

TERRORISTS ATTACK NEW YORK, PENTAGON

Thousands Dead, Injured as Hijacked U.S. Airliners Ram Targets; World Trade Center Is Destroyed



Tragedy: Assault leaves Manhattan in chaos. Three of the flights were en route to L.A., one to San Francisco. President Bush puts military on highest alert, closes borders and vows to 'find those responsible.'

By GERALDINE BAUM and MAGGIE FARLEY
TIMES STAFF WRITERS

NEW YORK—Terrorists struck at the preeminent symbols of America's wealth and might Tuesday, flying hijacked airliners into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, killing and injuring thousands of people.

As a horrified nation watched on television, the twin towers of the World Trade Center in lower Manhattan collapsed into flaming rubble after two Boeing 767s rammed their upper stories. A third airliner, a Boeing 757, flattened one of the Pentagon's famed five sides.

A fourth hijacked jetliner crashed in western Pennsylvania. Authorities said the hijackers might have been trying to crash the plane at the presidential retreat at Camp David, Md.

The assaults, which stirred fear and anxiety across the country and evoked comparisons to Pearl Harbor, were carefully planned and coordinated, occurring within 50 minutes. No one claimed responsibility, but official suspicion quickly fell on Saudi fugitive Osama bin Laden.

Addressing the nation Tuesday night, President Bush vowed to "find those responsible and bring them to justice." This country, he said, would retaliate against "those behind these evil acts" and any country that harbors them.

Altogether, the four downed planes carried 266 people. Scores of people jumped to their deaths or died in fires and the collapsing superstructure at the World Trade Center. New York Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani said earliest reports counted 2,100 people injured, about 150 of them in critical condition.

Estimates of the death toll at the Pentagon ranged from 100 to 800.

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Special Coverage

The buildings: Terrorists struck the World Trade Center towers at their most vulnerable spot, structural engineers say, **A2**

Washington: In the nation's crippled capital, dazed people flee federal buildings and wander the streets as the Pentagon burns, **A5**

Pittsburgh crash: A passenger aboard United jet calls 911 to report a hijacking. Moments later, the plane plunges to earth, **A8**

Planes grounded: For the first time, the FAA halted all U.S. air traffic. Stricter security measures are expected, **A15**

The suspects: Preliminary evidence indicates that Osama bin Laden is behind the attacks, U.S. officials say, **A16**

The victims: At least three people aboard the hijacked jets make cell phone calls to alert others of the danger, **A20**

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United Flight 175, left, heads for the south tower of the World Trade Center, then explodes on impact while the north tower burns from an attack 20 minutes earlier.

NEWS ANALYSIS

President Shoulders Historic Weight

By RONALD BROWNSTEIN and DOYLE McMANUS
TIMES STAFF WRITERS

WASHINGTON—The greatest challenge any American president can face is war—and George W. Bush, who won the presidency at a moment of peace and prosperity, is abruptly facing a sterner test than anyone expected.

Tuesday's attacks on New York and Washington were almost certain to rank as the most damaging ever against U.S. territory, with the final death toll expected to exceed Japan's 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor.

Bush's initial response—after an awkward day, dictated by security concerns, in seclusion on military bases—was a brief statement pledging "to find those responsible and to bring them to justice."

"We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them," Bush said, warning countries such as Afghanistan that they can no longer count on U.S. restraint.

But the real test of the new president's leadership will come in the weeks to come: Can he unify the nation in grief and anger? Can he choose an effective military response and can he find ways to prevent another attack from occurring?

Please see BUSH, A6

A Struggle to Escape Fiery Chaos

Scene: For those who got out of the burning towers, it was a day of fear and heroism.

By GERALDINE BAUM and PAUL LIEBERMAN
TIMES STAFF WRITERS

NEW YORK—People likened it to a bomb, to midnight, to a hurricane and, finally, when the air was choked with soot and smoke, to hell.

In the aftermath of the explosions Tuesday morning that shook the twin towers of the World Trade Center, thousands struggled to escape. Some were lucky and fast enough to find elevators still functioning. Others walked

and crawled and groped their way down hundreds of stairs.

Many, no one yet knows their number, could not escape, blocked by fire or fear. Experts said blazing jet fuel inside the building would have driven temperatures to beyond 1,400 degrees Fahrenheit, hot enough to melt steel, which it did, and hot enough to kill, which it did as well. Some people, unable to withstand the flames, jumped or were sucked out into the high empty air, their bodies tumbling like dolls all the way to the ground.

At 8:45 a.m., Robert Lipiak had just unlocked the door to Cosmos Service America on the 89th floor of the north tower, the first to be struck and the second to collapse. He still had his key in the lock when the explosion rocked the

building, sending him flying across the office, crashing into a desk. Others came in and he made them lie on the floor and covered them with towels.

Then he gathered them up and herded them toward the stairwell, which was locked. Police arrived, unlocked the exit and Lipiak's people joined what would become a throng on the route down.

Four floors below, Geoffrey Heineman, managing partner of a law firm on the 85th floor of One World Trade Center, had taken an early train from his home in Garden City, N.Y., because it was "a special day," his oldest son's 11th birthday, "and I wanted to get home for the party."

The firm's offices take up more than half the 85th floor, with spectacular views of New York Harbor

and the Statue of Liberty. Ohrenstein & Brown has 90 people at peak hours, but only the early wave had arrived, maybe 15 in all. Heineman was the first in and, by 8:20, had already finished his first phone conference of the day, about a case in New Jersey, when he heard the thud and felt the building sway.

"There was a big bang, an explosion. The building has always swayed in windy weather, but it was nothing like that," he said. "Then it swayed back. I came out of my office, and said, 'Let's round up the people.'"

He figured a helicopter or small plane had accidentally struck the tower because, as he explained, "we often see small planes flying by, below the top of the tower."

Please see DESCENT, A12

The Choreography of Carnage Was Precisely Timed, FBI Says

Terrorism: The hijackers penetrated susceptible security systems before authorities could react to impending disaster.

By RICHARD A. SERRANO and DAVID WILLMAN
TIMES STAFF WRITERS

WASHINGTON—The air attacks Tuesday morning in New York and Washington and a jetliner crash in Pennsylvania were the work of a conspiracy that deftly skirted a beleaguered U.S. airport security system and placed terrorists on four planes, senior

FBI officials believe.

Authorities suspect that the terrorists had help from airport ground crews, that they chose cross-country flights because the planes would be heavily loaded with fuel, and that their ranks included hijackers who could fly planes.

But what investigators found most surprising was the timing. They marveled at how teams of hijackers working in at least three cities simultaneously overpowered commercial planes in the air before federal authorities could shut down all flights across the country.

In doing so, the terrorists penetrated an airport security net that many have warned previ-

ously is inadequate.

Lewis Schiliro, who as head of the FBI office in New York helped oversee investigations into the explosion aboard TWA Flight 800 and an earlier bombing at the World Trade Center, was left in utter disbelief by what he saw unfold Tuesday morning.

"I've been chilled by a lot of things," Schiliro said. "But this is something I just can't begin to comprehend. They put this together very, very neatly."

Please see PROBE, A16



Associated Press

A woman watches the World Trade Center burn. Both towers collapsed within two hours of the first hit by a hijacked jet.