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DAILY NEWS, SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 2001

THE GREAT RESCUE

How heroes saved countless lives when terror struck

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Nearly 5,000 people perished in 100 minutes on Sept. 11—a loss of life the enormity of which is matched only by its cruel and relentless speed.

So began the city's darkest hours.

But at the same time a series of interlocking heroics saved lives by the dozens, and by the hundreds, and just one at a time, in what may be the greatest rescue effort in American history.

An estimated 25,000 people escaped from the World Trade Center from the time the first hijacked plane crashed into Tower 1, at 8:47 a.m., until both towers crumbled to the ground.

Thousands of firefighters, cops, medics and civilians assisted in the rescue; hundreds gave their lives.

Many of those who took part dwell on the people they couldn't get out. "When you think about the 5,000 who died, you always wish you'd done more," said Sgt. Dominick Amendolare of the Emergency Service Unit.

Still, he acknowledges, "When you sit back and look at it, a good job was done by everybody."

Two months after the attack, as the shock fades and grieving continues, authorities are piecing together the events of those first hours, chronicling scenarios of who was where, what they did, how people died and how an astounding number of people survived.

Those official reports full of dry detail, and dozens of personal accounts, still vivid after eight weeks, form this anatomy of a rescue.

Ordinary heroes

The Port Authority estimates about 50,000 people were in the World Trade Center during a typical workday; the agency believes that when the attack began, there were about 25,000 in the twin towers, and thousands more coming off PATH trains, heading to the subway and strolling in the 75 stores in the mall.

Transit Police Officers Michael Mazziotti and Eric Romero were on the 20th floor of 1 World Trade Center. They had escorted Janet Kent, 54, from the subway station to her office at Blue Cross-Blue Shield because her motorized wheelchair was damaged as she exited the E train.

"The building shook and the cops said, 'Get out, we've been hit by a plane,'" Kent said. "They got my co-worker, who has asthma, all the way down, then came all the way back up and got people out. They saved many lives."

> *"The building shook and the cops said, 'Get out, we've been hit by a plane.' "*
>
> SURVIVOR JANET KENT

Mazziotti said he yelled at those who stopped to grab coats or handbags.

"The floor emptied in about 15 minutes and we went up to 26, stopping at each floor to make sure floors cleared," Mazziotti said. "We walked around. Our radios were dead. We helped people down the stairs, told them to cover mouths with scarves, handkerchiefs, in the smoke. At the 18th floor, I met firefighters from Engine 6. ... They continued up."

Thousands of people were moving through the lobby of Tower 1 at the moment a fireball came down from the crashed plane, said Port Authority Police Capt. Anthony Whitaker, who was there greeting the familiar faces he saw every day.

He called for a full alert, and within 10 minutes 200 Port Authority cops arrived. The Port Authority and FDNY Deputy Chief Peter Hayden ordered the entire World Trade Center complex evacuated.

Engine 10 and Ladder 10 on Liberty St. were the first units to arrive; four of the firehouse members would later perish.

At 8:50, a third alarm was sent by Battalion Chief Joseph Pfeifer. "We have a lot of floors on fire at the World Trade Center," he said. Port Authority emergency cops were assigned to fire chiefs and firefighters who started up the stairwells.

The first NYPD Emergency Service Unit to arrive, ESU Truck 1, pulled up to Tower 1 at 8:50.

"There were dead bodies in the plaza, but it still looked nice, with aluminium chairs set up for a ceremony or something; the chairs weren't disturbed yet," Amendolare said. "But when we got in it was chaotic and debris started falling, and at every thunderous roar people would stop in their tracks."

ESU cops worked their way up, checking the floors, giving first aid to those with respiratory problems or chest pains, and reaching the 31st floor.

"The stairwell was packed but orderly," Amendolare said. "The civilians were telling us to be careful, God bless you; civilians were helping each other."

Four floors above, at 9:26 a.m., Ladder 3 Capt. Patrick Brown reported "numerous burn victims on the stairs." Brown, a Fire Department legend who was memorialized at St. Patrick's Cathedral on Friday, remains among the missing.

Stop the train

PATH Deputy Director Victoria Cross Kelly was on the concourse when she saw a dozen cops ordering people to leave the building; she immediately called trainmaster Richie Moran, at the control center in New Jersey. Unaware of the magnitude of the crisis, she nevertheless knew commuters had to be stopped before disembarking from trains and flooding the concourse area.

Moran directed an incoming train with some 900 passengers through the Trade Center station and back to Hoboken. He told the crew of another train to unload at Exchange Place, the last stop in New Jersey, and bring the train into the Trade Center for evacuations. The Port Authority estimates about 3,000 people were removed from the danger zone.

Meanwhile, ESU Inspector Ronald Wasson divided his officers into four teams of five or six, with two teams entering each tow-



Police Officer Michael Mazziotti helped rescue Janet Kent, whose motorized wheelchair was damaged.

