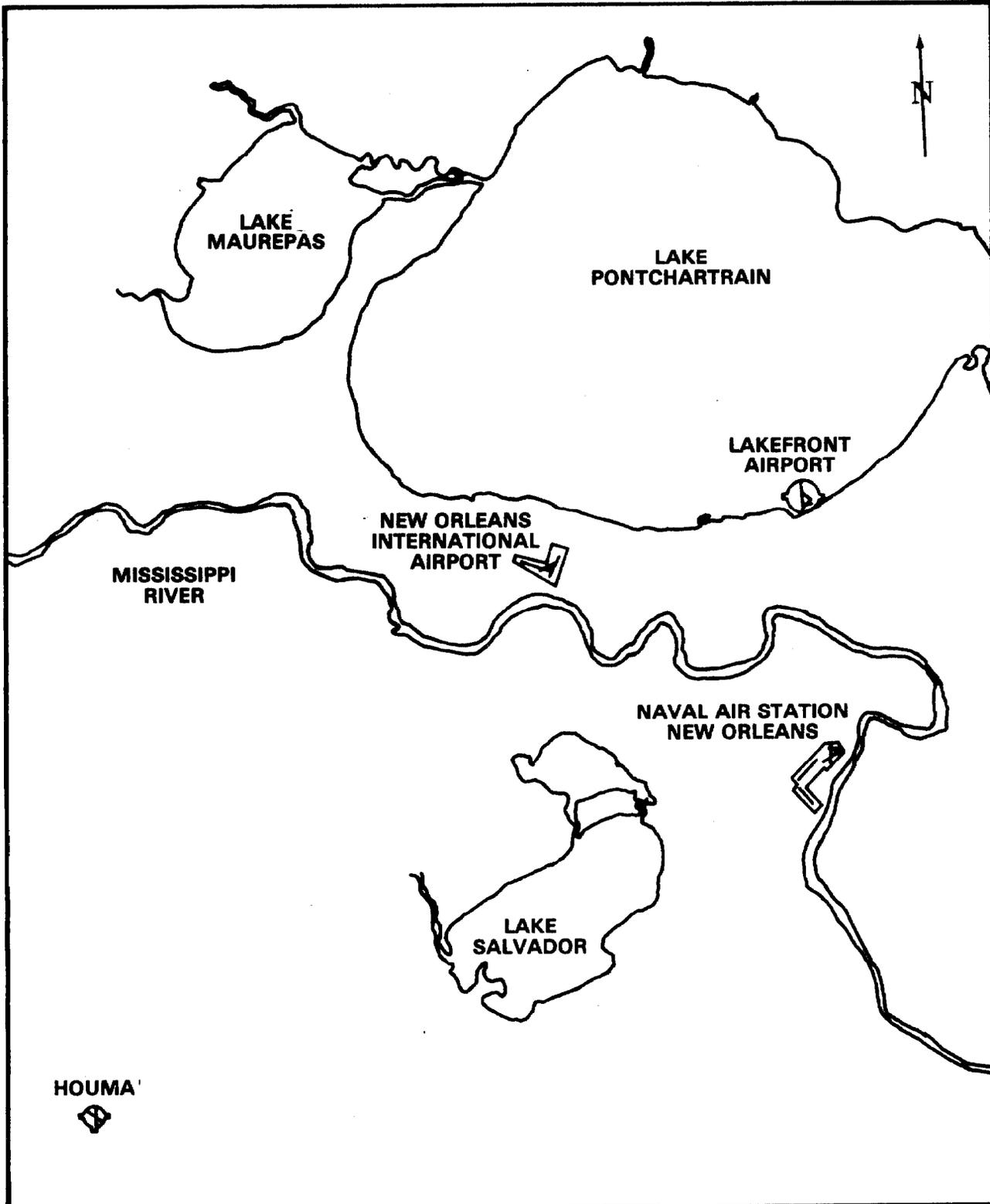
Moisant Field, 15 miles west of downtown New Orleans, is a primary connecting point between the United States, Mexico, and Central and South America. Sixteen major domestic and foreign air carriers, including six international air carriers, provide passenger and freight air service.

The number of passenger enplanements ¹/ at Moisant was estimated at 3.6 million in 1980 and is expected to increase to 4.6 million in 1985 and 5.9 million in 1990.

Moisant Field is part of the national airspace system administered by FAA, Department of Transportation. The system is a nationwide network of radar, terminal control towers, en route air traffic control centers, personnel, and navigation equipment which track and control aircraft from takeoff to landing. In order to provide for a safe, orderly, and expeditious flow of air traffic in the New Orleans area, FAA

¹/The number of revenue passengers boarding aircraft, including originating, stopover, and transferring passengers.

Figure 1-1. Airports in the Greater New Orleans Area



SOURCE: FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION

--designated in 1975 portions of the airspace surrounding Moisant Field as controlled airspace, known as the New Orleans terminal control area (TCA) and

--controls the airspace by providing ground and air communications, including radar, navigation aids, and air traffic services through a staff of controllers located at the Moisant Field Control Tower.

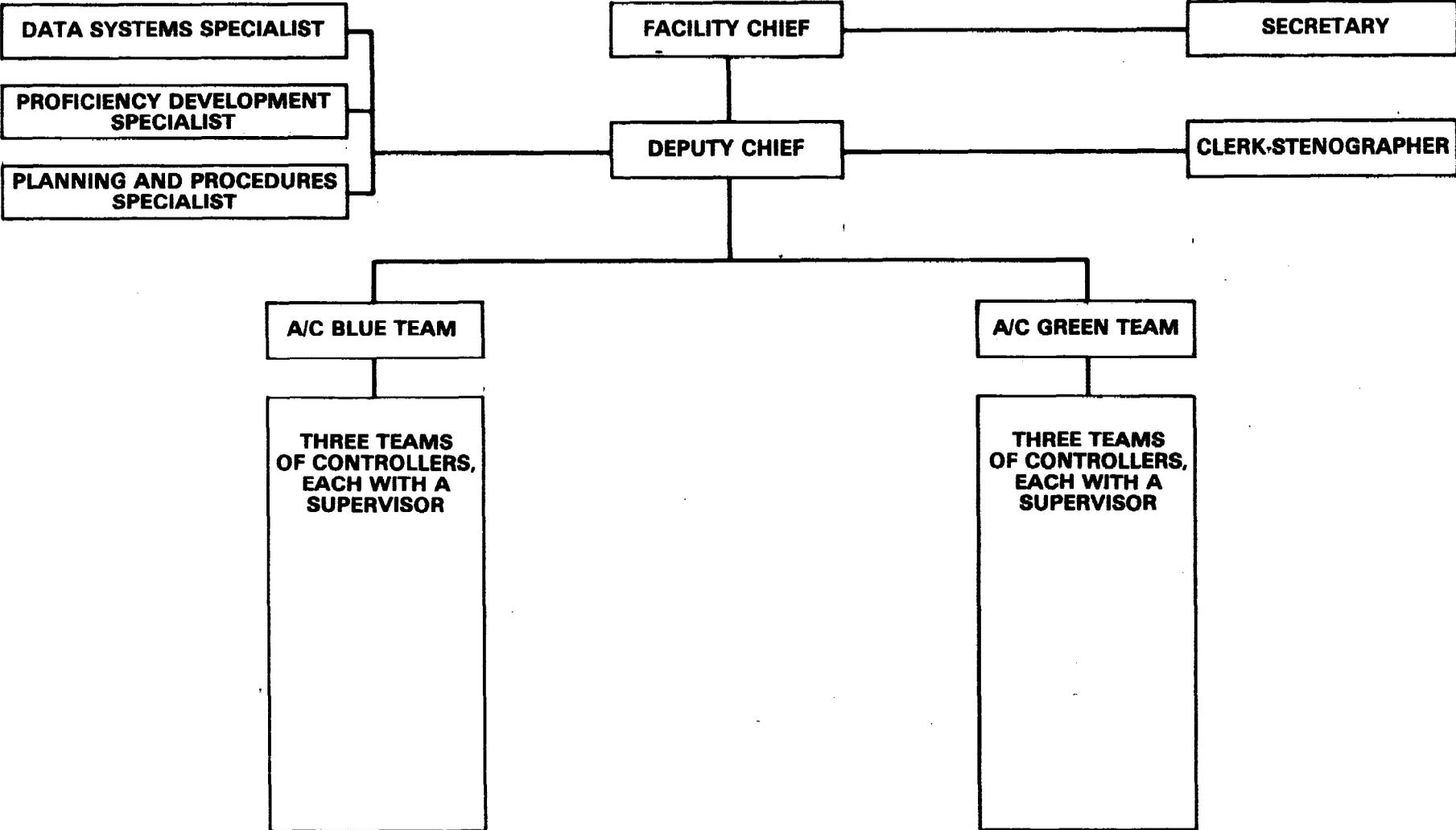
The New Orleans TCA was established as part of a national program to reduce the risk of mid-air collisions due to the rapid increase in the number of flight operations around major terminal areas. Pilots must obtain FAA authorization before they can operate within a TCA. In addition, aircraft operating within the TCA must be equipped with specified equipment such as two-way radios and transponders, which provide speed and identification information.

