

THE WORLD TRADE CENTER

The Gates of Hell - 'Ground Zero'

JD Lock, Lieutenant Colonel (Ret), US Army

I have seen war today.

11 September 2001



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"There but for the grace of God go I." They claim there are a million stories in the Naked City and, if that is so, there are sadly now millions more following the unimaginable and malevolent events of the 11th of September. My sudden change in plans were meant to surprise a family friend with the oath of enlistment but, instead, the surprise was not all his. As I watched in anger and absolute frustration the Twin Towers burn in the distance, I momentarily pondered life's seemingly random and whimsical twists of fate that had placed me there, on the Verrazano Narrows Bridge at 0846 hours rather than in the basement of the Word Trade Center complex stepping off the PATH...as I had so routinely done previously for more than three years.



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concrete thoroughfares elicited images of old, circa 1950 science fiction movies that portrayed the end of the world. In a sense, maybe it was the end of the world...at least the end of a world we once knew.

Looking to be of some assistance in this time of national and personal tragedy, I soon found myself twenty-four hours later leading the Federal government's first Damage Assessment Response Team into what was being termed

But, the contemplation of life's little mysteries was an exercise best left to others I thought as I drove towards the Holland Tunnel on major artery's devoid of any other vehicular traffic other than my own car, under huge electronic signs that read "New York City Closed." New York City closed? The pale of gray smoke rising from the great metropolis in the distance and the vast emptiness of the normally choked and winding



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friends and associates he knew to be missing and presumed dead. The list was extensive, detailed and heartbreaking and I struggled, as I would later, to keep from crying. Upon this brave man's departure, the best I could offer was a heartfelt "Thank you" and a pat on the shoulder as we began to work our way through the debris, slush, and hoses underfoot. An exceptionally underwhelming gesture for the noble sacrifices made and selfless services rendered...a powerless feeling further reinforced as we passed the refrigerated truck of a makeshift morgue as six men lifted a heavy black body bag into the semi truck's cavernous interior.

'Ground Zero.' Moving through forests worth of littered paper, thick, dark smoke, and the pulverized dust of concrete, from the police command post at PS 189 at Chambers and West to the city's mobile emergency operations centers along West Street to the fire department's Field Control at Vessey and West, we eventually were linked up by the acting city fire chief with one of his department's special operations captains who led our team around the World Trade Center's perimeter. As we walked, the grime covered, red eyed, overwhelmingly exhausted fireman who'd been on his feet fighting the battle for 24 hours and who wore a 'First Responder' patch on his shoulder, wearily ran down the names of those



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Thursday found me needing to actively participate in the search for survivors, to assist the legions of firefighters, police, and assorted other volunteers that we, the nation, were all watching on the small screen. In pursuit of that quest, I approached a corner of Ground Zero at Liberty and West only to be stopped...as a function of my battle dress uniform and rank...and asked by a group of firefighters about how they could obtain additional 'e-tools' of the type carried by a handful of rescuers who most obviously were past or present military service personnel. The small, collapsible, metallic implements were religiously prized by those few who tightly held onto theirs. A swift call by cell phone to the New York District Army Corps of Engineer emergency operations center at Caven Point, NJ, would soon result in the quick procurement of 200 of the precious tools from nearby Fort Dix.



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With the call in and a "working on it" confirmation to the fireman, I put away the phone, jostled my way through the gathering of people milling about, grabbed a new pair of work gloves from a box, before moving towards the debris of what remained of 3 World Trade Center, the Marriott Hotel, that defined the current forward edge of the battle area from that direction. Crushed by the implosion of the south tower, Tower 2, all that remained of the Marriott's once twenty some stories that stretched for half a block were five crushed stories serving as little more than a corner stone.

As I moved forward, I passed a small security guard shack that once secured an entrance into the underground parking facility...site of the earlier 1993 terrorist bombing attack against the Twin Towers. Prominently, and ironically, displayed on the door was a sign that proclaimed "All Vehicles Subject to Search." Sad to realize that it should have read "All Aircraft..." as we were caught looking in the wrong direction.



