

New Mexican's Claims of Ground Zero Rescue Work Called Into Question

A 9/11 Phony — a series published starting July 11, 2004

Self-proclaimed rescue guru Doug Copp's mission to ground zero was considered so important that he had clearance to be flown to New York even though all civilian air traffic in the United States had been grounded. Once there, he says he assumed a pivotal role and sustained devastating injuries while wading through the "toxic soup" in search of survivors and victims, and was awarded nearly \$650,000 for his injuries. But there is little evidence Copp performed real rescue work, and it is doubtful that he deserves compensation.

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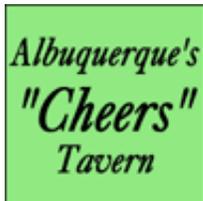
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Doug Copp sat on a ledge outside the ground zero perimeter on Sept. 13, 2001, after he talked his way past the first police barrier. The East Mountains resident had arrived in Manhattan from New Mexico hours earlier and maintained there were between 400 and 500 people still trapped alive at the World Trade Center.

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Sunday, July 11, 2004

New Mexican's Claims of Ground Zero Rescue Work Called Into Question

A 9/11 Phony— Part one in a four-day series

Self-proclaimed rescue guru Doug Copp's mission to ground zero was considered so important that he had clearance to be flown to New York even though all civilian air traffic in the United States had been grounded. Once there, he says he assumed a pivotal role and sustained devastating injuries while wading through the "toxic soup" in search of survivors and victims, and was awarded nearly \$650,000 for his injuries. But there is little evidence Copp performed real rescue work, and it is doubtful that he deserves compensation.

See column at right for links to all stories in this series

By [Leslie Linthicum](#)

Journal Staff Writer

Doug Copp made his case to the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund last fall with a story that stood out even among the incredible tales of bravery and loss that are the daily bread of a board assigned to compensate victims of the nation's worst terrorist attack.

As the most experienced rescuer in the world, equipped with the only device that could detect the scent of decaying flesh, Copp said, he mobilized a search and rescue team from his home in the East Mountains after the World Trade Center buildings were hit.



Doug Copp

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He said he flew to New York the next day and undertook the most dangerous work—searching the deepest underground cavities of the rubble.

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"For six days, Mr. Copp waded in a toxic soup, breathed toxic air, and had toxins smeared on his body surface," a report by one of his doctors said. "It is unlikely that anyone has ever in human history been exposed to as concentrated or complex a mixture of dangerous chemicals."

Copp's claim to the victim compensation fund said he returned to New Mexico two weeks later and was never the same.

Over the next months, Copp said, his health deteriorated until he could walk no more than a block without resting. His list of 41 medical problems included chest pain, coughing, blurred vision, dementia and a fractured spine.

Kenneth Feinberg, the special master of the fund, heard Copp's case for two hours in Washington, D. C. Then he sent Copp a check for \$649,885, tax free.

That might have been the end of the story except for two things.

Copp is not satisfied with the amount of money. He says he will die if he doesn't get at least \$1 million more for medical treatments.

And there is substantial evidence that Copp's claims of heroism and life-threatening injuries regarding 9/11 are not true. An Albuquerque Journal investigation also found a nearly 20-year history of exaggeration, self-promotion, freeloading and very little evidence of real rescue work.

Copp on various occasions has bartered tales of bravado and heroism for free airline flights, hotel rooms and donations— all in the name of helping innocent disaster victims and saving lives.

One former high-ranking federal disaster official says Copp's modus operandi is to hang around rescue sites and take pictures, then say he played a crucial role.

The Journal's investigation found that Copp's experience in New York generally fit that description.

New York Fire Department Chief John Norman was in charge

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of the massive rescue and recovery effort at ground zero. He said Copp had no authority to be at the site and played no legitimate role in the search and rescue.

Norman said Copp's claim to have been the first to search collapsed subway tunnels and only one of four people to go underground is "a fraud."

Had he known Copp was on the site, the chief said, he probably would have had him arrested.

Chase Sargent, a night operations chief for the Federal Emergency Management Agency, said he ordered Copp off the World Trade Center site. Sargent called Copp a phony, and claims by Copp's rescue organization "a bag of lies."

Despite claims to the commission that he spent "a week several floors below ground zero," Copp now concedes he went underground at ground zero just six times for a total of eight to ten hours.

But one of Copp's former colleagues said Copp spent only a few hours at the World Trade Center site in the two weeks he was in New York. According to the diary of Stephen Lentz, each time Copp and Lentz ventured to ground zero, Copp obtained videotape, which he sold to a television news show.

Lentz said Copp visited the set of "Inside Edition" twice and passed much of his time in a nice Times Square hotel, on the phone trying to "drum up publicity for himself" or drinking from the mini bar.

Copp claimed his death-detecting machine helped him recover 40 bodies. In fact, there is general consensus that it didn't work.

Copp's medical claim relied heavily on a report by Dr. Timothy Smith, a California anti-aging specialist.

Smith said Copp's immune system is seriously compromised in ways that affect his breathing and thinking. He said Copp's exposure to molds and toxins have caused autoimmune responses that bring on shortness of breath and swelling of the brain.

But two doctors who reviewed Copp's medical records for the Journal said they do not show Copp was seriously injured or completely disabled.

A pulmonary specialist said the records submitted to the fund show the most serious ailment Copp suffers from is a mild lung restriction. An internist said the records show Copp has mild asthma, is overweight and is clearly depressed.

'A medical miracle'

Copp is a bombastic 52-year-old Canada native with a flair for dramatic exaggeration. He frequently talks about his accolades, which he says include 650 pages of diplomatic papers and thank-

you letters and hundreds of hours of video of his rescue missions.

Copp says that lately he's been on the road in his RV.

In wide-ranging phone conversations from various locations on the road, Copp has talked about his health, his heroism and how he hasn't gotten a fair shake. He often rails against Feinberg, head of the compensation fund.

"I'm a medical miracle," Copp said in a phone call from somewhere in Texas in April.

He said his doctor told him that never in history has there been anyone with this concentration of toxins in their system.

"I'm literally trying to stay alive," Copp said in the telephone interview. "I haven't had a single day that hasn't been insufferable pain."

When Copp called two weeks later from a fishing village in Canada, he said Feinberg is "a rat. He's just a plain, son-of-a-bitch rotten rat. He's not doing his job because Congress put the money there to help people like me so we wouldn't be dying in the street."

In another phone call, Copp said, "He told me I was a hero and sentenced me to death."

New Mexicans who traveled to New York with Copp on Sept. 13, 2001, said they were astonished by the claims Copp made to the compensation fund and by his award.

"My understanding of that fund was that it was for the victims and bona fide rescue people," said Eric Wade, a writer and filmmaker who had known Copp only a short time when he signed on as a member of Copp's team. "I'm mortified. I'm horrified that he even made a claim."

Mike Holley, a former North Valley regional chief of the Bernalillo County Fire Department who flew to New York with Copp, said he spent hours crawling through crevasses and saw Copp only twice at ground zero— once when they arrived and again when Copp returned to the underground subway station because his video camera battery had run out and he wanted more footage.

"I went down (underground) and I spent a lot more time than he did," Holley said. "Am I dying? I refuse to take money from the families of the victims."

John Grace, an Albuquerque videographer who also went to New York with Copp, said Copp fits neither of the categories the fund was designed to repay.

"Doug Copp," he said, "is neither a hero nor a victim."

Copp flew to New York on a corporate jet owned by the Journal Publishing Co. and piloted by publisher T.H. Lang with FAA

clearance obtained by the office of Rep. Heather Wilson, R-N.M. Lang said he agreed to take Copp to New York because Copp came recommended as a bona fide rescuer.

He said he didn't realize until he was on the ground in New York that Copp's team consisted of a screenplay writer, a film producer, a cameraman and an adventurer. None had any rescue experience.

On the ride toward the smoldering ruin where thousands of people were still missing and presumed dead, Lang said Copp was telling gruesome tales and laughing. "It was all juvenile, unprofessional," Lang said. "I thought, 'This is bogus.' "

'Pumped up' truth

Lentz, a state of New Mexico archaeologist who was writing a screenplay about Copp's life and came along on the trip, wrote an affidavit about Copp's work at ground zero at Copp's request.

That affidavit, signed by Lentz in his capacity with the state Office of Cultural Affairs, was part of Copp's claim to prove he was legitimately at the site and was injured. It was the only independent, firsthand evidence, besides Copp's own assertions and his video, of his work in New York.

Today, Lentz says he did not lie in the affidavit but says he "pumped up" Copp's role because he felt badly that Copp said he was ill and in debt.

"I painted a rosier picture of Doug than maybe was the truth," he said. "It is a little pumped up because I wanted to help him with his bills."

Lentz's affidavit said "... numerous casualties, including NYC firemen, rescue workers, EMTs and policemen were located as a direct result of Doug Copp's efforts and equipment."

But Lentz says today that Copp located no bodies that he knew of, although he believes Copp's equipment was used by others who found corpses.

The affidavit also said, "Several stories below ground level, we waded through water, jet fuel and effluents from ruptured sewage pipes and the Hudson River."

Lentz says today that he and others walked through that muck, but Copp was not with him. He also said he saw Copp smear soot on his face to appear he had been in more dangerous circumstances.

In terms of rescue work, Lentz said, "I gotta tell you, he didn't do anything like that."

"He never lifted a bucket," Lentz said. "He didn't do anything."

Lentz said in his affidavit that Copp slipped and fell in the subway area on Sept. 18. The September 11th fund initially

refused Copp's claim based on a back injury because it would have had to occur by Sept. 15 to qualify for the fund.

Lentz said Copp asked him to change the date on the affidavit to reflect that the fall occurred earlier. Lentz said he refused and had nothing more to do with Copp.

Copp's initial claim included lung and other injuries, and his subsequent communications with the fund centered on those. Lentz said today he regrets that anything he wrote could have given the impression Copp did legitimate work at ground zero.

"I would never sign an affidavit saying he was the hero of 9/11," Lentz said. "I think basically he was a fraud and a bombast."

In earlier interviews, Lentz was more supportive of Copp and of the affidavit.

He said telling the full story now, "is kind of liberating for me because I've kept this to myself for so long."

Five-hour defense

Copp, when confronted with the accounts of his colleagues and other evidence that dispute his version of events, talked for five hours one Saturday in Albuquerque.

He was alternately angry, boastful and forlorn.

"So now is this going to come out that there's nothing wrong with me? That I'm a total fraud? That it's bogus? That I went there drinking and sitting in the hotel and wiping dirt on my face and now there's nothing really wrong with me?" Copp said.

"That would be . . . the most immoral thing I have ever heard of in all of my years of going and seeing death squads and all sorts of other things. That would be the most immoral, improper thing that I have ever heard of."

Copp provided scant evidence of what he did in New York to respond to assertions that he did nothing. But he attacked at length people who have questioned his claim. Copp said:

- Team members are lying because they are embarrassed about their own actions at ground zero or because they want to steal his body-finding machine technology.
- FEMA officials are lying about him because they are jealous of his TV time.
- The New York Fire Department is lying about him to cover up its cowardice in failing to search for victims.
- Lang is pursuing a vendetta against him because he wouldn't take Lang underground.

When he was asked by the Journal for the name of someone he worked with at ground zero who could vouch for him, Copp offered Ron Hadani, an electrical engineer from New Jersey.

When reached by phone, Hadani described the time he spent with Copp in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 as strange.

Hadani, who went to New York to lend a hand, said he ran into Copp at the Jacob Javits Center and Copp took him to ground zero twice.

Hadani said the area they were exploring was dirty and dangerous, but that Copp did not appear to be looking for victims. Copp had a video camera along, Hadani said.

"I don't know if it was picture taking, but if you want my opinion it wasn't rescue," Hadani said.

