

Chapter 2

THE ACCOUNT OF WTC 7

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Shortly before 9:00 a.m. on Tuesday, September 11, 2001, about 4,000 people were at work in WTC 7. This was about half of the roughly 8,000 people who worked there. It was the first day of school for many local children, and it also was a primary election day in New York. The weather was clear and comfortable, so some had taken time to do early morning errands.

At 8:46:30 a.m. EDT, five hijackers flew American Airlines Flight 11 (AA 11), a Boeing 767-200ER aircraft with 11 crew and 76 passengers on board, over the top of WTC 7 and into the north face of WTC 1. Moving at about 710 km/h (440 mph), the nose hit the exterior of the tower at the 96th floor. The aircraft cut a gash that was over half the width of the building and extended from the 93rd floor to the 99th floor. At 9:02:59 a.m., 16½ minutes after the first impact, five other hijackers flew United Airlines Flight 175, a Boeing 767-200ER with 9 crew and 51 passengers on board, into the south face of WTC 2 at about 870 km/h (540 mph), about 160 km/h (100 mph) faster than AA 11. The center of the nose of the plane struck at the 81st floor slab. This entry wound stretched over nine floors, from Floor 77 to Floor 85 (NIST NCSTAR 1).

The account that follows is the result of an extensive, state-of-the-art reconstruction of the events that affected WTC 7 and eventually led to its collapse at 5:20:52 p.m. Numerous facts and data were obtained, then combined with validated computer modeling to produce an account that is believed to be close to what actually occurred. However, the reader should keep in mind that the building and the records kept within it were destroyed, and the remains of all the WTC buildings were disposed of before congressional action and funding was available for this Investigation to begin. As a result, there are some facts that could not be discerned, and thus there are uncertainties in this accounting. Nonetheless, NIST was able to gather sufficient evidence and documentation to conduct a full investigation upon which to reach firm findings and recommendations. The reconstruction effort for WTC 7, the uncertainties, the assumptions made, and the testing of these assumptions are documented in NIST NCSTAR 1-9.

2.2 ACTIVITY AT THE WTC 7 SITE

2.2.1 8:46 a.m. to 9:59 a.m. EDT

People throughout WTC 7 heard the impact of the aircraft hitting WTC 1, which was only about 110 m (350 ft) to the south. Lights flickered, the building shook, and some windows on the south side of WTC 7 were broken. However, few, if any, of the workers felt their lives were in immediate danger. This perception changed as the occupants became aware of the subsequent attacks on WTC 2 and the Pentagon, and people began using the elevators and stairs to leave the building. The elevators alone could have evacuated the building in about 20 min. The stairwells, although somewhat narrow for the maximum possible 14,000 occupants (estimated using the formula in the NYCBC), were more than