

NEW YORK TIMES, MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2001

## THE TALLY

*With No Miracle in the Rubble, Hope Grimly Shifts to Acceptance*

By DAN BARRY

Day after day come the numbers that never seem to add up, from the number of the confirmed dead (190) to the number of those those still categorized as "missing" (4,957). But of all the statistics being solemnly shared in the aftermath of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center last week, two in particular bleed the reservoir of hope.

Number of those rescued from the rubble: five.

Number of those rescued since Wednesday: zero.

Yesterday, though he in no way suggested that rescue efforts were drawing to a close, Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani gently reminded the world that the chance for more survivors was minuscule.

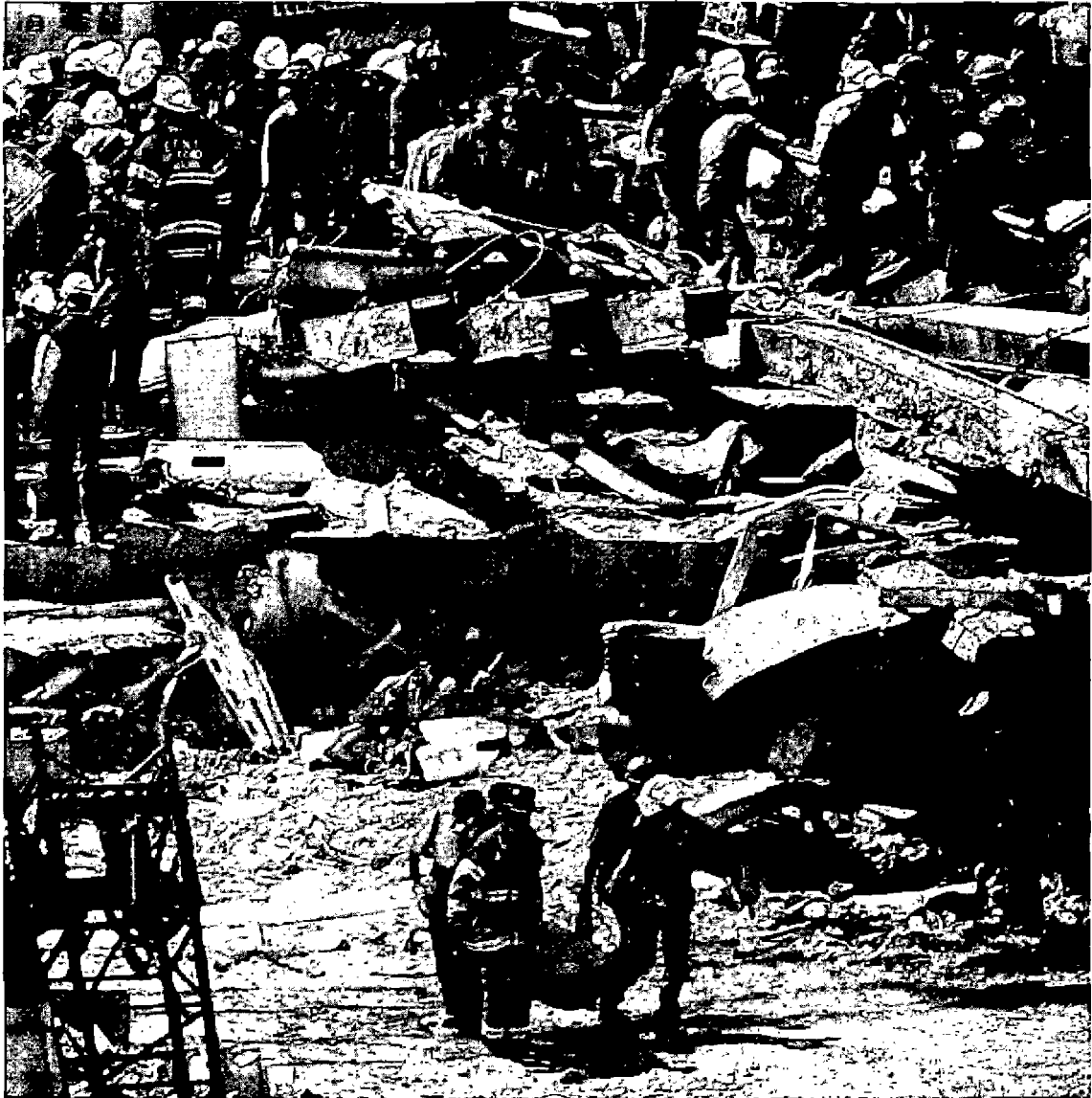
"The recovery effort continues and the hope is still there that we might be able to save some lives," he said. "But the reality is that in the last several days we haven't found anyone."

Even so, wisps of false rumors — of firefighters found and cellphone calls placed — continue to rise from the ash heap of Lower Manhattan to bolster and then dash the hopes of relatives and friends not quite prepared to say goodbye. Early yesterday morning, word spread like fresh air that rescue workers could hear tapping from that hell below.

