

Under attack

Vulnerable sites

As Pentagon watched NYC news, 'Boom!'

Defense chief helps victims after jet crash starts inferno

By Dave Moniz and Andrea Stone
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — The symbol of the world's mightiest military power lay smoldering and partly in ruins Tuesday after a civilian jetliner believed commandeered by terrorists slammed into the southwest corner of the Pentagon. Military officials fear that as many as 800 personnel might have died in the devastating attack.

As about 20,000 uniformed and civilian workers filled the cavernous headquarters of the U.S. armed forces, an explosion shook the walls of the five-sided building. The crash triggered fires and a hurried but calm exodus shortly after 9:30 a.m.

Military officials said there were a large number of injuries, but they could not say how many were killed or wounded. A flatbed truck carrying dozens of metal coffins was parked near the Pentagon, the world's largest office building.

"It's not possible to have solid casualty figures at this time," Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said at a news conference inside the Pentagon 9 hours after the attack.

A Pentagon official said Tuesday night that 790 of the 850 people who worked in the destroyed wing were not accounted for.

Many at the Pentagon said they were watching horrific TV images of the twin World Trade Center towers burning in New York when a jet flying fast and low, according to eyewitnesses, plowed into an area near the Pentagon's heliport.

Authorities said the jet was American Airlines Flight 77 headed to Los Angeles from Washington Dulles International Airport, 25 miles from the Pentagon. All 64 listed aboard are presumed dead.

The jet flew near the White House and Pentagon before circling back toward its target, federal aviation sources said. Air traffic controllers became suspicious when they noticed the jet turning in the opposite direction from where it was supposed to be heading and alerted the White House.

The explosion from the crash carved a 100-foot-wide hole near an area where helicopters land and take off. The impact ripped through three of the five rings that make up the Pentagon's interior and exposed the five-story build-

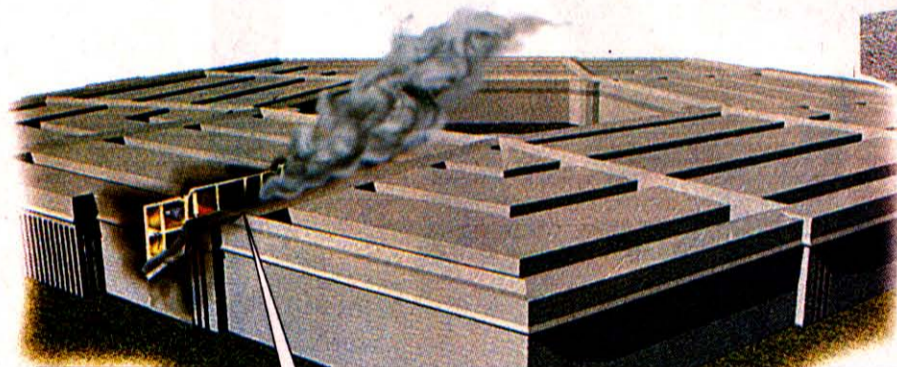


Engulfed: Firefighters and rescue workers try to extinguish the blaze ignited when an airliner crashed into the Pentagon on Tuesday morning.

By Rob Curtis, Army Times

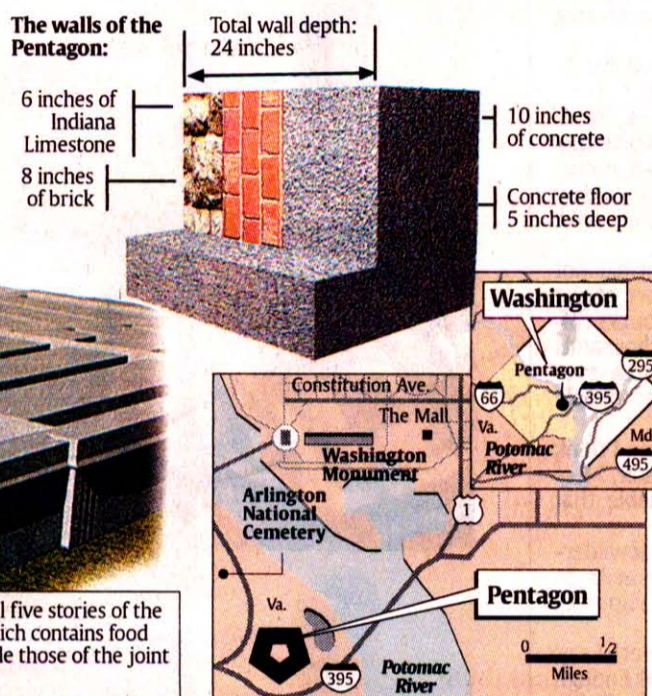
Attack on the Pentagon

The Pentagon, the command center for the U.S. military, was struck by an American Airlines jetliner during rush hour Tuesday. The plane tore a giant gash near the Pentagon heliport, in the southwestern side of the building, which had recently been renovated. The building, one of the world's largest offices, houses 20,000 civilian and military employees.



