



0. DAVID KARNES and JASON THOMAS - Story Preface

1. BIRTH of the WORLD TRADE CENTER

2. THE NORTH TOWER: WTC 1

3. THE SOUTH TOWER: WTC 2

4. INSIDE 2 WORLD TRADE CENTER

5. ATTACK on the PENTAGON

6. FLIGHT 93

7. FIREFIGHTERS on the SCENE

8. P.A.P.D. RESCUE EFFORTS

9. JOHN McLOUGHLIN and WILL JIMENO

10. DAVID KARNES and JASON THOMAS

11. TREASURES from the LIBRARY of CONGRESS

12. LETTERS FROM A BROKEN APPLE

The Marine Corps Association & Foundation website includes [this photo](#) of "Sergeant Jason Thomas at the ruins of the World Trade Center."

David Karnes was working in Wilton, Connecticut when he saw the televised destruction in New York. A senior accountant with Deloitte Touche, he had been a Staff Sgt. in the Marines Corps infantry.

He told his colleagues: "We're at war." Then he did something about it, advising his supervisor he might be gone for awhile.

Stopping for a "good Marine Corps squared-off haircut," he once again looked like an active duty Staff Sgt. He changed clothes, donning Marine fatigues, and drove his new Porsche 911 to the storage facility where he stored his gear.

Before he left town, he went to his church. There he prayed that God would help him find survivors.

Driving to Manhattan with the top down - so authorities could quickly tell he was a Marine - Karnes pushed the Porsche at speeds of 120 miles an hour. He arrived at the disaster scene around 5:30 in the afternoon.

The entire complex was damaged and still totally unstable with buildings - like 7 World Trade Center - collapsing. At the time, although it was not well-publicized, officials feared that the Hudson River could flood the entire area if the WTC foundations caved in.

As his eyes surveyed the scene, Karnes spotted another Marine - Sgt. Thomas. (Karnes did not learn the sergeant's first name - Jason - until years later.) Smoke was obscuring their view of the former trade center. Then, as the sun was setting, "the smoke just opened up."

The Marines were able, for the first time, to see the extent of the massive destruction. They entered the pile of rubble and ran, disappearing into the smoke.

No one else appeared to be searching since rescue workers had been ordered off the unstable debris. Karnes and Thomas began to shout, over and over, for about an hour:

United States Marines. If you can hear us, yell or tap!

Karnes told Rebecca Liss, an associate producer for *60 Minutes II*, that he believed the whole pile was sacred ground:

I just had a sense, an overwhelming sense come over me that we were walking on hallowed ground, that tens of thousands of people could be trapped and dead beneath us.

Then the Marines stopped. Karnes thought he'd heard a response from somewhere below.

It was McLoughlin and Jimeno.

Following the sounds - faint at first, then louder - Karnes and Thomas reached the trapped officers. Unable to reach people locally, to help dig them out, Karnes called his wife, Rosemary, in Connecticut, and his sister Joy, in Pennsylvania. The women were able to make contact with rescuers in New York.

Karnes stayed with McLoughlin and Jimeno until Will was freed from the rubble. (Helping in that rescue was another man who'd pulled out an old uniform - Chuck Sereika, a former paramedic whose license had expired.)

Sgt. Thomas accompanied the P.A.P.D officer to the hospital. Rescuers, meanwhile, continued to dig out Sgt. McLoughlin. It took many more hours before that happened. He'd spent nearly an entire day in a helpless condition.

Very few survivors were pulled from the World Trade Center wreckage after the towers fell. [Jimeno](#) and [McLoughlin](#) (the links take you to interviews with those two heroes) were the last.

Thirty-seven PAPD officers died [trying to help](#). They were [posthumously awarded](#) Medals of Honor.

By the time the recovery and [site-clearing](#) process officially ended on 30 May 2002, 1.8 million tons of debris had been removed from [the disaster site](#).

Regrettably, 1796 people (or, about 69% of the World Trade Center victims) were never recovered.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)
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Media Stream



David Karnes
Photo by Cpl. Ryan D. Libbert. Collection: US Marine Corps. Image online, courtesy U.S. Marine Corps.
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SSgt. David Karnes
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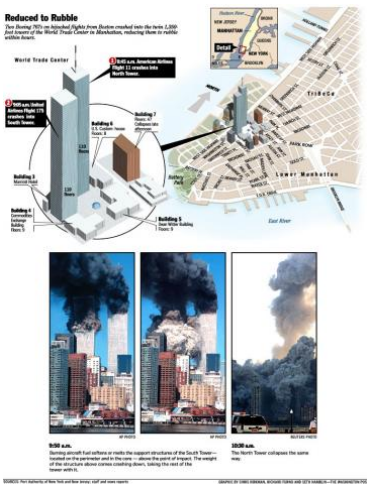


Illustration and Photos - WTC Reduced to Rubble
[Graphic depiction](#) by Chris Kirkman, Richard Furno and Seth Hamblin for the *Washington Post*. Copyright, *Washington Post*, all rights reserved. Image provided here as fair use for educational purposes.
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Sgt. Jason Thomas - WTC Rescuer

Image of Sgt. Jason Thomas online, [courtesy MCA](#) (U.S. Marine Corps Association and Foundation).

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Trade Center Debris Field

Image online, courtesy 9-11 Collection at the Library of Congress.

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Chuck Sereika

Image, described above, online courtesy 9-11 Archives.

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Port Authority Police Department - Badge

Image online, courtesy PAPD.

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WTC - Clearing the Debris Field

Image online, courtesy 9-11 Collection at the Library of Congress.

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Aerial View of the Trade Towers Site

Image online, courtesy Jersey City Online.

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