

For the Eyes of the President Only



**Article From the Front Page of the New York Times:
Eyewitness Testimony to the Attack on the World Trade
Center.**

***U.S. ATTACKED; HIJACKED JETS
DESTROY TWIN TOWERS AND HIT
PENTAGON IN DAY OF TERROR***

By N. R. KLEINFELD SEPT. 12, 2001

It kept getting worse.

The horror arrived in episodic bursts of chilling disbelief, signified first by trembling floors, sharp eruptions, cracked windows. There was the actual unfathomable realization of a gaping, flaming hole in first one of the tall towers, and then the same thing all over again in its twin. There was the merciless sight of bodies helplessly tumbling out, some of them in flames.

Finally, the mighty towers themselves were reduced to nothing. Dense plumes of smoke raced through the downtown avenues, coursing between the buildings, shaped like tornadoes on their sides.

Every sound was cause for alarm. A plane appeared overhead. Was another one coming? No, it was a fighter jet. But was it friend or enemy? People scrambled for their lives, but they didn't know where to go. Should they go north, south, east, west? Stay outside, go indoors? People hid beneath cars and each other. Some contemplated jumping into the river.

For those trying to flee the very epicenter of the collapsing World Trade Center towers, the most horrid thought of all finally dawned on them: nowhere was safe.

For several panic-stricken hours yesterday morning, people in Lower Manhattan witnessed the inexpressible, the incomprehensible, the unthinkable. "I don't know what the gates of hell look like, but it's got to be like this," said John Maloney, a security director for an Internet firm in the trade center. "I'm a combat veteran, Vietnam, and I never saw anything like this."

The first warnings were small ones. Blocks away, Jim Farmer, a film composer, was having breakfast at a small restaurant on West Broadway. He heard the sound of a jet. An odd sound -- too loud, it seemed, to be normal. Then he noticed: "All the pigeons in the street flew up."

It was the people outside, on the sidewalk, who saw the beginning. At 8:45, David Blackford was walking toward work in a downtown building. He heard a jet engine and glanced up. "I saw this plane screaming overhead," he said. "I thought it was too low. I thought it wasn't going to clear the tower."

Within moments, his fears were confirmed. The plane slammed into the north face of 1 World Trade Center. As he watched, he said, "You could see the concussion move up the building."

"It was a large plane flying low," said Robert Pachino, another witness. "There was no engine trouble. He didn't try to maneuver. This plane was on a mission."

Dark spots fell from the sides of the buildings, and at first it wasn't clear what they were. Sarah Sampino, who worked across the street, noticed black smoke outside and went to the window. "We saw bodies flying out of the windows," she said. "It was the 85th floor. I used to work on that floor."

James Wang, 21, a photography student snapping pictures of people doing tai chi at a nearby park, looked up and saw people high in the north tower. They seemed like tiny figurines, and he didn't know if they were awaiting rescue or merely looking out. "They were standing up there," he said. "And they jumped. One woman, her dress was billowing out."

Inside the towers, people felt it without knowing what it was. At about 15 minutes to 9, Anne Prosser, 29, rode the elevator to the 90th floor of Tower 1, where her global banking office was.

As the doors opened, she heard what seemed like an explosion. She didn't know it, but the first plane had just hit several floors above her.

"I got thrown to the ground before I got to our suite," she said. "I crawled inside. Not everybody was at work." She said she tried to leave but there was so much debris in the air she couldn't breathe. Port Authority rescuers finally steered her to a stairway.

Tim Lingenfelder, 36, an office manager at a small investment banking firm, was sitting before his computer terminal on the 52nd floor of Tower 1. He had just sent an e-mail to his sister in Minnesota. Nothing special -- just how was she and what he had had for breakfast.

The windows rattled. He heard a loud noise. The entire building shook. He looked up. Outside the windows, he noticed rubble falling, and he thought, "That can't be from here."

Only two others were at work, a father and son who were both bond traders. They said they had better get out. They hurried to the stairs and, along with flocks of others, began their descent.

"When I got to the 18th floor, my cell phone rang," Mr. Lingenfelder said. "It was my sister. She said a plane had hit and to get out now."

On the 32nd floor, the entourage was stuck for about 20 minutes because of smoke. Everyone ducked into offices on the floor to catch their breath. Mr. Lingenfelder peered out the window and saw a body lying on the roof of the hotel.

They returned to the stairs and made it out onto the plaza. Rubble and debris was all around. On the street there was endless paper and unmatched shoes.

