



The President's Story

The President Talks In Detail About His Sept. 11 Experience

Fuente:
© MMIII, CBS Broadcasting Inc. All Rights Reserved.
Sept. 10, 2003

Comentarios y sugerencias:
C. Verónica Astrid Karam Enríquez.
Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.
www.mexicodiplomatico.org
vake_diplomatic@mexicodiplomatico.org



(CBS) No president since Abraham Lincoln had seen such horrific loss of life in a war on American soil. No president since James Madison, nearly 200 years ago, had seen the nation's capital city successfully attacked.

But two years ago, President George W. Bush was thrown into the first great crisis of the 21st century.

This is the president's story of Sept. 11, an exclusive look at how the president dealt with terrorism at home, and his plan to wage a war on terror worldwide.

"I have a classified document that might have some pictures on there, just to keep reminding me about who's out there, where they might be."

President Bush

"You couldn't brief me, you couldn't brief anybody on ground zero until you saw it. It was like – it was ghostly. Like you're having a bad dream and you're walking through the dream."

President Bush

In a series of exclusive interviews about the events of 9/11, **Correspondent Scott Pelley** spent two hours with Mr. Bush - one on Air Force One and another in the Oval Office - just before the first anniversary of 9/11.

60 Minutes II found that the president was still moved, sometimes to tears, when he remembered Sept. 11.

"I knew, the farther we get away from Sept. 11, the more likely it is for some around the world to forget the mission. But not me," says Mr. Bush during the Air Force One interview.

"Not me. I made the pledge to myself and to people that I'm not going to forget what happened on Sept.

11. So long as I'm president, we will pursue the killers and bring them to justice. We owe that to those who have lost their lives."

The memories come back sharp and clear on Air Force One, where **60 Minutes II** joined the president for a trip across the country. We wanted to talk to him there because that is where he spent the first hours after the attack.

Not since Lyndon Johnson was sworn in on Air Force One has the airplane been so central to America in a crisis.

"That's interesting," says Mr. Bush. "I hadn't thought of that but it was certainly a focal point and it took place where decisions were being made and doctrine was being set."

For President Bush, Sept. 11 2001, started with the usual routine. Before dawn, the president was on his four-mile run.

It was just before 6 a.m., and at the same moment, another man was on the move: Mohammad Atta, who was caught by a security camera on his way to lead the attack against America.

Two hours later, as Mr. Bush drove to an elementary school, hijackers on four planes were murdering the flight crews and turning the airliners east. As the motorcade neared the school at 8:45 a.m., jet engines echoed in Manhattan.

Atta plunged the 767 jumbo jet into World Trade Center Tower One.

"I thought it was an accident," says Mr. Bush. "I thought it was a pilot error. I thought that some foolish soul had gotten lost - and made a terrible mistake."

Mr. Bush was told about the first plane just before sitting down with a class of second graders. He was watching a reading drill when, just after 9 a.m., United Flight 175 exploded into the second tower.

There was the sudden realization that what had seemed like a terrible mistake was a coordinated attack on the nation - live on TV.

Back in the Florida classroom, press secretary Ari Fleischer got the news on his pager. The president's chief-of-staff, Andy Card, stepped in.

"A second plane hit the second tower; America is under attack," Card told the president. What was Mr. Bush's reaction?

"I saw him coming to recognition of what I had said," recalls Card. "I think he understood that he was going to have to take command as commander-in-chief, not just as president."

What was going through Bush's mind when he heard the news?

"We're at war and somebody has dared attack us and we're going to do something about it," recalls Mr. Bush. "I realized I was in a unique setting to receive a message that somebody attacked us, and I was looking at these little children and all of the sudden we were at war. I can remember noticing the press pool and the press corps beginning to get the calls and seeing the look on their face. And it became evident that we were, you know, that the world had changed."

Mr. Bush walked into a classroom set up with a secure phone. He called the vice president, pulling the phone cord tight as he spun to see the attack on TV. Then he grabbed a legal pad and quickly wrote his first words to the nation.

"Ladies and gentlemen, this is a difficult moment for America," he said in the speech. "Today, we've had a national tragedy. Two airplanes have crashed into the World Trade Center in an apparent terrorist attack on our country."

It was 9:30 a.m. As he spoke, Mr. Bush didn't know that two more hijacked jets were streaking toward Washington. Vice President Dick Cheney was in his office at the White House when a

Secret Service agent ran in.