The Moisant Field Control Tower was staffed by 40 controllers and a managerial and support staff of 18 as of January 1981, and it controls all aircraft arriving and departing Moisant Field and airports at Houma and Patterson, Louisiana. The tower also controls aircraft passing over the New Orleans area at specified altitudes and aircraft movements over the Lakefront Airport and the New Orleans Naval Air Station. Figures 1-2 and 1-3 show the tower's organizational structure--the Moisant tower chief reports to FAA's southwest region's air traffic division chief.

HOW AIR TRAFFIC IS CONTROLLED

Air traffic is controlled through local operating rules and procedures developed by the tower management, within a framework of national and regional directives. The rules, which reflect the geographical features and airport locations served, are reviewed by FAA's regional office but do not require their approval. These rules subdivide the airspace into controller operating positions. At the Moisant Field Control Tower as many as seven controller positions may be in operation in the radar room during peak traffic periods. The positions are arrival radar, final radar, north radar, south radar, Navy radar, departure radar, and a nonradar position controlling traffic at the airport in Patterson. During nonpeak periods, positions are combined and during the lightest

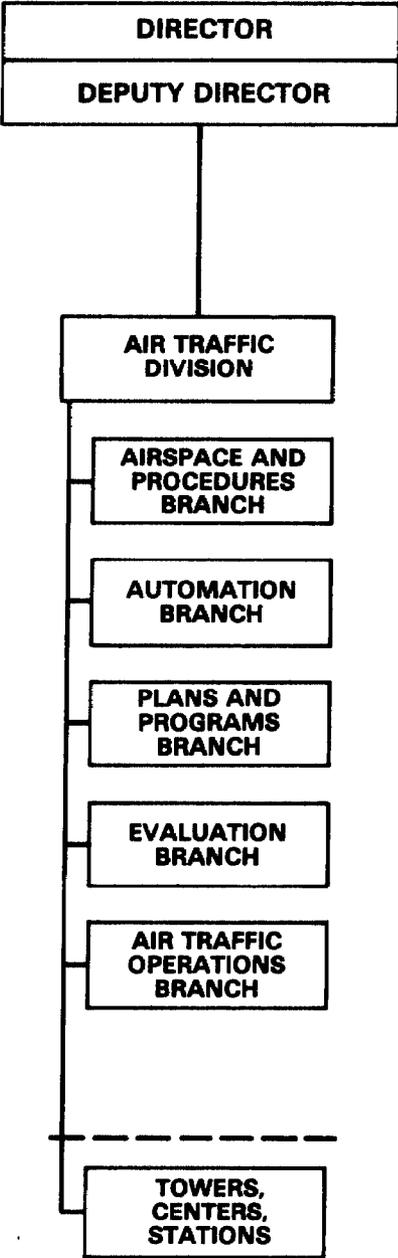
Figure 1-2. Moisant Tower Organizational Chart



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SOURCE: FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION

Figure 1-3. Air Traffic Division, Southwest Region, Organization Chart



SOURCE: FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION

traffic periods, usually the midnight shift, one controller handles all the positions.

Controllers use radar and two-way voice communication to direct aircraft to follow prescribed altitudes, headings, and speeds, thereby assisting them in reaching their objectives--landing at Moisant Field or departing the area.

During 1980 Moisant Tower handled over 198,000 air traffic operations. The number of operations is expected to increase to over 238,000 by 1985 and over 265,000 by 1990.

FAA's EVALUATION PROCESS

FAA reviews towers at airports the size of Moisant Field annually. In FAA's southwest region, the air traffic division's evaluation branch conducts the evaluation.

The annual evaluation checks such things as operations, supervision, training, and action items from previous evaluations. The air traffic division chief can also choose to have other items checked. The evaluation team reviews its findings with the facility chief and prepares a written report to the chief, air traffic division, setting forth the findings and any recommendations for improving operations. The facility has 30 days to respond to the recommendations, stating its proposed actions and expected completion dates. If the facility disagrees with any recommendation it may appeal, detailing its views. The chief, air traffic division, is the final arbiter.

The southwest region's air traffic division chief requested that the Moisant Tower evaluation team review Moisant controller allegations concerning air traffic control procedures during its September 1980 evaluation.

OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

Our objectives were to (1) gain an indepth knowledge of the allegations and the related air traffic control procedures, (2) determine how FAA's own periodic evaluation process and its regional personnel viewed air traffic control procedures used by Moisant Tower, (3) obtain the views of knowledgeable people outside FAA about these air traffic control procedures, and (4) examine labor-management relations at the Moisant Tower.

The controllers initially submitted 12 allegations to the Members of Congress who requested this review. In an initial meeting, the controllers told us that these allegations were illustrative of operating problems at the Moisant Field Control Tower. At that meeting we stated that we could not pursue all the allegations in the time available for our review. We identified eight that we would pursue and proposed to eliminate the others because one was duplicative, a second was being pursued in another review, a third was too vague, and a fourth involved a minor problem that appeared to have been resolved. One of the eight was later eliminated because additional clarification we needed was never supplied by the controllers. We also agreed to listen to any additional allegations in the course of interviews with the controllers.

Our review of the allegations, conducted between October 1980 and January 1981, consisted principally of the following.

- We conducted extensive interviews with the majority of air traffic controllers assigned to Moisant Tower. We also interviewed three former controllers who are presently retired.
- We obtained written and oral comments on the allegations from FAA's southwest regional office and oral comments from the Moisant Tower management. Appendix I contains the southwest regional office's written comments.
- We independently pursued the allegations by reviewing logs and other documentation at Moisant Tower to confirm information supplied to us.

We also interviewed officials of FAA's headquarters office; the New Orleans Aviation Board, which operates Moisant Field; the Louisiana State Office of Aviation and Public Transportation; and selected aviation users at Moisant Field. We reviewed FAA directives, handbooks, notices, facility logs, and evaluation reports.

We reviewed the FAA regional office 1978, 1979, and 1980 annual evaluation reports on Moisant Tower; discussed their recommendations at length with both facility and regional management; and reviewed the facility's response to the recommendations. The controllers expressed distrust of FAA's capability to objectively examine the allegations; however, in our opinion the FAA documents and information obtained during interviews provided candid information

concerning the allegations. In addition, we discussed the allegations with air traffic control specialists at the National Transportation Safety Board and requested its written views, which are contained in appendix II.

To explore the LMR climate, we interviewed headquarters, local, and regional FAA officials; national, regional, and local officials of the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO); and headquarters and regional officials of the Federal Labor Relations Authority.

One audit approach we considered but rejected was developing sufficient information to judge the adequacy of air traffic control procedures. This alternative was rejected because we determined that we lack the technical expertise to make such judgments. Consequently, we determined that we could be most responsive to the request by serving as a factfinder in reviewing the allegations.

CHAPTER 2

AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL PROCEDURES ARE BEING MADE MORE EFFICIENT

Prompted by controller allegations concerning operational problems at Moisant Field Control Tower, FAA's 1980 evaluation of the facility placed special emphasis on these problems. The southwest region's evaluators found that Moisant Tower has some significant airspace and procedural problems that result in increased coordination and workload for controllers and stated that major airspace and procedural changes were needed. Similar procedural problems were voiced in the controllers' allegations. FAA regional officials told us that they think improvements are needed and that appropriate action is being taken.

SAFETY IS HARD TO DEFINE

In the majority of their allegations the controllers contend the procedures in question create unsafe conditions. Moisant Tower management has consistently stated that conditions are safe. Southwest region officials maintain that while in some instances modifications to existing airspace and/or procedures will enhance the overall operation, the system as it currently operates is safe.