Hadani said Copp took a lot of video and found no survivors or victims in their time together.

"And then when FEMA threw us out, I realized the whole thing was fake," he said.

\$6.5 billion payout

Congress created the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund to avoid an anticipated onslaught of lawsuits against the airlines whose planes were hijacked and the New York Port Authority, which owned the World Trade Center.

The fund has compensated families of people who died in the four crashed airplanes, on the ground at the Pentagon and at the World Trade Center as long as they agreed not to sue.

The fund also has compensated families of rescue personnel killed in the initial response and rescuers who were injured in the aftermath.

The fund, which ended its operation last month, was essentially unlimited by Congress. And Feinberg, a veteran trial lawyer, was given leeway in deciding who got paid and how much. Awards have ranged from \$500 to \$8.6 million. Feinberg said the fund will have paid out about \$6.5 billion.

There are four tests an applicant claiming to be a rescuer must have met to be considered for compensation according to the guidelines set by Congress.

- The rescuer had to have been injured at the site within 96 hours of the planes hitting the World Trade Center buildings, or by about 9 a.m. on Sept. 15.
- The rescuer had to provide proof of physical injury.
- The rescuer had to seek medical treatment within three days of the injury (although Feinberg could make exceptions to that time restriction).
- The rescuer required hospitalization or could show the injury caused partial or total physical disability, incapacity or disfigurement.

Copp told the fund he went to New York on Sept. 12, but didn't

even arrive at a New Jersey airport until the afternoon of Sept. 13. He was escorted out of the rescue coordination command center when he went there to get credentials and got to the World Trade Center site several hours later by talking a street cop into taking him in.

His lawyer, Charles K. Purcell of Albuquerque, said in a letter summarizing his claim that Copp "quickly assumed primary responsibility for exploring the subterranean areas of ground zero. Day and night Doug searched for survivors in a place where day and night were indistinguishable < in underground ruins where very few others dared to go."

A videotape made by the film crew Copp brought along shows Copp looking for bodies with his casualty-locating machine and going into a ramp leading to a collapsed parking garage that first night.

The tape shows Copp asking for a dust mask and coughing twice in the underground parking area and commenting "there's a lot of dust in the air."

However, Copp said in an interview in April that the air there was clean.

The videotape also shows Copp interacting that night with a New York Police Department supervisor who instructed him several times to leave the site and check in at the command post before returning.

Copp did neither but motioned for his cameraman to follow and keep filming.

According to team members, Copp was only at the site a few hours and then returned to the Marriott Marquis hotel in Times Square where he was staying for free.

The site was closed for most of Sept. 14 because of President Bush's visit. Copp spent Sept. 14 making telephone calls to peddle the videotape and arranging an interview with "Inside Edition," according to Mike Miller, a film producer who accompanied Copp on the trip.

Copp also took his casualty-locating machine to the fire station on Roosevelt Island in the East River and team members attempted to demonstrate its use so they could get permission to return to ground zero, where restrictions had become tighter after the president's visit.

Grace and Wade said the machine failed in that demonstration.

By the morning of Sept. 15, when the fund's timetable for injuries ended, Copp had been underground only once, according to Lentz, and had been above ground at ground zero only for a few

hours.

Wade, who was in New York with Copp during the time period that coincides with the Sept. 11 fund's requirements for rescue work, said Copp spent most of that time at the Marriott Marquis.

"He was at the hotel and uptown and whereabouts unknown," Wade said. "At the hotel 16 hours a day at least. He was at the hotel when we left and when we got back." (Bald-faced liar'

Copp says he made two trips to the parking garage and four to the subway area, each time looking for bodies. He said the subway area was where he encountered thick smoke, dripping jet fuel and other liquid that made him sick.

Lentz said he kept a diary of the trip. He said it shows that Copp's first trip into the subway area occurred sometime around midnight on Sept. 16 < which would have been outside the fund's time frame for injury.

That excursion was also videotaped and the video sold to "Inside Edition."

Copp says a message spray-painted on the entrance to the subway underground that said, "DO NOT ENTER < UNSTABLE" is evidence the area had not been searched and proves he was brave enough to go where others would not.

But FDNY Chief Norman said he had gone with crews into the subway stations late on Sept. 11, made the determination that no one had been crushed or trapped and had the areas marked "cleared." Norman said the claim that Copp had authority to clear the underground is untrue.

"That's an absolute fraud," Norman said. "I was the chief in charge of the site. I didn't authorize him to do anything." Norman bristles at Copp's assertion that he searched for survivors or bodies where FDNY or FEMA wouldn't.

"I'll call him a bald-faced liar to his face," Norman said. "That site was thoroughly searched, both primary and secondary searches, before any area was marked off limits. We had people going places and doing things that I never would have permitted in any other circumstance because we had over 300 of our brothers among the thousands missing."

Lentz said Copp's purpose in going into the subway the second time on Sept. 18 was to get more videotape. TV had been stymied by media restrictions and was hungry for more images from ground zero.

Lentz videotaped Copp's second trip to the subway station and said he watched Copp smear soot on his face to appear he had been in a dangerous place.

Copp maintains he did not put soot on his face. He said Lentz

must have been confusing him with someone else. When he was told Lentz was sure it was Copp who was involved, Copp said, "That is such an outrageous lie. My God, that breaks my heart to hear that."

Later in the interview Copp said, "I can tell you right now, telling me I put black on my face < I'd rather someone put a bullet hole in me."

A FEMA supervisor said he confronted Copp outside the subway entrance that night and had him removed by police. Copp says FEMA did not have him removed < he was leaving on his own < and that they didn't want him there because he was showing them up.

"They got mad as bloody hell that we went in there, mad as bloody hell, and they came to me and they confronted me with it," Copp said.

Lentz said he stopped working with Copp after that excursion because he thought their purpose at the site should be to help, not to make money off videotapes.

"There wasn't much of an effort to do anything," Lentz said. "It was me training the camera on him. It was really posing for the camera."

The soot-smearred Copp posed for a still photograph when the team emerged from the subway that night, Lentz said.

Copp attached that photo to his cover letter to Feinberg with his claim to the fund. He pointed out, "I am the one with the Black Face."

Who's Who

JOHN NORMAN: Chief of special operations for the New York Fire Department.

Norman was in charge of the World Trade Center rescue and recovery operation, and he called Doug Copp's claim to have cleared the cavities underneath the twin towers "a fraud."

He said Copp was at the site with no authority and bristles at Copp's boast that he searched areas FDNY was afraid to enter.

"We had people going places and doing things that I never would have permitted in any other circumstance because we had over 300 of our brothers among the thousands missing," Norman said.

CHASE SARGENT: A Virginia Beach, Va., fire battalion chief and member of a FEMA task force.

Sargent was one of the night operations chiefs at the World Trade Center. He said he found Copp on the site without credentials and had him escorted off.

Sargent said he knew Copp by reputation— as someone who shows up at rescue sites without authorization, takes video and gets on TV.

"Anybody who's legitimate in this business knows who this knucklehead is," Sargent said.

STEPHEN LENTZ: Archaeologist for the state of New Mexico.

Lentz had met Copp weeks earlier and had decided he would write a book about Copp's adventures. Copp persuaded him that writing a screenplay for a movie about him would be a better idea.

After another team member declined to take the camera underground, Lentz became the photographer and spent the next few days with Copp.

Lentz wrote an affidavit in support of Copp's claim to the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund, but now says he "pumped up" Copp's role because he felt sorry for him.

"I would never sign an affidavit saying he was the hero of 9/11," Lentz said. "I think basically he was a fraud and a bombast."

RON HADANI: A New Jersey man who went to New York in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 looking to lend a hand. Copp gave the Journal Hadani's name and said he could vouch for Copp's work in New York. Hadani said he ran into Copp at the Jacob Javits Center and Copp took him to ground zero.

"The whole thing was kind of weird," Hadani said. "We were wandering around there for a few days."

Hadani said he and Copp were thrown off by FEMA officials. "I can tell you," Hadani said, "that it was not serious rescue work."

When he found out Copp received money from the victims fund, Hadani got angry.

"That's outrageous," he said. "It's immoral."

Leslie Linthicum can be reached by e-mail at llinthicum@abqjournal.com.



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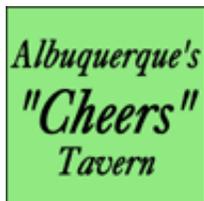
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Sunday, July 11, 2004

Appeals to 9/11 Fund Had Lawmakers' Help

Earlier this year, Doug Copp was awarded \$649,000, tax free, from the fund set up to compensate victims of 9/11. He says it's not enough. But it's doubtful he deserves anything. A Journal investigation found no evidence Copp did real rescue work in New York. Read the Journal's full four-day series [here](#).

By [Leslie Linthicum](#)

Journal Staff Writer

Doug Copp's appeal to the 9/11 fund came with strong letters from Rep. Tom Udall, D-N.M.

Rep. Heather Wilson, R-N.M., and Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., also wrote on Copp's behalf.

Udall, the Democrat who represents New Mexico's 3rd Congressional District, lobbied strongly on Copp's behalf. He wrote four letters to the commission describing Copp's dedication as a rescuer and the extent of Copp's injuries.

Copp met Udall at a town hall meeting in Edgewood, near where Copp lived in a rented house off Frost Road, and told a Udall staffer of his work in New York, his litany of injuries and his frustration with getting redress from the victim fund.

When the fund initially doubted Copp worked at the World Trade Center site and then told Copp it would give him \$284,436, Udall helped him appeal for more money.

"I ask that Doug be adequately compensated for the life-changing injuries that he suffered during the course of his most courageous work at Ground

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Zero," Udall wrote in a letter to Kenneth Feinberg, who approved Copp's monetary award. "I remind you that Congress' creation of the Victim Compensation Fund provided our nation with the opportunity to fairly compensate the bravest of individuals such as Doug, who placed themselves in harm's way time and time again to rescue and save the lives of others."

Udall has now asked the Department of Justice to investigate Copp's claim.

"If these allegations are confirmed, they are deeply troubling," Udall said. "It would seem that a number of well-intentioned New Mexicans were ensnared in a web of deception."

Charles K. Purcell, an attorney with the Rodey law firm, took over Copp's case before the fund had decided Copp qualified for compensation but after the evidence on the qualification issue had been submitted.

Purcell said his role was limited to establishing the evidence of Copp's damages and submitting that evidence to the fund, appealing the fund's preliminary award and representing Copp at the hearing.

"I fully believed that Doug had been present at ground zero, had been performing rescue work there and had been seriously injured in the process— all within the time frame described by the fund's regulations," Purcell said. "I never would have represented him otherwise. I'm not sure what to make of the information turned up by the Journal's investigation but I want to take a very hard look at it before concluding Congressman Udall, the fund and I were all mistaken."

A spokesman for Wilson, who was instrumental in securing flight clearance for Copp's trip to New York, said Wilson helps thousands of New Mexicans each year.

"Most people seek assistance in good faith and the congresswoman helps them in good faith," he said. "To learn otherwise in this instance is disappointing, but does not change Congresswoman Wilson's commitment to help people in New Mexico."

Bingaman said helping constituents is an important part of his job and that he counts on them to tell the truth.

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"It is only on rare occasions that a constituent approaches my office with insincere motives, and it is difficult if not impossible for us to know in advance when this has been the case," Bingaman said. "It is very unfortunate when that happens because it takes time and effort away from my ability to work on behalf of New Mexicans with real concerns."

Gov. Bill Richardson took a pass on helping Copp. His office listened to Copp's complaints and decided against intervening, Richardson spokesman Gilbert Gallegos said. That has not stopped Copp from saying Richardson was acting on his behalf.

Journal publisher T.H. Lang, who flew Copp to New York, said he was shocked to learn Copp had been compensated as a first responder.