John Cerqueira, 22, and Mike Ben Fanter, 36, were working on the 81st floor of 1 World Trade Center when they felt the collision. "People were freaking out," said Mr. Fanter, a sales manager. "I tried to get them in the center of the office. About 40 people. I led them to the hall down the steps."

He continued: "We stopped on the 68th floor. I could hear people screaming. There was a woman in a wheelchair. John and I carried her down from the 68th floor to the 5th floor, where we got out. We started to see people jumping from the top of the World Trade Center."

Teresa Foxx, 37, works at an investment banking firm a block from the World Trade Center, and she had dropped off her 15-month-old daughter, Trinity, at the Discovery Learning Center on the plaza level of 5 World Trade Center, the building adjacent to the two towers. While she was in her office, Ms. Foxx heard the blast and immediately knew it was a bomb. "Ever since I enrolled her in the World Trade Center, I keep thinking about the bombing that they had there," she said.

She grabbed her purse and went outside and began running toward the daycare center. Other people were speeding toward her, crying and screaming. She was crying herself. She had to get her daughter.

By the time she got to the center, the children had been evacuated several blocks away. She hurried over there and found her daughter. "I just grabbed her and held her," she said. "I was still crying, the other parents were still crying, but we all got our children."

When she got home, Ms. Foxx told her husband, "Now I understand why people run into burning buildings."

Within about 15 minutes of the first crash, the second plane struck the neighboring tower.

People in the street panicked and ran. Some tripped, fell, got knocked down, were pulled up. People lost their keys, their phones, their handbags, their shoes.

Brianne Woods, a student at Pace University, was walking to class, and as she passed a Burger King not a hundred feet from the trade center she heard a blast and felt the ground shake. She ran to a bank, where people were banging on the glass, breaking it, trying to get inside. "I saw a guy bleeding from the head right by the bank," she said. "People were getting stomped on under the crowd. I saw a lady with no shoes, her feet were bleeding. I was probably in there for about 10 minutes, and I was hysterical."

Her brother worked in the World Trade Center and she didn't know if he was in there. She learned later that he had not gone to work.

She happened to have her cat, Oliver, with her, and she began wandering around, clutching her cat carrier, dazed. "I saw two people jump out," she said. "It was horrible. I felt I was in a bad nightmare."

Then a calm set in again. For blocks around, all the way up to 14th Street, the sidewalks were a mass of people, eerily quiet, for the incomprehension had struck them mute. As emergency vehicles, sirens blaring, sped downtown, people stood and gaped at the towers with holes in them. Many people were steadily inching downtown, not imagining anything worse was to come.

Marilyn Mulcahy, 31, had a business appointment at 9 at an office on Broadway a few blocks from the World Trade Center. She got off the subway at Chambers and Church Streets. She saw what she believed were pieces of a plane engine on the sidewalk, police officers running tape around it. She saw the holes in the towers and was dumbstruck.

Reason dictated caution, to get out of the area, but she was overcome with shock. Almost unknowingly, she walked to the office where her appointment was. Everyone had left. Even so, she took the time to scribble a note that she had been there and would call later.

Back on the street, fear caught up with her. She changed out of her heels into flat shoes she had in her bag and ran uptown.

On the corner of Vesey and Church Streets, across from the Borders Books and Music store in the corner of the trade center, a small-boned woman, her hair caked with blood, was sitting on the curb, shaking uncontrollably. One eye was clouded over. A man in a business suit was lying on a stretcher, being loaded into an ambulance. Emergency workers came to comfort the woman. Five feet away, another rescue worker crouched down next to a heavysset woman who was breathing through an inhaler and hugged her.

Some Trade Center workers blessed their luck at being late for work. Kathleen Dendy, 50, had gotten her hair cut and so never got to her office at her usual 8:30. She worked on the 99th floor. Rajesh Trivedi, 40, a computer programmer, normally reported at 7, but he had to drop his son off at school and so didn't get in. He worked on the 80th floor.

A plane was heard overhead and people looked up. Another one, they thought. "No, it's a fighter," someone said. "Ours."

"Are you sure?" a woman asked.

Many people were busy on cell phones, trying to reach friends and relatives they knew in the buildings or to alert their own loved ones that they were all right. But the circuits overloaded. Fear mounted.

And then it got even worse.

Police officers warned people in the vicinity to move north, that the buildings could fall, but most people found that unthinkable. They stayed put or gravitated closer.

