

Two Marines Die In Oklahoma Blast

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The remains of two Marines were recovered from the rubble that once was the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Office Building in Oklahoma City.

Four other Marines and a Department of Defense civilian were injured in that catastrophic explosion April 19, which claimed 167 lives.

The remains of Captain Randolph A. Guzman, 28, the recruiting station executive officer from Castro Valley, Calif., and Sergeant Benjamin L. Davis, 29, an operations clerk and native of Oklahoma City, were found at their recruiting station posts in the building April 24.

The four Marines and one DOD civil-

ian injured in the bombing have been treated and released from hospitals.

Injured were Gunnery Sergeant Earl A. Bussell, the supply chief from Council Bluffs, Iowa; GySgt Paul K. Cooper, the delayed-entry program pool coordinator from Howard, Wis.; Staff Sergeant Jack R. Jocsing, a visiting Oklahoma City recruiter from Chattanooga, Tenn.; Capt. Mark R. Norfleet, the officer selection officer from Richmond, Va.; and Barbara J. Hedrick, a civilian computer systems operator from Oklahoma City.

All are assigned to the U.S. Marine Corps Recruiting Station, Oklahoma

City, which was located on the sixth floor of the federal building at 200 N.W. 5th St. The building received extensive damage from the bomb explosion shortly after 9 a.m. Central Standard Time.

News reports state that Capt. Matthew Cooper and Sgt. Tad Snidecor were heroes of the blast in that they dug by hand to pull survivors from the rubble and looked for others still trapped. They eventually pulled the four Marines and woman employee to safety.

"It looks just like the embassy in Beirut," was the common comment, referring to the April 18, 1983, terrorist blast in Lebanon. The embassy bombing was only a prelude to the Oct. 23, 1983, terrorist bombing that claimed 241 Marines, sailors, and soldiers.

As in Lebanon, the always faithful ethos of Marines is alive in Oklahoma City. It was demonstrated and especially poignant in the recovery of Capt. Guzman's body.

New York City police officer Michael S. Curtain recalled what happened.

He and several hundred others had been activated and sent to Oklahoma under the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Task Force 1, which organized police, firemen and emergency medical service specialists from around the nation for the tragedy. They were near physical and emotional exhaustion. The psychological trauma of the explosion, still to be felt by most of the rescuers, had to be set aside in order for them to tackle the ordeal of rescuing those who may have still been alive beneath the rubble. For the first 40 hours, they took no rest.

Sometime on the morning of April 21, Curtain, almost spent of energy and using only adrenaline to keep moving in the hopes of saving lives, came upon a familiar sight.

Scrambling across and through the wreckage of the federal building, Curtain saw a body covered by the rubble. He recognized the trousers. They were deep blue with a broad red stripe known in the Corps as a "blood stripe."

Curtain knew immediately the wearer was a Marine. He, too, is a Marine. A Marine Reserve first sergeant.

"It was like I was driven," said Curtain, who has been a reservist for five years after serving on active duty for 14 years.

After the first sergeant saw the dress blue trousers, he cut away part of the fabric and saw that the man in them was white. He knew then that it had to be Capt. Guzman. The other Marine then still unaccounted for was Sgt. Davis, who was known to have been of Asian heritage and darker.

"When I found the captain, I started asking around to see who among the rescuers was a Marine," Curtin said. "I found three former Marines who were part of the rescue effort."

Curtin found Manny Hernandez and Juan Garcia, both New York City policemen. But Curtin needed another man to complete the team.

Ray Bonner, a paramedic, stepped forward. First Sergeant Curtin now had a fire team.

Because of the inherent danger involved with the unstable structure, most recovery efforts were focused on other areas of the building at that time. However, Curtin approached the FEMA chain of command and told them he and a team of former Marines were taking special interest in the recovery of Capt Guzman's remains.

Permission was granted for the Marines to accomplish their unique mission, but they had only a four-hour window of time to work.

"It was something I had to do," said Hernandez, a Vietnam veteran who has been a police officer for 22 years. "I had a squad in 'Nam, and whenever we lost a Marine, he was never left. We have this tradition. We take care of our own."

The evacuation took five hours and, according to situation reports, involved a great deal of risk. The team was operating on the subground level with concrete and steel debris.

"We had to use an electric jackhammer to chip the concrete away from the captain," Curtin said. During this effort, the columns dangerously shifted twice before they were able to free Guzman's body.

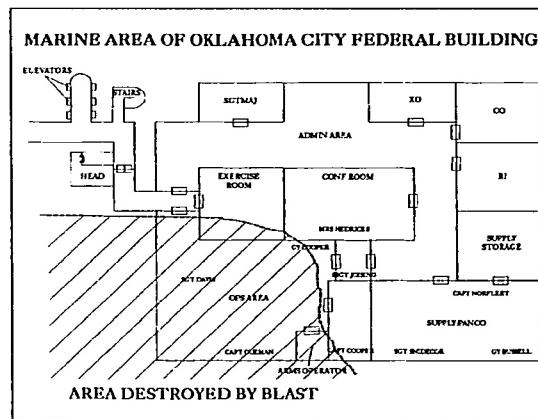
Kneeling beside the captain, former Corporal Hernandez covered Guzman's face with his hand.

"I closed his eyes," said Hernandez. "For the glory of God and the glory of the Corps. It was just a little thing. We had to keep the tradition alive. The captain deserved the honor and respect—like all Marines."

After Guzman's remains were placed in a body bag, the word spread throughout downtown Oklahoma City that the Marines were bringing out one of their own.

With the help of Dennis O'Connor, also a New York police officer; Peter Conlin, whose father served as a Marine in World War II; and Steve Smalls, a structural engineer from New York City, the Marines prepared to take Guzman home.

An unidentified Air Force colonel, upon hearing of the Marines' mission, found an American flag and sent it to the building.



The missing operations section, which was destroyed during the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City. The recruiting station served as headquarters for more than 50 Marine recruiters.

expect anything else from any other Marine if it were me in that body bag," said Hernandez. "It revalidated the esprit and brotherhood that I remember was taught to me in boot camp years ago. It lifted me up.

"It was overwhelming. We are a band of brothers."

Once Guzman's remains were carried from the building, two long lines of rescue workers and bystanders formed, without any order or direction, and made a corridor leading to the recovery vehicle that was to take the remains to a makeshift morgue.

"It was one of the most emotional experiences of my life," said Curtin. "It was symbolic of all the emotion that everyone was feeling, whether they were a Marine or not. We were all involved. The compassion for all the lost just seemed to surface at once."

"It was just a simple thing, but it had to be done," Hernandez said. "Once we saw the blood stripe, we knew it was a Marine—we had no choice."

"It was simply semper fidelis."