The Federal Aviation Administration Act of 1958 (49 U.S.C. 1421), which established FAA, directs the Administrator to develop plans for

"the use of the navigable airspace and assign by rule, regulation or order the use of the navigable airspace under such terms, conditions, and limitations as he may deem necessary in order to insure the safety of aircraft and the efficient utilization of such airspace."

The act offers no definition of safety, but seems to recognize that there are degrees of safety in that it calls upon the Administrator to develop minimum standards. The report of the House Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, 85th Congress, on this legislation also seems to recognize degrees of safety and efficiency under proper regulations. It seems to us that one could assume that airspace was safe if it met FAA requirements, but there is no basis for judging the level of safety provided by the requirements themselves. Accordingly, the term "safe" is a nebulous one that is difficult to apply as an evaluation standard.

CONTROLLER ALLEGATIONS

We gathered information concerning seven allegations made by the Moisant controllers. A discussion of each is presented below. The information was drawn from extensive interviews with and written material provided by both the controllers and FAA Moisant Field and regional management. Judgments on the procedures, which are the subject of the allegations, are drawn from written material provided by FAA. As noted in the previous chapter, we are serving as a factfinder, gathering and presenting information relevant to each allegation, but we are not making judgments on any of the allegations.

Separation of Moisant/Lakefront traffic

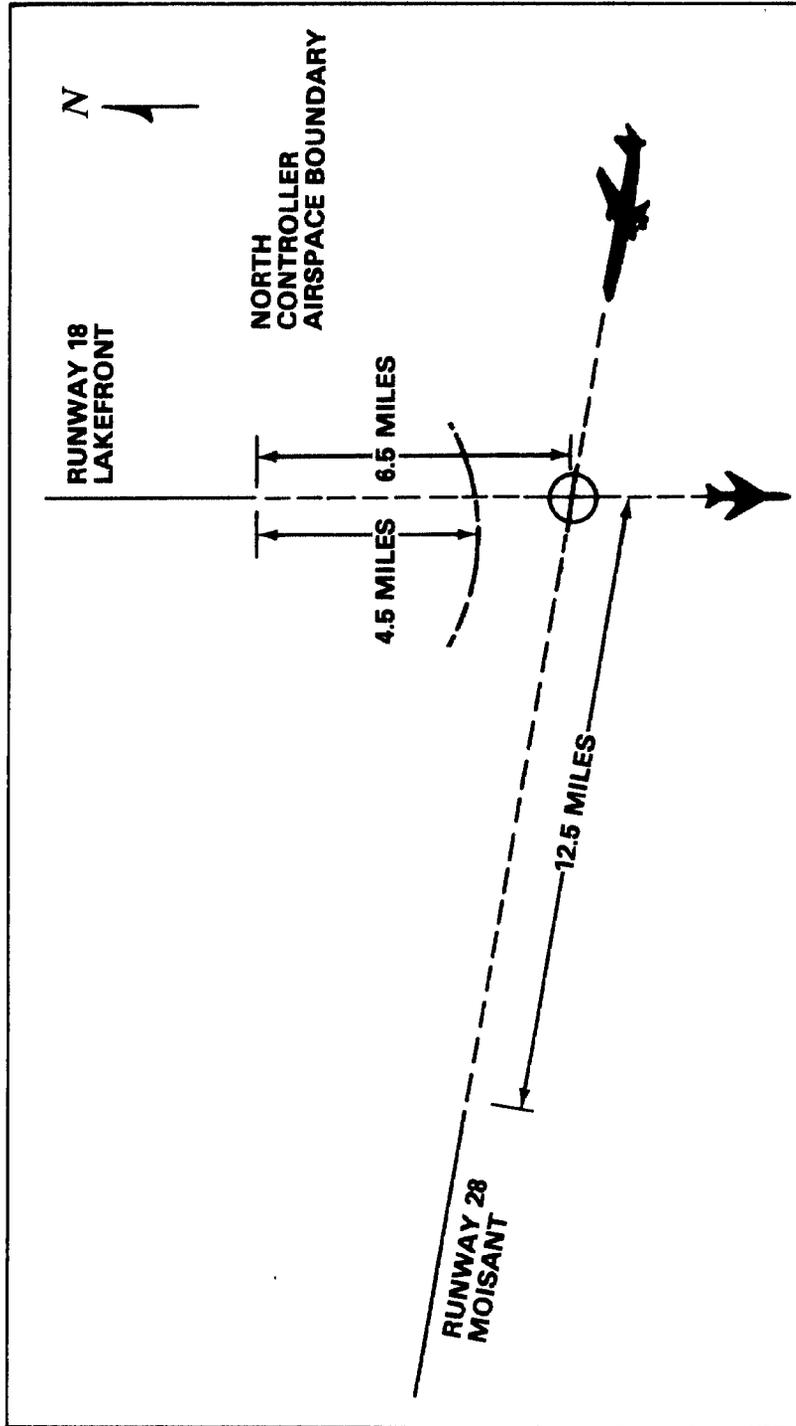
When aircraft are departing on runway 18 1/ at Lakefront Airport and aircraft are landing on runway 28 at Moisant Field, their projected flight paths cross. Under this runway configuration the controllers allege that the controller handling aircraft departing Lakefront, which is called the north radar position, does not have sufficient airspace to maneuver the aircraft to avoid the airspace allocated to the controller responsible for the aircraft landing at Moisant, which is called the final radar position. This situation is most pronounced when high-performance, high-speed aircraft are departing Lakefront.

Information gathered

Moisant and Lakefront are 14 miles apart. When aircraft are landing on Moisant runway 28, which is to the west, and departing on Lakefront runway 18, which is to the south, their projected flight paths cross, as shown in figure 2-1. In order to prevent the flight paths from crossing in this configuration, aircraft departing Lakefront are restricted to airspace extending a radius of 4-1/2 miles from Lakefront and from the surface up to 2,500 feet. This airspace is controlled by the north radar position. The final radar position, handling aircraft landing at Moisant, controls the airspace outside and above the north radar's airspace, up to 5,500 feet.

1/ Runway numbers are magnetic compass headings with a zero eliminated; for example runway 18 is a magnetic compass heading of 180 degrees.

Figure 2-1. A Depiction of Pertinent Air Traffic Information Concerning Allegation 1.



Aircraft departing to the south from Lakefront must operate within the delegated airspace and usually make a turn before reaching a point 1-1/2 miles from the 4-1/2-mile boundary. This maneuver is necessary to maintain required FAA standard separation between aircraft. ^{1/} Should the departing aircraft desire to cross the 4-1/2-mile boundary, it can do so only if the north radar and the final radar controllers coordinate the maneuver. The FAA Air Traffic Control Manual states that a controller cannot allow an aircraft under his control to enter another controller's airspace without first completing coordination; that is, informing him. FAA air traffic control specialists told us that a rule of good air traffic control procedures is to keep coordination to a minimum.

In September 1980 the Moisant Tower management, in an attempt to maintain the 1,000-foot standard vertical separation, restricted aircraft landing west at Moisant Field to 3,000 feet altitude and aircraft departing Lakefront to 2,000 feet altitude until they pass the intersection of the projected flight paths. This action, however, did not eliminate the problem of Lakefront departing aircraft occasionally entering the final radar controller's airspace and the subsequent need for the north radar controller to coordinate with the final controller.

The FAA regional office recognized this airspace problem in its 1980 Moisant Tower evaluation and made a recommendation to solve it. The regional office recommended that the north radar position's allocated airspace from 2,000 feet to the surface be extended to the south so controllers could ensure that high-performance aircraft departing runway 18 could turn eastward within the north radar controller's airspace beneath the area where aircraft on final approach to Moisant Field are maintaining 3,000 feet.

The Moisant Tower management is proposing to revise the north radar controller's airspace as recommended with a planned implementation date of March 15, 1981.

^{1/} FAA standards require separation of 3 miles horizontal and 1,000 feet vertical between aircraft. To achieve this separation each controller must keep aircraft 1-1/2 miles from the boundary of his allocated airspace.

Arrival/departure airspace

The controllers alleged that operating procedures allow the departure controller, who controls aircraft leaving Moisant Field, to direct aircraft into the airspace belonging to the arrival controller, who controls aircraft approaching Moisant Field. The controllers feel that the lack of defined arrival routes results in the departure controller not always knowing which route an arriving aircraft will follow.

Information gathered

Current Moisant Tower operating procedures require that the arrival controller keep aircraft at an altitude of at least 6,000 feet until they reach a specified point at which they can start their descent to land. The departure controller can keep aircraft at 5,000 feet until they reach a designated area, known as a departure gate, about 15 miles from the airport, at which they can start their climb to leave the area. This procedure ensures the 1,000-foot vertical separation required by FAA.

