NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

'THE LOST SON': BERNARD KERIK'S STORY

NEW YORK CITY



EXCLUSIVE

Sept. 11, 2001, a day that will live in infamy for New Yorkers especially, started out routinely for Police Commissioner Bernard Kerik. It soon forever changed his life and the life of every American. In today's final installment of Kerik's autobiography, "The Lost Son," he details what happened that fateful day and how he dealt with the crisis.

"The Lost Son," by Bernard Kerik (Regan Books imprint of HarperCollins, $26.50) is available at booksellers nationwide.



THE DAY AFTER: Police Commissioner Bernard Kerik (right) and Mayor Giuliani survey the catastrophe at ground zero. AP

AT 1:30 a.m., on Tuesday morning, I finished the final chapter of this book. I reread the last section and then leaned back and sighed, relieved that this emotionally draining journey into my past was finally over.

At 6 a.m., I got up and went downtown to my office at 1 Police Plaza, arriving a little before 7 a.m. I looked over the day's schedule of meetings and obligations. In bold letters at the top, it read: **Tuesday, September 11, 2001.**

I went in the back room of my office to work out. At 7:45 a.m., just as I was finishing my workout, American Airlines Flight 11 was taking off from Logan Airport in Boston, bound for Los Angeles.

I walked out to my desk to go over some paperwork, talked to my aide, John Picciano, about the day, and then went into the back room to take a shower. It was about 8:25 and Flight 11 had just notified the ground it had been hijacked.

Twenty minutes later, Hector Santiago, another member of my security detail, heard a muffled explosion. He didn't think anything of it.

A minute later, he heard an NYPD Emergency Services officer scream into the radio that "an airplane just hit the World Trade Center."

Every phone in the office seemed to ring at that instant.

Hector answered his own phone and it's Lenny Lemer. "Hec, we got a plane just crashed into the towers!"

I was in the shower and the door to my back office was locked. Hector began kicking the door. "Boss! Boss!" Pitch joined him.

I came out in a towel, shaving cream all over my face, and Hector and Pitch told me what they'd heard.

"They're saying a plane hit the building," John said, "but you should see the . . . hole! It's unbelievable."

Still, I thought it would be manageable.

A small airplane — a prop plane, a twin engine — has smashed itself harmlessly against the side of the building, tragic for the handful of people on the plane, but certainly something we could handle.

I walked through the outer offices to my conference room, which had a window overlooking the World Trade Center.

What I saw — what millions of New Yorkers and Americans saw — was terrifying. There was a huge hole in the top portion of the north Twin Tower and black smoke was pouring out of it.

This wasn't a twin-engine plane.

But at that point I couldn't grasp how a commercial jet would hit the tower. I didn't know, of course, that I was staring at the gaping hole caused by Flight 11 — the 767

Terrorists slammed two jetliners into the World Trade Center. The sky was raining debris. Fires, smoke and death were everywhere. And Bernard Kerik raced to the scene and plunged headlong into the crisis.

hijacked and flown into the building by radical Muslim terrorists.

"Get the mayor's car on the phone," I said.

I was dressed in less than two minutes and Hector, Craig Taylor and I raced to the elevator and down into the garage, where we jumped in a car and began screaming through mid-morning traffic toward the towers, lights and sirens blaring.

My office at 1 Police Plaza is less than half-a-mile from the World Trade Center. We were there in less than three minutes.

We squealed up to the intersection on the northwest corner of the World Trade Center, at West Broadway and Vest, near the mobilization point that my Chief of Department, Joe Esposito had set up.

I climbed out, leaned back and stared almost straight up to take in the top of the 110-story smoking tower. I couldn't believe my eyes.

A black cloud poured from the side and the fire — fed by a full tank of jet fuel — was burning up to the higher floors. Debris was raining form the sky.

The jet had hit between 96th and 103rd floors and anything above those floors was an inferno.

They could burn alive or jump to their death. A few held each other as they jumped.

It is a vision I will never forget.

I caught Hector's eyes. This was beyond anything we could have imagined.

"We gotta get that building evacuated," I said. "Now."

The city had built a state-of-the-art $13 million command center at the Office of Emergency Management, in 7 World Trade Center, right next to the towers and Mayor Giuliani was on his way to meet there. But I wasn't sure how safe it would be since it was so close to the tower.

And then there was a loud boom. It was 9:06.

On our side of the World Trade Center. I had just turned my back to give an order when I heard the explosion.

I turned. A massive orange and black fireball rolled up the side of the second building as smoke billowed and glass streamed from it.

The second hijacked 767 —United Flight 175, with 65 people on board — has hit the south tower somewhere between the 87th and 93rd floors. I had no idea what happened.

First I had believed that a small plane hit the first tower, and then I thought that a passenger jet accidentally hit the first tower, but now, with both towers engulfed in flames, I could see this was something else entirely. Terrorism.

I didn't know about the second plane, so for an instant I thought there were bombs. The second jet has entered on the other side of the South Tower and debris was shooting out the side.

The wreckage was coming right at us.

"They're blowing up the . . . buildings!" I said.

What had been light rain of debris was now a torrent. We turned and ran up West Broadway to get away from it.

We were only a block away, right under the towers, and pieces of the building and the jet fell all around us.

Behind me, a two-foot chunk of metal caught Hector in the leg and nearly dropped him to the pavement.

Craig Taylor had pulled my car into a garage and he went to retrieve the car, stopping to pick up the piece that had hit Hector.

It was a piece from a jet engine.

We were a block away now and the radio traffic confirmed it: A second jet had crashed into the World Trade Center.

Now my mind raced as I tried to get my arms around this situation, tried to think of what to do. In the NYPD, we have contingency plans for every imaginable problem. But this . . . was unimaginable. This wasn't a police job anymore.

This was a military situation. We were under attack.

I had to concentrate: What would the next target be? City Hall? The United Nations? Police Headquarters? The Empire State Building?

"Hector!" I yelled. "Evacuate City Hall and 1 Police Plaza. Call aviation and have them restrict this airspace. And get the military on the phone."

Hector, still smarting from the chunk of metal that had clipped his leg, was shaking his head and holding out a cell phone. "Sir, phones are dead! The radios are dead! We can't get anything!"

I looked back at the buildings, the flames burning their way up to the top, more desperate people leaping to their deaths

CITY_21MC100_011832984

NYC-WTC_000414945