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Three processions of men moved up, into the wreckage of what had been the Marriott. I opted to assist with the middle line. No bucket brigade here. Items were picked up and handed back down the line to be discarded farther to the rear where the debris would eventually be scooped up and deposited in a dump truck to be driven off. As an area cleared on the heap or individuals moved back for a break, the line would slowly, painstakingly advance.



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For nearly an hour, we worked, making our way forward, up onto the rubble, until around 1600 hours when, suddenly and unexpectedly, the order was given to quickly fall back. The threat appeared to be 1 Liberty Plaza, ominously blackened and residing on the east side of Church Street at the corner of Liberty Street. A slight shift on the top floors had been sensed by a survey laser leading to concerns that the structure was in immediate danger of collapse. If the sixty or so stories were to fall, the risk was too great to ignore.

Many of the searchers quickly began to move down off the heap of rubble. Two other volunteers stayed with me to assist the last, those who were highest up, over some unstable debris. From the look of it, however, and based on our team's earlier assessment the day before, I didn't believe that the Liberty skyscraper was going anywhere soon...if ever.

Moved back towards the western edge of the island, along the Hudson in the vicinity of the World Financial Center's marina, the mass of searchers took a well-earned breather, resting, eating, drinking, or sorting through the growing piles of clothes and

equipment. I stopped at a stand to grab a quick bite to eat. Behind a table, a policeman was 'hawking' his wares. "How about a chicken sandwich, burger or fries. They're from McDonald's." Without skipping a beat, a browsing fireman asked, "Can I super size that?" Glad to see a sense of humor still remained despite the pall of dust, smoke, death, and destruction that literally hung over this once vibrant city.

Finally, around 1700 hours, the word came that we could once again move forward to resume search operations. At Liberty and West, a fireman directed the pedestrian traffic of the searchers, sending 'volunteers' forward along Liberty while firemen, the trained searchers, were sent north, towards the ground floor of Two World



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Financial Center...to what he defined as "the true ground zero." As I stopped to query him, he came to attention, saluted me, and identified himself as an Army reservist. Even in the chaos of the 'battlefield,' discipline continued to exist...as a few firefighters around me were quick to comment.

Any uniform, especially a military uniform with some rank, was a 'key' to the kingdom of 'Ground Zero.' "Follow the hose" had been the man's hymn for those of us heading through the World Financial Center, and follow the hose it would be. With a small group of firefighters trailing me and feeling like Dorothy walking the 'yellow brick road,' I made my way into the pitch-black dark of a mud encrusted, smoke filled, narrow corridor. For a moment, I hesitated in the dark, unsure as to whether I was heading underground, towards the subterranean floors of the northern Tower...down into 'the belly of the beast.' Unequipped with any emergency or rescue gear, my hesitation was to question whether I could be of any 'value added.' As two firefighters passed by my side, I fell in step with them. Even without the gear, I knew that I could be of some assistance...and I would be damned if I didn't stand shoulder to shoulder with these men.



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stories or so in some places, pushed out like a peeled banana, propped up and resting against the shell of 6WTC, U.S. Customs Building, to the north and, seemingly, solitarily on its own to the east. I immediately realized that our 360-degree damage assessment reconnaissance of the previous day had been somewhat deceptive...and exceptionally lacking in overall perspective.

Laid out before me were the bits and pieces of twelve million square feet of office space from two towers that had once spanned three dimensions, but were now compressed into a two

As it would turn out, my hesitation was unnecessary for we soon emerged from the murky cave that we had traversed to find ourselves in front of the building we had entered. Before me lay a scene that even my tour of Bosnia and combat engineering experience did not prepare me for...complete, utter, cataclysmic devastation. It was an image that had yet to be conveyed by the media as I gazed out at the five-story mound of debris that rose around the vertical shards of what remained of the steel beamed core of the north tower. Remnants of the structure's outer façade...the skin...stood upright, to a height of twenty



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dimensional footprint only a bit larger than sixteen acres. The Twin Towers had been constructed with 200,000 tons of steel and 425,000 cubic yards of concrete and, by the looks of it, nearly ninety percent of that material lay crammed in a pile five stories above and six stories below the ground.