An optional procedure in effect at Moisant Tower allows the departure controller to permit aircraft to climb above 5,000 feet into the arrival controller's airspace, using radar information to maneuver the aircraft around arriving aircraft. While this procedure can increase the movement of air traffic, the departure controller does not always know which route an arriving aircraft will follow because Moisant Tower does not have defined arrival routes, called STARS (standard terminal arrival routes). 1/

The September 1980 FAA regional evaluation criticized Moisant Tower's procedures and the lack of STARS. The tower's procedures, according to the evaluation, leave the departure controller uncertain about where the arrival controller may direct aircraft. The evaluation report recommended that the tower develop STARS or specific

1/STARS are preplanned arrival routings into an airport's terminal area used by pilots flying under instrument flight rules.

internal routings 1/ for landings on the various runways. Moisant Tower, in response to the regional evaluation, has developed internal routings which are scheduled to take effect March 1, 1981.

Availability of instrument landing systems

The controllers alleged that the New Orleans terminal area was without any instrument landing systems (ILS) on October 19 and 20, 1979. They believe this was due to insufficient coordination between Moisant Tower management, the New Orleans Aviation Board, and FAA maintenance personnel.

Information gathered

Moisant Field is an FAA-certified air carrier airport owned by the city of New Orleans and managed by the New Orleans Aviation Board. The board is responsible for maintaining the terminal building; the runways and taxiways; and the runway, centerline, and taxiway lights.

Navigational communications, radar, and other lighting equipment are provided and maintained by FAA's Airways Facilities Sector. Coordination of all of these activities between FAA and the New Orleans Aviation Board is the responsibility of the area coordinator, who in this instance is also the tower chief.

Moisant Field has two runways (01/19 and 10/28), three ILS systems, and several other methods for making instrument approaches. An aircraft can land in all but the poorest weather using these approaches.

The ILS on runway 01 needed refurbishing. The Airways Facilities Sector requested and received the tower chief's permission to shut the system down in July 1979 to do the necessary repair work. On the evening of October 20, 1979,

1/Internal routings are standardized arrival routes used only by controllers and not made available to pilots. Internal routings place responsibility for aircraft arrival approaches on the controllers, who must give pilots specific approach commands. STARS place the responsibility between controllers and pilots, with the pilot following the approach path designated in the STARS and the controller monitoring flight progress.

the system passed a flight check and was returned to service.

Also during the July - October 1979 period, Moisant Field was experiencing problems with runway surfaces. Runway 10/28 had been resurfaced and needed grooving. 1/ Runway 01/19 was deteriorating and its use was limited to lighter weight aircraft except when runway 10/28 was closed for grooving.

During meetings on the grooving contract, the FAA area coordinator (the tower chief) requested that the aviation board delay grooving until runway 01/19 was completely resurfaced. The aviation board, however, decided to proceed with the grooving but did agree to do it at night when it would cause the least inconvenience to air traffic. Grooving operations began on the evening of October 16, 1979. News of both the runway 01 ILS outage and runway 10/28 grooving operations was distributed through the notice to airmen (NOTAM) 2/ system.

In addition, on October 19 and 20, 1979, Lakefront Airport had its main runway and ILS shut down due to a runway construction project.

1/Grooving allows water to run off quicker and lessens the chances of an aircraft hydroplaning after landing on a wet surface.

2/An FAA system designed to disseminate to airmen information on an airport's facilities, services, or procedures.

The following table summarizes the status of the runways and ILS at Moisant Field and Lakefront Airport on October 19 and 20, 1979.

| | <u>Runway Availability</u> | <u>ILS status</u> | |
|---------------------------|---|--|---|
| | | <u>October 19</u> | <u>October 20</u> |
| Moisant Field: | | | |
| Runway 01/19 | Restricted use, except when 10/28 was closed for grooving. | Out of service | Passed flight check and returned to service sometime between 9:15 p.m. and 11:30 p.m. |
| Runway 10/28 | Closed for grooving during the hours of 10 p.m. to 6 a.m.; open remainder of the day. | Operational on both days; during hours of grooving it could be used for circling approaches to runway 01/19. <u>a/</u> | |
| Lakefront Airport: | | | |
| Runway 18/36 | Closed due to a runway construction project. | Closed both days due to a runway construction project. | |

a/A circling approach is one which utilizes an ILS on another runway to bring an aircraft close enough to see the airport and land visually in all but the poorest weather.

The New Orleans area airports did have a straight-in operational ILS during most of October 19 and 20, 1979. Alternative navigational aids were also available that would allow aircraft to land in all but the poorest weather. Between 10 p.m. on October 19, 1979, and 6 a.m. on October 20, 1979, and for less than 1-1/2 hours on the evening of October 20, 1979, there was no straight-in ILS approach. In the late evening of October 20, the ILS on Moisant runway 01 was returned to service, providing a straight-in ILS approach.

Lack of emergency frequencies
at south radar position

This allegation stated that the south radar position does not have the emergency radio frequencies that the other six controller positions have. If the south radar controller needs to use the emergency frequencies, he must ask another controller to call or move to another position and make the call himself. This situation is particularly a problem when south radar controls military traffic.

Information gathered

Air traffic controllers and pilots communicate by radio. Two radio frequencies have been set aside by the Federal Communications Commission for emergency use only. One frequency, 121.5 MHz, is in the very high frequency (VHF) band and the other, 243.0 MHz, is in the ultra high frequency (UHF) band. The VHF frequencies are used primarily by civilian aircraft, while UHF is used only by military aircraft. A pilot must set his radio to the VHF frequency before he can transmit or receive on it. Most UHF equipment is designed so that the pilot can receive transmissions on the UHF emergency frequency any time his equipment is turned on, even though his radio is set on another frequency.

The Moisant Tower has seven controller positions. Six of these positions have both the VHF and the UHF emergency frequencies. The south radar position does not have either. Emergency frequencies are needed so that controllers can quickly contact an aircraft if it cannot be reached on the normal communication frequencies.

The FAA radio equipment installed at each controller position consists of a cabinet base that holds eight modules. Each module is assigned a frequency. None of the eight modules at the south radar position are assigned to emergency frequencies. Substituting the emergency frequencies for the ones presently installed would involve reconfiguring the wiring, which would affect the tape recorder that records all pilot-controller communications. It would also result in the loss of two of the commonly used frequencies, which are needed at the south radar position, to make room for the emergency frequencies. Adding the emergency frequencies while retaining the existing frequencies would require another cabinet base, which would depend on whether the custom manufactured equipment and funds are available.

Moisant Tower has a controller position which normally handles military traffic arriving and departing the New Orleans Naval Air Station. This position is identified as Navy radar and is equipped with the VHF and UHF emergency frequencies. When New Orleans Naval Air Station does not have sufficient aircraft flying to justify staffing the Navy radar position, the controller's responsibilities are combined with those of the south radar position. Because the emergency frequencies are available at the Navy radar position, which is next to the south radar position, and because the Navy radar position is unmanned when south radar is working Navy traffic, the emergency frequencies are available to the south radar controller by reaching over for the microphone.

Moisant Tower management plans to request funds to add the emergency frequencies at the south radar position in fiscal year 1983.

Lack of procedures for transitioning from a radar to a nonradar environment

This allegation related to the fact that Moisant Tower has no written procedures for changing 1/ from a radar to a nonradar environment. When the radar fails, the controllers must immediately combine control of airspace and aircraft into the positions used in a nonradar environment. Each controller should know what is expected of him during the transition. Without written procedures, changes are not always smooth and errors are possible.

Information gathered

Radar equipment is usually used to help control air traffic at Moisant Field. The radar display screen shows the location of aircraft. With the aid of computers and in combination with equipment on the aircraft, information such as speed, altitude, and identification is also displayed on the screen. Video maps are used with the display screen to show ground obstacles and other geographical information useful to the controller.

When the radar fails, the display screen also fails. The controller must then control the aircraft solely by using information radioed by the pilots. Air traffic controllers are trained to do so in their developmental training and receive refresher training during their annual professionalism training course.

1/This changeover is called transitioning.

