

To Honor Our Fallen Brothers

by Lieutenant Neil Skow, Hazardous Materials Company 1

Who ever would have thought that the front lines on the new war on terrorism would begin on September 11, 2001, between Church and West Streets? The tragic events that befell the United States that day forever have changed the sense of security that Americans have taken for granted as part of their birthright throughout the 20th century. No singular event since the bombing of Pearl Harbor has so shaken Americans' beliefs that they are secure within the confines of their country's borders.

The incredible impact that the World Trade Center collapse had on the FDNY with the loss of 343 Brothers--coupled with still-unknown totals of medical- and stress-related retirements--is overwhelming, as is caring and providing for the families of our Brothers lost in this first battle on the new war on terrorism. Who was really prepared at any house with a fallen Brother to handle the continued obligation to the citizens of the City of New York, plus work at Ground Zero for months on end, hoping against hope, that our Brothers and fellow Americans would be found alive? Sharing the grief with the families and providing for their needs baptized FDNY members in battle because we knew that we had to get it done. And get it done we did, in the proud FDNY tradition of taking care of each other.

Yet, the effects of digging, searching and digging some more for months on end, working the chart, acting as family liaisons and attending funeral after funeral left many with the sense that there had to be something more to do. There had to be something that would let our Brothers, families and friends know that this day had changed our collective lives forever. Members pledged never to forget what had been done since that day and to remember those lost and help the families of our fallen Brothers make it through these terrible times. I was one of many so affected.

The opportunity for me to do "something more" and show how I felt came during the middle of May 2002, when I was contacted by my Army Reserve chain of command, inviting me to travel to Normandy, France. At the request of the people from the town of St. Mere Eglise, I represented not only the Army Reserve, but the FDNY, in the annual ceremonies, celebrating the invasion of Fortress Europe on the 6th of June, 1944. St. Mere Eglise was the first town liberated by the 82nd Airborne Division in the early morning of D-Day.

Departing from Ft. Benning, Georgia, on the 2nd of June, with members of the 1st and 2nd Battalions, 75th Ranger Regiment, along with soldiers from the Ranger Training Brigade and the 82nd Airborne Division, I flew via the Azores, landing in Normandy, France, on the 4th of June. It was an honor to be in the company of these military personnel.

During the course of my deployment with fellow soldiers, I discovered how truly moved these mostly combat veterans were with what the FDNY had sacrificed and what FDNY had shown the world by its actions--including raising the American flag--which inspired them to stay focused and highly motivated during their combat actions in Afghanistan. In fact, every member of the 24 Rangers from the Ranger Regiment proudly showed me the playing cards and coins with the caption, *let's roll*, on one side and the picture of FDNY's three Brothers (FFs Billy Eisengrein, George Johnson and Dan McWilliams) raising the American flag at Ground Zero.

My stay in France included guided tours to the five main invasion beaches, along with Point Du Hoc and the Normandy American Cemetery above Omaha Beach, where more than 9300 American servicemen are interned, including Medal of Honor winner Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. Additionally, the Ranger Museum and Grand Camp-Maisy and the D-Day Memorial Museum in Caen were on the itinerary.

The unexpected pleasure was provided by American, Canadian and British veterans from World War II, who were at all five beaches due to the D-Day ceremonies. This firsthand experience with combat veterans provided incredible insight to what it must have been like as Army Rangers climbing the cliffs at Point Du Hoc, fighting across the open sands of Omaha Beach or dropping into St. Mere Eglise during the early-



(Above) Left to right are Guy Fortin, the Fire Chief of Sainte-Mere-Eglise, FDNY Lieutenant Neil Skow and Sainte-Mere-Eglise FF Rober Fallon. FF Fallon displays plaque that commemorates the Sainte-Mere-Eglise firefighters who battled a church fire on D-Day. Chief Fortin and Lieutenant Skow hold helmet belonging to FF Fallon's father, who fought at this church fire wearing the above helmet.

photos courtesy of Lieutenant Neil Skow

morning hours of 6 June 1944. It became immediately apparent that the young American soldiers had both admiration and respect for these aging veterans, whose numbers decline every year. The stories they have to tell seem that much more important to remember.