No building could be practicably designed or constructed to withstand the impact of a commercial aircraft carrying the equivalent in jet fuel of one kiloton of explosives...or five percent of the kilotonnage of the Hiroshima atomic bomb. To survive the initial impact, alone, was a credit to American

design and standards. But even the best design and the best construction cannot survive the intense heat of fires generated by 15,000 gallons of fiery aviation fuel...especially when the vertical slice of a tilted aircraft maximized the spread of that fire across multiple floors. As flames spread and temperatures rose within the towers' central cores, the encompassing steel, began to literally melt as the heat climbed past 300+ degrees to those as great as 1,500 degrees. Eventually, and much too quickly, the physical laws of nature demanded that the integrity of the steel frame and concrete floors fail. But, even in such catastrophic failure, American design came through with an implosion that significantly mitigated any further cataclysmic devastation of lower Manhattan. Even in death, the Twin Towers were somehow...noble...in their self-containment.



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had not been witnessed, much less experienced, on American soil to this staggering scale since the American Civil War. Before us, unerringly at our feet, was West Street, buried four to eight feet under the scattered debris of the north Tower. In the street, rest the burned remains of a hook and ladder fire truck, blackened and twisted from the intense heat of the fires, the engine compartment in the front sliced open by a massive steel beam that still lay upon it. It was whispered that the remains of eight to twelve firefighters had been recovered earlier in the area of that vehicle. Snaking out, over the site were a number of fire hoses, many flat, lifeless, empty of water. A few meters south were the overturned wrecks of two Emergency Medical Service vehicles, strangely lacking any fire damage.



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Imposing forty foot long, four foot by two and a half foot girders were scattered about as though they were toothpicks, injected amidst the smaller steel beams of the north tower's west side façade that had struck a corner of 3WFC on the way down. Even from ground level, it was easy to see that the beams lay, for the most part, in the same pattern that they had once stood. Light sheet metal that had once covered the face of the skyscraper



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littered the area nearly as much as the paper lying about. Rebar, tangled and twisted, were totally devoid of the concrete in which they were once encased. Computers, office furniture, and drywall were virtually pulverized to the point it ceased to exist. Dust, inches deep, was layered over everything.



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Just beyond lay the gates of hell, one of the two true 'ground zeroes'...the five story mound of rubble that constituted the imploded cadaver of the north Tower 1. A black shroud of smoke enveloped the mammoth sarcophagus, nearly blotting out the second gate to hell, south Tower 2. How 110-stories of such mass could be compressed into such a small volume of area...even with the six stories below...should be beyond the laws of physics.

"Where does one begin?" I asked myself as I bleakly assessed the results of a limited Armageddon. "Wherever," was the only imaginable answer. With the light beginning to fade, I joined a small group of firefighters who randomly selected a location and began to dig. A massive girder, against which I periodically leaned, stretched vertically to the sky, the force of the collapse having impaled the joist in the ground as though it were a javelin tossed by Paul Bunyon. A meter or so away, a man's slip-on shoe, black in color, sat solitarily, forlornly, on a beam. From underneath that beam, two more shoes, a man's and a woman's, were pulled out. With each discovery, the unspoken questions were the same: was the footwear attached to a body or was there still 'something' in it. In all three of these cases the answers were the same. "No"...this time.



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A couple meters on the other side of the girder we were attempting to dig under, another team dug in an effort to meet us underneath. Two camera men walked by, one carrying a small optical wand, the second a six-foot rod with a lens and microphone tip. Each had a small monitor view screen. With no need for them at that time, they moved on.

We called for buckets and began a line, feeding the three men in the hole with empty white or orange five-gallon buckets from Home Depot that they filled by gloved hand with debris and quickly exchanged. Empty buckets sailed through the air, skipping like beach balls, when called for from one line to another. On

one occasion, one such bucket became an unguided missile, striking a fireman in the head. Fortunately, given the heavy, reinforced helmet he wore, he shrugged off the impact and continued to work with nary a look in the direction of the missile launcher, who called out "Sorry" as he, too, continued to pass other buckets down the line.