The plane gouged a hole 100 feet wide through three of the five "rings" and all five stories of the Pentagon. Witnesses said that they could see the 5-acre central courtyard, which contains food vendors and a sitting area, through the gap. Offices in the damaged area include those of the joint staff and the Army's deputy chief of staff for personnel.

Source: USA TODAY research by Traci Watson



By Robert W. Althaus, USA TODAY

ing's inner courtyard.

Army Lt. Col. Jerry Kitzhaber was on the telephone with his wife, who called to tell him about the World Trade Center crashes. "She said, 'Are you OK?' I said: 'This is the Pentagon. I should be OK here.'"

Then I hung up the phone and boom!" he said.

The Pentagon was soon consumed by flames and black smoke as the shrill sounds of a horn alerted workers to danger.

The attack, which some have lik-

ened to a modern day Pearl Harbor, left many wondering how the nerve center of the world's preeminent military could be so traumatically penetrated.

"I knew this was always called Ground Zero, but I thought it was

involate," said defense contractor Marsha Reid, 29. "I had no idea I would be in the middle of a war zone."

Terrorism experts say virtually nothing could have been done to thwart such a diabolical attack.

Pentagon officials said they don't have a defensive system in place to shoot down large aircraft.

Donald Hamilton, a retired State Department terrorism expert, noted that flights are continually passing near the Pentagon on their way into and out of nearby Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport. "If you see a commercial airliner off course, who would give the final order to fire?" he asked.

Rumsfeld was in his office when the jet struck a newly renovated section of Army, Navy and Marine offices. The Defense secretary went outside the building for about 15 minutes and assisted victims of the attack after a hasty evacuation order was piped around the Pentagon's 17.5 miles of corridors. Later in the day, Rumsfeld and other senior military leaders huddled in the National Military Command Center inside the Pentagon.

Rumsfeld said the Pentagon would reopen today. It was unclear when the huge building would resume normal operations and what precautions the military might take to prevent future terrorist acts.

Military officials were in the midst of assembling a crisis-response team for the attacks in New York when their own building came under attack.

John Gentilini, an Army staff sergeant at the Pentagon, said it was "by the grace of God" that the attack came in an area that wasn't as heavily populated because of renovation. He and a colleague reacted instinctively after the crash. They loaded injured victims into a truck to race to Virginia Hospital Center in Arlington, Va., and drove on the median part of the way.

Sen. John Warner, R-Va., spoke for many Americans when he declared at a Pentagon news conference: "This is, indeed, the most tragic hour in America's history."

U.S. forces worldwide were put on the highest state of alert. The Navy sent a group of ships on patrol along the East Coast of the United States.

While fear of terrorist attacks has become ingrained in most military officers in recent years, few could have imagined a Tom Clancy novel-like scene unfolding here.

A police officer near the scene said the jetliner sheared off a lamppost just before striking the building near ground level.

Army Lt. Col. Kenny Cox, who fought through black smoke to rescue survivors, said, "This is a cheap, dirty, senseless way to attack somebody."

Contributing: Ed Foster-Simeon, Jonathan Weisman, Don Collins, Richard Benedetto, Tom Squitieri, Haya El Nasser and Cheryl Phillips

Need for homeland defense now 'grim reality'

Lawmakers already demanding answers

By Bill Nichols
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — U.S. counterterrorism and emergency management specialists feared a day like Tuesday would come. Precautions were taken. Possible disaster scenarios were devised and practiced.

But in the wake of the terrorist attacks on New York City's World Trade Center and the Pentagon, government officials and security experts said nothing could have prepared the country for a day unlike any in U.S. history.

