

# Bravest dives right in

## Marine Unit 1 member saves man from under Hudson pier

BY JONATHAN LEMIRE  
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

SWIMMING through the 40-degree waters of the Hudson River, Firefighter John Rizzo peered into the darkness beneath Pier 40, hoping to see signs of life.

A sudden movement caught his attention — a barely conscious man, desperately gripping one of the pier's pilings.

"When he saw the light from my flashlight, he started screaming for help," said Rizzo, a member of FDNY Marine Unit 1, which was dispatched to the river late Wednesday after a report that a man had fallen into the water.

"I knew I had to act fast," Rizzo said.

Moments earlier, at 11:40 p.m. the FDNY's 27-foot safe boat had pulled up to the pier off W. Houston St. Firefighters were told by Parks Department workers that a man was trapped under the pier.

Donning a dry suit, Rizzo hooked himself up to a tether rope and dived into the inky water. With three fellow crew members acting as spotters, he slipped beneath the pier.

"The river was really

high, so I only had about a foot of clearance between the top of the water and the bottom of the pier," said Rizzo, a 12-year veteran of the FDNY who joined the marine unit in 2006. "It was very difficult to make anything out."

Once he reached the flailing man, Rizzo locked his arms around him and tried to keep him stable.

"He went limp when I got to him. He had been under there for a long time, and I don't think he had much energy left," Rizzo said. "I then yelled to the boat and the guys pulled the rope and got us



John Rizzo

out." The firefighters rushed the victim, identified by sources as Messaud Boutamime, 23, to Bellevue Hospital. He was treated and released in good condition yesterday morning.

"It's a sense of accomplishment, and it's a good feeling to do what we trained to do," said Rizzo, whose boat has been used in five rescues in the past year.

"It's a new set of challenges for me to save someone in the water [rather] than in a burning building."

jlemire@nydailynews.com