Slowly, progress was made as the excavation site grew under the beam. Tools were exchanged on a rotational basis: pick, shovel, large crow bar, and short claw. A large sheet of canvas was encountered and pulled out after being quickly cut through by the razor sharp blade of the offered Leatherman Tool that I keep attached to the belt of my BDUs. Heavy concentrations of dust rose as the rubble was scooped up and passed along, coating our clothes in a soiled, off-white, chalky color. Lacking respirators, we attempted to minimize the amount of dust...and potential asbestos...we were inhaling with



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cheap, paper facemasks. Most of the time, however, it did not seem to be worth the effort. While some wore the masks continuously, the vast majority of us alternated, opting to put them in place only when the dust became exceptionally heavy. In the end, a deep, hacking cough would persist for weeks afterward...with many suffering from lung disorders.

With the attempted movement of a partially buried piece of sheet metal, there was a strong stench of what had to be decomposed human remains...or parts. The call went out for a dog. Unfortunately, there were

no cadaver dogs available, only a variety of search and rescue dogs. Most likely the cadaver dogs were out at the Staten Island landfill, checking the debris one last time prior to discard.

The three men in the hole pulled back to make room for the canine...which I lifted over a beam as it struggled to move. Into the hole the animal scampered, squeezing into areas that larger sized humans could not maneuver. Though not trained to alert for human remains, two of the dogs indicated a presence, so we continued to dig. Begrudgingly, we called out for a body bag in anticipation. In short order, two folded bags encased in a clear plastic bag came flying our way...one black, the other orange. I placed them out of the way, on a steel beam.



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Needing to gain access to the area below the thick sheet metal, a gas-powered circular saw was nosily and angrily yanked to life, wielded like a Star Wars 'Jedi Knight light saber' by a short but stocky fireman in a green t-shirt. Shaved head sweating profusely, the operator made blade contact with the offending metal. A continuous orange-red stream of sparks began to flow heavily from behind the saw, flying everywhere, bouncing off metal, off bodies, off the walls of the small hole as the grinding blade cut. Arm muscles and tendons strained, his back tightened as he contorted his body to get the blade at the right angle, applying the force necessary to make

the cut. Slowly, the black line of a cut made its way along the four-foot width of metal.

Papers lying about flared up in flames, set off by the sparks. Ignored for a while, the small bonfires grew until they were finally extinguished with a cascade liquid from a couple of water bottles. The cut completed, the metal finally gave, jimmied back and forth with a long metal bar until it could be pulled out and passed back along the bucket line. As I grabbed the reinforced suspenders of his fire trousers, the firefighter leaned forward and below, searching for where we would dig next.

For over an hour and a half, we labored to find the cadaver or body part, but no such luck, if luck is the proper term. Though the stench continued to rise periodically, it seemed to be rising from beneath another massive beam that had come to rest a foot or two above street level. Unable to move or to dig under the beam, we had to concede the fight and move on. If there were a body caught between the dense metal and the street, it's recovery would have to wait for the arrival of heavy equipment. Picking up a can of orange paint, the word "Searched" was sprayed on the beam with arrows pointing in the two directions our team had dug in our attempt to get beneath the underlying mass of steel. Gradually, orange markings began to sprout up everywhere, a virtual museum of search and rescue graphite.

There was no centralized plan, no sense of order. Just a Pavlovian work ethic that made one search for unoccupied terrain and begin digging. Looking for another spot, one of the team members asked, "OK...where do you want to work? Right here?" he arbitrarily indicated with a wave of his right hand at a point a few meters away. To the question another replied, "Let's go!" and the team moved over. They examined the area and found a break in the surface that, once cleared, offered the opportunity for subterranean exploration. Given the tightness of the underground passageway, a rope was attached to the 'tunnel rat' who would continue the search below, squeezing through any cavity or fissure he could find. In the end, though, he couldn't get much farther down into the small cavity than the length of his body.

In the distance, as we dug, back towards the corner of Vessey and West, a sizeable mound of rubble was attacked by a large number of firemen. On top, an American flag was planted. A vehicle...reportedly that of their fire chief, Peter Ganci...had been located underneath. The search...or so it was perceived...had begun in earnest for his remains.