As a member of FDNY, my presence was specifically requested after returning from the daily tours and visits with members of the military. I was hosted by and stayed with the Fortin family in the town of St. Mere Eglise, where I discovered French cooking and customs and answered many questions about America and the events surrounding September 11th. Fortin is the Chief of the town's volunteer fire department.

I switched to my FDNY dress uniform to accompany Chief Fortin to participate in various ceremonies with the color guards from both the 75th Ranger Regiment and 82nd Airborne Division. Needless to say, our collective presence drew an immediate large and friendly crowd. Wherever we went, pictures, handshakes and autographs were the order of the day.

Additionally, I was invited by the local school--which Anne (age 13) and Francois Fortin (age 11) attend--to speak about the events of 11 September and what transpired in the months that followed. There was a great deal of interest about families of lost members and how Americans in general and New Yorkers in particular were adjusting. Words cannot describe the pleasure at hearing more than 45 French students (ages 11-13), expressing their concerns and support for America and its people.

The highlight of my trip and the event that helped me express that "something more" was being done came on the 8th of June, 2002, at approximately 1130 hours when I exited the C-130 aircraft at 1000 feet as part of the mass parachute jump over the same drop zone the 82nd Airborne Division used on the 6th of June, 1944. I wore my FDNY bomber jacket in memory of the lost Brothers and to let the French people below see why I was jumping.

Ninety-three paratroopers jumped that day and I had the honor of jumping with 24 Army Rangers who had adopted me from the start. Below us lay the beautiful French countryside, with thousands of townspeople from the surrounding communities lining the road, watching all three aircraft using three passes each, discharge all jumpers.

