

Dodging security no big problem

Experts point to weaknesses

BY SETH BORENSTEIN
KNIGHT RIDDER

WASHINGTON — The terrorists who attacked America by turning jetliners into giant bombs did so by getting through airport security and sneaking weapons aboard four airliners that took off within 12 minutes of each other.

If the pilots were killed or otherwise incapacitated, it would be relatively simple to

steer a jet into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, aviation and security experts said.

The apparently coordinated attacks exploited an obvious weakness in America's flight system, which was geared more toward finding bombs than preventing hijacking, they said.

"The aircraft itself became the bomb, and therefore a lot of the effort we had been putting into attempting to detect explosives, bombs and the like would have had no impact here," said Douglas Harris, the chairman of the security consulting firm Anacapa Sciences in Santa Barbara, Calif., and a former mem-

ber of a National Academies of Sciences study on airport security.

"You could get enough weaponry on board (an airplane) until you can take control of the airplane," said Eric Doten, a former senior Federal Aviation Administration adviser who's now director of the Center for Aerospace Safety Education at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Florida.

Most likely, the terrorists smuggled plastic or composite weapons through the metal detectors that passengers pass through, Doten said.

Over the next few days and

weeks, investigators will try to find out how the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were staged, but aviation and security experts already were able to identify holes in America's safety and aviation system that allowed the attacks to occur.

In fact, the Transportation Department's inspector general started an investigation Monday — the day before the attacks — "to assess FAA's efforts for improving passenger and carry-on baggage screening at security checkpoints within the United States," according to an internal DOT memo.



MARK FARAM/ASSOCIATED PRESS

A priest prays Tuesday over a wounded man outside the west entrance of the Pentagon as emergency workers from all services mobilize to help the injured after a terrorist attack.

Capitol leaders whisked to safety

BY JEFF NESMITH
AND LARRY LIPMAN
COX

WASHINGTON — Police whisked key government officials, including Vice President Dick Cheney and the leaders of Congress, to "secure" locations in the White House and elsewhere Tuesday, minutes after a hijacked American Airlines jet crashed into the Pentagon.

First lady Laura Bush, who had just sat down to testify on early childhood learning issues before a Senate committee, was evacuated, as were members of the Cabinet.

Police-escorted motorcades raced separately away from the Capitol, carrying the president's wife and congressional leaders.

Among them were House Speaker Dennis Hastert, Democratic Leader Tom Daschle and Republican Leader Trent Lott.

Hastert is second in the line of succession to the presidency, behind the vice president.

Presidential counselor Karen Hughes said Cheney and White House national security adviser Condoleezza Rice were at a "secure location" at the White House.

Although the precise location wasn't disclosed, they most likely spent much of the time in the National Security Council's Situation Room in the White House basement.

The Situation Room actually is a complex of several rooms that bristle with sophisticated communications equipment that sends and receives encoded messages from military and other facilities around the world.

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld remained in the Pentagon, said Hughes, who spoke to reporters from the FBI headquarters in Washington.

Minutes after the Pentagon crash, police had started clearing Washington's two most-important buildings.

Secret Service agents shouted at tourists to get away from the White House. Two miles away, police guards ran through the Capitol, shouting for people to leave, some of them saying: "There's another plane coming."

Beyond what seemed to be previously rehearsed plans for moving Hastert and other congressional leaders to undisclosed locations, there were no preparations for other members of Congress, who were alerted by fire alarms, phone calls and aides shouting from the hallways.

Sen. Bob Graham, D-Fla., chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, praised the police response and noted that orders to evacuate the Capitol and the congressional office buildings that surround it, came within 45 minutes of the second aircraft crash into New York's World Trade Center.

Graham and Rep. Peter Goss, R-Fla., chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, were having breakfast with other members and staff on the House side of the Capitol when they were informed of the New York crashes.



RICHARD DREW/ASSOCIATED PRESS

The south tower of New York's World Trade Center collapses Tuesday after scorching heat apparently melted steel supports, causing a domino effect of floor upon floor in the 110-story building.

Ultimately, heat from fire caused collapse of towers

BY SHARON L. CRENSON
ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — The image of the World Trade Center's 110-story twin towers crumbling seemed a scene of impossible destruction.

But the miraculous steel and concrete architecture that made them couldn't withstand the power of Tuesday's attack and ensuing fire.

No building designed today could, said Masoud Sanayei, a civil engineering professor at Tufts University.

Experts in skyscraper construction said video of the collapse led them to believe the towers perhaps were weakened by the initial impact of the airplanes that hit them Tuesday, but that heat from the resulting fire likely was the most punishing blow.

Hyman Brown, a University of Colorado civil engineering professor and the Trade Center's construction manager, speculated that flames fueled by thousands of gallons of aviation fuel melted steel supports.

"Nothing is designed or will be designed to withstand that fire."

HYMAN BROWN
Trade Center's construction manager

"This building would have stood had a plane or a force caused by a plane smashed into it," he said. "But steel melts, and 24,000 gallons of aviation fuel melted the steel. Nothing is designed or will be designed to withstand that fire."

Sanayei said the heat may have disconnected one of the towers' concrete floors from the tubular steel columns that ringed the buildings. If one or two floors collapsed, it would have created a pancake effect of one massive floor caving into the next.

