NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

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Picture of Courage

Shown in agony on day of disaster, he's home to heal

By William Murphy
STAFF WRITER

The graphic picture showed firefighter Armondo Reno screaming in pain as he was pulled from the wreckage of the World Trade Center.

A week later and safe at home in Whitestone yesterday, he said he screamed only when fellow firefighters pulled on his broken left shoulder.

"That's what woke me up. Every time they pulled my arm I woke up," Reno said, sitting in an easy chair with his broken right foot in a cast.

The photograph of Reno's rescue was shot by freelance photographer Robert Mecea, who was on assignment for Newsday. Yesterday, he was in Reno's living room to take a picture of a fellow survivor.

Mecea said he got to the scene, at Liberty and West streets, by bicycle from Brooklyn and was ordered by a police official to help out — or get out of the area.

Mecea said he joined a line of firefighters and other rescuers who were passing debris along as the search for survivors went on after the towers collapsed.

"I saw the stokes basket [metal stretcher] coming down the line, and I dropped back because we were already shoulder to shoulder, and I took the picture," Mecea told Reno, 55, who joined the Fire Department in 1973.

Reno's daughter, Amanda, 21, held the Italian language newspaper Oggi with the picture by Mecea on the front page.

The serene quiet of Whitestone stood in stark contrast to the chaos around the rubble heap at the World Trade Center, where Reno came so close to death Sept. 11.

An American flag hung to the left of Reno's front door, along with a "Welcome Home" banner. Across the street, a neighbor's house carried a wanted poster for Osama bin Laden, the terrorist leader who has been linked to the attack.

Reno talked a couple of visitors through the morning when he responded to the attack. Working out of Engine Co. 65 on West 31st Street, Reno drove the rig through morning midtown traffic.

As the unit got near the scene, police were blocking off side streets and the rig made better speed, Reno said.

Reno was the chauffeur of the rig — the driver in civilian terms — and he said he pulled up near an overpass at Liberty and West streets.

The lieutenant and four other firefighters jumped out and rushed away as Reno found a fire hydrant and hooked it up to the pumps so water would be available if needed.

He and some other firefighters hosed down cars that had caught fire in the area, but they ignored body parts that were in plain sight. "We said, 'Forget them. They're beyond help,' " Reno said.

After that, Reno said he had little recollection of what happened, but it appeared that a bridge across West Street collapsed, pinning him and others.

"The next thing I remember is them pulling me out by my arm," he said. Minutes later, he said, he was in Bellevue Hospital Center, where his son, Michael, a city ambulance worker, was putting a brace around his neck.

Michael, 26, he said, passed the civil service test for firefighter and is waiting to be appointed. Yesterday Reno's left shoulder was still badly bruised, mostly a large splotch of purple and black. "It was about all black when he first came home. Now it's black and purple," his wife, Virginia, said.

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