Within the area, another of the fire department's pillars, Chaplain Reverend Mychal Judge, had been killed. Having arrived with the first responders, he had been offering last rights to a fellow firefighter who had been allegedly killed by a falling body when he, himself, was struck down by falling debris from Tower 1. Gathered in the arms of his men, his body had been taken to a nearby church where it had been placed before an altar...a most fitting resting place for a man of the cloth. Following a brief prayer, his pallbearers had headed back to the fight...just as, I'm sure, the Reverend Judge would have wanted it.

Other than words of encouragement, concern, or direction, little was said...and there was never a complaint. Every five minutes or so, the call went out for quiet. Whistles punctured the air, arms were raised. The army of searchers grew silent as they ceased digging, put down steel cutting saws, and turned off portable light generators to allow the search team dogs an opportunity to focus without distraction on a potential survivor location. With anticipation, eyes turned, seeking the location as we waited in anxious stillness for three, four, five minutes, hoping for some positive declaration that a survivor had been found. Raised hands muted any sound.

Taking advantage of the work stoppage, bottles flew through the air as modern day "Gunga Dins" made their way through the ranks with buckets filled with water, tossing bottles to those



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who indicated they needed them. Empty, discarded bottles littered the site. Eventually, and most cruelly, as though it were a hoax, "Yo!" would be yelled and the decibel level would rise, once again, as work resumed.

At our location, we did not worry about the noise from heavy equipment when the calls for quiet went out. Too deep in the wreckage for equipment to make its way from the southwest corner of the complex at Liberty and West, we had no such equipment in support. The dropped bridge across West had seen to it that no vehicles would make it from the northwest corner at Vessey and West. Too heavy to lift by crane and constructed with massive steel beams that prevented breaking through, it would be another two days before equipment would be able to dig its way to, and cut its way through, the bridge-obstacle. Despite the fact we can send men to the moon, despite the fact that we can 'see' the creation of the universe nearly all the way back to the Big Bang, and despite the fact that we have mapped the genetic code of human life, the simple and significantly frustrating fact was that we could not move heavy equipment literally a "stone's throw" distance to support our manual efforts. We were on our own.

Periodically, a searcher would run across personal effects, particularly personal photos, that nearly always brought him to a brief halt, as he peered at the image, placing a face to an occupant, wondering if that 'image' survived, or was 'it' buried beneath the mound upon which he toiled. Such halts were generally brief. A bucket would be grabbed and the picture stuffed within, to be passed down a long line of handlers to eventually end up in the landfill.

A team nearby...that included a female MIT structural engineer graduate student, seeing my uniform and rank, must have felt guilty about discarding such personal items and offered them to me to hold, believing that I would know of a centralized effort to collect and to return such items. Of course, there could never be such an effort at this location for a tragedy of this magnitude, but I had not the heart to tell them as they handed me pictures, costume jewelry, and even a slightly singed credit card. Quietly, I thanked them, placing the items in my pockets as they brought them over. Eventually, I, too, surreptitiously placed them in a bucket to be discarded in that landfill...but not without feeling my own sense of guilt for having to do so.

An exception to the 'brief look' was an intense examination by a young firefighter of a three inch by three inch photo contained within a clear plastic sleeve that had, for some inexplicable reason, caught his attention. For minutes, he squinted and twisted his hand while he intently peered at the print in the diminishing light. Suddenly, he realized what he had in his hand. "Do you know what this is?" he incredulously asked. "It's the first bombing"...meaning a picture of the 1993 bombing attack on the World Trade Center.

Shortly thereafter, in my own hand, I held a contact sheet of forty-eight color prints. Typed across the top, "*Perfect Attendance Luncheon @ PATC Cafeteria 4/7/00.*" I looked over the prints, at the faces of the men and women smiling back, proud of their public recognition and dedicated service. Gazing at the images in the dim light, I wondered how many of those that smiled back had died as a result of their continued pursuit of that 'perfect attendance?' With a sorrowful shake of my head, I stuffed the sheet into the next bucket that came my way.