Mr. Giuliani said he understood the strong human desire to almost will such stories to be true. But the rumor of "knocking at the site" was false, he said, just as many other heart-stirring rumors before it were not true. "In any event," he said, "we're going to continue to search for people and look for people — at the same time realizing that the losses here are staggering."

The mayor's carefully chosen words echoed the language that he and other officials have used over the days, language that seems to nudge people toward accepting what has happened so that they can mourn. In their vows to do everything humanly possible to save life, they have injected reminders of reality. Fire Commissioner Thomas Von Essen said on Saturday that "the odds of saving people are very slim," and yesterday Gov. George E. Pataki said that rescue workers were "doing all that they can in hope that a miracle will happen."

Some of the rescue workers emerging from the disaster site have been more pointed. One sweat-drenched firefighter from Long Beach, stumbling away after a 12-hour shift at the burial site called



Lawrence Jackson/Associated Press

A body was carried from the rubble of ground zero yesterday. No one has been pulled out alive since Wednesday, despite many false rumors.

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death, stumbling away after a 12-hour shift at the burial site called ground zero, gave some sobering advice: "Just don't give people false hope."

In tragic cases of wholesale loss of life — the 1995 bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City, for example — the line that separates rescue from recovery is often blurred; usually, the somber shift from hope to acceptance becomes almost understood. "There is no clear demarcation where we are in rescue and suddenly we're into recovery," an official from the Federal Emergency Management Agency said yesterday. "The elements of the two can coexist side by side, but there will come a point when rescue operations will be over."

He added: "It's just something that flows."

Subtly and very reluctantly, that transitional flow is taking place now in Lower Manhattan.

The rescue mission continued unabated, of course. Hundreds of workers still shared yesterday in "bucket brigade" duty, scooping pail after pail of dirt from a site containing hundreds of thousands of tons of debris. The reason for this maddeningly slow method of rubble removal is to preserve any below-ground pockets of shelter that might collapse under the weight and vibration of heavy equipment.

But what can be the odds of survival when a pair of 110-story towers, behemoths of concrete and steel, collapse, creating a crater several stories deep? When smaller buildings and structures nearby partly or completely collapse? When the remains of two full-sized jetliners are almost too insignificant to include in the measuring of the overall debris?

While there still exists hope that the bucket brigade will uncover haphazardly formed sanctuaries — with breathing people — what about the smoke plumes from still-burning fires that might choke those air pockets? What about the rainwater from Friday's heavy showers that would flow naturally into those pockets? And what about the spilled jet fuel poisoning that water?

Rather than entertain the likely answers to these ghastly questions, rescue workers carry on. They breathe in the dusty, stinging air — air that might be carrying atomized human remains — and dig, though futility tinges the words they use when they pause.

Police Officer Edward McQuade, with the Emergency Services Unit of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, said yesterday that workers had drawn some hope from the discovery of air cavities on the outer perimeters of the disaster site that appeared to be free of toxic fumes. But he said that he did not want to raise false hope that more survivors would be found: "I think it is possible, but unfortunately I think

## THE METHODS

# Hairbrushes, Razors, and High-Tech Identification

By SOMINI SENGUPTA

They poured into the Lexington Avenue Armory all weekend, the relatives of the missing, bearing what was both the most mundane and the most revealing fragments of a life.

A pink plastic hairbrush, its black bristles containing the last strands that came off a woman's head. A razor, maybe streaked with the detritus of a man's jutting chin. Dental records, a photocopied set of fingerprints, photos upon photos, and the most minute physical details: a shoe size, a bra size, the exact location of a flower tattoo.

So went the pilgrimage into the armory, which had been set up as a family assistance center. Family and friends were told that those killed in the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center would be identified using DNA matches. So they came bearing genetic filaments of the men and women they loved. If they shared a bloodline, they came to offer a bit of themselves, as did the teenager who hadn't been in contact with his father for some time who came to offer a smear from the inside of his mouth.

Or like the identical twin brother, the DNA matchmaker's dream, who came to offer a swab from inside his cheek. He came again the next day and offered another smear, and then his older brother came too, to offer a strand of his own hair. Of course, they said, they knew that just providing more things wouldn't bring back their brother, Neil Shastri, 25. But they couldn't keep themselves from coming anyway. "We just keep going to take other things," said Priti Naik, Mr. Shastri's sister-in-law. "Probably just for our peace of mind."

At a news conference on Saturday, the city's chief medical examiner, Dr. Charles S. Hirsch, called DNA analysis the most likely means of identifying many of those killed in the attacks. The city has contracted with several

private companies to help with the DNA analyses. The Laboratory Corporation of America, with 900 offices across the country, will analyze the personal items of the missing and the cheek swabs of their kin. Relatives outside of New York were urged to call the company at 888-520-6952 for the nearest lab location.

DNA samples from the recovered bodies will be analyzed by Myriad, a company based in Utah, and by Celera, a company based in Maryland. All of the analyses will be double-checked by New York State Police laboratories. The medical examiner's office could not say yesterday how long that might take.