“He said to me, ‘Sir, we have to leave immediately’ and grabbed, put a hand on my belt, another hand on my shoulder and propelled me out the door of my office,” recalls Cheney. “I’m not sure how they do it, but they sort of levitate you down the hallway. You move very fast.”

“There wasn’t a lot of time for chit-chat, you know, with the vice president,” says Secret Service Director Brian Stafford, who was in his command center ordering the round-up of top officials and the First Family. He felt that he had only minutes to work with. “We knew there were unidentified planes tracking in our direction.”

Cheney was rushed deep under the White House into a bunker called the Presidential Emergency Operations Center. It was built for war, and this was it. On her way down, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice called Mr. Bush.

“It was brief because I was being pushed to get off the phone and get out of the West Wing. They were hurrying me off the phone with the president and I just said, he said, ‘I’m coming back’ and we said, ‘Mr. President, that may not be wise,’” recalls Rice.

“I remember stopping briefly to call my family, my aunt and uncle in Alabama and say, ‘I’m fine. You have to tell everybody that I’m fine’ but then settling into trying to deal with the enormity of that moment, and in the first few hours, I think the thing that was on everybody’s mind was how many more planes are coming.”

The Capitol was evacuated. And for the first time ever, the Secret Service executed the emergency plan to ensure the presidential line of succession.

Agents swept up the 15 officials who stood to become president if the others were killed. They wanted to move Vice President Cheney, fearing he was in danger even in the bunker. But Cheney says when he heard the other officials were safe, he decided to stay at the White House, no matter what.

“It’s important to emphasize it’s not personal. You don’t think of it in personal terms. You’ve got a professional job to do,” says Cheney.

Cheney was joined by transportation secretary Norm Mineta who remembers hearing the FAA counting down the hijacked jets closing in on the capital.

“Someone came in and said, ‘Mr. Vice President, there’s a plane 50 miles out,’ then he came in and said, ‘It’s now 10 miles out, we don’t know where it is exactly, but it’s coming in low and fast,’” says Mineta.

It was American Flight 77. At 9:38 a.m., it exploded into the Pentagon, the first successful attack on Washington since the War of 1812.

As the Pentagon burned, Mr. Bush’s limousine sped toward Air Force One in Florida. At that moment, United Flight 93 - the last hijacked plane - was taking dead aim at Washington. At the White House, the staff was in the West Wing cafeteria, watching on TV. Press Secretary Jennifer Millerwise was in the crowd when the order came to evacuate.

“I no sooner walked outside when someone from the Secret Service yelled, ‘Women drop your heels and run, drop your heels and run,’ and suddenly the gates that never open except for authorized vehicles just opened and the whole White House just flooded out,” she recalls.

In Florida, as Mr. Bush boarded Air Force One, he was overheard telling a Secret Service agent, “Be sure to get the First Lady and my daughters protected.”

At 9:57 a.m., Air Force One thundered down the runway, blasting smoke and dust in a full-thrust take off. Communications Director Dan Bartlett was on board: “It was like a rocket. For a good 10 minutes, the plane was going almost straight up.”

At the same moment, 56 minutes after it was hit, World Trade Center Tower Two began to falter, then cascade in an incomprehensible avalanche of steel, concrete and human lives.

"Someone said to me, 'Look at that.' I remember that, 'Look at that' and I looked up and I saw and I just remember a cloud of dust and smoke and the horror of that moment," recalls Rice of the TV newscast.

"That we've lost a lot of Americans and that eventually we would get these people. I felt the anger. Of course I felt the anger."

Down in the bunker, Cheney was trying to figure out how many hijacked planes there were. Officials feared there could be as many as 11.

As the planes track toward Washington, a discussion begins about whether to shoot them down. "I discussed it with the president. 'Are we prepared to order our aircraft to shoot down these airliners that have been hijacked?' He said yes," recalls Cheney. "It was my advice. It was his decision."

"That's a sobering moment to order your own combat aircraft to shoot down your own civilian aircraft," says Bush. "But it was an easy decision to make given the – given the fact that we had learned that a commercial aircraft was being used as a weapon. I say easy decision, it was, I didn't hesitate, let me put it that way. I knew what had to be done."

The passengers on United Flight 93 also knew what had to be done. They fought for control and sacrificed themselves in a Pennsylvania meadow. The flight was 15 minutes from Washington.