Six radar positions and one nonradar position are normally staffed at Moisant Tower. In a nonradar environment, the radar positions are combined into two positions--arrival and departure. The nonradar position is continued in operation. Coordinators and a data person are added to handle contacts with other towers and provide aircraft flight data to the remaining controllers. When a facility plans to shut its radar down, usually to repair or replace equipment, the controllers have time to plan for the change to a nonradar environment. When the radar fails unexpectedly, they cannot plan; each controller must stabilize his position by maintaining aircraft within his airspace and then begin the process of combining positions. As of January 1981, controllers did not have preassigned roles to assume during a radar failure. The positions that will be active and the procedures that will be followed are left to the discretion of the team supervisor on duty at the time of the radar failure. Each supervisor may choose a different procedure for his team to follow.

The September 1980 FAA regional evaluation report cited the facility's lack of written transition procedures and the failure of facility directives to define the functions of the nonradar positions. The report recommended that Moisant Tower develop procedures for nonradar operations including, as a minimum, transition procedures, airspace allocations for the nonradar positions, and any changes in the duties of the coordinator or data functions.

Moisant Tower is developing written procedures that are scheduled to be implemented March 1, 1981.

Inadequate procedures and
insufficient notice for
planned radar shutdown

The controllers alleged that although management knew well in advance of a May 10, 1980, radar shutdown, neither aircraft operators nor controllers were notified until the week before the shutdown. Additionally, no prearranged procedures were implemented to handle the transition from a radar to nonradar environment. The controllers also alleged that backup coverage was available but not used.

Information gathered

In 1979 FAA had a nationwide program to install new radar beacon antennas at various airports. FAA's

Airways Facilities Sector at Moisant Field learned in August 1979 that its turn for receiving the new radar beacon antenna was coming up. In March 1980 the antenna arrived and was placed in front of the radar building at Moisant.

In early April 1980, Moisant Tower management tentatively set Saturday, May 10, 1980, as the installation date for the antenna after considering such factors as the availability of technical personnel, forecasted weather conditions, and expectations of low air traffic activity. Installing the new antenna would require shutting down the radar for about 8 hours. The shutdown date was announced in an April 23, 1980, tower supervisors meeting. At that time, supervisors were advised to inform their teams of the pending shutdown, review nonradar procedures at team briefings, and offer their personnel a chance to brush up on nonradar procedures through refresher training. Subsequently, 10 controllers received 13 hours of refresher training.

On May 2, 1980, the May 10 date for the shutdown became firm and a required reading item announcing it was posted. A required reading item is a written notice maintained in the tower that each controller must read and initial. Our check showed that all the controllers on duty initialed the item.

On May 6 and 7, Moisant Tower staff, as a courtesy, telephoned airline station managers about the shutdown. FAA's NOTAM system further disseminated the shutdown information throughout the aviation community.

A required reading item posted on May 9, 1980, amended the starting time of the radar outage. An attachment delineated procedures for handling visual flight rules traffic in the TCA while radar service was being resumed.

On May 10, 1980, after notifying the Houston Air Route Traffic Control Center, the team supervisor on duty permitted the radar shutdown to proceed as scheduled. The installation was completed in less than the estimated 8 hours.

The Moisant Tower management told us it had evaluated various alternatives for obtaining backup radar service but decided they were not feasible. The alternatives were to send a Moisant controller to Houston Center to control Moisant's traffic; to use the radar site at

Slidell, Louisiana; and use the radar site at the New Orleans Naval Air Station. The review concluded that all three options would require a considerable expenditure of funds for travel, training, and modification of equipment. It would also be necessary to ensure that all personnel were proficient in the use of the backup configuration. Some of the sites had other limitations, such as lack of land lines for communications and the absence of navigational aids depicting information about the New Orleans area on their radar screens.

The plan of action for the May 10, 1980, radar shutdown was reviewed by air traffic personnel at the FAA regional office and in FAA headquarters and found to be complete and appropriate.

Duties of the final radar controller

The controllers alleged that because of the present allocation of airspace, the final radar controller is required to control aircraft overflying New Orleans from Baton Rouge and Lafayette, Louisiana, to Gulfport, Mississippi. This situation requires manual coordination involving calls to several locations and diverts too much of the final radar controller's attention from his primary responsibility of positioning and landing aircraft at Moisant Field.

Information gathered

The final controller at Moisant provides precise directions and speed control to line up aircraft with the runway for landing without undue delays. When aircraft are landing on runways 10 and 28, the final controller's responsibilities also include controlling aircraft overflying New Orleans from Baton Rouge and Lafayette to Gulfport.

Aircraft cannot pass from one controller's airspace to another's without control being transferred, which is called a handoff. The final radar controller must make the handoff for each overflight by calling the other towers on the telephone and coordinating.

The September 1980 FAA regional evaluation report cited the final controller's duties and airspace allocation as an item which creates increased coordination and workload for the controllers. The report recommended that Moisant Tower revise the airspace and/or procedures involved with the overflight services to eliminate this workload from the final controller. In

addition, it recommended that the letter(s) of agreement with adjacent towers concerning these operations be revised accordingly.

Moisant Tower's response to the evaluation report stated that the letter of agreement with Houston Center and Ryan Tower in Baton Rouge had been revised to reroute aircraft overflying New Orleans from Baton Rouge and Lafayette to Gulfport in order to keep such aircraft clear of final radar's airspace. This letter of agreement was effective December 25, 1980.

CHAPTER 3

LABOR-MANAGEMENT RELATIONS

HAVE DETERIORATED TO A

POINT OF IMPASSE

Labor-management relations between FAA's air traffic controllers and managers at Moisant Tower have seriously deteriorated during the past year--almost to the point of a complete communications impasse.

LONG HISTORY OF LMR PROBLEMS AT MOISANT

According to an FAA regional official, LMR problems have existed at Moisant Tower since 1969. During the period 1969-73, relations between the controllers and facility management were characterized as bad by FAA southwest region officials. In 1974 the former facility chief was replaced by the current chief and relations were said to have improved. Improvement continued until 1977, when old problems began to resurface.

In contrast, some of the controllers stated that LMR problems also existed during the 1974-77 period. They claim that attempts to communicate problems and suggest improvements in air traffic control procedures have been met by intimidation and harassment since 1974. This opinion was also voiced by a PATCO regional official. He stated that in 1974 controllers were working in an atmosphere of intimidation and were afraid to file grievances. However, the facility chief received several letters from PATCO representatives at Moisant Tower, two in 1976 and two in 1979, that praised his working relationship with the PATCO local.

ADVERSE ACTION AGAINST ONE CONTROLLER WAS THE CATALYST FOR SAFETY ALLEGATIONS AND CONTROLLER UNITY

Controllers advised us that the adverse personnel action against one Moisant Tower controller was a rallying force and was instrumental in initiating the safety allegations. His case has involved five grievances, one unfair labor practice charge, and the first arbitration case in the facility's history. The arbitration decision was rendered February 3, 1981.

The controller was decertified, demoted, and transferred in a series of adverse personnel actions because FAA concluded that he could not consistently apply the procedures required in a radar facility to provide safe air traffic control services. He filed five grievances under the PATCO contract, none of which were sustained by the facility management. In addition, the PATCO local at Moisant Tower filed an unfair labor practice charge with the Federal Labor Relations Authority, the agency responsible for adjudicating such charges. PATCO charged that the controller was removed from operational duties because he had filed an unsatisfactory condition report (UCR). ^{1/} This agency did not sustain the charge and also denied the appeal.

PATCO contended in the arbitration proceeding that the controller did not receive the required remedial training and that the controller was demoted as retaliation for filing a UCR. FAA contended that the controller experienced considerable difficulty in controlling air traffic, that management made efforts to assist the controller in improving performance, and that the controller attempted to divert attention from his inefficiencies by alleging reprisal for filing a UCR.

The arbitrator decided that FAA did not provide the appropriate type and specified amount of remedial training. The arbitrator also found that there was insufficient evidence to establish that FAA's action was retaliatory. He stated that the evidence establishes that several UCRs have been filed and no retaliatory action has been taken. Because the arbitrator found that FAA had not provided the appropriate type and required amount of remedial training, he sustained the grievance and directed FAA to reinstate the controller and offer him a reasonable amount of training which may be necessary for recertification.

^{1/}The unsatisfactory condition report system was initiated by FAA to provide a means for employees to report hazardous conditions on the job and aviation safety problems. The UCR simultaneously goes to the initiator's supervisor and to the headquarters office. Resulting action can take place at the facility, region, or headquarters levels with the objective being to resolve it at the lowest level possible.

