



Spotlight On Nick Trotta, Former Secret Service Director discusses Security after 9/11

By Dave Schiavone, Oct 2020



On this recent anniversary of September 11th, Westchester Aircraft Maintenance Association had a chance to sit down and interview Mr. Nicholas Trotta. Nick was the former Secret Service Director who was assigned to President George W. Bush. Nick is no stranger to WAMA as Nick has roots in New Rochelle, Westchester County New York. In this interview, Nick shares his insight in what has changed in aviation and in America. We felt compelled to share some of the

discussion. When things get back to normal, Nick has graciously agreed to discuss his experience at a future dinner meeting.

In the following interview, Nick responds to questions on what has changed after September 2001. Nick was generous with his time and was found to be extremely knowledgeable on the subject.

We asked Nick how he got his start in the Secret Service. Nick shared that he attended IONA College in New Rochelle. He furthered his education by attending George Washington University and John Hopkins University School of Management and Mentoring. He then joined the Secret Service and spent over 31 years serving five Presidents until his retirement. Some of his assignments included being stationed overseas. He also served as a Training Instructor for the Secret Service Academy leading to his final assignment as the Special Agent in Charge of the White House and the Deputy Special Agent in charge of the Presidential Detail.



Many WAMA members remembered the activity at HPN when the airport would shut down due to President Clinton's arrival or departure. Nick was asked what changed with his operation after 9/11 regarding corporate airspace and travel. Nick responded, "Before 9/11 nothing flew in the airspace corridor when high risk heads of state were in the air. The time and flight corridors were less restrictive. After 9/11, there were huge changes. It became more difficult with the scheduling of the allotted time window and area expansion of the restriction. There was a two hour window before the trip when

airspace was completely shut down to secure the flight path and approach. This restriction was not only in place during flight but anywhere the President was located. If the President or VP stayed overnight in a location, the airspace in the area would be shut down until the President or VP departed. As you can imagine, a location such as Stamford, Connecticut required him to land in HPN, ground transport to Stamford, attend a function and stay overnight. That would shut down airspace for multiple hours. Corporate jets and private aircraft would not be allowed in the airspace in or around HPN. Just after 9/11, The Department of Homeland Security was formed and became the bridge to connect all the agencies and responsibilities for implementing security for the nation. A new security level was established. A new waiver would be applied that allowed under a tight restriction vetting known companies with aircraft to land or take off at nearby airports only if the President was in a secure location or if Air Force One or Marine One was not moving. This required select corporate operator crews to be subject also to a vetting process and the additional requirement for an Armed Security Representative to be onboard during the flight. The Security Representative required clearance by the Secret Service and trained on procedures in order to become a known entity. The waiver would only be issued to those individuals and only under special conditions. The person was usually a former Law Enforcement Officer or Secret Service Agent. Special call signs were assigned allowing the aircraft into the restricted airspace.

Nick commented, "The waiver did not apply to national security events. After 9/11, there was great



concern for the safety of any Heads of State of foreign countries. The President signed a bill to restrict airspace for events of large magnitude to include the State of the Union Address. Additionally, this included The International Summit where there were 20 Heads of State in attendance, the Pope when he visited, political conventions or national gatherings with VIP's in attendance."

Nick went on to say, "Sports organizations also petitioned to have sporting events be designated as national events. It began with the

football leagues, followed by various baseball teams and later, organizations such as NBAA. This was unrealistic. However, the only event that ever was categorized as such was the Super Bowl in 2002. The signed bill enacted the Secret Service to be the primary responsibility to these national events. The only airspace that was and is constantly restricted and protected is over the White House which includes the Capitol."

The interview continued, and Nick was asked if he missed his job. He replied, "It was an honor to serve the President and the country. After 31 years, I decided it was time to move on reflecting on the wonderful people and professionals."

WAMA had a few questions on aircraft maintenance related to the Presidential aircraft. Nick responded, "I felt the team of aviation professionals represented the best in the world." Nick concluded by saying, "It was a life time dream and experience. I could not ask for a more rewarding and honorable career."

The interview concluded and Nick was thanked for his time. WAMA looks forward to hearing more of his stories in person when he will be an invited guest at a future WAMA dinner meeting.