Rick Rescorla - Saved 2,687 Lives on September 11

Rick Rescorla—born a Brit (in Cornwall) who became an American (and fought in Vietnam)—was worried about the safety of New York City's World Trade Center. Ever since the 1993 terrorist attack, when a bomb blew-up in the building's basement, Rescorla worried that it would happen again.

During the 1993 attack, Rescorla was upset that the building evacuation had gone so poorly. He vowed that such a muddled exodus would never happen again. Among the first to understand that a new kind of terrorism was targeting innocent office workers, he became the director of security for Dean Witter/Morgan Stanley in 1997.

Believing the Trade Center (where Morgan Stanley was headquartered) was a particularly vulnerable terrorist target, Rescorla recommended that his company find different space. Because of lease obligations, however, that alternative was not possible. Instead, Rick developed an emergency evacuation plan which he required the Morgan Stanley employees to practice over and over.

Rescorla could just not get out of his head that the Trade Center would be attacked again. When it happened, on September 11, he and his colleagues were ready.

When the Port Authority issued an announcement, via its PA system, that everyone in the South Tower of the World Trade Center should remain calm and stay at their desks, Rescorla couldn't believe his ears. He immediately began an evacuation process.

With bullhorn in hand, he ordered the Morgan Stanley employees to evacuate the building. Before the second plane struck the South Tower, his colleagues were on their way down the stairs. Thousands of people—nearly 2700 to be precise— owe their lives to Rick Rescorla, and many are vocal about that fact (as you will hear in this video clip).

Trying to keep people calm, under such incredibly stressful circumstances, Rescorla began singing inspirational songs. One, among them, was from his home. Based on the *Men of Harlech*, he sang these words:

> *Men of Cornwall stop your dreaming,*
> *Can't you see their spear points gleaming?*
> *See their warriors' pennants streaming,*
> *To this battlefield.*
>
> *Men of Cornwall stand ye steady,*
> *It cannot be ever said ye*
> *for the battle were not ready*
> *Stand and never yield!*

Because of Rick Rescorla's foresight and belief that he knew what was right, nearly every Morgan Stanley employee made it safely out of the South Tower before it collapsed.

Rescorla was also a hero earlier in his life, during the first ground battle in Vietnam. His picture is on the cover of the first edition of *We Were Soldiers Once ... and Young* (a non-fiction account of the Ia Drang battle by Hal Moore and Joe Galloway).

Incredibly fearless and courageous, Rescorla entered the South Tower of the World Trade Center to be sure that all of the Morgan Stanley employees had safely left the building. He believed there were a few who still needed help. A soldier to the end, he would never leave anyone behind, even if it meant sacrificing his own life.

Rescorla knew he was facing difficult odds when he reentered the Tower. He was last seen near the 10th floor, on his way up to help the last of his colleagues leave the building.

Shortly before the South Tower collapsed, Rick called his wife Susan. He told her:

> *Stop crying. I have to get these people out safely. If something should happen to me, I want you to know I've never been happier. You made my life.* (Quoted by Amanda Ripley in *The Unthinkable: Who Survives when Disaster Strikes - and Why*, at page 209.)

Something did happen to him. When the South Tower collapsed, Rick was still in the building. His body was never found.

All but thirteen Morgan Stanley employees had safely exited the building.

Credits:

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In-line composite images—of the Twin Towers on 9/11, Rick Rescorla's US Army photo and Susan Rescorla—online via "The Sun," a UK newspaper.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Rick-Rescorla-Saved-2-687-Lives-on-September-11

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Rick-Rescorla-Saved-2-687-Lives-on-September-11

Media Stream

View of the WTC South Tower at Impact

Image online, courtesy the jerseycityonline.com website.
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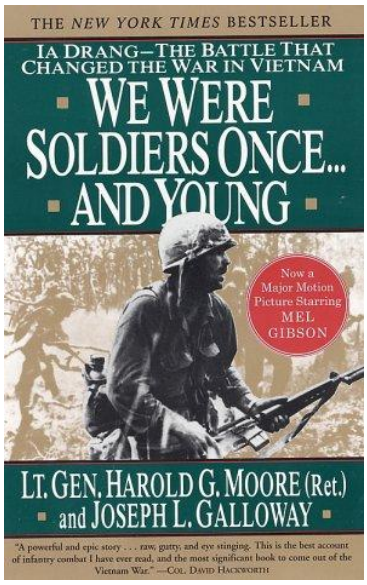

Rick Rescorla - Hero of Ia Drang

Image of book cover online, courtesy Amazon.com
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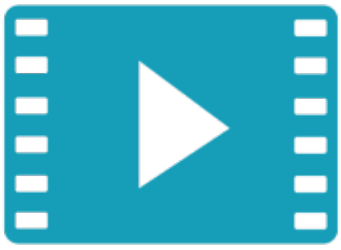

South Tower Collapse - A "Pyroclastic Event" in NYC

Video clip, from the September 11 archive.
View this asset at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/South-Tower-Collapse-A-Pyroclastic-Event-in-NYC