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GOODBYE TO A 'LEGEND': Beth Petrone, widow of Terence Hatton, clutches her husband's helmet as their godson, Conor, holds his dress cap at St. Pat's yesterday. N.Y. Post/ Don Hatley

RUDY AIDE'S HUSBAND IS 'A DEATH IN THE FAMILY'

By ADAM MILLER

Mayor Giuliani has mourned countless times and shared tears and heartache with innumerable shattered families in the weeks since terrorists toppled the World Trade Center.

But yesterday, at the funeral of Capt. Terence Hatton of Rescue Co. 1, the grief really hit home for the mayor.

"This is like a death in the family," a grim-faced Giuliani told a packed crowd at St. Patrick's Cathedral.

"Terry Hatton really stood out," the mayor continued, choking with emotion. "He is the kind of man I would like my son to grow up and become.

"He was what real courage was all about."

Hatton was dear to Giuliani because his wife was a key person in the mayor's life: Beth Petrone, his trusted personal assistant of 17 years.

Hatton and Petrone — whose relationship was the stuff of fairy tales — tied the knot May 16, 1998, at Gracie Mansion, with Giuliani officiating.

Petrone wiped away tears as Giuliani and a stream of others recalled her husband — who earned 19 medals for bravery during his 21-year career — as living the "life of a legend."

In a bittersweet twist of fate, Petrone learned she was pregnant just two days after Hatton, 41, vanished.

"Terry was our resident hero at City Hall," Giuliani said, citing the photo of Hatton, in full bunker gear and covered in soot, Petrone has on her desk.

Hatton had a tender side, too.

"Terry was always sending Beth flowers or just stopping by to take her out for lunch," the mayor said of the dashing, 6-foot-4 firefighter.

Timothy Brown, a close friend, and supervisor of the city's Office of Emergency Management, said, "Terry looked like Gary Cooper — until he put on a fire helmet, and then he looked better."

Fire Commissioner Thomas Von Essen hailed Hatton — who last year rescued a dozen people trapped in an elevator on the 78th floor of the World Trade Center — as a "great firefighter, great leader and a great friend."

"He was a strapping man with a chest full of medals," Von Essen said of Hatton, who was sent to Oklahoma City to search for survivors of the 1995 bombing of the Murrah Federal Building.

"His life was the stuff of fairy tales."

The fallen firefighter's grief-stricken father, retired FDNY Deputy Chief Kenneth Hatton, told mourners his son was a larger-than-life presence who "had laughter and compassion in his heart."

Retired Rescue Co. 1 Capt. John Cerato called Hatton a "one-of-a-kind firefighter."

"He lived for being a firefighter," he said. "He always wanted to learn. He would always call me up for advice and ask me questions."

After the Mass, Petrone clutched her husband's fire helmet and held the hand of the couple's 4-year-old godson, Conor, who carried Hatton's white dress hat — as the hero firefighter's flag-draped coffin was placed atop a firetruck.

In Memoriam

Terence Hatton
FDNY Captain
Rescue 1

Survived by wife Beth and parents Grace and Kenneth.

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