



Attack on America

Colleagues hope to find retired Marine



Courtesy of New York Police Department

Retired Marine reservist Sgt. Maj. Mike Curtin poses with Marines. Curtin, a New York police officer, has been missing since the Sept. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center. He was last seen going into a building near the towers to rescue people.

BY JEREMY KIRK
Stars and Stripes

NEW YORK — Retired Marine reservist Sgt. Maj. Mike Curtin headed into the maelstrom when he heard reports that terrorists attacked the World Trade Center.

A New York police officer with the Emergency Service Unit, the 45-year-old Curtin entered a building close to the towers shortly after the attack. As others rushed out, Curtin — a sergeant in charge of an ESU station in Harlem — went in.

Curtin, who has a wife and three daughters, has been missing since the Sept. 11 attack. Attempts to contact the family have been unsuccessful.

The action was not uncharacteristic of Curtin, who rappelled from a helicopter onto the top of a World Trade Center tower after a 1993 attack there, clearing antennas so other helicopters could land, said James McEniry, a fellow police officer and Marine reservist.

"He [Curtin] never worried about himself," said McEniry, 36, also with the Emergency Services Unit in Queens. "This building was probably collapsing. He's the type of guy — he wouldn't leave a guy behind."

"Obviously, we hope we can locate him alive," said Maj. David C. Andersen, director of U.S. Marine Corps New York City Public Affairs. "As time goes on, your hope stays there, but reality starts to push against your hope."

In 1995, Curtin went to Oklahoma City with a Federal Emergency Management Agency team of New York police to help after the attack on the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building.

There, Curtin ignored warnings and entered an unsafe area after he spotted a shred of blue clothing. McEniry said Curtin recognized the blue clothing as a piece of a Marine uniform. Emergency officials gave Curtin and others four hours to get the Marine.

Four hours later, with an American flag draped over the fallen Marine's body, Curtin emerged: one Marine who fulfilled the

promise to always bring back another Marine, McEniry said.

But Curtin shrugged at the plaques and accolades he received, McEniry said.

"Mike Curtin was a Marine's Marine," McEniry said.

Active-duty Marines at this small public affairs office in Manhattan have been helping search for Curtin in the massive tangle of debris left from the terrorist attack.

New York police officer Eric Becker remembers when Curtin tried to lure him from his EMS station in Queens to Harlem.

"You can't replace a guy like Mike Curtin," Becker said. "You just can't do it. If I had to run into the building with any of the guys, I would have followed him."

Becker has worked about 16 hours daily searching for Curtin and other survivors.

About 400 policemen belong to New York's Emergency Service Unit, which has stations throughout the city's five boroughs, Becker said. The elite rescue unit lost 14 men in the difficult hours after the attack.

"Even though there wasn't a large loss of Marines, there was a large loss of life which is just horrendous," said Staff Sgt. Robert Knoll, who helped looked through the rubble for Curtin. "It's just so terrible."

McEniry said he spoke to Curtin moments before the attack.

Curtin had wanted McEniry to pick him up a shirt made by the Marine recruiter's office.

Shortly after, McEniry found himself under a fire truck as one of the towers collapsed.

"It was pitch black," McEniry said. "People were running for their lives. You couldn't see your hand in front of your eyes for like 20 minutes."

His eyes, ears and face were caked with crushed concrete powder, McEniry said. He was literally blinded, and was led from the scene by another officer.

"We want to get all our guys back," McEniry said. "I don't want to leave [the site]. You just keep on going."

E-mail Jeremy Kirk at: kirkj@pstrips.osd.mil

Photo uncovered among rubble grips Marine recovery worker

BY JEREMY KIRK
Stars and Stripes

NEW YORK — The battered color photo in Marine Maj. David C. Andersen's Manhattan office shows three smiling children, a dog and has the simple caption, "I love you."

He found the photo among remains of the World Trade Center while searching for retired Marine reservist Sgt. Maj. Mike Curtin.

Curtin, a 45-year-old New York police officer and part of the city's Emergency Service Unit, was one of the first to respond to the World Trade Center attack. He has been missing since.

"I couldn't throw it away," Andersen said. "Look what it says down in the bottom right — 'I love you.' My only hope is that the parent of those kids was a survivor or was on vacation."

"I was sitting there resting and I picked it up and looked at it, and then I couldn't put it down."

Television images don't do justice to the area where the Trade Center towers and adjacent buildings collapsed, Andersen said. The rubble is piled six to seven stories high.

"What really gets me is when you see the firemen up on the pile and they are like, this big," Andersen said, barely showing a gap between his index finger and thumb.

"A block behind, faces of buildings have been blown off."

Scraps of paper and window blinds are strewn throughout lower Manhattan. Andersen said he walked by a crushed fire truck that was no higher than his waist.

A graveyard near the site looks completely white after rains of dampened paper had fallen, he said.

Normally, his uniform boots would be a coal-black shine, but after hiking through the rubble, they were stained white from crushed concrete.

"That's nothing," Andersen said. "That's just one day [of digging]."

The photo Andersen took is now in his office. There are no parents in the photo, so it will be difficult to find out if the children lost a parent or relative in the brutal attack, Andersen said.

At the devastated site, material from the 36th floor might be next to stuff from the 101st floors, making it very difficult to match it with a victim.

"I might leave it [the photo] at the Union Square memorial or keep it here," Andersen said, gesturing to the picture.

"It's memorialized right there."

E-mail Jeremy Kirk at: kirkj@pstrips.osd.mil



JEREMY KIRK/Stars and Stripes

Maj. David C. Andersen, director of U.S. Marine Corps New York City Public Affairs in Manhattan, shows a photo he found at Ground Zero.