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NEWSDAY, SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 2001

'May God

Bush tours disaster scene in Manhattan

By Jessica Kowal
STAFF WRITER

Cheering rescue workers chanting "U.S.A!" welcomed President George W. Bush on Friday to the World Trade Center ruins, on a rainy day that slowed efforts to find survivors.

Four days after an estimated 4,700 people perished in Tuesday's terror attack, Bush, wearing a fire helmet, climbed atop a wrecked fire engine that was brought to a safe location, the corner of Vesey and West streets, to be his symbolic stage.

With the World Trade Center's destroyed north tower behind him, the president spoke into a bullhorn to praise hundreds of firefighters, police and rescue workers.

"We can't hear you!" a worker shouted.

In reply, Bush bellowed, "I can hear you. The rest of the world hears you. And the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon!"

". . . Thank you for hard work and thank you for making the nation proud," he said. "And may God bless America."

He later met at the Javits Convention Center with 200 family members of firefighters and police officers killed when the towers crumbled.

There, Arlene Howard of Hicksville presented the president with the badge of her son, Port Authority Police Officer George Howard, whose body was pulled from the wreckage Friday. Bush spoke with the officer's teenaged sons, Christopher and Robert.

In a remarkable sign of New York City's collective grief, thousands of New Yorkers carried lighted candles Friday evening in poignant tribute to those killed. Responding to a suggestion that was spread mostly on the Internet, people walked the streets and clustered together on street corners with their tiny flames dipping and flickering.

Along 42nd Street, closed to traffic, people stood five deep, clapping and waving flags as the presidential motorcade passed before 8 p.m. At Bryant Park, as the president's motorcade drove slowly by, many held their candles aloft.

The investigation proceeded. Federal authorities released the names of 19 people they said hijacked and crashed four jetliners Tuesday. At 3 p.m., they arrested a man they described as a "material witness" in the attack on the World Trade Center, an FBI spokesman said. The spokesman declined to identify the man, discuss the circumstances of the arrest or say where it took place.

Friday night, Police Commissioner Bernard Kerik said 111 bodies had been recovered, 59 of which have been identified. Authorities were working to ascertain identities from 13 additional body parts, Kerik said; rescue workers also have found 408 other body parts. The number of people still missing stood at 4,717. As of Friday morning, 4,300 people had been treated for injuries related to the disaster, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani said.

For the third straight day, no survivors were found. Rain, heavy at times on Friday morning, hampered rescue operations, officials said. Firefighters leaving the site said the wet weather knocked down soot and dust but turned powdery debris into dangerously slippery mud.

Morning winds sent broken glass raining down on rescuers, who stopped working when lightning flashed in the area. The skies over the weekend are expected to be clear. Giuliani insisted there was "still a strong hope" that survivors will be found and recovered.

Some firefighters sounded frustrated with the slow pace of operations and depressed about what they are finding. "When I'm out there, I'm numb," said Carlos Liriano, a fire department emergency medical technician who works in Woodside. "Occasionally you hear something like 'Pass up a body bag,' and everybody gets quiet."

To assert control of the wreckage and to ensure safety, the Fire Department sent volunteer rescuers away and relied on professionals with safety training and respect for the chain of command, Fire Commissioner Thomas von Essen said.

"We think we can do it much more efficiently with our own people," von Essen said. "So we will not look for help from outsiders any more."

The city also is regularly testing the structural stability of buildings around the Trade Center by running subway trains beneath them and measuring vibrations. "Right now, they seem OK," Giuliani said.



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Bless America'



President George W. Bush, with firefighter *Bob Beckwith*, visits rescue workers at ground zero Friday.

AP Photo

The mayor said 1,400 truckloads of debris, or more than 13,000 tons, had been removed by Friday morning, a tiny fraction of what is left of the Twin Towers.

As of Friday morning, the FBI had released all but one of 11 people who were detained Thursday night at LaGuardia and Kennedy Airports. That person was talking to authorities voluntarily, said Barry Mawn, assistant director of the FBI's New York City office.

Area airports reopened Friday. Mawn said airlines have an appropriate "overabundance of caution" and are working closely with the bureau on security issues. City police and FBI agents will be stationed at local airports, especially at Kennedy and LaGuardia, he said.

City residents, the media and even rescue workers are also falling prey to scams that divert attention from the crucial tasks of safety, security and rescue, officials said.

