



“America salutes you this day, for a job well done...”

by Joanne M. Steen | September 11, 2011

We gather today in the shadow of a Manhattan skyline that still looks wounded, on a date recognized around the world simply by its month and day. We come together, not to relive the horror of that day, but to recognize the responder/working dog teams, veterinarians and VMATS, and all helping personnel, who contributed to the initial search and rescue, and the inevitable salvage and recovery after the 9/11 attacks.

Markers of time, such as this 10th anniversary, have the power to resurrect traumatic memories and troubling feelings. With vivid clarity, we each can recall where and how we learned our American homeland was under attack. Like acid-etched glass, that moment was permanently seared into our psyche.

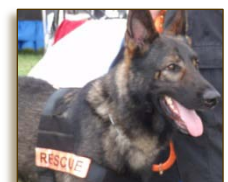
For the men and women who call this greater New York area home, the attacks of Sept 11th were profoundly personal. The emotional wreckage of 9/11 smothered this area like a hazy, hot and humid day. Some present at this Remembrance Ceremony had family members who never came home from their World Trade Center jobs; others lost neighbors and friends. And there was no escaping the ‘Empty Sky’ in the New York skyline, for a powerful piece of New York’s identity was missing. Once perched at the tip of lower Manhattan, the Twin Towers were the touchstone to the City: glistening in the daybreak sun; glowing in the twilight at day’s end, and glittering like rising stars in the evening darkness.

I, too, had a personal connection to these towers. I watched them rise through the windows of my high school; studied their engineering brilliance in college, and fell in love with a handsome Navy pilot atop this pinnacle of New York City. When the towers fell, I took it personally: as an American, a native of New Jersey, and a Navy pilot’s widow who cradled a folded American flag much too early in life.

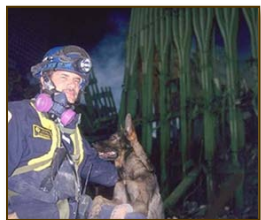
Ten years ago today, on a picture-perfect Tuesday morning, mass murderers turned hijacked airplanes into weapons, attacking the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Aboard Flight 93, the feisty passengers and crew fought back, foiling another attack on Washington. By nightfall, a crater entombed the remains of Flight 93 in a Pennsylvania field and chunks of the Pentagon smoldered in fiery ruin. Baptized with jet fuel and blood, the Twin Towers ceased to exist, and Ground Zero emerged from the burning debris.

As a shaken world struggled to comprehend this incomprehensible attack, you did what good people do: You volunteered!

Selflessly, you gave your time, your extraordinary resources as highly-trained working dog teams, and your critically-needed expertise in search, rescue and recovery. You volunteered your veterinary skills, and with competence and compassion, you tended to the wounds and needs of the four-pawed team members.



10th Anniversary Tribute | Canine Search and Rescue Community of 9/11 Liberty State Park, Jersey City, NJ | September 11, 2011



You worked under extreme and often dangerous conditions.

“That first night at Ground Zero,” you recalled, “there wasn’t much light and steel beams had fallen like skeletons over the burning debris. We had no idea what was out there.”

You found other scenes of horror in the Pentagon rubble and the Shanksville crash site. At the Fresh Kills Landfill in Staten Island, where Ground Zero debris was hauled, your mission became one of recovery. Working with other SAR professionals, you combed through 1.8 million tons of debris, recovering evidence, human remains and personal objects of everyday life.

When asked why you volunteered, you explained, “Search and rescue people are a silent-service. We come in, we do our job, and then we leave.” And when your job was finished, you went home, perhaps never realizing the profound goodness of your work.

To the surviving families of 9/11, those remnants of personal belongings and shreds of human remains, which you recovered, are sacred. They are not proof of death, but validation of a life! A life similar to yours and mine, in common, every-day ways.

You will never know how many of September 11th's fallen men and women you helped find their way home—one last time—to the loving families and friends who waited, hoped and prayed for them to come home.

America salutes you this day, for a job well done. You have our country’s profound respect and deepest gratitude for your service to our Nation, our communities, and where ever you are called to serve.

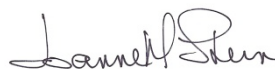


Looking back on the last ten years, patriotism, honor, justice and resiliency motivated America forward. The attack sites were cleared, the Pentagon repaired, and memorials and museums tell the stories of unspeakable tragedy and the power of goodness to rise out of evil. Navy SEALs delivered justice to bin Laden’s doorstep. And 7 tons of World Trade Center steel, which owns the final moments of thousands of lives, was forged into the bow of USS New York.



Soon, the New York will deploy into harm’s way, and we wish her fair winds and following seas. She sails with a mission of keeping the peace, but woe to the bad guys with evil intention who cross her bow, for hell hath no fury like an irate New Yorker!

God bless you all, and may God continue to bless America!



Joanne M. Steen

