

State Courts Recall 9/11 Attacks and Three Lost Court Officers

By Andrew Keshner

By the time Court Officer Mitchel Wallace saw Mary Jos on Sept. 11, 2001, she had shrapnel embedded in her body and heat burns on her back, left arm and hands.

Working in a makeshift triage at the South Tower's base on Church Street, Officer Wallace bandaged Ms. Jos' wounds and prepared to get her to an ambulance.

Officer Wallace had a "calming" effect on her, Ms. Jos said. As he cut her pant leg to get to the wound, she told him how much she liked those trousers. "There will be lots of sales, don't worry about it," Officer Wallace told her.

Ms. Jos boarded the ambulance and when it was 1 ½ blocks away, the World Trade Center tower collapsed. Officer Wallace was one of two "angels" who helped her that morning, Ms. Jos said,



FORMER CHIEF Judge **Judith S. Kaye**, right, greets **Mary Jos**, who was aided by Court Officer Mitchel Wallace after she escaped the WTC on 9/11 and he was killed. At center is **Noreen McDonough**, the court officer's fiancée. The meeting occurred on Friday before the Unified Court System marked the 10th anniversary of the terror attacks with a ceremony at 60 Centre St., above.

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The article first appeared in the New York Law Journal on September 12, 2011

adding that he saved her life. "Thank God for him."

Ms. Jos spoke Friday following a court system ceremony that commemorated the 10th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks and honored the three court officers who died that day: Officer Wallace, Captain Harry Thompson and Sergeant Thomas Jurgens.

Family members of the officers and judges, including Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman and former Chief Judge Judith S. Kaye, attended the event held in the rotunda of Manhattan Supreme Court at 60 Centre St.

Judge Lippman in his remarks told the gathering of more than 200 that the "best tribute" to the sacrifices of that day was a continued dedication to "strengthening our democratic institutions and moral obligations to provide justice for all."

He called the three officers "shining examples of bravery and strength in the face of danger."

Major Reginald Mebane, retired commanding officer of Manhattan Supreme Court, Criminal Branch, remembered the three officers fondly, telling the audience that Sergeant Jurgens was called "the kid," while Officer Wallace was "full of questions."



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Captain Thompson, who was 51 when he was killed, was "like a younger brother" Officer Mebane said. Known to take pride in his appearance, the one thing Officer Thompson "would not tolerate is a gray shirt," he said.

Though time is supposed to heal all wounds, Major Mebane said, "They neglect to tell you they leave scars. I now carry three scars: Mitch Wallace, Tommy Jurgens and Harry Thompson."

Before and after the ceremony family members of the officers remembered them as caring, dedicated men. Linda Propper, the mother of Sergeant Jurgens, said her son was "a real giver" who loved being a court officer. He was 26 when he was killed and was married for just three months.

A one-time Army medic and member of the Army reserves, Sergeant Jurgens was a captain of the volunteer fire department in Meadowmere Park, Long Island, at the time of the attacks. "No problem, can do," was his stock reply to any situation, she said.

From the moment Ms. Propper saw the news of the attacks in her Phoenix home that morning, she said she knew her oldest son was there. She tried calling him but never got through.

After the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, Sergeant Jurgens pledged to her he would go help if the site was ever attacked again.

"I miss him. I'm proud of him," Ms. Propper said. "I'm just sorry he wasn't able to survive. I'm proud of what he did that day."

Rita Wallace, Officer Wallace's mother, said her son found his ideal job.

"He loved it. Oh my God, he loved it. He said they were his family," she said, adding that he wanted her to visit him at the courts.

Officer Wallace, 34, was also a Bayside volunteer ambulance corps member, and had been a court officer for more than three years.

Ms. Wallace, who wore her son's photo and badge pinned to her shirt, said, "Sometimes it seems like yesterday and other times it seems like ages ago. ...Right now, it seems like yesterday."

Officer Wallace's uncle, Robert Schneider, traveled from Miami for Friday's event.

"He was put on this Earth to help others," Mr. Schneider said of his nephew, "and he gave his life helping others."