Flames in the downed 7WTC were generating intense smoke as heavy equipment made its way towards us at a seemingly glacial pace from the southwest corner of the complex. As the sun passed behind the World Financial Center, the shadows deepened. Off the southwestern corner of



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the Marriott Hotel, a large bank of portable lights on a large, raised stanchion were lit, casting an eerie, stark white light across the lunar landscape of the destroyed complex site. Searchers down in their holes, literally disappeared in the darkness, to be illuminated by the weak yellow light of hand held flashlights. Eventually, portable generator lights were placed throughout the debris field as additional banked lights were raised to the southwest, northwest, west, and east. Lights or not, the search teams pressed on without missing a beat.

By 1930 hours, the crews had been digging nearly all day within this debris field. With each halt, the exhausted teams were finding it more and more difficult to restart. It was with superhuman effort that each man and woman dug deep down within to rekindle the effort.

2000 hours brought a welcome, but conflicting, relief for the front line troops as they were replaced by new companies marching forward to battle. In the dark, with clashing light and shadows, the images took on an even more bizarre, ghoulish appearance. Smoke from the smoldering grave of Tower 2 hazily rose, periodically blotting out the emergency lights located on Church Street, between 4WTC and 5WTC. Most likely not a single searcher, other than I, even noticed.



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on the ground before Two World Financial Center. Over time, two separate islands were created that grew taller with each passing hour. For the moment, it was just a shell game...moving piles from one place to another as we sought survivors...or their remains.

A team of ten began to dig out the rubble from under the girder upon which I stood. An orthopedic surgeon, walking the ruins, stopped for a few minutes of chitchat. From him, I learned of some associates who had immediately loaded up a car after seeing the destruction of the Twin Towers and driven, non-stop, to NYC from Oklahoma. Unfortunately, they, as well as he, had very little 'work'...and I seriously doubted that prognoses would improve to any degree in the future...given the lack of any survivors found to date.

Just below me, a firefighter from New Rochelle dug, scooping concrete ash, paper, and other rubble into a bucket. He momentarily stopped, then flicked at what looked like a dark cylinder. "I've found a hand," he quietly stated. I squatted down to take a look as six others or so gather around for their first...of what would be many...look at a body part. Attached to the lower half of its forearm, the fingers of the hand...a left hand to be exact, a woman's it would seem...were attached and curled. The ripped and shattered muscle and skin of the arm did not resemble anything analogous to a clean cut. Though darkened by soot, the orphaned appendage was not burned. Nor was there a ring of any type, I thought. Was that 'good?'



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The chief called for a “bio bag,” but I knew that there would not be any. This was not business as usual, which was the primary reason why NYC had over 30,000 body bags on hand for the expected 5,000 to 6,000 victims. Looking up at the chief I let him in on the secret that there would be no bio bags. “Just place it in the body bag, Chief. That’s what they are for.” Hesitating only momentarily, he grabbed a nearby orange body bag, pulling back on the zipper. Noting a heaviness to the bag, he glanced inside to find that the bag already contained a body part. With a shrug, the chief had the young firefighter who found the arm pick it up and place it in the bag. With a strong whiff of nearly gagging stench, the hand was placed within the bag, which was then zipped and set aside. Such scenes would only increase in number with the passage of time. Few bodies were being found...just parts.

Literally “bloodied,” now, the men returned to digging, shoving more refuse into pails and working hard to cut through rebar and steel. Partially buried under the beam was an intact, uncracked, reinforced windowpane, one of 43,600 that had been attached to the Twin Towers. Within five minutes, it was history, cut to pieces by a circular saw. A nearby team of twenty plus men was actually able to manhandle a huge, twisted, ‘U’ shaped Beam overhead and slowly progress with it in lock-step movement down the ‘V’ shaped trenches to the refuse pile. Behind them, the digging continued.



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Sparks flew as circular saws with their special cutting blades ground into large and small pieces of steel. Streams of red hot metal streaked out, cascading on anyone standing in the ‘line of fire.’ Initially, one would step out of the way but, over time, we grew not to care and opted not to move, either ignoring the metallic flame, or simply turning our backs periodically to protect our unshielded eyes. OSHA would not have been very pleased.

