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DAILY NEWS, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2001

Senators get a tour

Devastated pols vow to give help

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Some of the nation's most powerful politicians pledged to help New York recover yesterday after viewing the horror and devastation that once was the World Trade Center.

On a dreary day when the rest of the city continued to recover from the terrorist attacks, Mayor Giuliani led 40 U.S. senators clad in orange ponchos to Ground Zero.

Many of the politicians appeared shaken by what they saw. Afterward, even senators who have not been friendly to New York in the past promised to help.

"I've seen the devastation from tornadoes, from droughts," said Senate Republican leader Trent Lott of Mississippi, after returning from the spot where more than 6,700 were killed or have been reported missing. "I've never seen anything comparable to what we've seen today. The magnitude of it. The horror of it."

Sen. Olympia Snowe, a Maine Republican, said: "The Devil incarnate descended on America on Sept. 11."

The strong words came on a day when:

■ The city's tally of people reported missing at the Trade Center jumped to 6,333. That marked an increase of 911 from the day before. Mayor Giuliani attributed most of the new reports to "getting numbers from foreign nationals."

■ City Controller Alan Hevesi announced New York's major pension funds — including cops, firefighters, teachers and teamsters — will pump $800 million into the stock market as a show of confidence in the economy. Meanwhile, the Dow dropped nearly 400 points — putting it on track for its worst week since the 1987 market crash.

■ The real estate mogul who holds the lease on the Trade Center site said he wants to build four 50-story towers on the property. But Port Authority officials said a decision on the site's future was at least a week away.

■ The Wall St. subway station on the 4 and 5 lines reopened as officials said partial Holland Tunnel service could be back as soon as next week.

Rescue workers continued their grim dig as the senators inspected the devastation.

While some firefighters quietly grumbled when the dignitaries interrupted their work, Fire Commissioner Thomas Von Essen said deep down his men understand "it's important for them to see it."

"This is not a show and tell," he said. "These are the folks who can really help us."

The rescue efforts also were slowed by a driving rain which threatened to shift the debris pile, already being undermined by water leaking into the PATH tube beneath the rubble.

Jesus Vasquez sat a few blocks away from Ground Zero in his truck, thinking about the body found in the rubble he had just hauled to the Fresh Kills landfill in Staten Island.

"It was all mangled," said Vasquez, 35, of Brooklyn. "It's not a good feeling. The odor is not a good smell. It was very hard to breathe."

Still on guard

More than a week after the terror attacks, the city remained on high alert. Cops and National Guardsmen manned barricades. Workers trying to get into many buildings downtown had to run security gantlets. Rumors were rife that a "second wave" of terror attacks was coming.

Yesterday, Police Commissioner Bernard Kerik attacked the rumors head-on.

"There is no specific threat against the city, none," he said. "There's rumor, innuendoes and misinformation."

But the fear was all too real to New Yorkers like Erin Stomkin, 22, who works for an insurance company two blocks from the disaster site.

"My family lives in North Carolina near all those Army bases," she said. "My mom sees soldiers all over the place. She wants me to come home."

A day after French President Jacques Chirac came to show support for New York, British Prime Minister Tony Blair met with city officials and prayed at a memorial service for the hundreds of Britons who died in the catastrophe.

"I can only imagine what it must have been like for the people of New York in the past nine days," Blair said outside St. Thomas Church in midtown. "My father's generation knew what it was like, they went through the Blitz."

Later, Blair's wife, Cherie, and former President Bill Clinton visited Engine Co. 8/Ladder Co. 2 in midtown to buoy the spirits of the firefighters there.

Clinton urged everyone to rally around President Bush's efforts to punish the terrorists. "Everything I have seen indicates to me they are exploring all the different options in a proper way," he said.

