

ATTACHMENT 9

to Operations/Human Performance Group Chairman's Factual Report

Chief Dispatcher Statement

DCA10IA001

October 26, 2009

Dispatcher Statement

On the evening of 21 October, 2009 I was the Senior Flight Superintendent (Chief Dispatcher or Floor Supervisor Domestic) on duty.

At approximately 0030Z, I received a call from a ZMP (Minneapolis Air Route Traffic Control Center) sector supervisor, male voice, regarding an NWA flight that was NORDO, and could I please contact the flight (via ACARS) to contact ZMP center on freq 124.87. I acknowledged the request by repeating back the information, flight number, requesting center, and frequency requested. NWA 188, Minneapolis center, 124.87. I ran my computer script, filled in the necessary fields, and sent the unsolicited ACARS message to the flight. The script I run also formats a message, for the Dispatch sector working the flight, and I sent the controlling Dispatcher the same message that is sent to the flight. There was no ACARS message reject sent to my screen, indicating that the message was received by the cockpit unit.

The text of the message is available in the ACARS history, and the message the dispatcher receives from me in his/her message cue is identical. This is so when the crew responds to the Dispatcher he/she knows what they are responding to.

Shortly after that first request was made, I received another call from a ZMP sector supervisor, female voice I recognized, the wife of a former co-worker. She requested I send a message to an NWA 188, contact ZMP on 119.87. When I advised her I had already sent a message to this flight for 124.87, she advised they needed them now on 119.87, and they had not come up on frequency yet. I ran the script again, and sent the message, again for MSP Center, with freq of 119.87. I received no reject message. Again, a hard copy message was sent to the dispatcher's message cue with the same information. This was in the vicinity of 0040Z. The controller had also advised me the flight was closing in on RWF (Redwood Falls VOR) and still not talking to center.

A few minutes later I received my third call, from the female area supervisor at ZMP, still requesting we try to get a hold of flight 188, tell them to contact ZMP on 119.87, and had we heard from the flight at all. I responded that I would send the ACARS message again, with additional emphasis added, and would check to see if the dispatcher had any contact. She advised the flight was now at SHONN intersection, or close to it, at FL370, and not in contact with the Center.

I executed the script again. I sent the ACARS message to the flight, and the hardcopy of the message to the dispatch sector (sector 40) again. After sending the message, I pulled the flight up on my traffic situation display (Flight Explorer), and noted the flight was now northeast of SHONN at FL370. I went to the dispatcher sector directly and asked if he had heard anything at all from the flight. He remarked he had not. I told him that ZMP center was still looking for this flight, and to let me know if/when he heard from him, based on his position, he looked to be closing in on the MSP airport, still at FL370.

I returned to my desk, and contacted ZMP, and queried to see if the flight had by now gotten in contact with them, and I was told they had not.

I then looked up the aircraft assigned to the flight, and looked up to see if it had a SELCAL code associated with it. It did, so I attempted to SELCAL the flight on the two NWA company frequencies that the crew could possibly be monitoring in the MSP area, 131.9 and 130.7. I attempted SELCAL on each frequency two times each. No response from the flight.

Upon assessing the situation, I requested the Strategic Planning Team (SPT) dispatcher to my left to see if the Domestic Events Network (DEN) position at ATC command center was aware of the issue. At this time the Delta ATC/SPT rep asked if we wanted him to contact the DEN for us, and I said yes. He made the call, and established contact. Based on that first call, the DEN was aware, and they were in separate discussions with ZMP. I had the NWA SPT dispatcher then get on that call so he could monitor what was being discussed, while I contacted a flight operations representative of the NWA Airbus 319/320 fleet on the on-call list. My first and only call was to Captain Glen Fink, Airbus 319/320 fleet director/Chief Pilot. I advised Captain Fink of the situation, how long the flight may have been out of contact, its present location and that we had sent numerous ACARS messages, and attempted SELCAL numerous times on different company frequencies all to no avail. Captain Fink asked me the crew names, what were the inoperative items listed (MEL), what other attempts we might be able to try, to make contact and if an intercept had been launched to see what may be the matter. When I asked the SPT member what was being discussed on the DEN line, the response was they were still in discussion with ZMP.

