

City's Underground Heroes

Kevin Moore climbed out of the Fulton Street subway station into the apocalypse.

Hundreds of people were running from the Twin Towers, gasping for air. Some women ran without shoes while windows shattered 100 stories above and shards of glass rained down on the street in the moments after the first hijacked jetliner struck the World Trade Center that crazy September morning.

Moore, 45, a transit supervisor, was standing outside the Fulton Street station when, in a mighty cloud of smoke, the first tower collapsed. Though 41 mornings have passed, it remains so vivid to a city of unfortunate witnesses.

"There was no place to run," Moore said. "I ran back to the subway."

Straphangers and transit workers were practically fighting each other now to reach the platform — jumping turnstiles, shoving and pushing for their lives. Even police officers sought the unlikely refuge of the subway. The day demons dropped out of the sky, everyone headed for the underground.

Behind them a volcanic burst of dust, smoke, glass and cement particles ripped through the crowded Fulton Street station.

"We kind of held each other as the debris went through," Moore recalled. "You ever open up a hydrant as a child and the water comes out with such force? The dust and debris came into the subway with that intensity."

Now the men and women who know the subways went to work.

They are train operators and conductors and token booth clerks and transit supervisors who usually get blamed when you're running late.

Kevin Moore was just one of thousands on duty on Sept. 11.

New Yorkers enjoy a curious love-hate relationship with the workaday grunts in the employ of New York City Transit. That Tuesday would be the exception.

There were scattered third-rail and signal power outages in the subways one hour after the first plane struck at 8:48 a.m. At 10:20 a.m., transit officials finally shut down the entire subway system.

Packed trains, meanwhile, were stranded all over.

Between the Brooklyn Bridge / City Hall station, where Moore works, and the Wall Street stop on the 4 and 5 lines, three trains were stuck with hundreds of nervous commuters.

One, a northbound train, was a couple of subway cars into Fulton Street. A southbound train barely got into Wall Street. Another southbound train was stuck in the tunnel between Fulton and Brooklyn Bridge. Transit radios crackled with frantic calls for

help.

With a flashlight, Moore trudged through a smoke-filled subway tunnel to the Wall Street station, a few blocks away. He needed to be sure there was no train at Wall. He headed back to Fulton and, on foot about 30 feet in front of the subway, guided the train operator and his human cargo to the next station.

Moore avoided the deadly third rail in the smoky station. In another stalled train, some anxious passengers stood in the dark between cars, looking down at him.

"Some people were yelling, 'Please get us out of here! Please help us,'" Moore recalled. "The power for the lights was still on. But the problem was that we had to turn off the AC because we didn't want it to draw up dust and smoke into the subway cars. People were starting to panic."

Dennis Dillon, 41, who, like Moore, works as a train service supervisor, climbed behind the control of the stranded subway. He had to guide the packed train, against the flow of traffic, to the Brooklyn Bridge station.

Moore and Dillon normally monitor the performance of train operators and conductors. Now they were the operators, guiding the train back along the tracks, manually hooking down the "stop arms" on subway signals, which are designed to keep trains from moving in emergencies.

At the Brooklyn Bridge station, hundreds of passengers were evacuated safely under a clear, blue sky.

"I never heard so many people say, 'Thank you,'" said Moore, who has put in 21 years as a transit worker.

"It was unbelievable," said Dillon, who started his transit career as a subway cleaner 16 years ago. "They usually blame us for everything."

IN THE
SUBWAYS



Ray
Sanchez

CITY_21MC100_011831476

NEWSDAY, MONDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2001