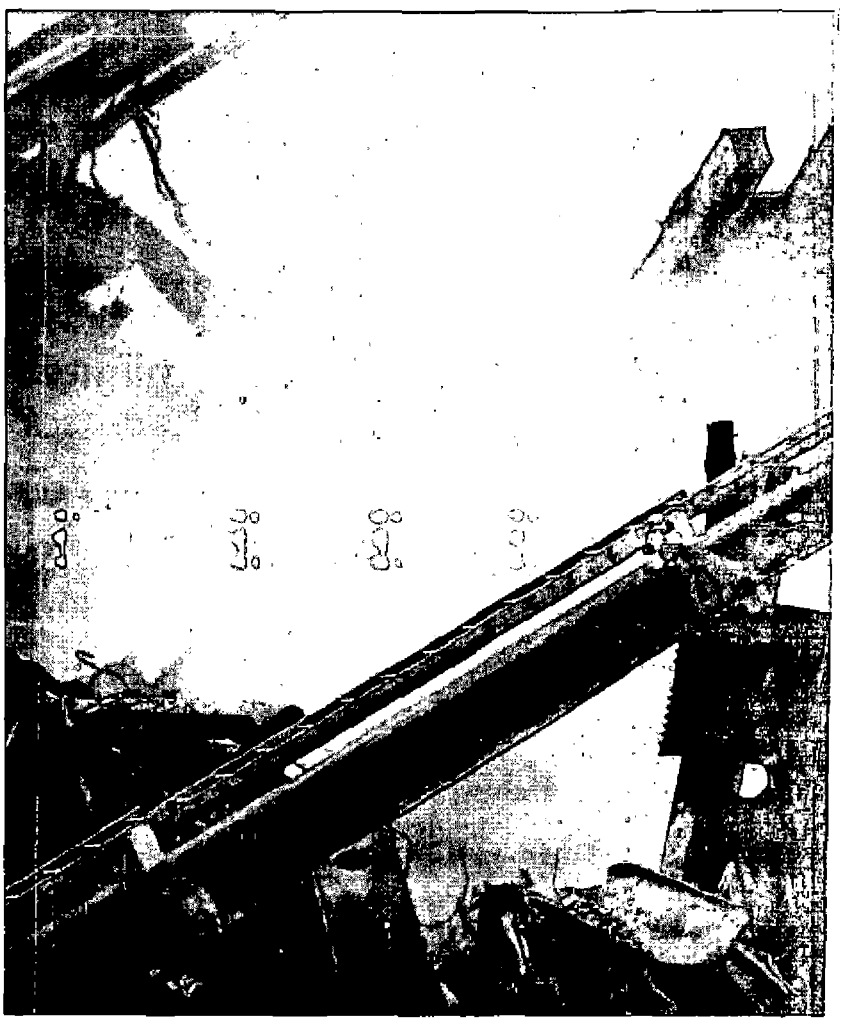
Firefighters also got a boost yesterday from another famous face — boxing legend Muhammad Ali. Shaking and weak from the Parkinson's syndrome sapping his strength, Ali donned an FDNY cap as he visited several firehouses and told the men he backs efforts "to bring justice to the people involved."

But Ali, a Muslim, also carried the message that all the followers of Allah should not pay for the sins of prime suspect Osama Bin Laden.

Although it has been more than a week since anyone was found alive in the rubble, Giuliani stressed that rescue workers were still trying to find trapped survivors.

Many of the relatives of the missing again gathered at the city's family assistance center at Pier 94, now barely clinging to hope that their loved ones would be found alive.

"It's hard because of the waiting," said Emily Amaranto, 26, of Borough Park, Brooklyn. Her dad, Angelo, 60, was a maintenance worker on the 87th floor of 2 World Trade Center.



MEN AT WORK American flag hangs from cherry picker as firefighters train hose on World

