NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

THE NEW YORK POST, MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2001

OSAMA 'AWOL'

- **Bush aides: We can prove that bin Laden did it**
- **Day of horror victims toll now tops 7,000**
- **Hijacker's suicide note: 'Be prepared for God'**
- **Faithful turn out for Yankee Stadium memorial**
- **Mayoral hopefuls make rounds; primary tomorrow**

By Brian Blomquist in D.C. and Dan Mangan, Ed Robinson and Dareh Gregorian in N.Y.

Where's Osama?

Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia yesterday said terror chief Osama bin Laden — the man believed responsible for the day of horror that has now left more than 7,000 people presumed dead — has disappeared.

The Taliban's ambassador to Pakistan, Abdul Salam Zaeef, said they have sent out emissaries to tell bin Laden of Thursday's decision by Afghanistan's Muslim clergy asking him to leave the country voluntarily, "but he has not been traced."

A spokesman for the militia's chief, Mullah Mohammed Omar, told the Afghan Islamic Press that "efforts were being made" to find "guest Osama," but he's "gone missing."

U.S. officials, who've demanded the Taliban hand over bin Laden and his fellow terrorists or face the consequences, scoffed at the claim.

"They know where he is," Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld told CBS's "Face the Nation." "They know their country ... It is just not believable that the Taliban do not know where the network can be located and ... turned over."

National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice suggested that Taliban rulers — who've been harboring bin Laden for years — are simply trying to evade U.S. demands.

"We're not going to be deterred by comments that he may be missing," Rice told "Fox News Sunday."

"We don't simply believe it."

Rice said if the Taliban do not hand over bin Laden and his lieutenants, allow access to terrorist training camps and free two detained American aid workers — as President Bush demanded in his dramatic speech to Congress — they will "face the wrath of an international coalition."

The strength of that anti-terror coalition is expected to get a boost today, when a high-level European Union delegation arrives in Islamabad, Pakistan, to start of a weeklong diplomatic tour of Islamic nations.

The delegation, led by EU President Louis Michel, also will stop in Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria and Jordan.

Secretary of State Colin Powell said to further build the coalition, the United States will release a report making it "very obvious to the world" that bin Laden and his al Qaeda terror ring were responsible for toppling the Twin Towers.

The governments of most Muslim countries have said they oppose terrorism, but they want evidence that bin Laden was behind the Sept. 11 attacks before moving against him.

"We are hard at work bringing all the information together — intelligence information, law-enforcement information," Powell told NBC's "Meet the Press."

"I think in the near future, we will be able to put out a paper, a document, that will describe quite clearly the evidence that we have linking him to this attack."

He also stressed that bin Laden isn't the only target.

"Even if we were to get Osama bin Laden tomorrow ... that would be good, but it would not be the end. It's his lieutenants we have to get. It's the whole network that has to be ripped up," Powell said.

"We're talking several thousand, maybe many thousands, we're not entirely sure ... You can find connections to them all around, and we have to get them all."

Meanwhile, as U.S. forces continued to amass near Afghanistan, not all was well with the coalition.

The Saudi base that Washington chose as its command and control center for the offensive has been declared off-limits for retaliatory flights, a Saudi official told The Associated Press.

While the United States has other possible bases in the region, the vast Prince Sultan Air Base hosts 4,500 U.S. military personnel and an undisclosed number of warplanes, and government officials are still negotiating with the Saudis to try to change their minds.

Powell, however, praised the kingdom and said that Washington was "working ... with the Saudis on a very, very satisfactory basis."

Meanwhile, protests against U.S. action in Pakistan — where the government has pledged to assist Washington — waned, but a frightening threat was issued by militants there.

Mullah Ghafoor Haideri, the national general-secretary of the radical Jamiat-e-Ulema Islami party, threatened suicide attacks against any U.S. servicemen deployed in Pakistan.

"We are directing our suicide force to guard those airways and areas that American forces wish to use against Afghanistan," he said at a news conference. "If American airplanes land at our air base, suicide fighters will attack them."

Rumsfeld, meanwhile, acknowledged that an unmanned spy drone that went down in Afghanistan was American, but said he thought it was downed by technical problems, not the Taliban.

"That happens from time to time," he said.

At Camp David in Maryland, President Bush stood with his hand on as heart as Marines raised Old Glory back to full mast for the time since the terror attacks.

The symbolic move came as a CNN/USA Today Gallup Poll showed an unprecedented 90 percent of Americans approve of the way Bush has been handling the crisis.

That's 1 percent more than the previous record-holder — Bush's dad. He scored an 89 percent approval rating at the end of the Gulf War in 1991.

In New York, search-and-rescue teams continued scouring through the debris and rubble of the World Trade Center in their desperate hunt for any survivors, and, for the 11th straight day, found none.

About 25,000 people attended a Yankee Stadium prayer service for the attack victims.

"Our skyline will rise again," Mayor Giuliani told the crowd.

"To those who say that our city will never be the same, I say you are right," Giuliani said. "It will be better."

The moving interfaith service included tenor Placido Domingo singing an emotional "Ave Maria," and a standing ovation for Bette Midler, who sang "Wind Beneath My Wings."

A simpler prayer service took place at St. Paul's Chapel for rescue workers and volunteers.

The 235-year-old church — just blocks away from the WTC site — survived the disaster unscathed. Worshippers had to make their way around the piles of relief supplies, and the church pianist was wearing a hard hat.

Rector Daniel Matthews pointed out that George Washington had prayed there in times of trouble, and Matthews told the dozens there last night that "we're doing exactly what people have been doing here for more than 200 years."

Meanwhile, for the second time since the worst terrorist act in world history, the Federal Aviation Administration, worried about possible chemical attacks, ordered a one-day ban on aerial crop-dusting.

"The intelligence community came to us and encouraged us to shut down the crop-dusters," said FAA spokesman Scott Brenner.

Investigators discovered a crop-dusting manual in a suspected terrorist hideout.



GUERRILLAS TUNE IN: Northern Alliance fighters, opposed to the Taliban, listen to a radio transmission yesterday in northern Afghanistan, where heavy fighting was reported between the rebels and the ruling fundamentalist Islamic militia. AP

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