The case united controllers in support of this one controller, polarizing the two sides on practically all issues at the Moisant facility. In addition, many controllers believe that this case led to the submission of the safety allegations to the Members of Congress as a retaliation for the adverse personnel actions.

NUMBER OF GRIEVANCES FILED
DRAMATICALLY INCREASED IN 1980

In 1980 a dramatic increase in controller grievances occurred at Moisant Tower. As of December 10, 1980, a total of 18 have been filed between April 27 and November 13, 1980, by seven different controllers and PATCO. This number contrasts to only three grievances filed in the prior 4 years; one in 1976, two in 1977, and none in 1978 and 1979. Of the 18 grievances filed in 1980, only 2 were resolved by local management. Two have been resolved by the arbitration proceeding just described. The other 14 are under consideration by the southwest regional office.

Grievances can be filed for various reasons, and the number of grievances filed is not necessarily a measure of the status of LMR. We could not judge why so many grievances were filed in this 7-month time span. We have not provided examples of the grievances because most of them are unresolved and to describe them here may mislead the reader as to their yet undecided merits.

COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN LABOR
AND MANAGEMENT--POOR OR
SATISFACTORY?

Depending on which party is talking, communications between the controllers and FAA management at Moisant are described as poor or satisfactory. The controllers feel no one is listening to them and are frustrated that nothing is accomplished through established communication channels. However, management told us that these channels are adequate and that communications are satisfactory.

In the management hierarchy at New Orleans, controllers must report any problems or concerns to their first line supervisors. Such concerns are, supposedly, conveyed up the line through second line supervisors, the deputy facility chief, and finally to the facility chief. The controllers feel that many of their concerns or suggestions may not be reaching the facility chief.

The controllers are not using the other major communication channel, the Facilities Air Traffic Technical Advisory Committee (FATTAC). FATTACs were established by a national FAA order to maintain open communications between a facility work force and the facility management on technical matters. FATTAC allows fully qualified controllers to participate in developing local air traffic operational plans and procedures. It is to be consulted on a wide variety of matters related to local air traffic control. The controllers at Moisant Tower feel that for many years their suggestions, especially for improving air traffic control procedures, have been turned down or ignored by facility management. As a result of the adverse personnel action previously described, the controllers resigned from the Moisant Tower FATTAC on May 17, 1980.

On the other hand, management told us that communications are satisfactory. It feels most problems or concerns can be handled between the controller and first line supervisor. The facility chief and his deputy said they are kept fully informed by the supervisors. They also felt that FATTAC had been operating effectively, that many ideas it advocated have been adopted, that it was serving the purpose intended, and that the controllers made a mistake by resigning from it.

The inability of labor and management to agree on whether communications are satisfactory in our view illustrates the lack of communication.

OUR OBSERVATIONS--LMR and COMMUNICATIONS ARE POOR

In our opinion, LMR and communications at Moisant Tower are poor. We base our opinion on both formal and informal talks with the controllers and managers at the facility, actions taken by both parties during the past year, and our observations. For example:

- Controllers fear using the unsatisfactory condition report process because they feel management will retaliate with adverse actions. Management views UCRs as embarrassing personal attacks rather than as useful tools to improve operations. It should be noted, however, that the recent arbitration and unfair labor practice judgment did not support the controllers' fear.
- Controllers are filing grievances which ask for punitive actions against the supervisors.

--Facility management's response to the safety allegations gives little credence to the controllers' concerns and takes the position that since the controllers had participated in the development of the facility's air traffic control procedures, they must now live with them.

The effects of this breakdown in LMR are twofold. First, Moisant Tower managers and controllers must work in an emotionally charged environment which has the potential to affect performance. Second, facility management is not able to draw effectively upon the knowledge and experience of the controllers because of the dissolution of FATTAC.

We believe the assistance of FAA's southwest region will be needed to help facility management and the controllers settle their disputes and that improving labor-management relations will require efforts by both labor and management. FAA's southwest region has agreed to thoroughly review the labor relations situation at Moisant Tower and take whatever corrective actions are necessary.

FAA southwest regional officials told us that PATCO, as the representative of most Moisant controllers, must also work to improve relations with facility management. This effort could include encouraging the controllers to rejoin FATTAC and requesting the assistance of PATCO's regional representative in conjunction with FAA southwest region efforts to improve relations.



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION
SOUTHWEST REGION
P. O. BOX 1689
FORT WORTH, TEXAS 76101

November 20, 1980

Mr. Thomas D. Reese
Group Director
United States General Accounting Office
Community and Economic Development Division
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Reese:

This responds to your letter of October 15, 1980, concerning New Orleans air traffic safety allegations.

The allegations are discussed by number with a brief description of the practice followed by the FAA position:

Allegation No. 1:

Description:

When aircraft are departing south (on Runway 18) at New Orleans Lakefront Airport and aircraft are landing west (on Runway 28) at New Orleans Moisant Airport, their projected flight paths cross. Under this runway configuration the controller working the aircraft departing Lakefront (North Radar position) does not have sufficient airspace to maneuver the aircraft to avoid the airspace allocated to the controller responsible for the aircraft landing Moisant.

Background

Each air traffic controller in a terminal area such as New Orleans is assigned one or more areas of airspace in which they control aircraft by instructing them to make turns or to climb or descend. These areas of airspace have both horizontal and vertical limits.

In the New Orleans area, the Lakefront Airport is located 12 1/2 miles east-northeast of the New Orleans Moisant Airport. A path extended south of Lakefront Airport Runway 18 will cross the extended path of Moisant Airport Runway 28, 6 1/2 miles south of Lakefront and 12 1/2 miles east of Moisant.

Controllers are required to separate aircraft either horizontally by 3 miles using radar or vertically using a minimum of 1,000 feet. Additionally, without prior verbal coordination, a controller must separate the aircraft from the horizontal limits of his assigned airspace by 1 1/2 miles.

The airspace allocated to the controller who is working the aircraft departing Runway 18 at Lakefront Airport extends approximately 4 1/2 miles south of the Lakefront Airport. The limited amount of airspace south of Lakefront Airport does create some problem in containing an executive jet aircraft unless verbal coordination is completed. A random sampling of traffic at Lakefront shows only 9 out of 62 departures on 1 day and 16 out of 72 on the other day were executive jet aircraft.

FAA Position:

Facility management revised the Runway 28 ILS approach procedures on September 4, 1980, to enhance the use of Runway 28 at Moisant and Runway 18 at Lakefront. Safety is not compromised since the aircraft landing at Moisant maintain 3,000 feet until passing an intersection on the final approach course which is west of the extended centerline of Runway 18 at Lakefront. Lakefront departures are restricted to 2,000 feet which insures 1,000 feet separation between these aircraft.

This does not, however, eliminate the requirement to contain the aircraft within the North Radar controllers airspace or to conduct prior coordination on those aircraft which cannot be contained within the airspace. In addition, modifications to the airspace boundaries are being considered which will provide the maximum available airspace to the North Radar controller and therefore reduce the number of occasions when prior coordination is required.

Allegation No. 2:

Description:

The procedure authorizing the Departure Radar controller to climb departing aircraft in airspace delegated to the arrival controller based on aircraft traffic information generated by the ARTS III computer is unsafe. The allegation is based on the fact that the arrival controller can randomly descend/vector aircraft anywhere in his delegated airspace rather than on defined routes. Thus, the departure controller would not know the potential headings of arrival aircraft and could have difficulty ensuring separation.

Background:

Each controller in the Moisant Terminal Area is delegated one or more areas of airspace in which to control aircraft. These areas of airspace have both vertical and horizontal dimensions. The ARTS III computer is used to gather data from properly equipped aircraft and display that data on the air traffic controllers radar display at the position of the aircraft. The data includes the aircraft identification, altitude, and ground speed in addition to a symbol indicating which controller in the Moisant Tower is working the aircraft.

FAA Position:

The FAA has determined that procedures authorizing one controller to enter the airspace of another controller without coordination on each aircraft can increase the efficient movement of aircraft without creating a safety problem. The Director of Air Traffic Service has issued an FAA Order 7110.74, Prearranged Coordination Procedures for Radar Facilities, which prescribes the requirements to be met before one controller may enter another controller's airspace without coordination. The procedures used at Moisant Tower were developed to comply with FAA Order 7110.74; however, they failed to require arrival aircraft to operate on predetermined routes when Departure Radar is applying prearranged coordination in arrival airspace. These procedures are currently being amended to specify which arrival routings may be used when applying these procedures.

