



When courage and helplessness worked side by side

For our men in blue, 9/11 was a mix of both, finds **George Joseph**

The problem was larger than any one could handle'

"A small group of people changed the world in one minute," says Sergeant Thomas Antony, who reached Ground Zero about 20 minutes after the first plane hit the North Tower.

The day had begun like any other day for the then 32-year-old officer with a decade

people did not know where to go in that melee. He knew the area well; it helped him distribute the manpower properly.

Soon the second tower was hit. Paper from the offices on the towers began to pile up on the streets. People were wading through knee deep paper, which soon caught fire. He began firefighting.

Then the saddest thing Antony had ever seen happened.

"The most tragic thing was watching people jumping from the building. We were helpless. There was no way to help them," he said. The memories and the pain still haunt him.

The second tower collapsed first and he and other officers escaped narrowly. They ran to the garage of the American Express building nearby, which saved their lives. "I should thank American Express for my life. If the garage had not been there, several of us would not have been alive," he said.

After the other tower also collapsed, he focused on evacuating people who were roaming around confused. There was utter chaos, he said.

"Normally, police work is not appreciated. We cannot make everyone happy. But September 11 changed things, at least for a while," he added.

The 9/11, Antony said, taught us the lesson that anything could happen any time; it taught us to be wary.

"The police have a different view on things. It does not mean that we suspect all, but we are always wary," he said.

Antony, who now serves in the Highway Patrol in Queens, believes the police are more prepared to face such situations now, but no amount of precautions can guarantee complete safety. "Till we are able to read the minds of people, we have limitations," he said.



Sergeant Thomas Antony

of service behind him. He was in the Special Operations Division based in Queens, which has jurisdiction all over the city. He was on his way to Manhattan when he heard the news on the police radio. He drove directly to the site.

"Unlike what I had expected, I found that I could not do much. The magnitude of the problem was larger than any one could handle," Antony recalled.

He took position in front of the tower directing people to safer locations. Most



Captain Stanley George

'There was total devastation'

It started like any other day, as normal as possible. Back then, I was a sergeant working with the Criminal Justice Bureau. When the first plane hit the tower, we came out and looked at the fire. I was standing next to the captain. As we were observing, the second plane hit the building. Then we knew, it was an attack.

That is when our captain decided to relocate all prisoners lodged in Manhattan Central Booking to undisclosed locations. After completing that task, we responded to Ground Zero. By then both towers had fallen.

Soon after the Towers fell, I responded and assisted in the evacuation of surrounding buildings. For the next 20 hours, we were involved in the custody and control of the WTC site.

There was total devastation. The most devastating sight at the scene was the scattered bodies all over.

A feeling of helplessness overwhelmed me. But in the midst of such misery, I also witnessed courage, care and perseverance too. There were people offering their assistance. So many businesses were bringing food and water to us.

I saw the power of unity and zeal to overcome this great tragedy. I also witnessed American patriotism at its best. I knew nothing could break our spir-

it.

I also give much credit to the agencies, especially my department for the way in which they carried out their responsibilities.

9/11 has truly prepared us to be more vigilant and diligent. 9/11 has changed the world in a drastic way. Many fronts such as policing, air travel, etc were directly affected.

Earlier, the primary duty of the police was to maintain law and order. Now it also involves the prevention of terrorist attacks. Now the police are involved in preventing chemical, nuclear, and biological attacks. The force has become high tech and the changes in many areas are profound.

Individual awareness and reporting responsibility of terrorism was instilled in people. So many attempts were spoiled because of it. Plans and policies were established. I think system wide accountability came as a result.

Captain Stanley George is the first Indian American to reach that level in the New York Police Department. He was involved in the rescue operation at 9/11 and worked at Command and Control, which oversaw the response to the terrorist activities in the weeks after the attacks.