

SEPTEMBER 11 ATTACKS



On the morning of September 11, 2001, the United States of America suffered a terrorist attack. It was the worst attack in the nation's history. It was the largest foreign attack on American soil since the World War II attacks on Pearl Harbor.

Thousands died and were injured. Many have suffered long-term health effects. The attacks shocked the nation and the world. A terrorist group, al-Qaeda, then led by Osama Bin Laden, claimed to have planned and carried out the attacks.

On September 11, 2001, nineteen al-Qaeda terrorists boarded four separate planes. They intended to use the planes as guided missiles. All nineteen terrorists passed through security checkpoints at the airports. After the planes took off they attacked the flight crew and took control of the planes. They set off on suicide missions to crash the planes into important buildings.

At 8:46 a.m., American Airlines Flight 11, from Boston headed to Los Angeles, crashed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center in New York City. All on board were killed instantly. Many inside the North Tower were also killed. First-responders, including firefighters, policeman, Red Cross and emergency crews, and civilians, began to help people evacuate from the North Tower.

At 9:03 a.m. a second plane, United Airlines Flight 175, crashed into the South Tower of the World Trade Center. Flight 175 also took off from Boston and was hijacked in the same way as Flight 11. Now it was clear that these events were an attack and not an accident. Both towers were on fire, with huge plumes of smoke billowing from the crash sites. Emergency crews were overwhelmed and the city was in a state of panic.

A third flight, American Airlines Flight 77, was hijacked after its departure from Washington Dulles International Airport in Virginia. At 9:37, the plane crashed into the Pentagon, the headquarters of the United States Department of Defense. Everyone on board and 125 people in the Pentagon died instantly.

The fourth plane, United Airlines Flight 93, was hijacked at around 9:28 a.m., after taking off from Newark, New Jersey. The plane was turned by the terrorists towards Washington D.C. Several passengers learned of the attacks by calling loved ones on their cell phones. By a vote, they decided to try to take back control of the plane and the terrorists. The terrorists piloting the plane decided to crash the plane when they realized that the passengers were going to regain control. It crashed in a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. By attacking the terrorists, the passengers prevented the plane from being crashed into the Capitol or the White House.

In New York, as emergency crews continued to help people evacuate, the two towers collapsed. They were weakened from the explosion and fire. The North Tower collapsed at 9:59 a.m., and the South Tower collapsed at 10:28 a.m. Many people were still inside of the buildings at the time of their collapse, including civilians, emergency crews, firefighters and policemen.

Nearly 3,000 people died in the attacks of September 11. The heroic efforts of emergency crews and citizens saved the lives of many people in New York City and at the Pentagon, however. President George W. Bush addressed the nation and the world that evening. He condemned the attacks on "our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom." He praised rescue workers and neighbors who came to help.

As a response to the attacks, the United States launched a military action against the Taliban in Afghanistan. The Taliban is a terrorist group that controlled much of Afghanistan at the time of the attacks. The Taliban helped to fund and train al-Qaeda terrorists planning the September 11 attacks. The United States' military action was intended to destroy Taliban military operations and terrorist training camps, and to capture those responsible for the attacks. The United States was able to eliminate Taliban control over most of the major cities in Afghanistan. But, the Taliban still has control over some rural towns in 2011. Ten years after the attacks the U.S. and allied forces are still fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Many high-ranking al-Qaeda terrorists, including Osama bin Laden, fled to the neighboring country of Pakistan. On May 1, 2011, nearly 10 years after he helped orchestrate September 11, Osama bin Laden was killed in his compound in Pakistan by US special forces. For many affected by the attacks of September 11, Osama bin Laden's death brought a sense of closure to one of the most horrific events in history.