"Clearly, the terrorists were trying to take out as many symbols of government as they could: the Pentagon, perhaps the Capitol, perhaps the White House. These people saved us not only physically but they saved us psychologically and symbolically in a very important way, too," says Rice.

Meanwhile, Tower One was weakening. It had stood for an hour and 43 minutes. At 10:29 a.m., it buckled in a mirror image of the collapse of its twin.

The image that went round the world reached the First Lady in a secure location somewhere in Washington. "I was horrified," says Laura Bush. "I thought, 'Dear God, protect as many citizens as you can.' It was a nightmare."

By 10:30 a.m., America's largest city was devastated, its military headquarters were burning. Air Force One turned west along the Gulf Coast.

"I can remember sitting right here in this office thinking about the consequences of what had taken place and realizing it was the defining moment in the history of the United States," says President Bush. "I didn't need any legal briefs, I didn't need any consultations, I knew we were at war."

Mr. Bush says the first hours were frustrating. He watched the horrifying pictures, but the TV signal was breaking up. His calls to Cheney were cutting out. And he says he pounded his desk shouting, "This is inexcusable. Get me the vice president."

"I was trying to clear the fog of war, and there is a fog of war," says the president. "Information was just flying from all directions."

Card brought in the reports. There was word Camp David had been hit. A jet was thought to be targeting Mr. Bush's ranch.

"I remember hearing that the State Department might have been hit, or that the White House had a fire in it," says Card. "So we were hearing lots of different information."

They also feared that Air Force One itself was a target. Cheney told the president there was a credible threat against the plane. Using the code name for Air Force One, Mr. Bush told an aide, "Angel is next." The threat was passed to presidential pilot Col. Mark Tillman.

"It was serious before that but now it is - no longer is it a time to get the president home," says Tillman. "We actually have to consider everything we say. Everything we do could be intercepted, and we have to make sure that no one knows what our position is."

Tillman asked for an armed guard at his cockpit door while Secret Service agents double-checked the identity of everyone on board. The crew reviewed the emergency evacuation plan. Then came a warning from air traffic control – a suspect airliner was dead ahead.

"Coming out of Sarasota there was one call that said there was an airliner off our nose that they did not have contact with," remembers Tillman, who took evasive action, pulling his plane high above normal traffic. They were on course for Washington, but by now no one thought that was a good idea, except the president.

"I wanted to come back to Washington, but the circumstances were such that it was just impossible for the Secret Service or the national security team to clear the way for Air Force One to come back," says Bush.

So Air Force One set course for an underground command center in Nebraska. Back in Washington, the president's closest advisor, Karen Hughes, heard about the threat to the plane and placed a call to Mr. Bush.

"And the military operator came back to me and in a voice that, to me, sounded very shaken said, 'Ma'am, I'm sorry, we can't reach Air Force One.'" recalls Hughes, who was out of the White House during the attacks.

When she came back, she says it was a place she didn't recognize: "There were either military, or maybe Secret Service, dressed all in black, holding machine guns as, as we drove up. And I never expected to see something like that in, in our nation's capital."

When she walked into the White House, no one was inside. "I knew it was a day that you didn't want to surprise anybody, and so I yelled, 'Hello?' and two, again, kind of SWAT team members came running, running through the, the hall with, again, guns drawn, and then took me to, to the location where I met the vice president."

On Air Force One, Col. Tillman had a problem. He needed to hide the most visible plane in the world - a 747 longer than the White House itself. He didn't want to use his radio, because the hijackers could be listening to air traffic control. So he called air traffic control on the telephone.

"We actually didn't tell them our destination or what directions we were heading," says Tillman. "We, we basically just talked to them and said, 'OK, fine, we have no clearance at this time, we are just going to fly across the United States.'"

Controllers passed Air Force One from one sector to another, warning each other to keep the route secret.

"OK, where's he going," one tower radioed to another.

"Just watch him," a second tower responded. "Don't question him where's he's going. Just work him and watch him, there's no flight plan in and we're not going to put anything in. Ok, sir?"

Air Force One ordered a fighter escort, and air traffic control radioed back: "Air Force One, got two F-16s at about your 10 o'clock position."

"The staff, and the president and us, were filed out along the outside hallway of his presidential cabin there and looking out the windows," says Bartlett. "And the president gives them a signal of salute, and the pilot kind of tips his wing, and fades off and backs into formation."

The men in the F-16s were Shane Brotherton and Randy Roberts, from the Texas Air National Guard. Their mission was so secret their commander wouldn't tell them where they were going.

