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A Coney Island police officer, trapped under water. Boat passengers sinking off the North Carolina coast. Fires in the Rockaways and babies in distress. These were the greatest moments of peril-but with them came great moments of valor.

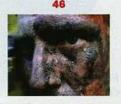
FEATURES



'Valley of Death' The mission was failing; the wounded were dying: the medevac team flew in. By Tony Dokoupil

and John Ryan

The Urge to Serve What makes a mother of a 3-year-old girl feel such a powerful need to sacrifice for her country? By Gail Sheehy



The SEALs' Biggest Threat What worries America's most celebrated fighting force is the lure of Hollywood's siren song. By Daniel Klaidman



The Renegade Diplomat Kael Weston risked his life on the front lines in Afghanistan-and reached his own, unusual conclusions. By Rajiv Chandrasekaran

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ON THE COVER FROM LEFT: Kenneth Brodhead, Erik Sabiston, David Capps, NOT PICTURED: Julia Bringloe PHOTOGRAPH BY PLATON