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aid William Garrido from the burning World Trade Center.

er. They carried rescue harnesses, ...packs, ropes, hand tools, hydraulic tools and medical equipment. After the second tower was hit at 9:03 a.m., and it became clear the disaster was an attack, they brought machine guns and extra handguns.

The two teams in Tower 2 made their way to the 20th floor, telling employees to remain calm and orderly, giving oxygen to civilians and out-of-breath firefighters. About 500 FDNY members were now in the towers.

Firefighters Joseph Graziano of Ladder 13 and Bill Casey of Engine 21 each lent a shoulder to an injured man and took him down the stairs, saying, "We're not going to leave you" over and over. They got him out a minute before the building came crashing down at 10 a.m.

Martin Glynn, 57, a trader at Euro brokers on the 84th floor of Tower 2, said he made his way down to the 40s and looked out a window to see pools of blood the size of blankets in the plaza, and enormous flames.

"A guy jumped ... we made eye contact," Glynn said.

When he and the other escapees got to the lobby, "I began to shudder, knowing what was out there. Then, I saw Officer Moira Smith. She was intense, but calm.

"'Don't look, keep moving,' she told us; she was shielding you from seeing the destruction. People would have backed up and caused a logjam, she was looking everybody in the eye. No doubt she saw the situation and thought people would stop. She saved hundreds of people."

Smith, of the 13th Precinct, was last heard from somewhere between the fifth and third floors, assisting an asthma patient. She didn't make it out.

"Heroism is not only running into flames," Glynn said. "It's doing your job in the face of horror."

Also in Tower 2 was Richard Rescorla, 62, a retired Army colonel whose battlefield valor in Vietnam was celebrated in the 1992 best seller "We Were Soldiers Once ... and Young."

Rescorla, head of security at Morgan Stanley retail operations on the 44th floor, ordered 2,700 employees out, using a megaphone, as soon as Tower 1 was hit. He profanely ignored announcements over the public address system telling people Tower 2 was secure, to remain in place.

Rescorla had conducted regular evacuation drills and "his calm coaxing of the staff helped people maintain their composure," said Richard Mainey, head of corporate security for Morgan Stanley. Only six of their employees — including Rescorla — died in the attack.

"Without his professionalism, the outcome could have been much worse," Mainey said.

From the 20th floor, ESU Sgt. Rodney Gillis must have known a collapse was imminent. "He radioed, 'Clear the air, emergency transmission,'" Wasson said.

When the building came down, Gillis and nine ESU cops died in cascading horror.

Keep moving

Now certain they had only a matter of minutes, the cops and firefighters across the plaza in Tower 1 scrambled to evacuate people.

"I just kept telling them to continue moving," said ESU Officer Dave Norman. "I was proud of the people. I was looking at their faces. I don't know if this one made it out or didn't."

On the 31st floor, Norman encountered Rescue 1 Firefighter David Weiss, yelling for medical gear.

"There were four firemen having chest pains. They were on the floor. We administered oxygen and took vital signs," Norman said.

Meanwhile, down below, clearing the exits became more difficult.

Port Authority Police Capt. Kathy Mazza began shooting out the floor-to-ceiling glass walls on the mezzanine of Tower 1 to allow people to escape.

"She evacuated hundreds of people," said PA spokesman Alan Hicks. "She stopped the bottleneck at the revolving doors." Mazza would be one of 37 Port Authority cops to die.

Norman said his team members were ragging slings with electrical tape and oxygen bottles for the stricken firefighters.

"Weiss said they were attempting to make a push to go higher. ... No one got out from Rescue 1," Norman said.

At about the same time, members of Chinatown's Ladder 6 were working their way down from the 27th floor with Josephine Harris, who was in a wheelchair. Port Authority cop David Lim was assisting.

Firefighter Bill Butler handed off his tools, and slung Harris' arm around his shoulder as he put his hand around her waist.

Another firefighter, Tommy Falco, was coaxing her. "Come on, come on, Josephine we have to keep going," he said.

At the fourth floor, the building began to crack and cave in on them. They wound up on top of a mountain of debris.

"We were on the sixth floor, and we were standing on what was now the top of the building," said Lim.

Josephine Harris and her rescuers all survived. She is now known as the Guardian Angel of Ladder 6.

Norman said he also passed Port Authority Public Safety Director Fred Morrone on one of the floors.

"We're getting out; building 2 collapsed," Norman told him.

"Yeah, I know; thanks," Morrone said, staying put. He never made it out.

Crystal Tyson, 31, who worked on the 49th floor of Tower 1, fell as she fled down the stairs and was hyperventilating.

"A maintenance man or engineer was helping me; then in the lobby I met [Transit Police Officer Ramon Suarez. ... Each of them took my arm. Suarez sat me on the curb. He got oxygen from

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JENNIFER ALTMAN

Crystal Tyson is helped from the disaster scene by Police Officer Ramon Suarez.

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