"I didn't see or hear anything that led me to believe he did any kind of real rescue work or was doing anything other than making a movie," Lang said.

Feinberg said he is bound by confidentiality rules from speaking about Copp's claim.

Leslie Linthicum can be reached by e-mail at llinthicum@abqjournal.com.



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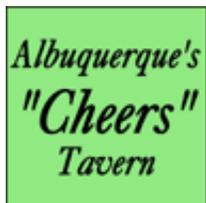
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Sunday, July 11, 2004

Justice Dept. Inquiry Requested by Udall

Earlier this year, Doug Copp was awarded \$649,000, tax free, from the fund set up to compensate victims of 9/11. He says it's not enough. But it's doubtful he deserves anything. A Journal investigation found no evidence Copp did real rescue work in New York. Read the Journal's full four-day series [here](#).

By [Leslie Linthicum](#)
Journal Staff Writer

Rep. Tom Udall, D-N.M., whose office lobbied the 9/11 fund on Doug Copp's behalf, made this statement:

Helping constituents who are encountering difficulties with federal agencies is one of the most important responsibilities I have as one of New Mexico's U.S. Representatives. As a member of Congress, I cannot approve a claim or appeal, or compel any agency to act in favor of our constituents. Those types of decisions are made by the federal agency involved based on the facts of the case. At the same time, we have to take our constituents at their word. Surely there are bogus claims made, but the majority of citizens who turn to their elected officials are decent and hardworking people looking for help. If these allegations are confirmed, they are deeply troubling. It would seem that a number of well-intentioned New Mexicans were ensnared in a web of deception.

While the Department of Justice undoubtedly had a difficult task in

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administering the Sept. 11 Victim Compensation Fund, if these allegations are proven, there is absolutely no excuse for Fund administrators not verifying a claim. I am concerned that a fraudulent claim may have been processed and paid. Considering some claims were rejected for lack of proof, something seems to be terribly wrong if compensation was wrongly awarded in this case.

I wrote a letter to the Department of Justice asking them to launch an investigation into this matter as soon as I was made aware of the discrepancies. The Department of Justice has a moral and legal responsibility to get to the bottom of this complex case, and I look forward to their response.



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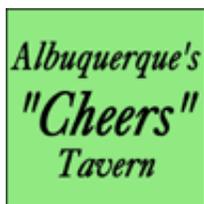
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Monday, July 12, 2004

'Bombero' Arrives at Ground Zero

A 9/11 PHONY— Part two in a four-day series

Doug Copp was awarded \$649,000, tax free, from the fund set up to compensate victims of 9/11. He says it's not enough. But it's doubtful he deserves anything. A Journal investigation found little evidence that Copp did real rescue work in New York. His forays into the rubble were to shoot video, some of which he tried to sell. His claim of seeking medical care within the time frame appears false. All typical of Copp's years as a self-proclaimed rescue guru.

See column at right for links to all stories in this series

By [Leslie Linthicum](#)

Journal Staff Writer

I flew from Albuquerque to New York with Doug Copp and four of his team members early Sept. 13, 2001, on the jet owned by the Journal Publishing Co. and piloted by publisher T.H. Lang.

It was the only plane in the sky that morning. When private and commercial aircraft all over the nation had been grounded as a precaution against hijacking, the Federal Aviation Administration had authorized this flight because it would bring a supposedly unique rescue crew to the World Trade Center.

On the approach to the New York area, some other aircraft finally joined us—military fighter jets with orders to shoot down



Doug Copp

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unauthorized airplanes.

It was an unsettling sight. And things would soon get stranger.

The series you are reading is about a trail of misinformation and exaggeration by Doug Copp and how he ended up taking in a lot of well-meaning people during a time of national grief.

The list includes the Journal, because we delivered him to New York.

It all started on Sept. 11, 2001, not long after the World Trade Center towers collapsed.

Copp and a member of his hastily organized team went to the Albuquerque office of Rep. Heather Wilson, R-N.M., and asked a staffer for help in obtaining permission to fly to New York. Wilson was in Washington, D.C., but a staffer called the FAA and made the agency aware of the request.

Meanwhile, Albuquerque urban search and rescue veteran Mike Holley called Lang and asked if he would be willing to fly to New York if a team could get clearance to go.

It was not unusual for Lang to lend the plane for humanitarian missions. In fact, Lang had used the publishing company's jet to ferry Holley and other search and rescue people in the aftermath of the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City in 1995.

Holley said he agreed to go to New York with Copp if flight arrangements could be made because Copp's credentials sounded legitimate— even though Copp had been drinking when Holley showed up at his house in the East Mountains on Sept. 11— the first time the two had met— and he seemed preoccupied with photography.

The call from Wilson's office to the FAA resulted in flight clearance on Sept. 12.

As dawn was breaking on Sept. 13, Copp arrived at the private aviation terminal at the Albuquerque Sunport. He was in an old Cadillac, wearing shorts and white knee socks.

He immediately started talking.

"I know how to take that whole big pile of rubble apart real fast without anybody getting hurt doing it," Copp announced on the tarmac as the flight team prepared for takeoff. "That's what I know how to do best."

GROUND ZERO

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He had six people with him for the flight— his four crew members and a reporter and photographer from a local TV station, a duo who he said were his "documentarians" for the trip.

Two too many

Lang, who had talked to Copp by telephone the day before, had told him he could bring only four rescue people and very little equipment because of weight restrictions on the flight. When Copp showed up with six people, Lang refused to take the TV crew.

"Four rescue people," Lang said. "That was the deal."

Copp and his four team members made the trip.

Also on board were Journal photographer Mike Stewart, Holley and me.

Holley was going to New York to do what he lives to do, crawl around in damaged buildings trying to find the living and the dead.

Lang, in addition to piloting the aircraft, was along to help Holley or other rescuers in any way he could.

Stewart and I were there to do what journalists do in trying times— document the tragedy and the work of the men and women who at that point were still hoping to save people.

Lang had never met Copp or any of his team before the flight, and he had spoken to Copp only once, to make flight arrangements.

"I remember being struck when I got off the phone with him that he sounded odd," Lang recalled. "A lot of jibber jabber."

No one among Copp's crew, we found out later, really knew him either. None of them had known Copp for more than a couple of months. None was an experienced rescuer.

One was a video producer. One was a camera operator. One was a filmmaker. Those three were also interested in the device Copp said he had invented, the "Copp Casualty Locator."

The fourth was an archaeologist who intended to write a screenplay about Copp's adventures.

All would drop away from Copp over the next few weeks, either disappointed or embarrassed by their association with him. None has anything to do with him today.

John Grace, the videographer, taped nearly all of that first day's events and shared the tape with the Journal, offering a record of Copp's approach to the monumental disaster.

Despite the early hour, Copp talked incessantly on the flight— mostly about himself and his accomplishments.

"I've been in more than 2,000 seriously life-threatening circumstances. I've crawled in 892 collapsed buildings. I could

have a different nightmare every night for the entire rest of my entire life," Copp said. "... I'm not as crazy or loco or nutty as you might expect."

With a trace of a Canadian accent, he talked about sifting through rubble in Peru, Mexico, El Salvador and Venezuela. He said he had discovered a unique survival technique. And he said by hollering he had saved 40 lives.

He said bulky rescue equipment was dangerous, and that he would "go in naked" if he could.

'They're dead for a reason'

Oddly, Copp didn't mention the one high-profile international rescue that a former federal rescue official says Copp seems to have played a part in— pulling a little girl out of a building flattened by an earthquake in Turkey in 1999.

That could be because the French team that directed that rescue says the only American there— a heavy guy trailed by a cameraman— showed up late, got in the way and tried to order everybody around.

About New York, Copp said his experience with collapsed structures told him that 400 to 500 people would be trapped alive.

And he said everything would be in better hands once he arrived.

"For me this disaster really boils down to an extremely complex, sophisticated, gigantic pile of rubble with lots of live people inside that I'm sure is freaking out and blowing the minds of all the structural engineers, architects and rescue people and fire chiefs and everybody who might be associated with it," Copp said.

"For me, it will actually be an enjoyable experience. For me it's like playing a big chess game. It's what I do and it's a great intellectual challenge and it's one that I will be successful at."

He also said, "This is something that I can actually do in my sleep. It's very easy for me."

Copp held court in the rear seats of the plane, lecturing his "team" about the work ahead, reminding them that "things fall down, not up" and to give his instructions more weight than the Ten Commandments.

And he had words about the New York rescue personnel who had responded to the disaster in the first minutes.

"We're going to a place where there's already 500 emergency people dead," Copp said. "They're dead for a reason. They didn't know what they were doing. They made a mistake."

After listening to Copp for a while, Holley covered his head with

his jacket and tried to sleep. Lang, who had turned the controls over to a co-pilot and walked to the back of the plane to listen, rolled his eyes and returned to the cockpit. Eventually, I put away my notebook and picked up the newspaper.

The videotape shows Copp kept talking.

"New York City has rats, lots of rats ... And I'll tell you the word's gone out. The word's gone out for one hundred miles: 'We got 3-1/2 million pounds of meat here, boys, and we can go in and get it.' You got rats coming from everywhere."

When we landed in New Jersey and drove into Manhattan, the nation's deadliest disaster lay a few miles to the south beneath a plume of gray smoke. At that point, it was a little more than 48 hours old and there was still hope of finding people alive in the rubble.

But Copp's first stop was the Marriott Marquis hotel in Times Square, where he identified himself as chief of the American Rescue Team International, the world's most experienced rescue team.

He asked for and received free rooms.

We paid for ours.

White House call

Copp had put on a red jump suit at the airport that said "BOMBERO" (fireman in Spanish) in large letters on the back. He got out a laptop and a laminating machine and made American Rescue Team International badges for the operation.

From there we went with him to the Jacob Javits Center, the command post for the rescue efforts. Copp had said we would be at the site within minutes because he had advance clearance from Andrew Card, President George W. Bush's chief of staff.

Holley went inside with Copp and listened as Copp told the people in charge that Card would be calling them to vouch for him.

According to Holley, Copp made numerous calls on his cell phone and told command center officers about his international experience.

He pointed at the phone on the command center desk and said Card would call at any minute. Then he gave the command personnel a phone number and told them to call.

Ray Lynch was the deputy commissioner of the New York City Mayor's Office of Emergency Management and in charge of the command post. He took the phone number from Copp and dialed it. The White House answered and, Lynch said, "I almost fell off my chair."

But no one at the number could vouch for Copp. Lynch

eventually reached a woman who said she spoke on behalf of Card and that Copp had no authority from the White House.

Lynch, who has since retired, said he instructed New York State Police officers to escort Copp out of the building.

In Copp's memory of the incident, it was the officials in the command center who acted unreasonably.

Copp cooled his heels on the street, eating a bowl of pasta salad from the groaning buffet tables set up for rescue people by concerned New Yorkers.

Copp then approached a police officer who was manning a roadblock and told him that cops were dying under the rubble at the World Trade Center site and that he could find them— if the bureaucracy would loosen up and let him in.

The officer flagged down a police cruiser and told the driver to escort Copp to the site. We all hopped into the van and rode along. As night darkened, we were walking down the deserted West Side Highway toward ground zero.

Lang, who had talked to the rest of the team members and found out they were movie makers, not search and rescue experts, confronted Copp and told him he had misled Lang and Heather Wilson. He told Copp to stay away from him, Holley, me, and Stewart.

"I thought if we were going to be able to do anything, any journalism, we weren't going to be able to do it with this red-suited buffoon," Lang said. "I was upset that the Journal might be involved in fraudulent activity. I thought he was going to get us arrested."

Copp, he said, sat down on a ledge and cried.

Machine alert

As Copp recalls the event, he told Lang that he would not take him underground because he was there to do serious work.