"He just said, 'You'll know when you see it,' and that was my first clue, I didn't have any idea what we were going up until that point," says Brotherton. But he knew when he saw it.

"We, we were trying to keep an 80-mile bubble, bubble around Air Force One, and we'd investigate anything that was within 80 miles," adds Roberts.

Bush, however, says he wasn't worried about the safety of the people on this aircraft, or for his own safety: "I looked out the airplane and saw two F-16s on each wing. It was going to have to be a pretty good pilot to get us."

We now know that the threat to Air Force One was part of the "Fog of War," a false alarm. But it had a powerful effect at the time. Some wondered, with the president out of sight, was he still running the government? He hadn't appeared after the attack on Washington.

But Mr. Bush was clearly worried about it. At one point he was overheard saying, "The American people want to know where their dang president is." The staff considered an address to the nation by phone but instead Mr. Bush ordered Air Force One to land somewhere within 30 minutes so he could appear on TV. At 11:45 a.m., they landed at Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana.

"The resolve of our great nation is being tested," Mr. Bush said to the nation from Barksdale. "But make no mistake, we will show the world that we will pass this test. God bless."

At Barksdale, they believed the situation in Washington was still unsafe. So the plane continued on to Nebraska, to the command center where Mr. Bush would be secure and have all the communications gear he needed to run the government. Aboard Air Force One, Mr. Bush had a job for press secretary Fleischer.

"The president asked me to make sure that I took down everything that was said. I think he wanted to make certain that a record existed," says Fleischer

Fleischer's notes capture Mr. Bush's language, plain and unguarded. To the vice president, he said: "We're at war, Dick, we're going to find out who did this and kick their ass." Another time, Mr. Bush said, "We're not going to have any slap-on-the-wrist crap this time."

The President adds, "I can remember telling the Secretary of Defense, I said, 'We're going to find out who did this and then Mr. Secretary, you and Dick Myers, who we just named as chairman of the joint chiefs, are going to go get them.'"

By 3 p.m., Air Force One touched down at Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska. Mr. Bush and his team were herded into a small, brick hut that gave no hint of what they would find below.

At the bottom of the stairs was the U.S. Strategic Command Underground Command Center. It was built to transmit a president's order to go to nuclear war. But when Mr. Bush walked in, the battle staff was watching the skies over the United States. Many airplanes had still not landed. After a short briefing, Mr. Bush and Card were taken to a teleconference center which connected them to the White House, the Pentagon, the FBI and the CIA.

Mr. Bush had a question for CIA Director George Tenet. "George Tenet was just asked, 'Who do you think did this to us,'" recalls Rice. "He said, 'Sir, I believe its al Qaeda. We're doing the assessment but it looks like, it feels like, it smells like al Qaeda.'"

The evidence would build. FBI Director Robert Mueller says that an essential clue came from one of the hijacked planes before it crashed. A flight attendant on American Flight 11, Amy Sweeney, had the presence of mind to call her office as the plane was hijacked and give them the seat numbers of the hijackers.

"That was the first piece of hard evidence," says Mueller. "We could then go to the manifest, find out who was sitting in those seats and immediately conduct an investigation of those individuals, as opposed to taking all the passengers on the plane and going through a process of elimination."

In Nebraska, the White House staff was preparing for an address to the nation from the Air Force bunker. But by then, the president had had enough. He decided to come back.

"At one point, he said he didn't want any tinhorn terrorist keeping him out of Washington," Fleischer says.

On board, Mr. Bush was already thinking of issuing an ultimatum to the world: "I had time to think and a couple of thoughts emerged. One was that you're guilty, if you harbor a terrorist, because I knew these terrorists like al-Qaeda liked to prey on weak government and weak people. The other thought that came was the opportunity to fashion a vast coalition of countries that would either be with us or with the terrorists."

As Air Force One sped east, World Trade Center Number Seven collapsed. One of the nation's worst days wore into evening. At the World Trade Center, 2,792 were killed; at the Pentagon, 184; and in Pennsylvania 40. Total: 3,016 dead.

"Anybody who would attack America the way they did, anybody who would take innocent life the way they did, anybody who's so devious, is evil," said President Bush, who would soon see that evil face to face.

After arriving in Washington, Mr. Bush boarded his helicopter and flew past the Pentagon on the way to the White House.

