

sion systems within the building were probably damaged and possibly inoperable. . . . We knew that at the height of the day there were as many as 50,000 people in this building. We had a large volume of fire on the upper floors. Each floor was approximately an acre in size. Several floors of fire would have been beyond the fire-extinguishing capability of the forces that we had on hand. So we determined, very early on, that this was going to be strictly a rescue mission. We were going to vacate the building, get everybody out, and then we were going to get out.⁵⁸

The specifics of the mission were harder to determine, as they had almost no information about the situation 80 or more stories above them. They also received advice from senior FDNY chiefs that while the building might eventually suffer a partial collapse on upper floors, such structural failure was not imminent. No one anticipated the possibility of a total collapse.⁵⁹

Emergency medical services (EMS) personnel were directed to one of four triage areas being set up around the perimeter of the WTC. Some entered the lobby to respond to specific casualty reports. In addition, many ambulance paramedics from private hospitals were rushing to the WTC complex.⁶⁰

NYPD Initial Response

Numerous NYPD officers saw the plane strike the North Tower and immediately reported it to NYPD communications dispatchers.⁶¹

At 8:58, while en route, the NYPD Chief of Department raised the NYPD's mobilization to level 4, thereby sending to the WTC approximately 22 lieutenants, 100 sergeants, and 800 police officers from all over the city. The Chief of Department arrived at Church and Vesey at 9:00.⁶²

At 9:01, the NYPD patrol mobilization point was moved to West and Vesey in order to handle the greater number of patrol officers dispatched in the higher-level mobilization. These officers would be stationed around the perimeter of the complex to direct the evacuation of civilians. Many were diverted on the way to the scene by intervening emergencies related to the attack.⁶³

At 8:50, the Aviation Unit of the NYPD dispatched two helicopters to the WTC to report on conditions and assess the feasibility of a rooftop landing or of special rescue operations. En route, the two helicopters communicated with air traffic controllers at the area's three major airports and informed them of the commercial airplane crash at the World Trade Center. The air traffic controllers had been unaware of the incident.⁶⁴

At 8:56, an NYPD ESU team asked to be picked up at the Wall Street helicopter to initiate rooftop rescues. At 8:58, however, after assessing the North Tower roof, a helicopter pilot advised the ESU team that they could not land on the roof, because "it is too engulfed in flames and heavy smoke condition."⁶⁵

By 9:00, a third NYPD helicopter was responding to the WTC complex.