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At Ground Zero, tape is met with collective shrug

By Hugo Kugiya
STAFF WRITER

The day Osama bin Laden spoke was like most any other day at Ground Zero. As the tape known simply as the bin Laden video was broadcast over several television channels at 11 a.m., the unrelenting work here just continued. No one operating a crane, holding a torch, driving a truck, or blasting a hose stopped to consider the proof of who brought the destruction here more than three months ago.

Enough proof soils their boots, fills their dreams and nostrils, and covers every surface around here. Fresh messages are scrawled daily in the dust.

"It doesn't really matter," said a utility crew worker near Trinity Church, shrugging off the news of the tape's release.

He stood next to a subway entrance covered in plywood. On it, written in police-department blue spray paint, is the promise, "PD THEY WILL BE AVENGED."

For the people who work in or near Ground Zero, there is little time for television and not a second for doubt.

Excerpts from it would have been replayed and rediscussed hundreds of times by the time Frank Sirene arrived home in Franklin Square late yesterday evening from working his 12-hour shift at Ground Zero.

"I hate to see them put that on TV, but we have no control over that," said Sirene, who works for one of the large contractors at the site. "I think it will just give evil people more ideas . . . It will just bring out more anger, and I want life to go on."

He makes a point of not watching much television with what little time he has at home. He works from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., seven days a week assisting the police in making sure that only authorized workers enter Ground Zero.

"When I get home, I'm beat," he said. "I'm done. I shower. I go to bed."

A manager of an electronics store near Ground Zero, who felt the heat of the fireball from the second airplane, said he ignored the video when it appeared on a few television sets in the store, although customers crowded around them. He made a point not to have the video running on 60 television sets at once.

"There's never any good news on TV any more," said the man, who did not want to give his name. "People need to know what's going on, but we didn't want to bombard them. It's still very much on the minds of everyone, and I don't think it's going to be over for quite awhile.

"There was never any doubt that he [bin Laden] was guilty. I didn't need any confirmation. I lived through that awful day once, and I didn't need to relive it through the words of a madman."

Mayor Rudolph Giuliani said he did not view the entire tape but read excerpts of the translation. He supported the Bush administration's decision to release the tape.

"For anybody who had any doubt as to the justification of the military effort," he said, ". . . this tape removes any doubt . . . When you read what he says, you see that until or unless he is brought to justice or eliminated, he is probably going to kill a lot more innocent human beings.

"Obviously this man is the personification of evil . . . He seems delighted in having killed more people than he anticipated, which leaves you wondering just how deep his evil heart and soul really is."

Dressed in a heavy, leather smock and a hard hat, ironworker Tony Almeida was expressionless when asked about the bin Laden video.

"Show me a video of him hanging by his ankles, on fire," Almeida said, lighting a cigarette on his lunch break. "I'll pay to see that."

Staff writer Curtis L. Taylor contributed to this story.

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