Was there a time when he was afraid that there might not be a White House to return to? "I don't remember thinking about whether or not the White House would have been obliterated," he recalls. "I think I might have thought they took their best shot, and now it was time for us to take our best shot."

Mr. Bush arrived back at the White House nine hours after the attacks. His next step was an address to the nation. Karen Hughes and her staff were already working on the speech.

"He decided that the primary tone he wanted to strike that night was reassurance," remembers Hughes. "We had to show resolve, we had to reassure people, we had to let them know that we would be OK."

Just off the Oval Office, Mr. Bush added the words that would become known as the Bush Doctrine - no distinction between terrorists and those who harbor them. The staff wanted to add a declaration of war but Mr. Bush didn't think the American people wanted to hear it that night.

He prepared to say it from the same desk where Franklin Roosevelt first heard the news of Pearl Harbor. Now Bush was commander in chief, and 80 million Americans were watching.

"Today our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts," he said from the Oval Office that night.

The Oval Office speech came at the end of the bloodiest day in American history since the Civil War.

Parte 2: <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2002/09/11/60II/main521684.shtml>

Parte 3: <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2002/09/11/60II/main521679.shtml>

1. <http://www.9-11commission.gov/report/index.htm>

9/11 Commission Report (Informe de la Comisión del 11-S): Washington: Government Printing Office, Washington, 2004

2. http://www.9-11commission.gov/staff_statements/staff_statement_1.pdf
Entry of the 9/11 Hijackers into the United States (Entrada de los secuestradores a los Estados Unidos): Declaración N° 1 del staff
3. http://www.9-11commission.gov/staff_statements/staff_statement_2.pdf
Three 9/11 Hijackers: Identification, Watchlisting, and Tracking (Tres secuestradores del 11-S: Identificación, Colocación en Lista de Seguimiento y Localización), : Declaración N° 2 del staff
4. http://www.9-11commission.gov/staff_statements/staff_statement_3.pdf
The Aviation Security System and the 9/11 Attacks (El Sistema de Seguridad Aeronáutico y los Ataques del 11-S): Declaración N° 3 del staff
5. http://www.9-11commission.gov/staff_statements/staff_statement_4.pdf
The Four Flights (Los Cuatro Vuelos): Declaración N° 4 del staff
6. http://www.9-11commission.gov/staff_statements/staff_statement_11.pdf
The Performance of the Intelligence Community (El Desempeño de la Comunidad de Inteligencia): Declaración N° 11 del staff
7. http://www.9-11commission.gov/staff_statements/staff_statement_16.pdf
Outline of the 9/11 Plot (Esquema del Complot del 11-S): Declaración N° 16 del staff
8. http://www.9-11commission.gov/staff_statements/911_TerrTrav_App.pdf
Apéndice con las copias de los documentos incriminatorios utilizados por la Comisión 11-S: Appendix A
9. http://www.9-11commission.gov/staff_statements/911_TerrFin_App.pdf
Appendix A: The Financing of the 9/11 Plot (Apéndice A: Financiamiento del Complot del 11-S): Appendix A
10. <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/serialset/creports/911.html>
**Congreso de los Estados Unidos
Joint Inquiry into Intelligence Community Activities before and after the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001 (Investigación Conjunta sobre las Actividades de la Comunidad de Inteligencia antes y después de los Ataques Terroristas del 11 de septiembre de 2001, Comité de Inteligencia del Senado y Comité Permanente de Inteligencia de la Casa Blanca**
11. http://www.fema.gov/rebuild/mat/mat_fema403.shtm
World Trade Center Building Performance Study (Estudio sobre el desempeño de los edificios del Centro de Comercio Mundial), FEMA, mayo 2002
12. <http://www.investigiar11s.com>
Web que busca otra investigación sobre el 11 S
13. **National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (Sitio de la Comisión Nacional sobre Ataques Terroristas contra los Estados Unidos o Comisión 9-11**
<http://www.9-11commission.gov/>
14. **Sección del sitio web de la Casa Blanca dedicado a la Guerra contra el Terror**
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/nationalsecurity/index.es.html>
15. **Notes about 9/11** <http://home.comcast.net/%7Eplutarch/911.html>
16. **For never forget the 11 September**
http://perrin.olivier.free.fr/galerie%20graphique%20nyc%202005/don%20t%20forget%2011_09/index.html

17. Víctimas del 11S

<http://www.september11victims.com/september11victims/>

End.