As we walked toward ground zero, Copp followed. We rounded the corner of a building and there it was, a huge pile of rubble and litter, pierced by huge steel splinters and swarming with hundreds of men in dusty boots and yellow bunker coats. They were working amid ash and twisted steel as if every second mattered.

We watched Copp inch along the edge of the rubble of what would become popularly known as ground zero. Eric Wade, one of Copp's team members, held the casualty locating machine and Copp waved its detection wand over the dusty surface.

The machine didn't go off. Then it did go off.

Copp directed NYPD officers who had gathered around his machine to dig, saying they would find what the machine was

pointing to.

"You just scoop it out, if there's something in there the machine will say it is. It's that simple," Copp told them as they stared hopefully at the ground.

They did dig, and the videotape shows that everything they scooped up was shoveled into buckets. The videotape also shows buckets being passed along a line and dumped on a debris pile.

In Copp's application to the victim compensation fund, he included a snippet of that video and in a letter described it this way: "You can see my machine beeping and flashing as it finds parts of human brains, mixed with the rubble (after the bodies had splattered upon impact on West Street)."

However, later in the video, Copp said "... but as it turned out it was just blood in the dirt."

Copp said in his claim to the fund that he recovered 40 bodies, an assertion that both the New York Fire Department and the New York Police Department dismissed.

John Norman, FDNY's rescue chief, said, "If we had one person recover 40 bodies, I think I would have known about it."

NYPD spokesman Walter Burnes said Copp's machine would have been welcomed enthusiastically had it worked.

"If this guy had come with a device that was going to locate bodies, we would have used it and we would have given him credit for it," Burnes said.

"We recognized lots and lots of people who helped. We gave credit to people who brought milk and juice to the site."

Because Lang and Holley didn't want to be associated with Copp, they went off to volunteer on one of the hundreds of crews scrambling around the site, pulling steel and concrete from enormous piles, passing along buckets filled with debris, hoping to find someone alive or to at least recover the bodies of those who had died.

Stewart and I spent the night photographing and interviewing firefighters, iron workers and other volunteers as their hope for survivors turned into a grim realization that their task would be only to recover the dead.

On the air

Copp moved on.

The videotape shows him trying to negotiate his way across the rubble pile to a parking garage on the site's perimeter and being stopped by a NYPD supervisor. The supervisor told him to leave the site and check in for clearance at the incident command post, or CP.

Copp told the officer he must be allowed to pass because his experience tells him victims are trapped in the garage.

"I've been to more than 100 disasters ... and I'm telling you that's where they're live," he said.

"You're not going anywhere until you check in at the CP," the officer said.

Instead, Copp skirted the site and got to the parking garage, making sure the camera followed. By this point, Copp team member Stephen Lentz, a Santa Fe archaeologist, was carrying the video camera. Two other men they had met at the site were with them.

The four walked down a ramp until they got to a collapsed section. Copp called out for survivors and then sent the other two men to the surface to find a map of the garage.

As soon as the men left, Copp lay on his side in a tight spot and said, "Just do a shot with me."

With the camera on, he announced that he had added a new building to the previous inventory of 892 collapsed buildings he said he had been in.

"OK. Here's building 893, the World Trade Center in New York," Copp said to the camera. "I'm in the ramp going down to the parking garage. We're in quite deep. There's a lot of dust in the air. ... This is inside the ramp, deep inside the World Trade Center."

Then Copp turned the camera on Lentz.

"So what do you think being inside your first collapsed building, thousands of people dead?" Copp asked him. "Pull your mask down so we can see what you look like."

Copp laughed and said Lentz had started his career in collapsed buildings with a bang.

About three hours after they arrived at ground zero, Holley called one of Copp's team members on his cell phone because some of Holley's equipment was in Copp's van.

Copp was no longer at the site, Holley was told. He had taken the video he made inside the parking garage and was on his way uptown to make arrangements to sell the footage.

Copp says he went several days without a meal and got 23 hours of sleep in the entire 14 days he spent in New York. "The first time I went to that hotel, I frigging collapsed and then I went back to work."

But on Sept. 14, Copp was sprawled on his bed at the Marriott Marquis (where his food and drink were being paid for by the management), according to Journal photographer Mike Stewart.

Stewart was staying in a room near Copp's and spent most of Sept. 14 in the hotel editing and transmitting his images.

Mike Miller, a film producer along on the trip with Copp, said he went with Copp to "Inside Edition" that day to sell his footage because Copp wanted to be on the air.

Three days later, "Inside Edition" would lead its broadcast with Copp's footage from that first night and an interview taped in their studios.

"Your first look inside the darkest place on earth," the announcer intoned, "crawling through hell deep in the wreckage on hands and knees, searching for someone alive."

By the time Lang flew back to Albuquerque on Sept. 15, he had told Copp's team they were not welcome on the plane. Three team members returned to Albuquerque on commercial flights.

Lentz stayed on and accompanied Copp on two forays into the subway underground, each time carrying the video camera for Copp. After five days, he also split off from Copp and signed on with a rescue crew.

"He was much more a Barnum and Bailey promoter than in the fray," Lentz said. "He found a couple of areas that had already been cleared and were safe and he used them as sets."

Lentz said his breaking point came when Copp blackened his face by rubbing soot on it, so he would look like he had been in a dangerous place.

On that same underground trip, according to Lentz, Copp drank liquor from an abandoned bar area in the train station mall. "He said we should toast," Lentz said.

Lang's last glimpse of Copp came when Lang returned to the hotel early in the morning after working all night at the site.

Copp was in the lobby, the arms of his red jump suit tied around his neck and the body of the suit draped down his back like a cape.

"He had his arms out, like he was flying around," Lang said, "like Superman."

Who's who— Day Two

JOHN GRACE: Albuquerque videographer who was working with Miller on the Copp documentary.

Grace trained the camera on Copp until Copp went into the parking garage and then he handed it off to another team member.

"I felt like a fraud being there. Here people are trying to save lives and I'm tagging along with someone I'm quickly losing faith in. By the end of the night there was no doubt in my mind that the main motivation was face time on the camera rather than saving

lives.

"T.H. LANG: Publisher of the Albuquerque Journal.

Lang flew Copp and the four people Copp said constituted his rescue team to New York on Sept. 13 on the Journal Publishing Co. corporate jet.

Lang said his doubts about Copp started when he heard Copp's briefing on the plane, in which Copp said he had been in 2,000 life-threatening situations without getting a scratch; said he used his hair follicles as sensors inside a building and repeated that "things fall down, they don't fall up."

"It sounded arrogant, braggadocio. It was astoundingly preposterous," Lang said. "I called Mike Holley (up to the cockpit) and said, 'What have you gotten us into?' "

MIKE MILLER: Albuquerque video producer who was working with Copp on a documentary about his work when 9/11 happened.

Miller made arrangements for the trip to New York and for the sale of videotape of Copp at ground zero.

On Copp's claim to have recovered 40 bodies: "Nonsense. I know nothing about that. No. Time out. I know he spent a lot of time complaining about a lot of things in the hotel room and running around like a chicken with his head cut off."

ERIC WADE: Former stockbroker and filmmaker who had made money by selling an Internet domain name and was interested in the business prospects of Copp's casualty locator.

Wade tested the casualty locator with rotting meat and a human body in a body bag at the site and said it didn't work. He also denied Copp did any rescue or recovery work.

"I was broken hearted. I was disillusioned," Wade said. "I thought I was going out there with a real hero."

MIKE HOLLEY: Electronics manager at Baillio's.

A former North Valley regional chief for the Bernalillo County Fire Department, Holley had experience working in the rubble of the nation's other dreadful disaster, the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City.

Holley was looking for a way to get to New York when he came in contact with Copp and his team. Holley didn't know Copp and said he began to doubt his credentials before the flight to New York.

"What he said funds his team was taking footage and selling it to the highest bidder in the news media. That was a red flag. That's unheard of," Holley said. "In this business it's not hard to tell the real from the fake, and he's fake."

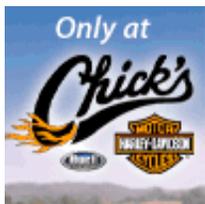
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Monday, July 12, 2004

AG: Fund Raising Violated N.M. Law

Earlier this year, Doug Copp was awarded \$649,000, tax free, from the fund set up to compensate victims of 9/11. He says it's not enough. But it's doubtful he deserves anything. A Journal investigation found no evidence Copp did real rescue work in New York. Read the Journal's full four-day series [here](#).

By [Leslie Linthicum](#)

Journal Staff Writer

Doug Copp's Web site advertises his adventures and points out without much subtlety that he survives on donations.

"THE NEED ... In a word, MONEY, and a lot of it," the Web site says.

But in interviews, Copp denied his American Rescue Team International asks for money.

"I've never asked anybody for a cent," Copp said in April.

In May, Copp said, "Nobody ever did send any money because we never did solicit any funds."

In June, Copp changed the address for mailed contributions from New Mexico to California.

In an interview at that time, he said, "I never collected any money."

A few minutes later, he said, "We received \$238 last year."

Despite what he says, Copp does solicit money and he does receive donations.

A PayPal link to donate to ARTI was on every page of the organization's Web site until they were removed in June. The site also had several pages

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that asked for donations by check or credit card.

ARTI has been in trouble with the state governments of New Mexico and California in recent months in regards to its status as a charitable organization and its solicitation of funds.

In New Mexico, Christine Turner, the registrar of charitable organizations for the New Mexico Attorney General's Office, found American Rescue Team International had solicited money in New Mexico as a nonprofit agency without meeting the proper regulations.

"They are in direct violation of the Charitable Solicitations Act," Turner said in May.

She said American Rescue Team International, of which Copp is executive director, never complied with requirements that it give the state information about its board of directors and documentation that shows how much money it has collected.

Turner said she referred the matter to the internal violations team.

"We just want them to quit asking for money," Turner said.

In early June, the American Rescue Team International changed its Web site to reflect a Post Office box in California for donations and dropped the New Mexico address from the site.

American Team Rescue International is registered as a 501(c)(3) charity with the Internal Revenue Service.

It has been registered in California as a nonprofit, but its status there was delinquent.

Copp received notification from the California secretary of state in April that his nonprofit status was out of compliance and that he would face a minimum penalty of \$800 if he did not produce documentation.

In May, Copp filed the paperwork stating the organization's income for the past five years and was in good standing.

The paperwork shows annual gross receipts ranging from a high of \$14,946 in 2001 to a low of \$1,610 in 2003.

Copp calls his nonprofit problems a "bureaucratic mistake" and blames them on the Journal for inquiring about his nonprofit status.

"It's a hell of a nightmare," he said. "I'm going to have to sort this out and I'm too sick to be doing this."

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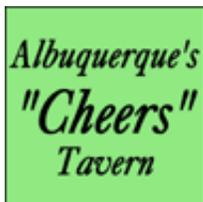
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Monday, July 12, 2004

Journal Jet Trips Not Unusual

Earlier this year, Doug Copp was awarded \$649,000, tax free, from the fund set up to compensate victims of 9/11. He says it's not enough. But it's doubtful he deserves anything. A Journal investigation found no evidence Copp did real rescue work in New York. Read the Journal's full four-day series [here](#).