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Thomas D. Healy	Ladder 25	Henry G. Molle	Squad 288	Peter A. Scipilliti	Engine 255
Dennis J. Heedles	Ladder 76	Clark J. Mooney	Ladder 52	Gregory J. Sclafani	Ladder 85
Eugene G. Herchenroder	Engine 268	Robert D. Morisie	Engine 164	Roger Scott	Engine 281
Harold Herzog	Engine 303	Joseph A. Morstatt	Battalion 13	James M. Sharpe, III	Ladder 51
Eugene T. Hickey	Ladder 112	Leonard Munda	Engine 164	Donald V. Shields	Ladder 133
Robert F. Hunter	Haz-Mat 1	Kevin A. Munnelly	Engine 313	Franky Simmons, Jr.	Ladder 52
James A. Iosue	Ladder 84	John J. Nash	Engine 313	John A. Simoncini	Engine 224
Richard E. Janoscak, Jr.	Rescue 4	Anthony J. Nuccio	Ladder 175	Joseph Socci	Engine 155
Julio Jimenez	Ladder 17	Richard W. O'Brien	Engine 166	John E. Spencer	Engine 313
Thomas J. Jones	Engine 265	Thomas W. O'Brien	Ladder 110	Guillermo Sterling	Engine 95
Thomas R. Keir	Engine 284	Michael J. O'Donnell	Ladder 35	Peter J. Strahl, Jr.	Engine 236
Daniel E. Kemmet	Ladder 173	Michael K. O'Rourke	Ladder 77	Ricardo M. Tavares	Engine 157
Michael P. Kemper	Ladder 83	Dean G. Pappas	Ladder 43	Oscar C. Thompson	Ladder 155
Evan D. King	Ladder 140	Robert A. Pappas	Engine 71	Edward V. Tietjen	Ladder 48
Rudolf W. Kohlroser	Ladder 162	John L. Passaretti	Engine 16	Gregory Tilearcio	Ladder 55
Apolinar LaGrandier (2)	Engine 235	Frank P. Perrino	Battalion 23	Kevin A. Tonkin	Ladder 116
Frederick H. Lawrence	Squad 1	Frank A. Perrotta	Ladder 149	Marshall A. Trapanese, Jr.	Engine 281
Robert J. Lembo	Ladder 144	Matthew W. Pettenato	Engine 233	Frank M. Trezza	Ladder 162
Edward R. Loehmann	Ladder 48	Edmund L. Plunkett	Engine 220	Michael Tripptree	Ladder 121
Christopher V. Long	Engine 260	Robert F. Polacik	Engine 281	Edward J. Turner	Engine 158
Joseph R. Losinno	Engine 302	Dan J. Potter	Ladder 31	Karl W. Van Kasten	Engine 326
Leroy Magee	Engine 70	Timothy J. Quin	Ladder 86	Angel Vasquez	Tech Services
Stephen R. Mancino	Engine 74	Joseph A. Recco	Engine 268	Saul Velez	Ladder 36
Daniel W. Manning	Ladder 43	Jaime J. Resker	Ladder 166	Richard H. Ward, Jr.	Mask-F
James A. Mara	Engine 67	Lenny I. Rintel	Ladder 160	Gregory W. Warnock	Ladder 114
Thomas P. Marks	Engine 66	William E. Ritter	Ladder 149	Jeffrey G. Weber	Ladder 149
Thomas F. Mastrodomenco	Engine 257	Alfred Rivera	Ladder 23	Michael A. Wernick	Ladder 9
Raymond W. Mayr	Ladder 106	William A. Rohe	Ladder 157	John L. White	Ladder 23
Thomas J. Mazaras	Ladder 157	William H. Ruhnu	Ladder 157	Robert J. Wilday	Ladder 6
Gregor W. McConnell	Ladder 167	Stephen E. Russack	Ladder 107	Michael G. Witkowski	Engine 278
Cornelius J. McGovern	Ladder 39	Peter J. Santelli	Ladder 160	Arnold Witlin	Ladder 147
John W. McGrane	Engine 265	James P. Savarese, Jr.	Battalion 27	Michael P. Woods	Engine 329
Christian P. McGurk	Engine 152	Alan Schickler	Engine 53	Andrew C. Wyckoff	Engine 95
Thomas V. McKeon	Battalion 44	William R. Schumacher	Engine 88	Mark J. Youngberg	Ladder 77
George J. McNally	Ladder 81	Alan E. Schwartz	Ladder 4	Gary P. Ziegler	Engine 204
Vincent W. Mischke	Engine 328	Victor M. Sciarappa, Jr.	Engine 164	Anthony W. Zilliox	ADMDT

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I had memorized the first 50 names of a list I had of all 343 Brothers who responded to their "last alarm" on 9/11, hoping to say every name prior to landing on free French soil. I was able to recite the 37th name, FF Andrew C. Brunn, Ladder Company 5, before landing.

As is the tradition of each jumper who participates in these commemorative jumps, it is expected that something small be left, either on the drop zone where one lands for the French children to find after the drop zone is cleared or for one to give them when walking off the drop zone, such as a beret or jump wings. I believe I left something more important that day on the drop zone at St. Mere Eglise--the laminated list of all 343 names, along with a miniature FDNY flag.

I did not know all 343 lost Brothers. That did not make a difference. I knew that it was only by chance on the 11th of September that I was not working in Ladder Company 2. My mutual partner and true friend, Captain Fred III, was working, however.

I wanted to make a difference by jumping for the first time in more than 21 years. I wanted to show the Army Rangers and paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne Division that I knew that they had taken the flag from them and carried the fight against terrorism in their name.

I will never forget the friendships that I made with my fellow soldiers and the incredible warmth and sincere feelings of compassion the French people showed during my short stay.

In closing, to my 10 lost Brothers from Engine 8, Ladder 2 and Battalion 8 and, especially Fred, I hope they all know that I miss them and that I jumped for 343; I jumped for 10; I jumped for Fred.



About the Author...

Lieutenant Neil Skow is a 25-year veteran of the FDNY, currently working in Haz-Mat Company 1.

(Right) Stained-glass window from the church in Sainte-Mere-Eglise. This church was ablaze on D-Day. Note the paratroopers incorporated into the glass (arrows).

