

DAY OF INFAMY

Nation's highest officials ordered to scurry for cover

By Joseph Curl
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Minutes after a hijacked plane smashed into one of the World Trade Center towers yesterday morning, President Bush ordered a state of emergency, the military went into its highest state of alert and top congressional leaders were gathered on Capitol Hill for transport to a secret bunker in West Virginia.

At about the same time, Vice President Richard B. Cheney left his office in the Old Executive Office Building and made his way to the fortified command-and-control center deep within the White House.

National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice and other top administration officials soon joined him.

"We have a federal emergency

response plan, and at President Bush's direction we are implementing it," Bush senior adviser Karen Hughes said yesterday afternoon. "We began to implement it immediately after the first attack in New York this morning."

"We contacted American forces and embassies throughout the world and placed them on high alert. The United States Secret Service immediately secured the president, the vice president and the speaker of the House, and they are all safe. They have also secured members of the national security team, the president's Cabinet and senior staff."

First lady Laura Bush and presidential daughters Barbara and Jenna Bush also were taken to secure locations, White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said.

While top White House officials argued — some, including senior Bush adviser Karl Rove, forcefully — to bring the president back to Washington in order to reassure Americans, Mr. Bush instead chose to fly in secret to Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana, leaving behind some aides in Florida.

Camp David, the presidential retreat in rural Maryland, was ruled out as a destination following rumors that terrorists planned to strike there, too. Unattributed reports said the hijacked United Airlines plane that crashed 80 miles from Pittsburgh had been targeting Camp David.

Before takeoff from Florida, Secret Service agents "swept" reporters flying on Air Force One and even checked White House staff

and stenographers.

Air Force One flew from Sarasota, Fla., to Barksdale, but not directly. Reporters in the "pool" — a rotating group of White House correspondents who travel with the president — said the plane appeared to fly in circles for some time, then flew east to within sight of the Atlantic Ocean, then north, then west to the air base. None aboard was told where the plane was heading.

At one point, the president's plane ascended to 40,000 feet, higher than normal but out of the range of many planes. Air Force One was shadowed in flight by several military aircraft. Upon landing about noon, the plane was surrounded immediately by soldiers in full combat gear: green fatigues, flak jackets, helmets

and drawn M-16s.

On the ground, reporters traveling with Mr. Bush were asked not to use their cellular phones so the calls could not be tracked back to the base to reveal the president's location. They also were told that in reports back to their news organizations, they could say only that Mr. Bush was at "an unidentified location in the United States."

At the base, a sign on the glass window of a door to a building where the president was briefed on the situation said in large black letters, "Def Con Delta" — the highest state of military alert.

About 3 p.m., the president was whisked to the home of the Strategic Air Command at Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska. The command oversees the U.S. long-range

nuclear arsenal and is designed to deal with threats such as the spread of weapons of mass destruction and biological, chemical and nuclear weapons.

After 4 p.m., when Washington was little more than a ghost town, Mr. Bush took off for the nation's capital. Air Force One was flanked by two F-16 fighter jets and one F-15 during the flight.

Top congressional leaders, including House Speaker J. Dennis Hastert, Minority Leader Richard A. Gephardt, Republican Whip Tom DeLay, Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle and Senate Republican Leader Trent Lott, returned to Washington after being taken to a secure government facility in northern West Virginia.



Firefighters and emergency personnel investigated the scene of a fatal crash involving a United Airlines Boeing 757 with at least 45 passengers yesterday morning near Shanksville, Pa., in Somerset County.

Passenger calls from airplane, tells dispatcher of hijacking

By Todd Spangler
ASSOCIATED PRESS

SHANKSVILLE, Pa. — A United Airlines jetliner carrying 45 persons crashed into a grassy field yesterday morning, minutes after a man who said he was a passenger told an emergency dispatcher in a cell-phone call: "We are being hijacked. We are being hijacked."

A Virginia congressman said the plane's intended target was apparently Camp David, the presidential retreat in Maryland.

United Flight 93 was en route from Newark, N.J., to San Francisco when it crashed north of Somerset County airport, about 80 miles southeast of Pittsburgh. Pennsylvania State Police Maj. Lyle Szupinka said there was no reason to believe there were any survivors of the crash.

The Boeing 757 crash was one of four reported yesterday by United and American airlines. Two jetliners crashed into the World Trade Center in New York City and one hit the Pentagon in Washington.