By [Leslie Linthicum](#)

Journal Staff Writer

It is not unusual for the Journal Publishing Company's corporate jet to fly to natural disasters or major crime scenes for news gathering and/or humanitarian purposes. Here are some of those events:

- Oklahoma tornado— 1999
- Mexico forest fires— 1998
- Northern California floods— 1995
- Federal building bombing, Oklahoma City— 1995
- Northridge earthquake, Los Angeles— 1994
- Branch Davidian standoff, Waco, Texas— 1993
- Hurricane Andrew, Florida— 1992
- Bowling alley massacre, Las Cruces— 1990
- Loma Prieta earthquake, San Francisco— 1989

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- **Hurricane Hugo, St. Croix— 1989**
- **Air crash, Sioux City, Iowa— 1989**
- **Baby Jessica in well, Midland, Texas— 1987**



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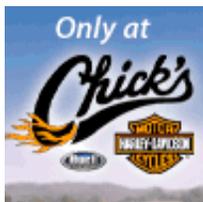
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Tuesday, July 13, 2004

Striking Out at Ground Zero

A 9/11 PHONY— Part three in a four-day series

Earlier this year, Doug Copp was awarded \$649,000, tax free, from the fund set up to compensate victims of 9/11. He says it's not enough. But it's doubtful he deserves anything. A Journal investigation found no evidence Copp did real rescue work in New York. And rescue officials say Copp's claims to having a unique body locator are highly suspect.

See column at right for links to all stories in this series

By [Leslie Linthicum](#)
Journal Staff Writer

Doug Copp says his small orange plastic box, which he calls the Copp Casualty Locator, can locate bodies within minutes of arriving at a disaster scene.

Over and over again, Copp has said he invented the machine and that there is only one like it in the world.

Copp has used the machine, he said, to pinpoint mass graves in Kosovo, to find people in collapsed buildings in Turkey, El Salvador, Taiwan and to locate many of the victims of the Swissair crash off the coast of Nova Scotia.

He said in his claim to the 9/11 victim compensation fund that he used the machine to find 40 bodies at the World Trade Center, although in an interview with the Journal he modified that to say he found parts of 40 bodies.


Doug Copp
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The machine he had in New York was a Crowcon Triple Plus off-the-shelf gas detector, according to Eric Wade, a member of the team Copp assembled to go to ground zero.

Crowcon's machines are generally used in mines, sewer pipes and other places to alert workers to combustible or toxic gases.

Tom Mandich, the company's operations manager, said the Ohio firm fits the machine with up to four sensors at a customer's request.

No one from the company could say which sensors were ordered on Copp's machine, but Mandich said buying a Crowcon Triple Plus with certain sensors does not amount to an invention.

"If all he did was use our machine, he certainly didn't invent it," Mandich said.

The machine is not designed to find human bodies, Mandich said, and would have a hard time separating out the unique components of rotting flesh from other examples of organics, which would include fuel and decomposing plant matter.

Copp has said that he has 35 patents. Records of the U.S. Patent Office show he has filed three patent applications— for a basic casualty location sensing device and for a "detector arm" that would mount a gas sensor, a video camera and microphone— but show no patents issued to Copp or his companies.

In New York, though, Copp did not use his detector arm. He had a Crowcon Triple Plus with his own sticker pasted over the Crowcon label.

Copp began trying to demonstrate the machine in his first minutes at the World Trade Center site, waving its wand around the debris pile and instructing firefighters to dig with their shovels in certain areas when the machine's alarm went off.

When the machine signaled that it had a hit and no body was found, Copp explained that the machine had detected tissue and blood that was imperceptible to the rescue workers in the dirt and dust.

"I was with the New York police using my machine and finding like pieces of brain and stuff like that and then we'd just put it in these white five-gallon buckets and they'd take it off," Copp said in an interview later.

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Promotion video

About two months after the Sept. 11 disaster, Copp made a video to market the Copp Casualty Locator. He included footage of its use at an earthquake in Taiwan and a testimonial from his patent attorney, Pat Kelly of St. Louis, that it found a body in Taiwan.

Copp also featured its use at ground zero as proof that it worked and said his price for the machine was \$19,000. Crowcon sold its machines for about \$2,500.

The New York Fire Department chief in charge of recovery at the site said he had heard of the machine but it was never used in recovery efforts.

"We would have used anything that aided us in rescue or recovery if it actually worked," said Chief John Norman.

A Madison, Wis., firefighter who used Copp's machine and several of the people who traveled with Copp to New York said the machine didn't work when they tried to use it.

Rob Verhelst of Madison said he didn't find any remains with the help of the machine.

Wade, a former stockbroker and writer, had known Copp for a short time when the World Trade Center towers were struck. The former stockbroker had made a good deal of money selling an Internet domain name and was interested in investing in Copp's casualty locating machine— if it worked.

Copp's team also included videographer John Grace, film producer Mike Miller and archaeologist Stephen Lentz.

On the second day the team was in New York, Wade and Grace went with Copp to the fire department's strategic command center on Roosevelt Island to demonstrate the machine for firefighters there. Copp wanted to show the fire department's top brass the machine worked, so he would have official access to the site, Wade said.

They demonstrated the machine on rotting meat and it did not work.

Later in the day, Wade and Grace went to ground zero to try to make the machine work.

They found a semi truck containing body bags that had been parked at the site. The back doors were open and they stuck the wand into a body bag, Grace said. The machine did not go off.

Copp said he wouldn't have expected the machine to work because the machine detects decomposition and decomposition would have been stopped when the body was chilled in a morgue truck.

Grace and Wade said they can't remember whether the truck

was refrigerated, but both remember that the smell was overwhelming.

Copp said in a Web site pitch marketing the machine that it had found 19 clusters of bodies of victims of the Swissair crash off the coast of Nova Scotia in September 1998. He said it located those bodies, at depths of between 150 and 180 feet with winds up to 40 knots by him holding the wand above the water.

The machine, he said, picked up whiffs as the boat he was in slowly drifted over the crash site. Copp said his machine also located the plane's fuselage.

In a video message to the 9/11 fund, Copp said the machine located 18 bodies in 598 feet of water.

A spokesman for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, which was one of the investigating agencies in the Swissair crash, said Copp showed up at the site and went out on a boat with a mountie. But he said Copp played no role in locating or recovering bodies.

"Many agencies played significant roles," Mounted Police spokesman Wayne Noonan said. "Not him."

New design

Some team members went to Copp in New York on Sept. 14 and told him the machine did not work.

Copp informed them the machine wasn't working because the filter was clogged. Later, Copp said the machine gave out because of heavy use.

Prior to Sept. 11, Albuquerque engineer Steve Harrington had been working with Copp to design a new casualty locator machine. Harrington, who did not accompany Copp's team on the first trip, ordered three more machines from Crowcon in Ohio and took them to New York aboard the Journal Publishing Co. corporate jet on Sept. 18.

Harrington said he tried to use one of the machines at the site with firefighters without success.

One instance still stands out in his mind.

Firefighters called Harrington over because they believed they had located a body underneath some rubble.

"You could smell something," Harrington said.

He said he brought the machine over and it showed no change from its ambient level.

That meant either the sensors were overwhelmed, the filter was clogged, or the machine didn't work, he said.

Harrington, who was the technician for the machine, said he

cleaned the filter and tried again. Still, it did not alert.

"Our gut feeling told us something was there," Harrington said. "The sensor didn't work and we found her and dug her out. I can still see her flowered dress."

Copp maintains that Harrington did not know how to use the machine and shoved the wand in the dirt. "It's not a friggin' vacuum cleaner," he said.

Before terrorists attacked the World Trade Center, Copp, Wade, Grace and Miller had been working with Harrington's company to develop a casualty locator.

After Wade, Grace and Miller concluded Copp's technology did not work, they became involved in a company that is researching and developing a machine they hope will do what Copp said his machine would.

Copp accuses the three men of stealing his technology. They say they did not.

On a Web site describing their work on a new machine, Miller and Wade highlight their experience at ground zero, saying they went there with an "independent rescue team."

Copp's name is not mentioned.

Miller said he initially believed Copp was going to New York to try to save lives, but was disappointed.

"If he thought his machine worked and he told people it worked, then that's a shame," Miller said. "If he knew the machine didn't work and he brought it there, then that's criminal. I'm deeply sorry for any part I had in that."

Leslie Linthicum can be reached by e-mail at llinthicum@abqjournal.com.



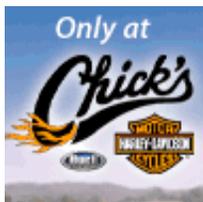
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Tuesday, July 13, 2004

Doctors Differ on Copp's Ailments

A 9/11 Phony— Earlier this year, Doug Copp was awarded \$649,000, tax free, from the fund set up to compensate victims of 9/11. He says it's not enough. But it's doubtful he deserves anything. A Journal investigation found no evidence Copp did real rescue work in New York.

See column at right for links to all stories in this series

By [Leslie Linthicum](#)

Journal Staff Writer

There is no doubt Doug Copp has something wrong with him.

In his claim to the September 11th victim fund, he submitted about \$87,000 in bills for doctors, medicines and travel to see medical specialists for the health complaints he said were related to his work at the World Trade Center.

Since 9/11, he has had pulmonary function tests, a CT scan, hair and urine analysis, a psychological consult and several visits to hospital emergency rooms.

But what exactly is wrong with Copp is open to debate.

Dr. Timothy Smith, a California anti-aging specialist who presented Copp's medical case to the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund, said Copp's immune system is seriously compromised in ways that affect his breathing and thinking. He said Copp has antibodies to about a dozen molds and

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has numerous toxins in his body.

A pulmonologist who tested Copp said he has "irritable airway."

An internal medicine specialist who reviewed Copp's medical records from September 2001 to May 2003 offered the opinion that Copp has mild asthma and depression.

Another pulmonologist who reviewed the same records said Copp has a "mild restrictive lung disease" but said he could not call it asthma.

'A nasty death'

Disagreement about Copp's health is further complicated by the debate between traditional and alternative medicine and by Copp's penchant for drama.

He says his doctor told him there has never been anyone in history with his concentration of toxins—and that he is dying.

In interviews and letters to Rep. Tom Udall, D-N.M., Copp described his health as ghastly. He said in a letter to Udall that he has had "11 respiratory attacks, 10 immune system attacks, 4 Organic Brain Syndrome attacks, damage to all of my internal organs, damage to my eyes and the auto immune system disease, 'lupus.' "

He repeatedly said he was dying and would not survive unless he received a great deal of money to pay for expensive therapy that might save him.

He said in a letter to Udall, "My Doctor has told me that I will become even sicker, in a great deal of pain and that my prospects of survival would be very dim. He made it plain, to me, that I will die a nasty death."

"I told him to stop saying that," Smith told the Journal. "He's not dying." Smith also said Copp does not have lupus.

But Smith, who Copp encouraged the Journal to contact to verify his condition, said Copp is very sick, although improving.

Smith prescribed Copp drugs usually used to treat Alzheimer's and hypertension. He said Copp showed dramatic improvement.

"I think his brain is functioning better now," Smith said.

Smith said the underlying causes of Copp's shortness of breath and cognitive problems will exist until he undergoes a series of detoxification treatments, treatments that Copp says he can't

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afford.

Smith saw Copp in person five to six times. He says he does most of his work over the phone. He billed Copp \$37,000 for his treatment, consultations, research and report preparation.

Hospital visits

Copp said he thinks he returned to New Mexico from New York on Sept. 26. Copp's medical records, provided to the Journal by him, show he first sought medical attention in New Mexico on Sept. 30 in the emergency room at St. Vincent Hospital in Santa Fe.

He complained of a cough, trouble breathing and rib pain. He was diagnosed with acute asthmatic bronchitis and prescribed an Albuterol inhaler and an antibiotic.

In December, Copp went to the University of New Mexico Hospital emergency room complaining of chest and leg pain and trouble breathing. He was discharged after an examination found his heart rhythm was normal. He was told to follow a low-fat diet and to take Maalox and Ibuprofen.

Both times Copp told the hospitals he had worked in dust and soot at the World Trade Center.

Three weeks later, he went to the St. Joseph's emergency room, this time complaining of back pain and saying he had taken an accidental overdose of Tylenol No. 3. A blood test found Tylenol in the low end of the therapeutic range and a blood-alcohol level of .07, near the presumed level of intoxication for driving.