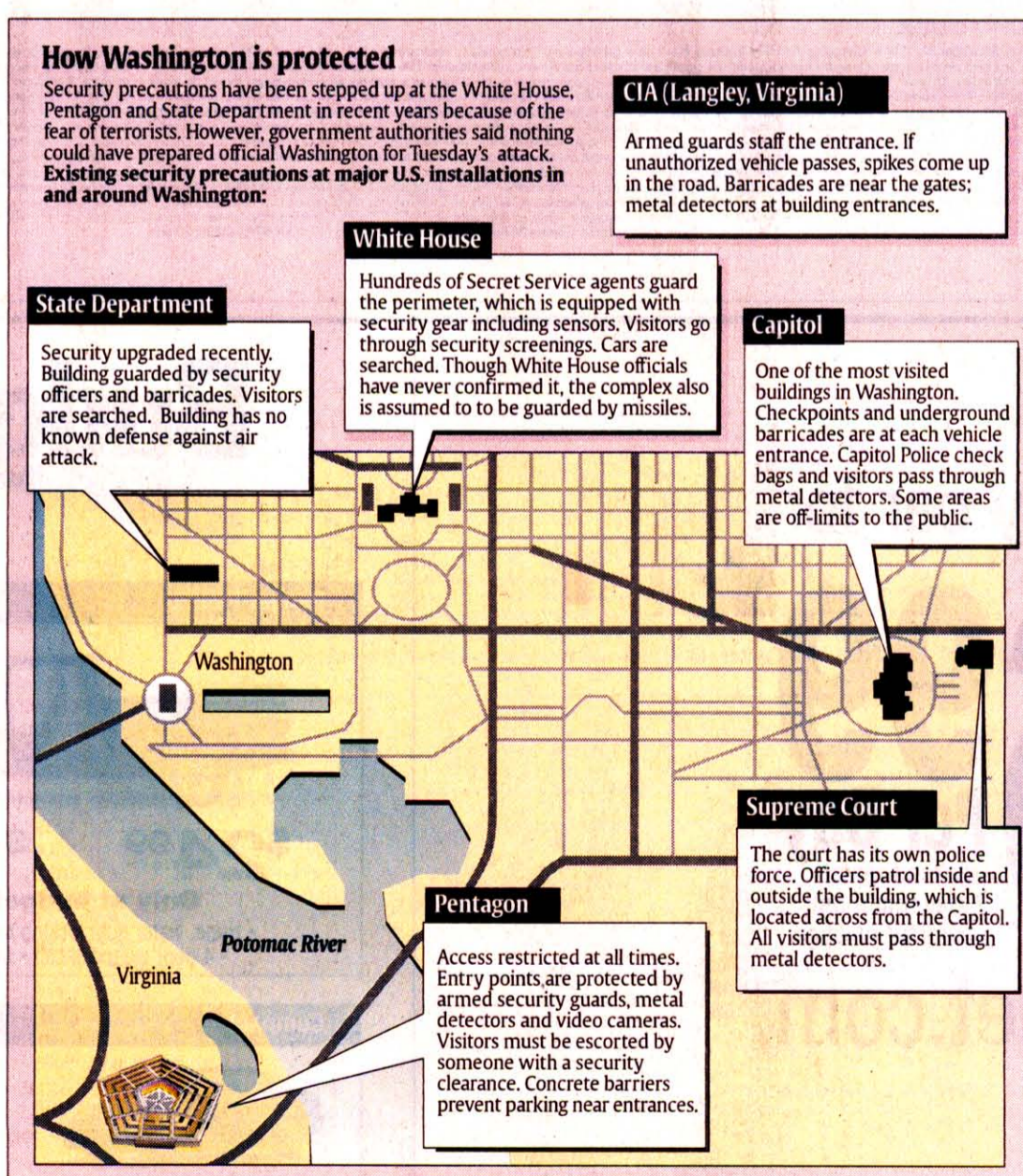
"You try to prepare for emergencies," said a shaken New York Gov. George Pataki, who was still trying to get news about friends who worked in the demolished World Trade Center towers. "But there's no way you can prepare for anything like this."

Not everyone, however, will agree with that. As the shock begins to fade from the multiple attacks on some of America's preeminent symbols of freedom and democracy, questions are going to be asked. The central one: How on Earth could this happen?

U.S. officials have made extensive efforts toward stopping potential terrorist attacks by Saudi-born terrorist Osama bin Laden. Just before the turn of the millennium in 1999, the Clinton administration believed it did stop bin Laden from staging a series of terrorist bombings within the USA.

The country's counterterrorism community constantly stages exercises of potential scenarios — terrorist bombings as well as chemical or biological warfare — to gauge U.S. readiness and be sure the United States has the resources to meet such threats.

Clearly, in this case, all the preparation didn't work. Already on Capitol Hill, some lawmakers were demanding answers as to how the



USA TODAY research by Bill Nichols

By Suzy Parker, USA TODAY

How Washington is protected

Security precautions have been stepped up at the White House, Pentagon and State Department in recent years because of the fear of terrorists. However, government authorities said nothing could have prepared official Washington for Tuesday's attack. **Existing security precautions at major U.S. installations in and around Washington:**

CIA (Langley, Virginia)

Armed guards staff the entrance. If unauthorized vehicle passes, spikes come up in the road. Barricades are near the gates; metal detectors at building entrances.

White House

Hundreds of Secret Service agents guard the perimeter, which is equipped with security gear including sensors. Visitors go through security screenings. Cars are searched. Though White House officials have never confirmed it, the complex also is assumed to be guarded by missiles.

