

STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE, OCTOBER 2, 2001

Rubble yields the bodies of 16 firefighters

Removal of giant steel beams had cleared way for searchers; remains of firefighters found in a collapsed stairwell

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ADVANCE CITY HALL BUREAU

The removal of some of the giant steel beams from the rubble of the World Trade Center has aided rescue workers in their grim task of locating bodies, according to reports.

The bodies of 16 firefighters were recovered yesterday, found in a stairwell between the ruins of the Marriott hotel and Tower 2 after a number of girders had been cleared away, although Fire Department officials would not confirm the report.

But according to a number of sources, firefighters stood in silence with their helmets removed as each body was taken away in a flag-draped body bag. Some wept openly. Some offered prayers for their fallen comrades.

"It looks like we found 16 of our guys," a Fire Department official said.

Work was halted as calls were reportedly put in to the dead men's firehouses and their fellow fire brothers were summoned to help remove the bodies from the debris. The department would not confirm reports that a fire captain's body was one of those recovered.

The number of bodies recovered, listed at 314 on Sunday, climbed to 344 overall yesterday. The Police Department's list of missing persons remained at 5,219.

"Now they've moved the steel, so now we can

see what's inside," said the Rev. Alfred Thompson, senior chaplain of the Fire Department.

Rev. Thompson said more bodies have been discovered in the past two-and-a-half days than in the previous 10. The movement of some larger beams in the wreckage has helped workers locate remains, he said. "We're finding a lot of stuff in there . . . It's not a happy sight," said construction worker John Yannucci. He said crews were hampered by hot spots in the still-smoking ruins.

Despite the gruesome discoveries, families, despairing of ever receiving remains, are going ahead with memorial services in place of traditional funerals.

"Whether they want to proceed is really a personal decision to make," said Richard Sheirer, the Dongan Hills resident who is director of the Mayor's Office of Emergency Management (OEM). "Whatever decision they make, we'll support them 100 percent."

Meanwhile, Deputy Mayor Joseph Lhota announced yesterday that traffic volume across Manhattan bridges plummeted due to last week's ban on single-occupancy vehicles entering Manhattan below 64th Street. The number of cars crossing the Brooklyn Bridge declined by 75 percent, he said, and traffic volume overall fell 34 percent.

Beginning yesterday at 6 p.m., Lower Man-

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hattan streets east of Broadway — but not including Broadway — were opened to residents, delivery trucks and taxis. Ferries to Battery Park City were due to resume service today, with bus connections.

Streets surrounding the disaster site, such as Broadway, are still a concern because of debris, air quality and proximity to Ground Zero, said city officials.

Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani called on the various charities raising money for the relief effort to coordinate efforts, so the maximum amount of money ends up with the victims.

Between memorial services, Giuliani toured Ground Zero with 108 House of Representative members yesterday, Rep. Vito Fossella (R-Staten Island) at his side.

They found a scene that was much more orderly and less dusty three weeks after the disaster. Isolated fires are still causing smoke in the rubble, but the heartbreaking bucket brigades are long gone, replaced by 1,000-ton cranes hoisting steel.

As the members of congress looked on, Giuliani explained to Rep. Ike Skelton (D-Missouri) what they were seeing: the pancaked interior and broken skeleton of two 110-story towers, rising no more than four stories now, and ringed by pocked, ripped and broken skyscrapers.

"Unspeakable," whispered Skelton.

Rep. Joseph Crowley (D-Queens) looked at the smoldering rubble and crossed himself, as the group stood at what used to be the corner of Liberty and West streets.

Roads have been cut into the rubble to divide the disaster scene into four quadrants, each with its own OEM commander.

A piece of steel ripped from the south tower's frame drifted at the end of a cable toward three workers, who steadied it to the ground. Part of the building's frame jutted out, like a door wrenched off its hinges.

Fossella, who has visited the site several times, played tour guide, answering out-of-town members' questions about the stability of buildings and the location of streets. He also praised a quick allocation of \$20 billion in emergency aid from Congress, calling the cash infusion a "work in pro-



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Gov. George Pataki, center, points out areas of devastation to members of Congress during a tour by more than 100 congressional members of the site of the World Trade Center in Manhattan.

gress" and adding that he expected more would be forthcoming.

"They were asking what we take for granted, I guess," he said of the legislators, before greeting baseball Hall of Famer Reggie Jackson, a surprise afternoon guest at the central command center.

Also yesterday, the city offered \$1 billion in bonds for sale to start paying for the aftermath of a terrorist attack. Giuliani branded "maniacal" during his address to the United Nations. The short-term bond offering will pay for such things as debris removal and unemployment insurance for people who have been put out of work by the World Trade Center collapse.

In a preliminary estimate last week, Senate aides said it would cost about \$39 billion to clean up after the Sept. 11 attack and rebuild the city.

House Speaker Dennis Hastert, following the tour with other members of Congress, said no one can know how much the recovery effort will cost. "We don't know if that's the iceberg or the tip of the iceberg," he said.

House Democratic leader Dick Gephardt, also on Monday's tour, called the damage "incomprehensible." "It is the face of evil, and it's hard to understand how people can hate other people as much as obviously has happened here," he said.

(Associated Press material was used in this report.)

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