"In my opinion, the fire weakened the connection between the floor system and the columns on the higher floors and caused a couple of the floors to collapse," Sanayei said. "The floors are

very heavy, made of reinforced concrete, so when one hits the next, they cause a domino effect ... and it can go all the way down to the first floor."

Architect Minoru Yamasaki, who died in 1986, worked with engineers John Skilling and Leslie Robertson to design the fabled twin towers, once the world's tallest buildings.

In his 2000 book "Building Big," architect David Macaulay described the towers' engineering as "a series of load bearing exterior columns spaced 3 feet apart and tied together at every floor by a deep horizontal beam, creating a strong lattice of square tubing around each tower."

Brown said the two towers have staircases in all four corners of the buildings and were designed to be evacuated in an hour. He said it appeared that since the planes crashed into the corners, escape was cut off for those on the floors above.

"I could never conceive of anybody being able to bring down those two buildings," he added.

D.C. area in a frenzy

BY GARY MARTIN
EXPRESS-NEWS WASHINGTON BUREAU

WASHINGTON — White House staffers raced from the West Wing and anxious tourists were ushered over the Potomac River and forced the mandatory evacuation of federal buildings that sent hundreds of people into downtown streets.

Thundering F-16 jets circled overhead. Sirens wailed as emergency vehicles sped to White House entrances. Guards shouted at dazed onlookers, "Get back!"

As President Bush, in Florida, ordered law enforcement to "hunt down" the people responsible for the attack, White House staffers in Washington ran through the northwest gate as threats of more attacks spread through the corridors of power.

"It wasn't chaos, but it was very deliberate. Everyone was getting out," said Steven Ruhlen of San Antonio, a deputy assistant for legislative affairs for Vice President Dick Cheney.

Rep. Lamar Smith, R-San Antonio, said he was driving into Washington when he saw a huge black cloud appear. As he entered the garage to his office, he was stopped by the Capitol Police.

"They just hit the Pentagon," the officers told Smith.

"This will forever change our country," Smith said. "It will change travel, security, national relations, everything."

When the attacks were carried out, rumors of bombings at the State Department and on the National Mall created a sense of confusion for tourists caught in the frenzied atmosphere.

Traffic came to a standstill. Bridges, rail systems and airports were closed.

Inside the Capitol, lawmakers joined sightseers fleeing the building under shouted orders by guards to evacuate.

"It was very, very frightening, getting out of the Capitol. People were running. It was confusing. People were crying," said Rep. Solomon Ortiz, D-Corpus Christi.

Many staffers were watching the events unfold on television when they were ordered from their offices.

"We are assuming that these incidents are not isolated. The halls of the Cannon Building are filled with evacuating staff," David McFarland, spokesman for Rep. Ciro Rodriguez, D-San Antonio, wrote in a hurried e-

mail to reporters before he fled.

Frantic attempts to use cell phones were futile when the system crashed due to overuse.

"Communication all over the city kind of broke down," said George Behan, press secretary to Rep. Norm Dicks, D-Wash.

"It tells you how unprepared we are for this kind of stuff," Behan said.

The attack on the Pentagon came about 8:40 a.m. CDT, nearly an hour after two airplanes struck the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York.

The Boeing 757 with 58 passengers and six crew members was en route from Dulles International Airport to Los Angeles.

Eyewitnesses described a lumbering commercial airliner flying low over Interstate 395 and too slow to reach nearby Reagan International Airport. It disappeared in an explosion and smoke at the Pentagon.

Rear Adm. Craig Quigley, a Pentagon spokesman, said people inside the facility heard a thud before a fire spread quickly through the building.

"The fire was intense," he said.

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld was in his Pentagon office. He ran toward the area of impact, trying to help, before being escorted back to security and protection, Quigley said.

Pentagon spokesman Glenn Flood said the numbers of injuries and fatalities were unknown.

Area hospitals began treating those rushed to emergency rooms and issued a plea for blood donors.

Plumes of smoke from the Pentagon continued to drift over Washington through the afternoon as firefighters battled the smoldering blaze.

Stores and shops in downtown Washington, as well as in the suburbs, closed early.

Schools let out as thousands of federal workers made their way home in bumper-to-bumper traffic.

Local newscasts replayed the horrific events.

"You expect to see images like this coming from another country, but not here," Ortiz said.

Reaction was swift from lawmakers seeking retribution.

"Americans are stunned, hurting and angry," said Rep. Kevin Brady, R-The Woodlands. "This is a declaration of war on our country on our shores, and together we must act accordingly."

Rep. Henry Bonilla, R-San Antonio, said President Bush will have the full support of Congress when he seeks to punish the culprits.

"Those who have declared war on the American people must now face the full might and power of the United States," Bonilla said.

gmartin@express-news.net
Staff Writer Sherry Sylvester contributed to this report.

INTERNATIONAL LEADERS

"We are completely shocked. It's unbelievable."

— Palestinian leader
Yasser Arafat

"It is impossible to fully comprehend the evil that would have conjured up such a cowardly and depraved assault."

— Canadian Prime Minister
Jean Chretien

"This mass terrorism is the new evil in our world today. It is perpetrated by fanatics who are utterly indifferent to the sanctity of human life."

— British Prime Minister
Tony Blair

"This outrageous and vicious act of violence against the United States is unforgivable,"

— Japanese Prime Minister
Junichiro Koizumi