He was diagnosed with sciatica and a non-toxic drug ingestion, and told to take pain medication, including Vicodin.

Over the next year and a half, Copp saw a number of doctors in New Mexico, including an internist, a pulmonary specialist, a neurologist, a pain specialist and a neuropsychologist.

Bruce Miller, the pulmonologist who examined Copp in Albuquerque, diagnosed him as having "irritable airway secondary to World Trade Center exposure."

Copp had told Miller and Smith that he spent days underground at ground zero and that prior to going to New York he had been healthy.

But in a letter Copp wrote in 1993 to the commanding general of the Mexican Red Cross, Copp recounted terrible health problems.

"I have suffered post traumatic stress syndrome, sickness from prolonged exposure to decomposing bodies (bacteria and concrete in my lungs). Sores all over my body with my feet swollen to the point of being unable to put (on) shoes; continue to have my

blood stream infected with fungi. ..."

Copp said on his Web site he got pneumonia in the Kobe earthquake in 1999.

Records examined

Two New Mexico doctors who reviewed Copp's medical records provided by Copp for the Journal based their conclusions about Copp's health solely on those records, which did not include anything after May 2003.

Michael Wagner, a pulmonary specialist with a practice in Española, said the only serious health issue he found in Copp's medical records was "a mild restrictive lung disease" that might be asthma. He said the restriction on Copp's lung volume in a test taken in Albuquerque could also be caused by obesity. According to his medical records, Copp is between 5 feet 9-1/2 inches and 5 feet 11 inches and weighed about 240 pounds.

Wagner said it was impossible to prove or disprove that the source of the damage to Copp's lungs was exposure at the World Trade Center.

He said that, whatever the cause of Copp's breathing impairment, the impairment is mild.

Ulton Hodgin, a retired internist who reviewed the same records, said there was nothing in Copp's medical records to support claims of clinically significant immune dysfunction, hypersensitivity pneumonia, or hypothyroidism— all problems that Copp included in his medical claim.

He said Copp had esophageal reflux, another condition Copp has reported having.

Hodgin discounted the hair analysis that concluded Copp has heavy metal poisoning. Hair testing, he said, "looks very important but it's all sound and fury meaning nothing."

Hodgin said Copp has asthma— like about 20 million other Americans— and that his asthma is mild. Even mild asthma, however, could prevent someone from working in smoky or dusty places, like collapsed buildings, he said.

He said Copp was very depressed and had gained 40 to 60 pounds.

"My final diagnosis is he's convinced of ill health, which doesn't seem reversible," Hodgin said.

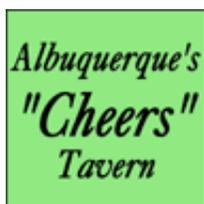


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Copp Apparently Missed 9/11 Fund Deadline

Earlier this year, Doug Copp was awarded \$649,000, tax free, from the fund set up to compensate victims of 9/11. He says it's not enough. But it's doubtful he deserves anything. A Journal investigation found no evidence Copp did real rescue work in New York. Read the Journal's full four-day series [here](#).

By [Leslie Linthicum](#)

Journal Staff Writer

Whatever Doug Copp's illness, he does not appear to have met the requirement of the 9/11 compensation fund that he received medical attention within 72 hours of being hurt. Copp told the fund he did.

Copp said he approached a doctor— he can't remember exactly when, but thinks it was probably Sept. 13 or Sept. 14— "coughing my guts out" and asked for advice.

The doctor told Copp not to worry, Copp said, and that he would cough it all out in a couple of weeks.

Copp identifies that doctor as Elliot Pierce of Albuquerque.

Copp said in earlier interviews that his interaction with Pierce came when he came out of the subway at ground zero.

He said in an interview in Albuquerque last month that he consulted Pierce outside the Jacob Javits Center, the command center for operations that was about three miles north of ground zero.

Copp said he asked Pierce there, "Do I need to take medicine? Do I need to stay out of there? Do I

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need to do something? Is there something I need to do like, I don't know, take oxygen or something?"

Copp said Pierce's response was "very cavalier."

"And I remember his exact words," Copp said. "'Don't worry about it, you'll cough it all out in a couple of weeks.' "

"Please quote me in the newspaper that I blame him entirely, OK?" Copp said.

Pierce said he believes he spoke to Copp once—many hours after his arrival and beyond the fund's time frame— and never talked about Copp's health. He said he did not talk to him at all at the Javits Center.

"This is absolutely 100 percent false," Pierce said when he was shown a letter Copp wrote to Rep. Tom Udall, D-N.M., describing his supposed encounter with Pierce and saying it satisfied the fund's requirement for seeking medical attention.

Pierce did not arrive in New York to help in the rescue operation until the evening of Sept. 18, already beyond the 72-hour requirement for seeking medical attention for a 9/11 injury, which would have ended about 9 a.m. Sept. 18.

Pierce said he cannot remember speaking to Copp until sometime around mid-morning on Sept. 19— about 24 hours after the time limit to consult a doctor had passed. And Pierce said they never talked about Copp's health.

Pierce had flown on the Journal Publishing Co.'s corporate jet on publisher T.H. Lang's second trip to New York. Lang said that after returning from ground zero on Sept. 15, he wanted to go back to help and decided "to bring some hands."

Pierce, a friend of his who has been an internist for years and now specializes in osteoporosis, wanted to make the trip.

Robert Staehlin, the Albuquerque Publishing Co.'s director of maintenance, also agreed to go but traveled by commercial airline because he was waiting in Albuquerque for communications equipment.

A flight log shows Lang and Pierce landed at the airport in suburban White Plains, N.Y., just after dark on Sept. 18. After driving into the city, Pierce and Lang headed to ground zero.

Pierce and Lang, without credentials, went into the site and worked on a bucket brigade for several hours, Pierce recalls.

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Pierce said he passed Copp at ground zero that night but said he doesn't think they spoke.

After going to the hotel early that morning for some sleep, Pierce said he had breakfast with Staehlin and Mike Holley, another Albuquerque man who had gone to New York with Lang and Pierce to help.

After breakfast they went with Lang to Copp's room at the Marriott because they wanted to see whether Copp had obtained credentials to be at the site, Pierce said.

Pierce said Copp talked non-stop for between 30 and 40 minutes.

"He talked about his heroics. He talked about how great he was," said Pierce. "He stood out in an atmosphere where people were trying to help and he was trying to promote himself. He contrasted to everyone. He was outstanding by himself as a self-promoter. He was concerned only with himself."

Lang said he left the room in disgust after a few minutes. Pierce, Staehlin and Holley stayed.

Pierce said Copp never coughed and did not talk about his health. Holley and Staehlin said they also do not recall Copp coughing or addressing Pierce with questions about his health.

"I don't remember saying anything," Pierce said. "It was like a lecture."

"We never discussed anything about his medical condition, period," he said.

Later that day, Pierce said he saw Copp at the Javits Center and stopped to listen as Copp was trying to interest someone in his machine, which he said could sniff out dead bodies.

He said he did not talk to Copp there.

Pierce said no one from the September 11th fund contacted him to verify Copp's account before Copp was awarded nearly \$650,000.

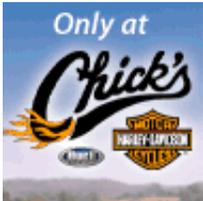


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Wednesday, July 14, 2004

'Knucklehead' or Hero?

A 9/11 PHONY— Part four in a four-day series

Earlier this year, Doug Copp was awarded \$649,000, tax free, from the fund set up to compensate victims of 9/11. He says it's not enough. But it's doubtful he deserves anything. A Journal investigation found no evidence Copp did real rescue work in New York. But his claims of valor were typical for this self-proclaimed rescue guru.

See column at right for links to all stories in this series

By [Leslie Linthicum](#)

Journal Staff Writer

Doug Copp is the most experienced rescue professional in the entire world. He has been to more than 100 disasters, crawled through 894 collapsed buildings and saved 125,000 people.

He has been in 50,000 newspapers. He was appointed by the United Nations as its expert in disaster mitigation. He treated several hundred children for skin disease in Venezuela. He saved India from the plague.

Really.
Just ask him.

Copp, 52, has been telling his tales of daring exploits for nearly 20 years. At the center is always Copp— figuring out a puzzle no one else could solve, going where no one else dared to go, enduring hardship and making big



Doug Copp
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things happen.

But many of his stories don't stand up to scrutiny, including this example from sworn deposition testimony in a California lawsuit in the 1990s:

Copp boasted many times about his association with the United Nations and its Disaster Relief Office. He said on his résumé that his code was "UNX051" and he was tapped by the U.N. as its expert in disaster mitigation.

He said Philippe Boullé, the U.N.'s disaster relief coordinator in New York, asked him to advise the U.N. and directed him to respond to Hurricane Gilbert in 1986.

Boullé, who went on to direct the U.N.'s International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, said in a sworn affidavit that Copp's claim to be a United Nations expert was "completely false" and that he never asked Copp to go to the hurricane.

"UNX051" was an e-mail address for a subscriber to the U.N.'s public information network, Boullé said.

"It is my opinion," Boullé said, "that Douglas Copp has fraudulently misrepresented himself regarding the United Nations."

Information generated in the California court case also indicates the Mexican Red Cross told Copp not to portray the organization as a sponsor of an event he was organizing in Puerto Vallarta.

That prompted a response from Copp to Mexican Red Cross commanding general Salvador Padilla Cano.

"I am very surprised even shocked to receive your letter dated August 9, 1993, in which you inform us for the second time not to consider the Red Cross to be a sponsor of the conference," Copp wrote.

'Guts of rats'

Copp says many people call him a hero for the dangerous things he has selflessly offered to do. And in Copp's version, he has courted calamity that would sour the souls of mortal men.

"I have seen the many faces of death," Copp wrote in an essay about heroism. "I have met many thousands of dead, horribly mutilated, ripped apart and decomposing corpses. I have stared

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inside the eyes and reached down inside the guts of rats as I interrupt their feast of dead children."

Copp, who was born in Canada and moved to New Mexico in 2001, is indeed known in rescue circles— sometimes as a phony, a trespasser and a bother.

Federal Emergency Management Agency chief Chase Sargent of Virginia Beach, Va., said he had Copp removed by New York City police officers when he found Copp at the World Trade Center site in the immediate aftermath of 9/11.

Sargent said he recognized the self-appointed, most experienced rescue chief in the world— the red jump suit and video camera and lack of credentials.

"He turned around and I said, 'Oh, no,' " Sargent said. "Anybody who's legitimate in this business knows who this knucklehead is."

Copp has operated the American Rescue Team International since 1986, most recently from his rented house in rural Bernalillo County off Frost Road.

Dewey Perks, manager of the Virginia FEMA task force that responds to international disasters, said Copp has never worked in an official capacity at an overseas disaster FEMA has responded to.

"Heard of him. Never seen him," Perks said.

Mark Ghilarducci, who served as FEMA's federal coordinator and also as the deputy director of the Office of Emergency Services in California, where Copp lived for nearly 20 years, also knows Copp— but not as a prominent search and rescue pro.

"There's something of an ambulance chaser to this guy," Ghilarducci said.

Ghilarducci said that Copp "... kind of walks on to the site and takes a few pictures with the rubble behind him."

Ghilarducci said people in the international rescue community discount most of Copp's photos, videotapes and thank you letters.

But he said Copp's video of the rescue of a little girl from an apartment building in the 1999 Turkey earthquake looks convincing.

Copp has used that footage and photos and videotapes he has taken of himself at other earthquakes, bombings and disasters to build an impressive-looking portfolio.

Video of the rescue of 12-year-old Tugba Altun from a crevasse in Turkey— with Copp visible in the hole— has been included in a special that has aired on the Discovery Channel and ABC. The special features Copp and credits him with rescue. Copp says he interceded when a French rescue team was about to pull a pin that

was holding up concrete that would have crushed her.

