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Won't go without a fight

Crews struggle to break up what's left of Tower 2

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Part of the jagged facade of 2 World Trade Center was still standing defiantly last night after construction crews tried again to bring it down.

A day after they yanked off large sections of the scarred wall, workers stretched fortified cables from the skeletal remains to four excavating machines.

Then, at 5 p.m., they started up the machine and began pulling it down. But about a half hour later, one of the cables snapped and the crew had to start over.

"The beams are still so strong," marveled Rochelle Breton, 21, of the Bronx, who watched the operation. "It doesn't want to fall down."

Matter of time

William Harris, president and owner of Harris & Sons Construction in Pearl River, Rockland County, said it was only a matter of time. He said his crews also were preparing to take down the rest of the remaining sections of Trade Center buildings.

"Buildings Four and Five are scheduled to be demolished sometime soon," he said. "They are both completely burned out, and engineers are examining them."

The city wants the remaining sections of the complex taken down because of fears pieces could fall on rescue workers, who have been on the scene around the clock for more than two weeks.

Yesterday, workers looking for bodies continued to pick through the rubble of what had been the Concourse Mall, carrying off pieces by hand.

No survivors have been found since a day after the Sept. 11 attacks.

"It's real slow, because whenever we find a body part, we've got to stop and let them come in and investigate further," said Wayne Fallon, a heavy equipment engineer.

Slow and steady

Mayor Giuliani warned it would take three months to remove all the wreckage as the death toll rose to 300 and the number of missing held at 6,347.

"One thing that has to be done is a beautiful memorial," Giuliani said, adding that officials are planning to preserve pieces of the fallen towers. "It will be a burial ground for a lot of people."

Ted Palatucci, 49, of Middletown, N.J., who can see Ground Zero from his office window at 140 Broadway, said the scene of destruction looks like "the gates of hell."

"But I do agree, they should preserve a portion of it for the memorial," he said.

Steve Stoller, 56, who lives in lower Manhattan, set up an easel at the corner of Cedar St. and Broadway and began painting the ruins. "I don't know if there's a way to describe it," he said.

Giuliani has declared Ground Zero a crime scene, and yesterday cops threatened to confiscate cameras of tourists trying to take pictures of the wreckage.

"Put your camera away," a police officer yelled at one offender. "This is not Disneyland."

All photographers — press and civilian — were barred from the corner of West Thames St. and West St. There, FBI agents wearing white hard hats searched a collection of crushed and burned cars — including several police cruisers and a fire truck.

Pols visit site

Some politicians, however, got an up-close view of Ground Zero.

State Senate Majority Leader Joe Bruno (R-Rensselaer) was stunned by what he called "the magnitude of the destruction."

"You have to see it, smell it, see it," Bruno said. "It is almost overwhelming."

Italian Foreign Minister Renato Ruggiero grew angry as he viewed the wreckage. "This has been a crime against humanity," he said.

Refugees continued to trickle back to homes abandoned after the attack. Last night, workers tore down the fence on Chambers St. and police reopened the section between Murray and Warren Sts., from Broadway to Greenwich St. — and allowed people to go home.

"I was starting to think I'd never be able to get back," said Pablo Ruggiero, 24, as he trundled two duffel bags and a grocery bag back to his apartment. "I'm not concerned about the mess and the noise. I just want to get home."

His fiancée, Maggie Rowen, 25, added: "I wasn't sure I wanted to stay, but watching all of this work down here makes me want to be part of bringing lower Manhattan back to life."

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