Although the total intent of the FAA policy had not been fully met at Moisant Tower, during the past 3 years there has not been a report filed indicating that the separation standards have been violated because of these procedures.

Allegation No. 3:Description:

The claim is made that insufficient coordination between air traffic managers, the New Orleans Aviation Board, and FAA maintenance personnel resulted in an unsafe condition shutting down all the instrument landing systems (ILS) in the New Orleans terminal area on October 19 and 20, 1979. Management is also charged with belittling the controllers in response to unsatisfactory condition reports (UCR's).

Background:

An ILS is an electronic navigation system designed to provide an approach path for exact alignment and descent of an aircraft on final approach to a runway. The ground equipment consists of two highly directional transmitting systems, and along the approach, three or fewer marker beacons. The transmitting systems are the localizer which provides guidance to the runway centerline and the glide slope which projects an electronic glide path to the runway. Pilots use the aircraft's radio equipment and instrumentation to position the aircraft on the localizer and glide path for landings when weather conditions do not permit visual reference to the ground.

Moisant Airport is served by three ILS's, one serving Runway 10, one serving Runway 28, and the other serving Runway 01.

In addition to the ILS systems there are four other methods of making an instrument approach to Moisant, three of which require airborne navigation equipment, specifically a VHF omni-directional range (VOR), nondirectional beacon (NDB), area navigation (RNAV), and airport surveillance radar (ASR).

A UCR is a method for employees to identify areas considered unsatisfactory to their immediate supervisor. FAA policy is that UCR's be resolved at the lowest possible level, but provides for review to the Service Director level.

FAA Position:

In order to respond to this allegation, a general status of the runways and navigational aids in the New Orleans terminal area on October 19 and 20, 1979, is appropriate:

- a. New Orleans (Moisant) International Airport
 - (1) The ILS serving Runway 10 was operational both days.
 - (2) The ILS serving Runway 28 was operational both days.
 - (3) The ILS serving Runway 01 was out of service October 19, 1979, and had been out of service since July 26, 1979, for refurbishing the localizer site foundation resulting from sub-soil problems. This ILS was flight checked and returned to operational status October 20, 1979.
 - (4) Both Runways 10/28 and 01/19 were available under the following conditions:
 - (a) When Runway 10/28 was in use Runway 01/19 was limited to aircraft weighing 12,500 pounds or less to reduce the deterioration of the runway.
 - (b) When Runway 10/28 was closed for the grooving project (between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m.) or closed for a disabled aircraft, Runway 01/19 was open unrestricted since only a few (6-10) aircraft were expected to use the runway during this time frame.
- b. New Orleans Lakefront Airport
 - (1) The ILS serving Runway 18 was out of service as a result of an airport construction project which was causing interference to the ILS signals.
 - (2) Runway 18/36 was closed due to an airport construction project.

We have investigated the charges and found that extensive coordination was accomplished concerning projects affecting the status of various navigational aids and runways on the dates indicated in this allegation. Specifically, the FAA recommended to the New Orleans Aviation Board that the grooving project for Runway 10/28 be delayed until Runway 01/19 was fully reopened. This recommendation was not accepted and, as it turned out, resulted in the New Orleans terminal area being without straight-in landings from an ILS approach during the period that Runway 10/28 was

being grooved (10 p.m. to 6 a.m.). The hours for closing Runway 10/28 were derived from input from facility managers based on the predicted traffic activity during this period.

The New Orleans Aviation Board was faced with a decision on whether to close Runway 10/28 during low traffic periods when the impact on air traffic would be minimal or close it during daylight hours when the impact would be significant. We concur in the decision to close the runway during periods of expected low traffic (10 p.m. to 6 a.m.).

With regard to the unsafe condition, safety was not compromised for the following reasons:

- a. Prior to closing a runway or shutting down a navigational aid (NAVAID), a Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) is issued. These NOTAM's are distributed to airline dispatch offices and are also available to general aviation and corporate pilots through our flight service stations (FSS). Pilots are required by Federal Aviation Regulations (FAR's) to check NOTAM's along their proposed route of flight as a part of their preflight planning.
- b. Instrument approach procedures were available for Moisant and Lakefront Airports during this period, one of which could be made to a straight-in landing on Runway 01/19 at Moisant.

These approaches are:

ILS Runway 10 circling to land on Runway 01/19. The minimum descent altitude (MDA) for the circling approach ranges from 460 feet mean sea level (MSL) for the smallest category aircraft to 560 feet MSL for the largest aircraft. Visibility requirements range from 1 to 2 miles.

Circling approaches to Runway 01/19 using the ILS to Runway 28 with the same MDA and visibility requirements were also available.

Additionally, airport surveillance radar approaches (ASR) are authorized to Runway 01 for straight-in landings with an MDA of 460 feet MSL and visibility ranging from 1 to 1 1/2 miles. An ASR approach is authorized for Runway 19 with MDA of 360 feet MSL and visibility ranging from 1 to 1 1/2 miles. An ASR approach is based on radar navigational guidance from the controller to the pilot to align the aircraft with the runway centerline by assigning the aircraft headings to fly.

Safety is not a factor in either the circling approaches or ASR approaches since the pilot descends to the MDA on either approach and if the runway environment is not sighted upon reaching the missed approach point, the pilot executes a missed approach.

Management response to the UCR's was certainly not intended to belittle the controllers.

Allegation No. 4:

Description:

The South Radar position does not have emergency frequencies 121.5 or 243.0 MHz. This position controls most of the military traffic arriving or departing from New Orleans Naval Air Station (NAS).

Background:

Two radio frequencies of those designated for aviation use have been set aside by the Federal Communications Commission for emergency use only. One frequency 121.5 MHz is designated in the very high frequency (VHF) band and the other 243.0 MHz is in the ultra high frequency (UHF) band. The VHF frequencies are used primarily by civilian aircraft with some military use, while UHF is used only by military aircraft. VHF equipment in the aircraft is designed in such a manner that the pilot must change his equipment to select the emergency frequency (121.5) before he can transmit or receive on it. Most UHF equipment is designed so the pilot can receive any transmissions on 243.0 any time his equipment is turned on even though his radio is set on another frequency.

FAA Position:

Moisant has a control position which normally handles the traffic arriving and departing New Orleans Naval Air Station. This position is identified as Navy Radar and is equipped with radio frequencies 121.5 and 243.0 MHz. When New Orleans Naval Air Station does not have sufficient aircraft flying to justify Moisant assigning a controller to the Navy Radar position, the controller responsibilities are combined with those of the South Radar position. Because the radio equipment at each position of operation is restricted to eight frequencies the South Radar position does not have frequencies 121.5 or 243.0 MHz. This is not considered unsatisfactory as frequencies 121.5 and 243.0 MHz are only used during an emergency and are available at the Navy Radar position which is next to the South Radar position. Additionally, when the Navy traffic is being worked from the South Radar position, the Navy Radar position is unmanned making the radio frequencies available by simply reaching over for the microphone.

Allegation No. 5:Description:

When radar is operational, traffic in the area is normally worked by six radar positions. When the radar is either shut down or fails, traffic is worked by two or three controllers and there are no written procedures to transition from a radar to a nonradar environment. When the radar fails without warning, controllers must combine operations in a short period of time.

FAA Position:

As indicated in the allegation, in the past the facility has not had written procedures for transition to and operation in a nonradar environment.

Based on background and required knowledge of national nonradar separation standards, controllers do know how to transition from a radar to a nonradar operation. Also, considering the high reliability of radar systems, the absence of written nonradar procedures does not compromise safety.

For example, according to Airway Facilities records of unscheduled outages, radar service was not available for only 2.7 hours in 1978, 0(zero) hours in 1979, and .6 hours in 1980. In summary, based on the above data, the failure of radar without warning is not considered a major problem.

However, to ensure that documented procedures are available to facilitate transition if the radar fails, the facility is currently formulating detailed written procedures for transition from a radar to a nonradar environment.

Allegation No. 6:Description:

The radar was shut down on May 10, 1980, for an antenna change. The shutdown was planned by management well in advance, but the controllers and users were not informed until the week before. Also, there were no prearranged transition procedures.

FAA Position:

Facility managers personally telephoned airline station managers or their representatives on May 6 and May 7, 1980 concerning the shutdown. This was considered sufficient advance notification and air carriers continued to operate their normal schedule. These phone calls were more of an advance courtesy call so the airlines could be prepared to respond to their flight crews, and operations offices located in other cities. The FAA NOTAM system further distributed the information throughout the aviation community in a systematic manner. It should be noted that the facility did not receive any complaints from users concerning this

shutdown, but to the contrary, compliments were received from the Delta Airlines, New Orleans chief pilot concerning how smooth operations went during the outage.

