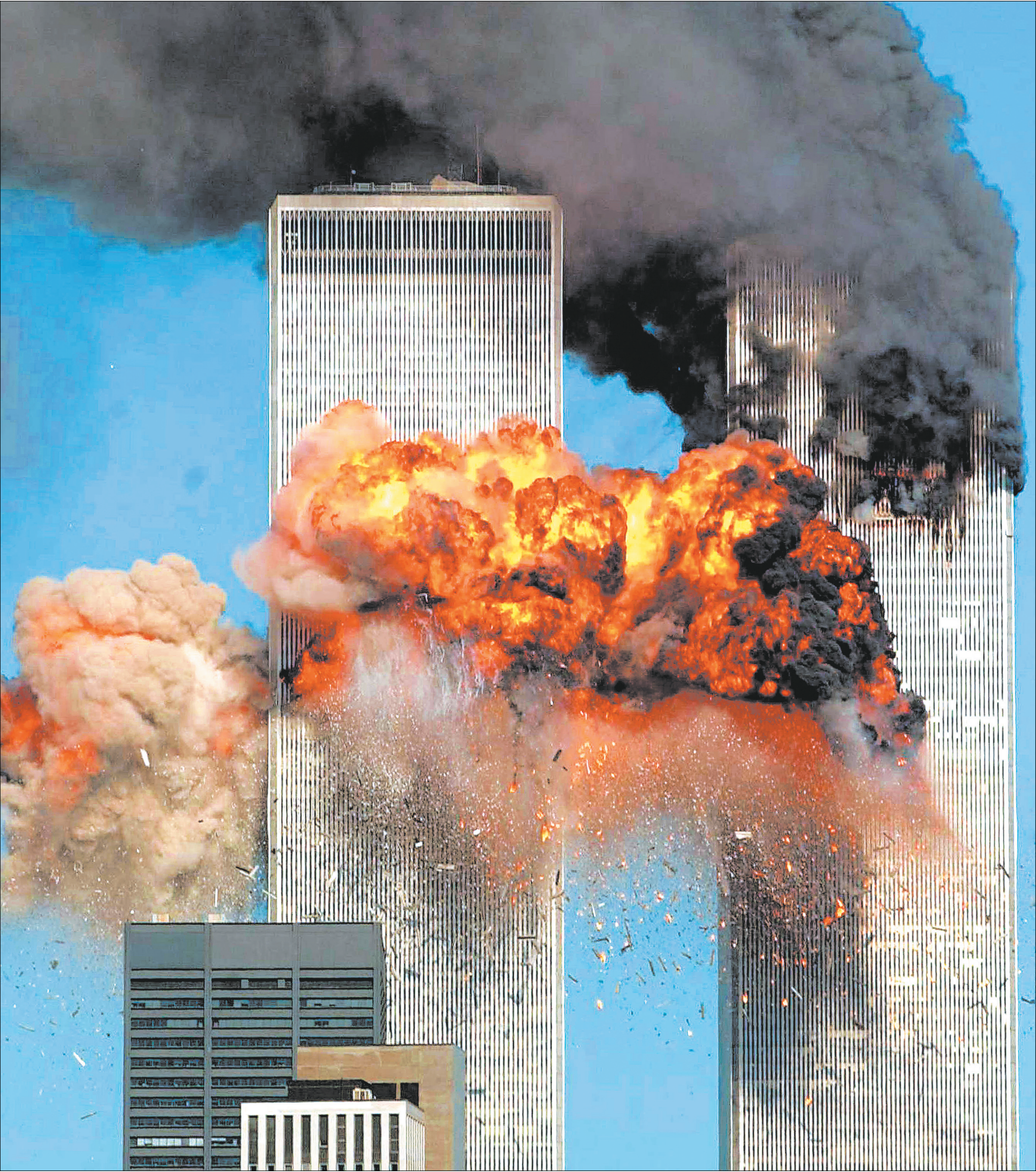


War on America

Picture: SPENCER PLATT/GETTY IMAGES



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THE United States was on a war footing last night after the most devastating terrorist attack in history.

Two hijacked passenger airliners crashed into the twin towers of New York's World Trade Centre. Both towers collapsed with the loss of thousands of lives, sending out great clouds of thick dust that covered buildings and people in the streets like volcanic ash. Lower Manhattan was evacuated and the New York skyline changed for ever.

Minutes later in Washington DC a third hijacked aircraft crashed into the Pentagon, the heart of America's military machine. A fourth, believed to be heading for the presidential retreat Camp David, crashed near Pittsburgh.

The atrocity was meticulous in its co-ordination and horrifying in its effect.

A global television audience watched in disbelief as live footage showed the second plane hitting the Trade Centre minutes after the first. Land borders were closed and airspace cleared of all but military aircraft as US forces were put on "high alert".

Financial centres were paralysed when Wall Street closed and shares plunged across world markets. The departments of Justice, State, Treasury, Defence and the CIA were all evacuated.

President Bush was flown to a bunker in Nebraska before returning to the White House. He pledged: "Make no mistake, we will hunt down and punish those responsible for these cowardly acts."

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