I terminated my call with Captain Fink, advising I would follow-up as soon as I had more information. About this time the Sector manager for Airbus narrow bodies came over to advise he was talking to Captain Lynn Melin, Managing Director of Flying. He was keeping Captain Melin updated as I was keeping Captain Fink updated.

We continued to monitor the DEN line, while I copied images of my Flight Explorer, to capture the location of flight 188 at various times. My first screen capture had the flight approaching MSP at FL370, my second had the flight northeast of MSP at FL370, and the last was just as the flight made a course change, still northeast of EAU (Eau Claire VOR).

Sometime between my first and second screen capture, the DAL OCC duty director came over to me to ask if I needed any assistance with any other contacts. The DAL OCC security director requested the total passengers on board. The DAL OCC duty pilot also offered assistance if needed. The Dispatcher had advised he still had no contact.

At about this time ZMP called on the NWA SPT line, but it was the TMU specialist asking if we thought the MSP GDP (ground delay program) could be cancelled. He was advised that someone would get back to him but right now we were all busy dealing with the NORDO issue. I did my second Flight Explorer screen capture, attempted SELCAL on the two NWA company frequencies again, trying 2 times on each frequency again, with no response. I got in touch with Captain Fink again to advise the current status, and what had been up to this point. Again I was asked if an intercept would be launched, and word from the DEN line was they were at combat ready status, but had not launched yet. I believe it was about this time I looked into ACARS history to see if the flight had attempted any response to the ground. I noted what appeared to be six or seven attempts from the Dispatch office, via ACARS, to get the crew on the correct ATC frequency.

Three attempts from me. It was in this timeframe that our contact with the DEN line ended.

The dispatcher then came over and advised us, after doing an electronic query of the aircraft, he was able to get the total fuel onboard, the flight had approximately 95 minutes to dry tanks (fuel exhaustion). I noted on Flight Explorer the flight appeared nearly halfway between MSP and GRB (Green Bay Wisconsin airport).


Shortly after hearing the approximate fuel status from the Dispatcher, the NWA SPT phone rang again, and ZMP was advising the SPT dispatcher that they were now indeed in contact with NWA 188. I was on the phone with Captain Fink, when this call came in. It was confirmed again with the Center they were in radio contact with the flight. I took my third and final screen capture of Flight Explorer, as the flight was receiving vectors from ZMP center.

When asked what their fuel state was, the dispatcher told us, and we relayed it to ATC. There was discussion on how best to route the aircraft back to MSP, since there were numerous flights holding over the EAU VOR. The route given took the flight northwest towards GEP (Gopher VOR), then south to land on runway 35. ATC (MSP tower) asked what the arrival gate would be.

We were then asked by the Flight Operations representatives to have the Dispatcher ACARS the crew to let them know not to de-plane the aircraft, that it would be met by local law enforcement and TSA representatives. This message was relayed to the dispatcher. I was also told by the NWA sector manager and by Captain Fink that a MSP Chief pilot representative would be meeting the flight at the gate as well. I heard the sector manager comment that this crew was supposed to continue on to GEG (Spokane, WA airport) later that night.

The NWA SPT dispatcher and I continued to monitor the flight's status on Flight Explorer. I was asked by Captain Fink to let him know when the flight was on the ground. As the flight entered the traffic pattern I had forwarded on my screen capture images to Captain Fink as well as my Director of Dispatch. When the flight touched down, I notified Captain Fink via text pager flight was on, and taxiing in. Flight landed at 0207Z.

It was noted that the crew responded to the dispatcher at 0125Z. The flight had then proceeded to the MSP airport without further incident. The dispatcher working the flight submitted a company incident report, which was subsequently logged into the NWA Systems Operations Control (SOC) duty log.



David P. Francisco
Senior Flight Superintendent