The repository of genetic intelligence will

## Providing the bits of information for DNA and other matches.

be moved today from the armory to a new family assistance unit inside Pier 94 on the Hudson River, near West 54th Street. A battery of city agencies will set up shop there starting today, along with a child care center. It is scheduled to be open seven days a week, from 8 a.m. to midnight, a place for relatives to take the things that contain their missing's genetic maps. New Jersey officials said they would set up their own family assistance center by Wednesday at Liberty State Park in Jersey City. Residents were urged to go there or call 866-652-7474 (866-NJCRISES) for inquiries.

Yesterday, the scene outside the Lexington Armory signaled a marked shift in the miser-

able trajectory of the families of the missing. No longer was it the frenetic, crowded epicenter of inquiry that it had been last week. Eyes were glazed and shoulders were slumped among the men and women who came through the police barricades. The dull ache of waiting had set in. No one inside the armory could tell them how long it would take to identify their loved ones. Days, weeks — no one knew.

"I just feel very helpless," said Sherwin Dhanani, 16, a twig of a boy with shades covering his eyes. He came down from New Hampshire on Saturday to offer the trace he bore of his father, Simon, 62. He furnished a smear from inside his cheek. "They said, 'We'll contact you'."

Friends of Simon Dhanani, a vice president at Aon, on the 99th floor of 2 World Trade Center, had spent the past five days scouring hospitals, leeching a toothbrush from his home in Hartsdale, N.Y., finding recent photographs. "Then it began to sink in — maybe we should look for other ways," said Barkat Fazal, a friend.

What other ways? Mr. Fazal shook his head.

"The DNA," offered Albano Martelli, who called Mr. Dhanani his best friend. He had in his hand a plastic bag stuffed with "missing" posters, and wondered aloud whether it was futile to paste more of them all over town. "What we're doing now is hoping for miracles," he said.

Likewise, for Mr. Shastri's family, there was no more busy work to be done. There was only time now, and nothing left to do but talk. Yesterday, they told stories about Mr. Shastri and every now and then, they got a laugh from Kruti, his wife. They were not holding out false hopes any longer, Ms. Naik, Kruti's sister, said. They wanted the waiting to be over.

"At this point, everyone just wants to know, either or," Ms. Naik said.

we're starting to reach the outer boundaries."

In the immediate wake of the terrorist attack on Lower Manhattan, hospitals throughout the metropolitan area braced for action, setting up gurneys, mustering surgeons, rounding up supplies of blood — all for streams of victims that never came. Search-and-rescue teams are now undergoing a similarly heart-rending experience. A group of highly trained rescuers from California — equipped with mountaineering gear, oxygen tanks and helmets with headlamps — spent the weekend waiting for a call that never came.

Everyone at ground zero knows that the last survivor to be rescued was a woman found early Wednesday afternoon, and that she was pulled from beneath the rubble of a crumpled pedestrian walkway that was several dozen yards from the epicenter of collapse.

In the nearly five days since then,

the gap between necessary hope and inevitable realization has been filled with backbreaking drudgery, gut-wrenching idleness — and the swapping of inspiring rescue stories that are the stuff of myth. Some of those stories have risen from the hole to reach the ears of the anguished through the news media, only to be sadly denied by Mayor Giuliani or some other official.

On Thursday, for example, there were smiles in homes and newsrooms when false word surfaced that five firefighters lost since Tuesday had been rescued, found in a buried sport utility vehicle. In the white tent on West Street that serves as a Fire Department command post, a battalion chief, with face clean only where rivulets of sweat had run, was asked that day whether the story was true. He just cursed.

On Friday, a police officer who had been near ground zero told a clutch of workers at the Veterans Affairs

Medical Center on East 23rd Street in Manhattan that rescue workers were pulling many living people from the rubble, but that officials were suppressing the information because they did not want terrorists to know.

The story made absolutely no sense, but a clinical psychologist said that she and others who heard the tale eagerly believed it. "It did seem sort of incongruous," she confessed. "But everybody wants to believe."

On Friday and Saturday, several news media outlets reported that calls were being made from emergency telephones in the PATH station below the concourse of the World Trade Center; not true. Then came other news reports that a PATH train full of passengers was stuck somewhere between New York and New Jersey; "I spent most of my Saturday addressing this one," said Pasquale DiFulco, a Port Authority spokesman.

When asked why he supposed that some people would perpetuate such rumors, Mr. DiFulco — who has dozens of Port Authority colleagues missing — said: "I think we have all been traumatized whether or not we were there, and as a result, we are not all entirely rational."

Few see malice in the rumors; rather, they see aching wishes gone awry. The construction workers who cannot accept that the clanging responses they hear to their own banging on girders may be mere echoes. The firefighters who cannot quite believe that the glints of light coming from one evacuated building are simply reflections from a glass shard moving in the wind, not an SOS signal off a compact mirror.

They are all motivated by this thought: What if you stopped working, and there was someone's mother — or father, or brother, or wife — still staring at darkness, waiting for light?

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