When questioned about his rescue résumé by the Journal, Copp angrily cited the Turkey video:

"Have you seen the videotape of me saving the little girl?" Copp said. "Well that's me. She's a real little girl. My head's stuck in with her under those slabs. That's me."

The Journal contacted French rescue team, Secouristes Sans Frontieres, and talked to Fusun Ulu, a Turkish member who acted as the team's translator during Tugba's rescue, standing next to the little girl during the several hours it took to dig her out.

Ulu was surprised by Copp's claim that he saved Tugba and that he stopped the French from allowing her to be crushed.

"No, no," Ulu said. "That is not possible."

She said she did not remember the name of the American who showed up with a cameraman, but that he was the only American there and that he was heavy and shouting orders.

Ulu said the camera got in the way and made it harder to work and that the American was loud, telling people what to do and getting in the way.

"He was trying to give orders but he's not the one who rescued her," Ulu said. "If he's saying that, shame on him. It's not true. It cannot be true."

For the most part, though, Copp's claims have gone unchallenged. He has appeared on many television shows and in many newspaper features recounting his credentials.

He has persuaded airlines to fly him to natural disasters throughout the world, persuaded hotels to put him up for free, and collected donations to his organization, the American Rescue Team International.

Exaggerations

Copp's persona as an international rescue expert has its roots in 1985 when Copp said he dispatched himself to his first disaster.

He was watching a television report on the Mexico City earthquake and saw bulldozers approaching a collapsed building. Copp, who has said that he worked for demolition companies in the early 1980s, said he realized that anyone trapped in that building alive would be killed.

He went to Mexico City and began his career as a volunteer responder to earthquakes, hurricanes, landslides, tornadoes and other disasters.

Seven years later, Copp was living in Alameda, Calif., and had organized his American Rescue Team International when he

criticized the state of California's approach to earthquake safety, saying that people who "duck and cover" as the state recommended would be killed.

He advocated a technique called the "triangle of life," a phrase he coined, in which people in earthquakes are supposed to get next to solid objects such as beds or desks instead of under them for safety.

He pointed to his Mexico City experience to support his claim.

When a county official sent an inter-office memo to his staff saying Copp's advice was "nonsense," Copp sued for defamation.

Copp lost the case and the Superior Court judge ordered him to pay about \$4,800 in court costs. Copp appealed and also lost on appeal.

One of the consequences of the lawsuit was that Copp's claims to grandeur were investigated.

With Copp under oath, the lawyer for the county tried to pin Copp down on the basic elements of his résumé and experience.

But generally speaking, the claims examined in the course of the lawsuit— from details of his college degree and employment, his supposed United Nations clearance and some of his claims of international deployments and rescues— were found to be false or exaggerated.

For example, Copp stated on his résumé that he graduated from Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 1974 with a B.A. with honors in philosophy and engineering.

Copp has boasted about his understanding of the science of structures and said his knowledge contributes to his success in search and rescue.

He graduated with honors in philosophy from Dalhousie, but his college transcript does not reflect a degree in engineering.

His college transcript shows he failed one engineering course and received Cs in two others. He received a D in calculus, failed to complete applied mathematics for engineers and failed introduction to architecture before changing his major from engineering to philosophy.

Copp said he spent five months working for a German "think tank" when he was 20, the only college student among more than 200 Ph.Ds. When questioned about the claim, Copp produced a letter offering him a two-month summer internship in Germany.

Copp moved to California when he was 31 and, according to Copp, he worked in the demolition field there.

He included a two-year stint with Cleveland Wrecking Co. on his résumé and said he held the positions of general superintendent, estimator, project manager and engineer and did

sales for the conglomerate's three companies. The company's president at the time, Donald Fenning, said Copp worked for Cleveland's Canadian company and managed some projects but did not hold the other offices he said he did.

Under oath

Portor Goltz, deputy county counsel for San Mateo County, said his experience deposing Copp— asking him questions under oath— was "bizarre. Complete frustration. He wouldn't answer questions. I couldn't get a straight answer from him."

For example, Copp had claimed in a document to "Have saved approximately 200 lives."

In the deposition, Copp said he couldn't specify when or where that happened.

"So this is speculation on your part?" Goltz asked. "You didn't pull 200 people out?"

"No," Copp said, "because I don't pull bodies out."

"We're talking about survivors," Goltz said. "There wouldn't be bodies at that point, they would be live people."

"I don't pull live or dead out," Copp said.

In a discussion in the deposition about Copp's claim that he saved 32 rescue workers, Copp said he once shouted that a compressor should be turned off at a rescue site and counted that as saving two lives because the machine's vibration could have caused a tunnel to collapse.

He said at another time he told a crane operator to stop when his crane was swinging a piece of concrete close to some gas bottles.

The discussion went on for several more pages before Copp said he could not provide the name and contact information for anyone he had ever rescued or anyone who had seen him rescue anyone.

Goltz contacted several experts in earthquake response and urban search and rescue. One found Copp's advice that schoolchildren not seek cover during earthquakes "wrong," and said it would "lead to injury or death."

Another called it "bad advice."

The third said Copp's qualifications regarding earthquake survival were "questionable."

Copp presented statements from two men who work with a rescue team in England and who supported his "triangle of life" survival technique.

Goltz asked Copp to enumerate each of the 50 disaster teams he had said he worked with. Copp acknowledged that he had not

actually worked at natural disasters with some of them.

Copp listed Armenia, for example. Under questioning he said he had not gone to the earthquake in Armenia but he had spoken by phone to the head of the Armenia American Assembly in Washington, D.C., about the earthquake.

Copp said that stamps on his passport could not be used to verify his rescue trips to various countries because he often arrives at an international disaster with permission and is whisked away to the scene as soon as he lands.

Former FEMA chief Ghilarducci, who now works for a consulting business in California, said he has tracked Copp's claims over the years and has found almost no evidence that Copp has done anything other than go to sites and take photos and videotape.

Ghilarducci ran the Oklahoma City command center and said Copp did not work at the site in any official capacity and that there was no way anyone without permission could have gained access to the building.

Copp's Web site photograph from the Oklahoma City explosion, which he said he responded to within hours, shows him standing with the damaged building in the background.

Ghilarducci said the photo is of the site at least two weeks after the explosion, when the debris had been cleared from the street and rescue operations were finished.

Ghilarducci was in Japan attending a conference in 1995 when the earthquake hit there. He went to Kobe and coordinated between the Japanese and American governments.

He said Copp's photos show he was in Kobe, but not much more. Copp points to a thank you letter from the Kobe mayor to prove he did important work there. Ghilarducci said the Japanese are gracious and commonly write thank you letters.

'Find a hole and crawl in'

Copp tells of terrible conditions he has endured in his work and sickness he has picked up on his exotic travels, even though he told doctors he consulted in relation to his 9/11 fund claim that he had always been healthy.

This is how Copp described his on-the-road lifestyle as he flew to New York in the Journal Publishing Co. jet to respond to the World Trade Center collapse.

"Typically the way I rate a disaster is how many times is my life severely threatened? How many days do I have to go without sleep? How many diseases, or what kind of weird diseases, am I

going to get? Am I going to be able to eat something that's decent or am I going to be eating something that's disgusting and probably will make me sick? ... Water. Am I going to have something to drink? ... Am I sleeping on the rubble? Once I even slept on a pile of boulders with scorpions without even a tent."

Copp said he got wet crawling in freezing rain in the Kobe earthquake and got pneumonia.

In his deposition, he tells of spending a month wet and dirty, driving 4,000 miles along the Mexican coastline during Hurricane Gilbert and enduring bugs hatching their eggs underneath his skin during landslides in Costa Rica.

One of the claims in Copp's California lawsuit involved an international disaster conference he was attempting to organize in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, where he had been staying at a beach-side resort hotel.

In a document Copp prepared for the case, he said the hotel had provided free rooms, supplies and telephone service.

In New York, Copp stayed at the Marriott Marquis in Times Square. A hotel spokeswoman said she could not comment on any guest. But Copp and the four men he brought with him from Albuquerque said they stayed free.

The current room rate is about \$300 a night.

Stephen Lentz said Copp cleaned out the mini bar in his room and then drank all the liquor in the mini bar in Lentz's room. Lentz said the hotel took care of the mini bar bill.

In New York, FEMA chief Sargent worked the night shift at the World Trade Center from Sept. 13 to Oct. 2.

When he saw Copp's video from ground zero, even though Sargent had ordered him off the site, Sargent posted this message on a FEMA message board:

"American Rescue Team are basically a bunch of disaster buffs who represent themselves as the guru of collapse rescue. ... Those of us in the business know these kinds of phonies for who they are."

In his posting, he said he was "damn tired of phonies like them trying to make a name off the backs of dead firemen, civilians ..."

Sargent's missive ended with a suggestion that the American Rescue Team "find a hole and crawl in because you are just about at the end of your bag of lies."

Who's Who—Day Four

MARK GHILARDUCCI: consultant in California.

Ghilarducci, a former emergency services official in California and with FEMA, has tracked Doug Copp's claims to have been

part of rescue efforts at earthquakes in California and Japan and the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City and found them exaggerated.

He said Copp's pattern is to take pictures of himself at disasters and overstate his role in the rescue.

"There's something of an ambulance chaser to this guy," Ghilarducci said.

FUSUN ULU: member French rescue team, Secouristes Sans Frontieres.

Ulu worked with the French rescue team at the 1999 earthquake in Turkey in the rescue of a 12-year-old girl and disputes Copp's claim that he was responsible for saving the girl.

Ulu said she remembered only one American at the site, a heavy, loud man who was getting in the way, ordering people around and had a video cameraman with him.

"He was trying to give orders but he's not the one who rescued her," she said. "If he's saying that, shame on him."



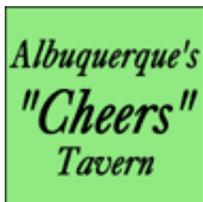
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Wednesday, July 14, 2004

Copp Says Proof Is in the Footage

Earlier this year, Doug Copp was awarded \$649,000, tax free, from the fund set up to compensate victims of 9/11. He says it's not enough. But it's doubtful he deserves anything. A Journal investigation found no evidence Copp did real rescue work in New York. Read the Journal's full four-day series [here](#).

By [Leslie Linthicum](#)
Journal Staff Writer

Doug Copp talks for hours about his exploits, dropping the names of foreign countries and recounting the devastation he has seen. His stories ramble across continents, are most often vague on names and details and routinely involve conspiracies. He hardly pauses for a breath.