In Pennsylvania, an emergency dispatcher received a cell-phone

call at 9:58 a.m. from a man who said he was a passenger locked in a bathroom aboard United Flight 93, reported dispatch supervisor Glenn Cramer in neighboring Westmoreland County. The man repeatedly told officials the call was not a hoax.

"We are being hijacked. We are being hijacked," Mr. Cramer quoted the man from a transcript of the call.

The man told dispatchers the plane "was going down. He heard some sort of explosion and saw white smoke coming from the plane and we lost contact with him," Mr. Cramer said.

FBI Agent Wells Morrison wouldn't confirm that the plane was hijacked but said the FBI was reviewing the tape of the 911 call.

"At this point, we're not prepared to say it was an act of terrorism, though it appears to be that," Mr. Morrison said.

Rep. James P. Moran, Virginia Democrat, said after a Marine Corps briefing in Washington that Flight 93 was apparently intended for Camp David, the presidential retreat in the mountains of Maryland. The crash site is 85 miles northwest of Camp David.

The 10 a.m. crash of Flight 93 occurred about 85 miles northwest of Camp David near Thurmont, Md.

"There's a crater gorged in the earth, the plane is pretty much disintegrated. There's nothing left but scorched trees," said Mark Stahl of Somerset, who went to the scene.

He described the area as a former strip mine that is now a grassy field edged by woods. The plane came down near the tree line, he said.

Michael R. Merringer was out on a mountain bike ride with his wife, Amy, about two miles away from the crash site.

"I heard the engine gun two different times and then I heard a loud bang and the windows of the houses all around rattled," Mr. Merringer said. "I looked up, and I saw the smoke coming up."

The couple rushed home and drove near the scene.

"Everything was on fire, and there was trees knocked down and there was a big hole in the ground," he said.

United said Flight 93 left Newark at 8:01 a.m. with 38 passengers, two pilots and five flight attendants.

Muslim groups decry attacks
No cause justifies the 'immoral' act, U.S. councils say

By Larry Witham
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Ten major U.S. Muslim organizations issued statements yesterday condemning the sneak air attacks against the Pentagon and New York's twin World Trade Center towers that injured and killed perhaps thousands of Americans.

"There is no cause that justifies this type of immoral and inhumane act," said officials of the American Muslim Council (AMC). They called for "swift apprehension and punishment of the perpetrators."

Leaders of the American Muslim Political Coordinating Council said the attacks were "vicious and cowardly acts of terrorism."

"No political cause could ever be assisted by such immoral acts," they said.

"This is not 10 or 20 years ago, when Americans were surprised by the Iranian revolution," said Sayyid M. Syeed, secretary-general of the Islamic Society of North America. "People are very familiar with their Muslim neighbors."

He said Muslims were immediately blamed for the bombing of the Oklahoma City federal building, when the culprit was actually Timothy McVeigh. "This is not turning out to be like 1995, because the press has

"Things have gotten better for American Muslims, but this will have an unfortunate fallout,"
— John Esposito

matured," he said.

Yet such gigantic acts of terrorism as those in New York and Washington can't help but revive images or stereotypes from the past, said John Esposito, director of the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University.

"Things have gotten better for American Muslims, but this will have an unfortunate fallout," he said. "They are in a tough spot."

The nation's 5 million Muslims are mostly immigrants or children of immigrants. Consequently, they frequently are associated with political turmoil or struggles for human rights abroad, Mr. Syeed said. "As Americans, we support the rights of our people, but it does not mean we

endorse" one political solution or another.

Muslim leaders also said they repeatedly condemn terrorism and often distance themselves specifically from the more extreme political groups — though not all the time.

Members of the AMC have endorsed Hamas, a political wing of the Palestinian Liberation Organization. They protested the criminal proceedings against the Egyptian cleric, Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahma, when he was given a life sentence for the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center.

Mr. Esposito said that if Muslims now distance themselves from any particular radical group, they will make Islam look complicit when nobody yet knows who masterminded the terrorism.

"That would be premature and play into the idea" of Muslim guilt, he said.

If a terrorist who espouses Islam is identified, he said, "I expect major Muslim leaders will jump out front" to condemn that group.

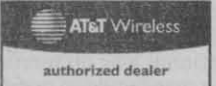
Mr. Esposito said Americans must distinguish "legitimate resistance" movements that involve Muslims abroad from terrorist organizations.

The AMC, meanwhile, said yesterday it "supports all efforts of the investigation in order to track down the people responsible."

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