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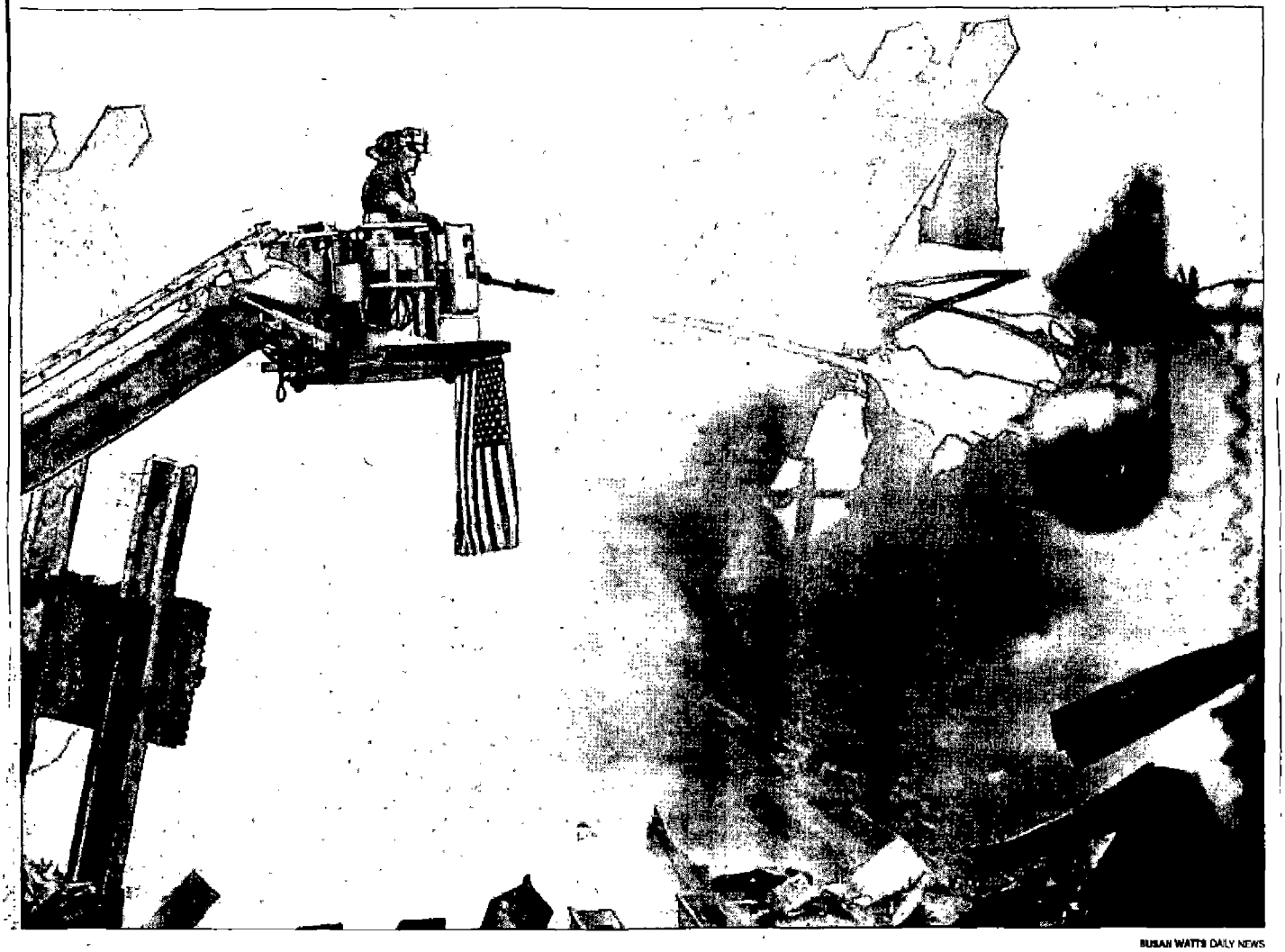

SUSAN WATTS DAILY NEWS

Trade Center attack site. As rumors swirled about more terror attacks, Police Commissioner Bernard Kerik said, "There is no specific threat against the city."

"I hope he's still there alive, waiting for us," she said.

Going home

Just north of Chambers St. at the West Side Highway, the hundreds who lived in the shadow of the fallen towers began returning home to Battery Park City's northern half through a police barricade.

"41 River Terrace, welcome home!" one of the cops told a returning refugee.

Those who live at 22 River Terrace and at the Tribeca Bridge Tower, 450 North End Ave., were also allowed to come home. Those unlucky to live in the Gateway Plaza complex on South End Ave. were told they could grab some fresh clothes, but not stay.

Giuliani said officials expect to open the rest of Battery Park City as early as today.

"You can smell the food rotting in the refrigerators," said Steve Dougherty, 53, who returned from Gateway Plaza with his bike and a bag of clothes. "My daughter's stuffed animals and everything else was covered with dust. It's so awful. Along with world peace, they destroyed my neighborhood."

Tempers flared when well-meaning National Guardsmen began demanding driver's licenses as identification from New Yorkers who don't drive.

"We're just trying to go home!" one woman with three children in tow screamed at a stunned soldier.

First day of school

While most city schools reopened last week, for the 9,000 kids from the eight schools near the World Trade Center that were evacuated, it was their first day in class since the attacks.

Giuliani said about 70% of them showed up at their new schools around the city.

Melissa Watt, 7, couldn't wait to start and a broad grin spread across her face as she and other students from blast-damaged Public School 89 bounded down the corridors of their new school in Greenwich Village.

"I know that everything's going to be okay," Watt said.

In the days that followed the terror attacks, there were numerous reports of Muslims being harassed and even assaulted by angry thugs.

Members of the city's Sikh community also were targeted for abuse because they wear turbans, although they are not Muslims.

Yesterday at the Sikh Cultural Society of Richmond Hill, Queens, worshipers held a marathon scripture reading in memory of the Trade Center victims.

The readings are "the highest spiritual act Sikhs can conduct for souls of those who are seriously injured," said Avtar Singh Pannu, the chairman of the temple.

"We have come to the United States to leave behind the discrimination we suffered in India and build a better life for our families," Pannu said. "Our hearts and souls are with the American people."

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