State Department

Security upgraded recently. Building guarded by security officers and barricades. Visitors are searched. Building has no known defense against air attack.

Capitol

One of the most visited buildings in Washington. Checkpoints and underground barricades are at each vehicle entrance. Capitol Police check bags and visitors pass through metal detectors. Some areas are off-limits to the public.

Supreme Court

The court has its own police force. Officers patrol inside and outside the building, which is located across from the Capitol. All visitors must pass through metal detectors.

Pentagon

Access restricted at all times. Entry points are protected by armed security guards, metal detectors and video cameras. Visitors must be escorted by someone with a security clearance. Concrete barriers prevent parking near entrances.

vaunted U.S. intelligence system apparently could have had no clue that such a broad and intricately choreographed attack was in the works.

The State Department has had a worldwide terrorist warning since June 22, placing U.S. forces on alert. That alert was heightened last Friday to specifically include U.S. military installations in Japan and Korea. Security at U.S. ports of entry also has been strengthened since

the attack on the USS Cole in Yemen last October.

Administration intelligence officials said they have had indications in recent weeks of an increased risk of an attack on U.S. installations overseas. But there are no indications that administration intelligence assets were on guard to try to counter an attack of this scope at home.

"Today, our government failed the American people," Rep. Curt

Weldon, R-Pa., told CNN. "Our FBI and CIA are there to intercept raw data. ... This is a failure that was caused by a lack of resources and a complacency that has overtaken America in the past few years."

The attack was so unexpected that a joint FBI/CIA anti-terrorist task force that specifically prepared for this type of disaster was on a training exercise in Monterey, Calif. As of late Tuesday, with airports closed around the country,

the task force still hadn't found a way to return to Washington.

The major homeland-protection focus of the Bush administration has been on building a missile-defense shield to protect against nuclear missile attack.

Such a shield would have done nothing to stop what happened Tuesday. And once regular business resumes in Washington, the administration can expect a vastly different focus to the debate on how to defend U.S. territory.

"In one horrible moment, the need for homeland defense has gone from being a theoretical risk to a grim reality," said Tony Cordesman, a military and Middle East expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

"Not one of us in government or counterterrorism experts outside government believed that anyone was capable of launching an attack with this degree of lethality and coordination," Cordesman said.

Sen. Joseph Biden, D-Del., who chairs the Foreign Relations Committee, warned in a speech Monday that the administration was de-emphasizing threats other than a missile attack at its peril.

"Even the Joint Chiefs say that a strategic nuclear attack is less likely than a regional conflict, a major theater war, terrorist attacks at home or abroad, or any number of other real issues," Biden said.

If the administration proceeds with building a missile-defense system, he said, the country will have "diverted all that money to address the least likely threat, while the real threat comes to this country in the hold of a ship, the belly of a plane, or smuggled into a city in the middle of the night in a vial in a backpack."

Members of a House defense appropriations subcommittee were about to meet to discuss moving \$800 million from the administration's budget request for missile defense into counterterrorism efforts on Tuesday, when the attacks began. The meeting was canceled.

The attacks also will unquestionably prompt a review of security procedures at Washington institutions such as the White House, Pentagon and State Department.

Among the questions being asked here: How could the Penta-

gon, the center of the U.S. defense establishment, not be prepared to defend itself against an attack by an airplane?

Spokesman Rear Adm. Craig Quigley said the Pentagon has no anti-aircraft defense system that he is aware of.

The White House is assumed to have surface-to-air missiles available for protection. The problem, according to past and present government officials, is who makes a decision to fire a missile at an incoming airplane in the midst of downtown Washington.

Any proposed security upgrades could be controversial in a city celebrated for its openness and where millions of visitors come each year.

Secret Service officials already were roundly criticized for shutting down Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House during the Clinton administration because of fears of car or truck bomb attack. That level of precaution could look minor compared with steps that may be taken now.

Imagine this scene at the most venerated building in America: At approximately 9:40 a.m., according to press aide Rachel Sunbarger, a Secret Service guard burst into the White House lower press office, saying, "If I tell everybody to run, you run." Five minutes later, he returned, saying, "Get out now."

On a human level, Washington seemed to react to a day of catastrophe with grace and courage. On the city's subway, which was essentially the only way to get anywhere during the chaotic morning hours, passengers shared news bulletins and encouragement.

Throughout the city, calls and e-mails flooded in, all asking the same question: "Are you OK?"

The effect of this, however, both psychologically and in how the government decides to change the way the country protects itself, likely will transform America's way of life forever.

Said New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani: "I've never seen anything like this."

Contributing: Joan Biskupic, Jack Kelley, Jessica Lee, Barbara Slavin, Ed Foster-Simeon and Jonathan Weisman