Press Release

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Fort Drum Public Affairs

Fort Drum first responders, community members commemorate 9/11 anniversary

FORT DRUM, N.Y. (Sept. 11, 2020) -- Members of the Fort Drum Fire and Emergency Services commemorated the 19th anniversary of 9/11 today at Clark Hall, with a small gathering of community members in attendance.

A bell tolled four times during the 9/11 Remembrance Ceremony, each followed by a moment of silence to recognize a specific event that happened on Sept. 11, 2001.

\*8:46 a.m., when American Airlines Flight 11 hit the north tower of the World Trade Center in New York City

\*9:03 a.m., when United Airlines Flight 175 struck the south tower

\*9:37 a.m., when American Flight 77 hit the Pentagon in Washington, D.C.

\*10:07 a.m., when United Flight 93 crashed into an empty field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania.

The phrase “Never Forget” is oft-repeated during 9/11 tributes and ceremonies such as this, but those words resonate strongly in the hearts and mind of first responders.

“For me, ‘Never Forget’ is doing just what we are doing today – paying respect and remembering those who gave the ultimate sacrifice,” said Deputy Fire Chief Michael Marks, Fort Drum Fire and Emergency Services. “The events of that horrific day run through the minds of our first responders daily. There are so many reminders, whether it’s on the television, or it has been incorporated in one of our training classes, or maybe it is a picture on the wall in the fire station – there is always something there for us to remember.”

Marks was working on morning vehicle checks with his crew outside Fire Station 3 when they heard that a plane crashed into the World Trade Center.

“We turned on the news to try to find more information and quickly realized how intense the situation was as the second plane struck,” he said. “As for most people, it was hard to fathom. I remember wanting nothing more than to be there, wanting to help those people in need.

“It was a rough time after, knowing so much destruction had occurred, so many people in need of help and I was so far away,” Marks continued. “It is natural for folks in our line of business to want to help, but this was so much more than that – it was painful to not be there.”

Mary Sherman retired from Fort Drum as a nurse case manager several years ago and now works at the Watertown Veterans Affairs Outpatient Clinic. She said that she has attended the ceremony almost every year since 2005.

“I was at the Pentagon on 9/11, so I honor this day every year,” she said. “I just have to disappear and do something like this, or else I’m no good to anybody on this day.”

Sherman said that she worked for the Office of the Chief of the Army Reserves in the Jefferson Plaza 2, across the street from the Pentagon. When the plane struck, everyone in her building evacuated outside, and she saw people streaming out of the Pentagon.

“It was an eerie feeling outside,” she recalled. “Reagan International Airport is right behind us, and so we were used to planes flying overhead and all the noise from that. But all the planes had to turn off their engines, and that constant hum we were so used to went away.”

Sherman said that she lost friends on 9/11, and she remembers frantically trying to call people she knew who were inside the building.

“The phones were jammed and we couldn’t do anything,” Sherman said. “We couldn’t find out anything that was happening at the Pentagon, because the national news kept overriding local news and they kept going back to the Twin Towers. It’s a day I will never forget.”

Sherman said that those thoughts and memories will circulate in her mind throughout the day, and she spends time on 9/11 connecting with people.

“I’ve already had five or six texts this morning who knew where I was that day,” Sherman said. “One of my co-workers called and asked what kind of coffee I want, so it will be on my desk when I get to work.”

The annual event was scaled down this year to conform to COVID-19 safety protocols. It was held inside Clark Hall where 9/11 artifacts are on display, when normally the ceremony is conducted outside the building with a wreath-laying at the 9/11 Memorial. Road repavement in that area necessitated the change in venue.

“When the Fire Chief (Jason Brunet) and I started planning this year’s observance, we were about two months into the COVID-19 pandemic,” Marks said. “At that time, we were both still expecting to be able to conduct the ‘normal’ ceremony that we have always done at Clark Hall. As we rolled into July and mid-July, we quickly knew we needed to adjust our plan.”

Still, Marks said there was no doubt that they would conduct some sort of ceremony.

“There was never a point where we discussed not having anything, but we knew we needed to scale back the attendance for the health and well-being of the community and the first responders who would be in attendance,” he said.

“This ceremony allows us to take a tactical pause and really reflect on that day,” Marks continued. “It is imperative that our folks are given the chance to pay their respects. Each of us will remember and reflect in different ways, but today, on September 11th, we do it together.”

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Caption: Members of Fort Drum Fire and Emergency Services commemorated the 19th anniversary of 9/11 today at Clark Hall, with a small gathering of community members in attendance. During the annual remembrance ceremony, a bell tolled four times during the 9/11 Remembrance Ceremony, each followed by a moment of silence to recognize a specific event that happened on Sept. 11, 2001. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)