This, for example, is an answer Copp gave when he was asked to provide the Journal with some documentation to support his claims of rescue experience:

"Well, OK. You know what it is? I got— I even have some with me— but I've got like 650 documents of thank you letters and all this and everything for what I've done. I've got hundreds of hours of video of me actually doing it, I mean wading across a river with crocodiles in it, I mean on top of a landslide with the thing coming down where the camera's being shot from a mile away. I got film footage of me inside of collapsed buildings. I got film footage of me with the Russians. I got film footage of a Chinese colonel, all big smiles, 'Oh we're very happy, we're very happy, the machine works so good, the machine works so good.' You

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know? I've got all this video. And why? Because if anybody's to say what you just said, Oh yeah, well, here's letters, here's videos to see with your own eyes, OK? You know, I've got on TV where they're interviewing this guy because the British and the French had said at this landslide, it was a gigantic one, they said, and the British and the French with their dogs, they came around and they said, 'The victim's 15 feet inside of here, this very spot, but it's too dangerous. It's too dangerous and everybody would be killed, we can't remove.' And then they left. And the Red Cross— I'm a member of the Mexican Red Cross and different Red Crosses and I've worked with many excellent Red Crosses. It's only the American Red Cross and the German Red Cross that collect money and don't spend it on the victims. So, anyway, I'm working with the Red Cross, in fact they even had a parade for me. I stayed at the director of the Red Cross for the country at his home

"I stayed at his home with him and his family before I left. Now, at any rate, what happened there was I said, yeah, OK, so they said they were going to go, OK, they said the victim was here but it was too dangerous. They said they were going to go do it anyway. I said to them, I talked them out of it. I said, 'They're probably not there.' I said, 'It's just for TV or something, they're probably not there.' And, no, first of all I said, 'They're right, it is too dangerous. It is too dangerous. You'll all be killed. You can't do it.' They said, 'We're going to do it anyway.' And I tried to talk them out of it and I couldn't talk them out of it. I said, 'Look they're just pulling your ... they're just doing it for TV. There's nobody in there. Dogs can't smell 15 feet under dirt. That's why you bury people so you can't smell them.' OK, they're still going to do it. So finally, and this was at night. I spent all night, 'cause I'm very religious, and talking to God I say, 'God, should I do this?' Because I know there's nobody there and I don't want to, I don't want to die for no reason cause there's nobody there, but if I don't do it with them they're all going to be killed. So I went and did it anyway. Anyway. So, there you see the film footage, there I am off in the distance and they interview this guy who's the engineer

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with the Red Cross and one of the things they say to him, they say, 'How can you do this? The British and the French took off. How can you do this?' And he said, 'Because of rescue engineer Doug Copp.' And then the camera went over to me, panned over to me and then I'm just there working."



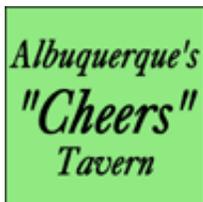
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Sunday, July 18, 2004

Widow Tells of Copp Ordeal

By Leslie Linthicum
Journal Staff Writer

Pennsylvania widow Joanna House hoped she would never hear Doug Copp's name again.

But then she sat down at the computer in her home outside Philadelphia one night last week to check her e-mail. Her AOL newspaper carried a story about the Albuquerque Journal's investigation of Copp's claim to the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund.

House clicked on the headline and said, "Doug Copp! Oh, my God. That's the guy."

What she read in the Journal story— freeloading, exalted claims to heroism and a dubious body-sniffing machine— brought back memories of her brief encounter with Copp four years ago.

For House, that encounter was both disturbing and expensive. House contacted the Journal by e-mail after reading the story.

Copp, reached by telephone Friday, declined to comment and referred questions to a California lawyer who did not return a call.

House said she found Copp on the Internet in May 2000 at the lowest point in her life.

Her husband, Fred, and her 14-year-old son, Paul, had drowned in the Perkiomen Creek when their canoe was sucked under the water near a dam.

Paul's body was recovered within a week. But House, her family and volunteers had searched for more than a month for Fred's body.

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House was left widowed, with five surviving children and no insurance payment because the body had not been found.

"It was a desperate time for us," House said in a telephone interview. She found Copp touting his body-detecting machine on the Internet and asked for his help.

Copp, a New Mexico resident most recently, was living in California at the time.

House said Copp agreed to travel to Pennsylvania as long as she paid his airfare, hotel, meals and expenses.

House gave this account of what happened after Copp arrived in Pennsylvania:

He attempted to show the grieving family how his body-finder worked by demonstrating it on some rotting meat. It didn't alert.

Copp told the family the machine had located victims of the Swissair crash off the Nova Scotia coast— a claim Candadian authorities told the Journal wasn't true— among other accomplishments.

He said the machine would find her husband within a day— they just had to take it up and down the river in a motor boat and it would alert when it detected the gases given off by the decomposing body.

The machine, Copp said, could sniff out the body from a mile away.

It didn't alert on anything the first day. (Cliff Roach, Fred House's best friend, said in an interview there were dead cats and dogs and other decaying things in the river.)

Copp said the machine needed to be fixed and the family agreed to pay for the repair.

Then Copp told Roach he could take the machine on the river and Copp spent the day in the bar, Roach said.

When it didn't alert on anything after four days, Copp told the family that Fred's body wasn't in the creek, it had washed away.

Copp went back to California and Joanna House was out about \$2,500.

House said she was glad to see Copp leave.

"He was just a devastating character to be brought into our lives at that time," House said. "He was so egotistical. He was so all about himself. He had us running around for him instead of doing what we needed to do. There was no sympathy. There was no

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empathy."

After Copp left, Roach and others kept looking for Fred's body in the river. They found it a few days later.

Copp had left the machine behind, but Roach and House said it played no role in finding the body.

They said that Copp had told them it was the only one in the world and to insure it for \$150,000 when they shipped it back to him.

They sent it back "one week mail."

A couple of weeks after Copp left, House said, she started receiving phone calls and e-mails from him.

He demanded money for his time and trouble— about \$2,000.

House said she didn't have the money to pay Copp and wouldn't anyway because he had not found her husband.

"He said my late husband was a good man and would be very disappointed in me for not compensating Doug for his time," House said. "He wrote that my other children were going to think badly of me for not doing the 'right thing.' He did his best to intimidate, shame and harass me."

Copp's parting words to House after she again refused to pay him were, "What goes around comes around."

"I saw the story," House said, "and I thought that maybe that's true. I really hope he pays for what he did this time."

Upshot of Journal report

Publish Doug Copp's name in the newspaper and this is a sampling of what you get:

- A phone call from an Albuquerque businessman who says Copp owes him about \$2,000 for an unpaid backhoe rental bill.
- A call from a Turkish newspaper concerned that Copp was wearing a patch from a Turkish rescue team in the laid-out-on-the-bed-in-the-red-jumpsuit-with-a-rip-down-there photo that ran on the Journal's front page and in the New York Post.
- An e-mail from a member of the Fairfax, Va., urban search and rescue team who says he helped to remove Copp from the World Trade Center command center.
- An e-mail from a woman in Pennsylvania who says Copp took advantage of her after her husband drowned four years ago.
- A call from the Bernalillo County sheriff saying, "I'd like to kick

his ass. Seriously, let me have five minutes alone with him."

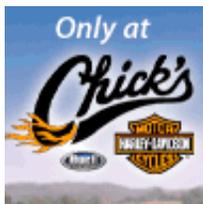
- A call from the man who said he, not Copp, really found JFK Jr.'s body.
- A challenge from "the world's most outspoken investigator of the paranormal, the psychic and the just plain weird" to Copp to prove his body-sniffing machine works.
- A call from firefighters at a firehouse in Pittsburgh to offer their support— to the Journal, not to Copp.
- Loads of e-mails and phone calls from angry search and rescue professionals and volunteers who said things like "... it makes me sick to read of the fraudulent actions of those like Copp." And, "Thank you for finally exposing Mr. Copp. His antics have frustrated and embarrassed legitimate SAR volunteers for years."
- And e-mails from people angry at the newspaper for picking on Copp and wasting newsprint when there are many stories that are more important.



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Sunday, July 18, 2004

Feds Investigate 9/11 Injury Claim

By Leslie Linthicum
Journal Staff Writer

A U.S. Department of Justice fraud unit is investigating former New Mexico resident Doug Copp's claim to the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund.

An investigator for the Fraud Detection Office of the Justice Department's Office of Inspector General has interviewed several of the people featured in the Journal's investigation of Copp, "A 9/11 Phony."

The Journal published the four-part series last week.

Copp has defended his work at ground zero and has said the people who dispute his claim are out to get him.

A Justice Department spokesman would not confirm the investigation, but the department has told Rep. Tom Udall, D-N.M., that it is investigating.

Udall, who lobbied on Copp's behalf to the victim's fund, asked for the Justice Department inquiry after Copp's work at ground zero was challenged.

"The Department of Justice's Inspector General has launched an investigation based on our request coupled with the questions raised by the Journal's series," Udall spokesman Glen Loveland said Friday. "We are pleased the department has responded to our request to immediately launch an

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investigation to determine if Mr. Copp's claim to the 9/11 Victim Compensation Fund is unfounded and assess whether there is enough evidence to refer the matter for criminal prosecution."

The Journal's series examined Copp's claims that he played a key role in the World Trade Center rescue and recovery operation and was seriously injured in the process.

Just hung around

No one who worked with Copp said he did real rescue work in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks. Instead, they said, he took videotape at the site, tried to get on TV, hung around a hotel and promoted himself.

In the Journal series:

- Everyone who went to New York with Copp disputed his claims about what he did there;
- Doctors questioned Copp's claims that he is seriously and terminally ill;
- The doctor Copp says he sought care from within the fund's time requirement said the encounter never happened;
- And Copp's body-finding machine, which he said he invented, turned out to be a commercially available gas detector.

In January, Copp received \$649,000 from the fund, which was set up by Congress to compensate those injured in the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks or the families of the several thousand people who were killed.

A Justice Department spokesman in Washington, D.C., said the department has investigated about a dozen fund fraud claims.

The fund processed about 2,900 death claims and 4,400 injury claims before it shut down last month. Some of those claims were withdrawn or denied. The fund paid out about \$6.5 billion.

Several people have been charged with fraud in connection with false claims.

Some recent cases involving the fund, in which fraudulent claims were identified before payment was made, resulted in sentences of between 12 and 18 months in prison for mail fraud and making false statements. Mail fraud carries a maximum prison sentence of five years and a \$250,000 fine. The statute also

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requires the convicted person to pay back the money taken by fraud.

Norm Cairns, spokesman for U.S. Attorney David Iglesias in Albuquerque, said if Copp were to be prosecuted for making a false claim to the fund, the criminal proceedings would likely occur in U.S. District Court in New Mexico.

'Bald-faced liar'

Copp flew to New York aboard the Journal Publishing Company's corporate jet on Sept. 13. The flight had special clearance from the Federal Aviation Administration when all civilian aircraft in the U.S. were grounded.

Copp got to the World Trade Center site 21/2 days after the terrorist attacks. The compensation fund covered rescue workers who were injured there in the first four days.

Congress created the fund on Sept. 22, 2001, while Copp was still in New York. He returned to his home in the East Mountains on Sept. 26 or Sept. 27.

Copp has since left New Mexico and is living in Nova Scotia, Canada, where he was born.

He did not respond to a phone call from the Journal about the Justice Department investigation except to say, "Wow, I'm amazed you're calling me" and to refer the call to a law firm he said was representing him.

John Norman, chief of special operations for the New York Fire Department, said a special agent from the Justice Department interviewed him about Copp's claims to have played a crucial role in World Trade Center rescue operations.

Norman said he told the investigator that Copp had no authority to be at the World Trade Center site and was not in charge of clearing the underground cavities.

Norman also told the Journal Copp was a "bald-faced liar."

The Justice Department has also contacted Ray Lynch, who was the deputy commissioner in the New York Mayor's Office of Emergency Services and who refused to give Copp credentials when he arrived in New York.

Lynch told the Journal that Copp's claim to have high-level White House authorization was fake.

Copp exposed

Andrew Hubert of the Virginia FEMA Task Force also said he has been contacted by a Justice Department investigator.

Hubert contacted the Journal after reading the series last week and said he was the first person Copp approached at the Jacob

Javits Center in New York, where rescue teams were getting credentials and assignments. Hubert said he has become familiar with Copp from 15 years of traveling to foreign disasters.

"It dawned on me right away who he was and I exposed him to the rest of our command and Ray Lynch," Hubert said.

Elliot Pierce, the Albuquerque doctor who Copp said he sought care from when he was having coughing fits at the World Trade Center, was also contacted by the Justice Department.

Pierce was never contacted by anyone with the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund, even though Copp used an encounter he said he had with Pierce to prove he met the fund's requirement for seeking medical help.

Pierce said he would have told anyone who called that he never spoke to Copp about his health and wasn't even in New York until late on Sept. 18— after the time frame had expired.



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