Abruptly, there was an ear-splitting noise. The south tower shook, seemed to list in one direction and then began to come down, imploding upon itself.

"It looked like a demolition," said Andy Pollock.

"It started exploding," said Ross Milanytch, 57, who works at nearby Chase Manhattan Bank. "It was about the 70th floor. And each second another floor exploded out for about eight floors, before the cloud obscured it all."

Seth Bower was on Broadway when the force of the collapse knocked him over onto other people. Bodies fell on top of him -- not all of them, he thought, alive.

A plume of smoke reminiscent of an atomic bomb rose upward and then descended to street level and sped uptown. People began running, chased by the smoke. The air rained white ash and plaster dust, coating people until they looked ghostlike.

Some people were screaming, and many were in shock. "Don't breathe the air," people shouted. "It could be toxic." People held their breath or covered their faces as best they could with cloths or their shirts.

Lisle Taylor, 26, a recruiter with Goldman, Sachs, had just gotten out of a nearby subway stop and saw hundreds of pieces of paper in the air. She thought it was a marketing campaign. Then she looked up and saw the tower collapsing. "A woman grabbed my hand," she said. "She was saying the Lord's Prayer."

For several blocks, everything was black. People found their eyes burned. Many wondered if they were seeing the very face of death.

Michael Clinch, a security officer for an Internet company, left his office soon after the first plane struck and was standing on Broadway talking to a police officer when the first tower fell. He saw a woman running, grabbed her and pulled her under a sport utility vehicle with him. "We got under the truck and waited until it got light again," he said. "There were cars just blowing up. They were trying to get equipment off this emergency truck and get it into a building and all these cars just blew up. One would blow up and set off the next one. It got so bad we just couldn't do anything any more and we had to get out of there."

Ten or so blocks north of the towers, the smoke had been outrun and it began to dissipate into the air. People stopped, turned and looked downtown. As the air cleared, an unthinkable site presented itself: empty space where a 110-story tower had been.

People gasped. They trembled. They sobbed.

"It can't be," an elderly woman said. "It just can't be. Where did it go? Oh, lord, where did it go?"

Many of the onlookers stayed put, frozen in horror. Slowly, the next thought crept into their consciousness: The other tower would come down too.

Several people voiced the thought: "Get out of here, the other tower's going to fall."

People started walking briskly north until the premonition became real -- another horrifying eruption, as one floor after another seemed to detonate. Another giant cloud, soot, smoke streaming through the avenues. Again, people ran.

Many of them stopped at Canal Street and watched the smoke dissolve. People cried at what they saw: a crystalline sky with nothing in it.

"Oh my God," Tim Lingenfelder said, "there's nothing there."

That was when he lost it and began to cry.

People stood, numb, transfixed by what had to be a mirage. "All that were left of the buildings that you could see were the steel girders in like a triangular sail shape," said Ross Milanytch. "The dust was about an inch and a half thick on the ground."

Onlookers gathered in clumps and tried to understand. People with cars opened the doors and turned on the radios, and knots of people leaned close to hear what was happening. The news came across of of the plane at the Pentagon, the plane in Pittsburgh.

"It's like Pearl Harbor," said a middle-aged man at a small parking lot on Canal Street. "It's Pearl Harbor. It's war."

"It's sickos," someone else said. "Sickos."

"This is America," a man said. "How can it happen in America? How?"

A young man came around imploring people to report to St. Vincent's Manhattan Hospital to donate blood.

Lines five, eight deep developed at pay phones, but many of the phones didn't work. Most of the downtown businesses were closed. People borrowed cell phones, but the heavy phone traffic made communicating hard if not impossible. Countless people spent hours not knowing where a wife, a husband or a child was.

For hours, people lingered, uncertain where to go or what to do in a no longer plausible world. Some felt compelled to leave Manhattan, taking ferries to New Jersey. A man holding his weeping wife headed toward the Manhattan bridge, telling her, "Let's walk over the bridge to Brooklyn. They can't hurt us in Brooklyn."

Late in the afternoon, hundreds of rescue workers remained outside where the trade towers once loomed, watching the stubs of the buildings continue to burn into infinity. Several stories still stood, but it was hard to judge how many. Above the second story was nothing but an intense orange glow.

"It's eerie," said Monet Harris, 22, a transit worker. "You always look for those two buildings. You always know where you are when you see those two buildings. And now they're gone."