With regard to informing the controllers of the proposed shutdown, the exact date was not published until good weather was forecasted. A tentative date of May 10, 1980, was selected in early April and was discussed in the facility supervisors meeting on April 23, 1980. Supervisors were advised to inform their team of the tentative shutdown date and to discuss nonradar procedures at team briefings, especially those teams that would be working the day of the shutdown. On May 2, 1980, the target date of May 10, 1980, became firm based on forecasted weather and traffic activity. A tower Required Reading Item was posted on May 2, 1980, which confirmed to all personnel the exact date of the shutdown.

The two team supervisors, Messrs. Blossman and Sappington who were to be responsible for the operation on May 10, 1980, had been discussing the radar outage at their team meetings, including plans for handling the traffic and afforded their personnel refresher training in nonradar procedures. Facility training records indicate that the 10 controllers who were to work during the radar outage were provided 13 hours of nonradar refresher training in preparation for this outage. On May 9, 1980, a subsequent Required Reading Item was posted amending the time of the outage. This item contained attachments delineating procedures for handling visual flight rule (VFR) traffic in the terminal control area (TCA) during various stages of resumption of radar service.

On May 10, 1980, Mr. Blossman, the supervisor in charge, contacted the Houston Air Route Traffic Control Center to implement previously developed plans and to coordinate final details. He then gave his personnel a final briefing and permitted the shutdown to be accomplished as scheduled.

Therefore, the allegation of "no prearranged procedures" cannot be substantiated. The facility did consider alternative plans for sending personnel to the Houston Air Route Traffic Center, use of the radar site at Slidell, Louisiana, and using the radar at Navy New Orleans that were recommended by controller representatives. After a careful review, it was determined that fully safe, satisfactory service could be provided from the Moisant facility.

This plan of action was reviewed by Air Traffic personnel at the Regional Office and in Washington Headquarters during the week prior to the radar shutdown and determined to be complete and appropriate, regarding both safety and prior notification requirements.

Allegation No. 7:Description:

The Final Radar controller is required to divide his attention between vectoring aircraft for approaches at Moisant and controlling other aircraft traversing the New Orleans terminal area, especially those to/from Lafayette, Baton Rouge, and the Gulfport areas.

Background

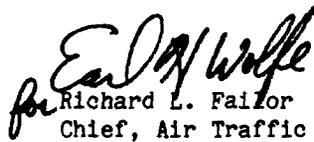
The Final Radar controller provides radar service to those aircraft landing at Moisant Airport by giving them turns and altitude changes which place them in a position from which they can continue straight to the runway and land without further assistance from a controller. The skills required for this position are basic skills required to work any radar position. The delegation of airspace in the Moisant area was made in an attempt to equalize the complexity and volume of traffic handled by each position. This resulted in the Final Radar position also being required to work those aircraft overflying New Orleans from Baton Rouge and Lafayette to Gulfport.

FAA Position:

While we do not believe the present procedures are unsafe, we are reviewing the airspace delegation to determine if another radar position could assume the responsibility of the overflight traffic and provide a more efficient traffic flow.

In summary, we have reviewed all the allegations and have found that while in some instances modifications to existing airspace and/or procedures will enhance the overall operation, the system as it currently operates is considered safe. If we can provide additional information, please contact us.

Sincerely,


for Richard L. Failor
Chief, Air Traffic Division



**National Transportation
Safety Board**

Washington, D.C. 20594

Office of
Chairman

DEC 17 1980

Mr. Thomas D. Reese
Group Director
United States General Accounting Office
Community and Economic Development Division
Washington, D.C. 20548

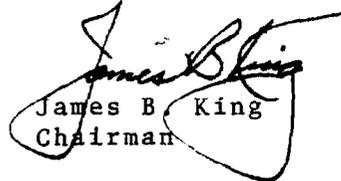
Dear Mr. Reese:

This is in reply to your letter of November 24, 1980 regarding air traffic controller allegations of unsafe conditions at New Orleans, Louisiana.

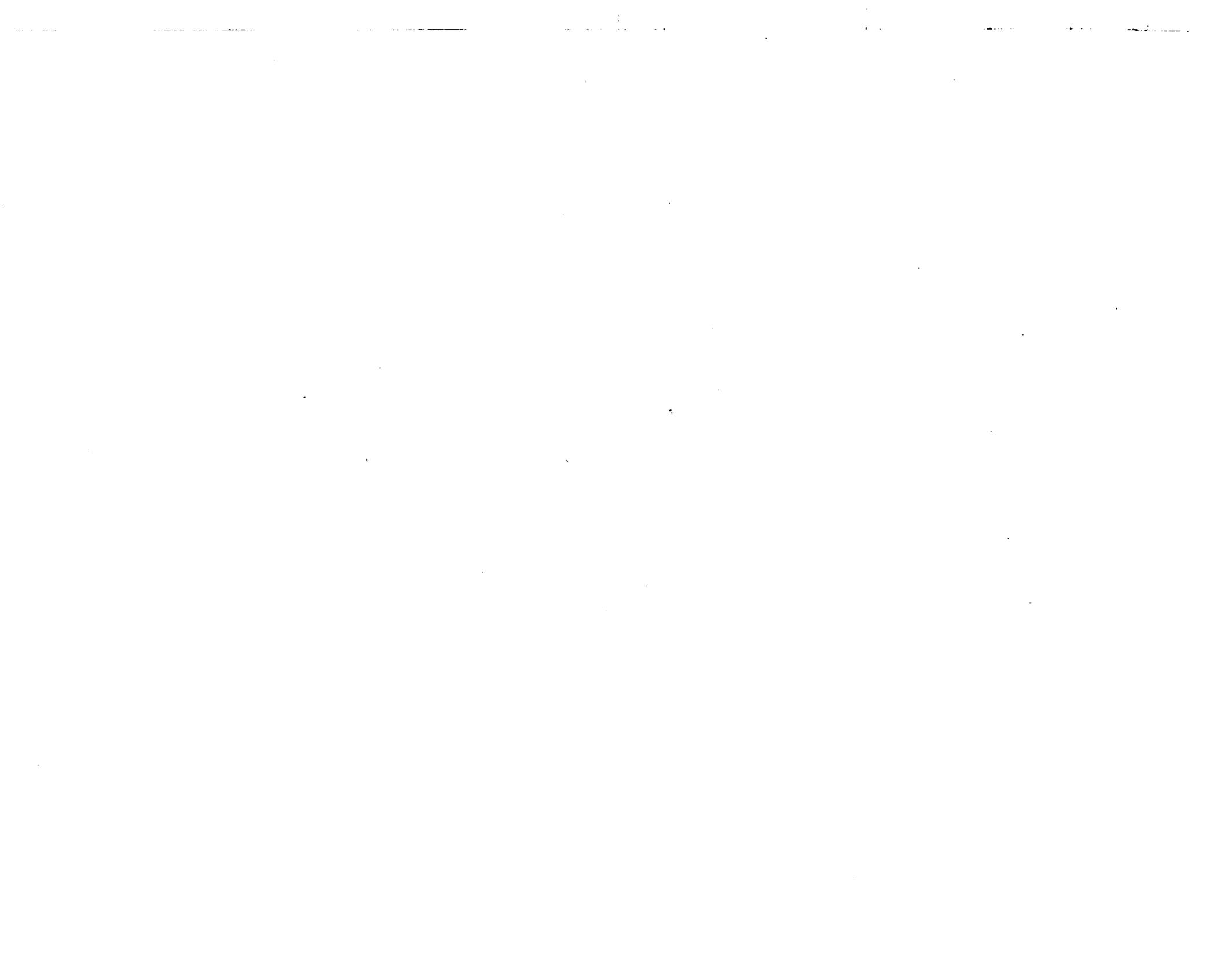
Our review of the documentation submitted by PATCO does not provide sufficient information to draw a definitive conclusion regarding the safety of operations in the New Orleans terminal area.

The response by the Federal Aviation Administration to PATCO's allegations indicates that management has conducted an extensive evaluation of terminal operations at New Orleans and that facility action has been taken to improve operational procedures. However, we do not believe the limited data presented is sufficient to categorize the New Orleans terminal operations either as safe or unsafe.

Sincerely yours,


James B King
Chairman

(341028)



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