Police arrested a woman Thursday who showed up at ground zero, dressed in medical scrubs, and told officials that her husband had contacted her via cell phone to say he was buried under the north tower with nine other people. Workers scrambled to dig where she directed them before authorities discovered the truth. "It was all fake. There was no husband," Police Commissioner Bernard Kerik said.

The woman, Sugeil Mejia, 24, of Union City, N.J., was arrested and charged with reckless endangerment, obstructing a fire operation and filing a false report. Kerik said he also hopes the federal government prosecutes her.

Mawn said the many bomb scares in the city were "very disruptive" to the bureau's Terrorism Task Force and that federal authorities will aggressively seek to prosecute anyone making threats. Bomb scares occurred Friday at New York University Medical Center in Turtle Bay and the city medical examiner's office next door.

City police and federal authorities are pursuing Web site operators or telemarketers who contact people asking for donations. Giuliani said he'd "really like to catch them and set an example" by arresting them.

Von Essen, as well as the mayor and Mawn, criticized the media for inaccurate reporting, though Mawn said misinformation also results from a taxed FBI not being able to verify things in a timely manner.

Bush, after landing in New Jersey on Air Force One, circled New York Harbor near the Statue of Liberty in his helicopter before landing at 3:50 p.m. at the downtown Manhattan heliport off South Street.

Greeted by Giuliani and Joseph Allbaugh, director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Bush climbed into a silver sport utility vehicle and joined a motorcade to the devastated World Trade Center. American flags had been placed all along their route.

At Barclay Street and West Broadway, one block north of the smoking wreckage of collapsed 7 World Trade Center, the motorcade halted. Bush greeted Gov. George Pataki, Sens. Charles Schumer and Hillary Rodham Clinton, U.S. Reps. Charles Rangel and Jerrold Nadler, New Jersey Sens. Robert Torricelli and Jon Corzine, and Connecticut Sen. Joseph Lieberman.

The president stopped to talk with the police and fire commissioners, and Schumer described what they were about to see, gesturing with his arms to emulate the pancaking effect when buildings collapsed.

At a brief ecumenical prayer service near the Twin Towers after Bush had addressed the rescue workers, Cardinal Edward Egan spoke about justice.

Before meeting with bereaved families at the Javits Center, the president expressed shock at what he'd seen. "It's hard to describe what it's like to see the gnarled steel and broken glass, twists of buildings silhouetted against the smoke," he told reporters during an impromptu question-and-answer session.

He repeated what he has said in recent days, that the attack represented "the first act of war on America in the 21st century," and said the nation's response was "on course" and would be "justified."

At the Javits Center, one woman showed the president a picture of a deceased loved one. When he signed the picture, she placed it in her Bible.

Outside Bellevue Hospital, where photographs of *hundreds of victims cover what has been dubbed "The* Wall of Prayers," pastors from across the city created a sidewalk ministry, laying their hands on the heads of grieving family and friends.

"God knows the pain you are feeling. He knows the comfort you seek," said Ivan Valencia, a member of an evangelical church in Woodside, who led 30 people in prayer.

In some good news for the financial industry, Giuliani asked Wall Street to clean up this weekend, as the New York Stock Exchange and other markets are expected to reopen on Monday.

The rain, plus city workers and private crews, cleaned streets in the financial district, and other workers hosed off buildings coated with ash and soot. Trucks from the city Department of Environmental Protection washed out gutters and drains, and Con Edison workers repaired electric cables.

State Health Commissioner Antonia Novello said New Yorkers should not worry about contaminants in the air and insisted that face masks are needed only at the epicenter of the towers' collapse. People with asthma, heart disease or other serious ailments might need to see a doctor, but normally healthy people should experience only a runny nose, itchy eyes or coughing, Novello said.

Air quality tests in the five boroughs show "no asbestos problem at all," First Deputy Mayor Joseph Lhota said at a Friday night briefing.

City schools, except for those south of Canal Street, opened on time. Cars, which had been banned from going south of 14th Street, were allowed to travel to Canal Street. On Saturday, Lhota said, the city will reopen streets east of Broadway to pedestrians and buses, and resume subway service, but vehicles still will be prohibited.

Staff writers Bobby Cuza, Dan Janison, Hugo Kugiya, Melanie Lefkowitz, Margaret Ramirez, Graham Rayman, Joshua Robin and Curtis L. Taylor contributed to this story.

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