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Attacks Rock Nation

Planes Crash Into World Trade Towers; Pentagon Also Hit



AP Photo/ABC via APTN

ABOVE: An aircraft, at right, is seen as it is about to fly into the World Trade Center in New York in this image made from television, Tuesday Sept. 11, 2001. The aircraft was the second to fly into the tower Tuesday morning. **BELOW:** Smoke and fire surround the upper floors of the World Trade Center in New York City, Tuesday, Sept. 11, 2001,

in this image from television, after a second plane crashed into the buildings. Planes crashed into the upper floors of both World Trade Center towers minutes apart Tuesday in a horrific scene of explosions and fires that left gaping holes in the 110-story buildings.

IN ONE OF THE MOST horrifying attacks ever against the United States, terrorists crashed two airliners into the World Trade Center in a deadly series of blows Tuesday that brought down the twin 110-story towers. A plane also slammed into the Pentagon as the government itself came under attack.

Thousands could be dead or injured, a high-ranking New York City police official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Authorities had been trying to evacuate those who work in the twin towers when the glass-and-steel skyscrapers came down in a thunderous roar within about 90 minutes after the crashes, which took place minutes apart around 9 a.m. But many people were thought to have been trapped. About 50,000 people work at the Trade Center and tens of thousands of others visit each day.

American Airlines initially said the Trade Center was hit by two of its planes, both hijacked, carrying a total of 156 people. But the airline later said that was unconfirmed. Two United airliners with a total of 110 aboard also crashed — one outside Pittsburgh, the other in a location not immediately identified. Altogether, the planes had 266 people aboard.

"This is perhaps the most audacious terrorist attack that's ever taken place in the world," said Chris Yates, an aviation expert at Jane's Transport in London. "It takes a logistics operation from the terror group involved that is second to none. Only a very small handful of terror groups is on that list ... I would name at the top of the list Osama bin Laden."

'The Second Pearl Harbor'

President Bush ordered a full-scale investigation to "hunt down the folks who committed this act."

Within the hour, the Pentagon took a direct, devastating hit from a plane. The fiery crash collapsed one side of the five-sided structure.

The White House, the Pentagon and the Capitol were evacuated along with other federal buildings in Washington and New York.

Authorities in Washington immediately called out troops, including an infantry regiment. The Situation Room at the White House was in full operation. Authorities went on alert from coast to coast, the U.S. and Canadian borders were sealed, all air traffic across the country was halted, and security was tightened at strategic installations.

"This is the second Pearl Harbor. I don't think that I overstate it," said Sen. Chuck Hagel, R-Neb.

In June, a U.S. judge had set this Wednesday as the sentencing date for a bin Laden associate for his role in the 1998 bombing of a U.S. embassy in Tanzania that killed 213 people. The sentencing had been set for the federal courthouse near the World Trade Center. No one from the U.S. attorney's office could be reached Tuesday to comment on whether the sentencing was still on.

Palestinians Celebrate

Afghanistan's hardline Taliban rulers condemned the attacks and rejected suggestions that bin Laden was behind them, saying he does not have the means to carry out such well-orchestrated attacks. Bin Laden has been given asylum in Afghanistan.

Abdel-Bari Atwan, editor of the *Al-Quds al-Arabi* newspaper, said he received a warning from Islamic fundamentalists close to bin Laden, but did not take the threat seriously. "They said it would be a huge and unprecedented attack but they did not specify," Atwan said in a telephone interview in London.

In the West Bank city of Nablus, thousands of Palestinians celebrated the attacks, chant-

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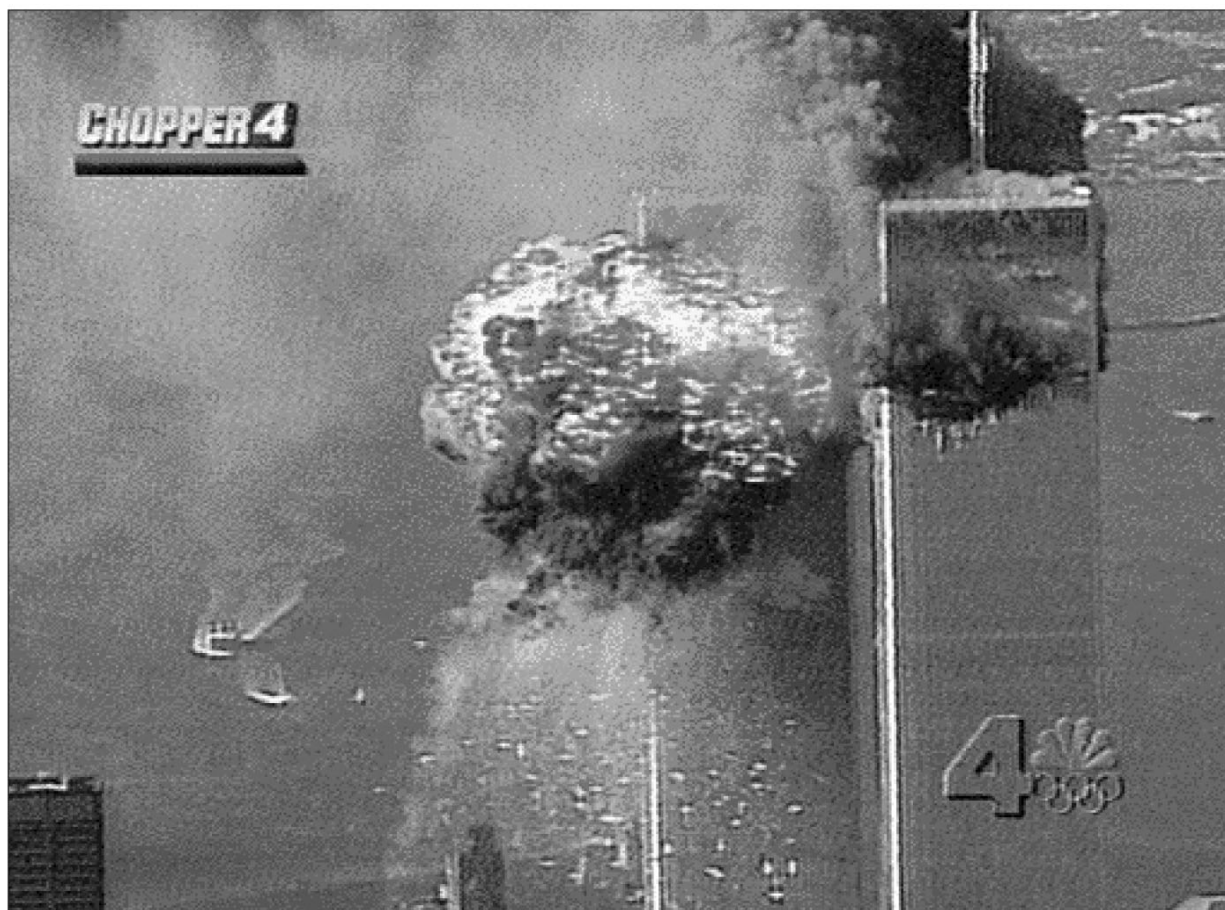
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AP Photo/NBC

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