Dust rose from many search locations to mingle with the smoke of flames that still smoldered below the majority of large mounds. One such smoldering heap was located ten meters away. Upon it stood a two-man team with a hose. The application of water seemed to change the smoke of the inundated area white, while another smoking area nearby changed from a pale brown to a dark black. A shift of the torrent of water changed the dark black back to pale white, only to have the first location change from pale white back to dark black. Though it seemed to be a never-ending battle with the flames merely taunting the firemen above, the men continued to drive on, seemingly undaunted by the challenge.

At 2245 hours, horns blew and a frantic call went forth. “Everybody out!” No one knew why but most were not willing to question the order. A surge of humanity began to make its way back across West Street. A few of us held our ground, seeing no real threat, begrudgingly giving just a few meters back at a time. Within minutes, the word was announced “Continue operations!” Once again, like a tide, the searchers surged back.

A few minutes later, a large mechanical claw began to assault the downed bridge lying across West Street, between the World Trade and World Financial Centers. Dust rose and chunks of concrete fell to reveal the steel beam skeleton beneath.

By now, various states and numerous local, state, and federal functions...firemen, police, U.S. Treasury, National Guard, Reserves, and civilian contractors...were represented at our site. Grime covered grim faces from which bloodshot and exhausted eyes stared. Firefighters prominently stood out, easily distinguished by their suspender



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pants, jackets, and helmets...all heavily adorned with yellow reflective tape on black that literally sparkled in the unearthly glare of the stark emergency lighting. Helmets with shields of all colors...black, white, red, green, and orange...and company numbers...521,235,164, 4, 239, 178, 243...adorned their heads

To the south, many levels above the street, a steel cutting crew with acetylene torch rode high in a cage suspended from a large crane. Raised to the top story of a smoldering building undergoing renovation to the south, there was a flicker of light then the glow of a torch. Soon molted metal began to drip as the intense flame cut its way through damaged scaffolding that hung precariously over the heads of those below.

Beneath the caged crew, another, smaller crane was lifting a large, single girder, weighing at least five tons. It did not take a mathematical genius to roughly calculate the time necessary to simply recover the heavy girders given the size, weight, location and vast number of beams involved. It will be a long and mind-numbing cleanup.

Throughout the day, night, and early morning hours, the senses continued to be assaulted, pummeled, and violated. The eyes, windows to the soul, streamed tears from the smoke, dust, and morbid visions of Man's inhumanity to Man. The nose, lined inside...as were the lungs...and encrusted outside with powdered concrete endured the whiff of human remains in the light breeze. The tongue, dry from the exertions of the search, periodically flicked out across one's lips, tasting the dirt and grime when it was not coughing up phlegm. The skin, painted in the light pastel of concrete grit, chafed as though it were being scrubbed with sandpaper. And, the sounds, the clang of sledgehammers on metal, the high-pitched screech of circular metal saws cutting through steel beams, and the continual scream of sirens, seemingly hundreds of sirens, as emergency vehicles made their way through the streets of lower Manhattan resonated and echoed in one's ears. Ultimately, if there are to be flashbacks, it will most likely be the sound of a siren that hauntingly stirs all these images, all these smells, all these tastes...along with the feel, both physical and emotional.

In the darkened expanse to the east, the smoldering mass that was Tower 1 secreted a plume of dark brown and yellow smoke that rose and expanded as an opaque umbrella overhead, diffusing what illumination there was from the distant bank of lights. In the distance, the remnants Tower 1 that leaned upright against the Customs Building seemed to stand and rise as a surreal apparition into the darkness overhead. The image created conflict within my conscious as my mind attempted to correlate what was with what used to be. Such must be the feeling one has when an amputated leg can still be 'felt.'

The wind began to blow hard around 0045 hours, raising a brutal, swirling dust storm that was soon, thereafter, followed by a torrential downpour. Tears from Heaven...from God...from Allah...saddened by the religious perversion extremists had wrought, blasphemously, in His name?

The streets were relatively dead, and all surrounding buildings peered down on the scene, as though in mourning, with darkened windows. The city that never sleeps...was, momentarily, at rest. But life in Ground Zero, in the Kill Zone, existed. There was a resiliency. The "Big Apple" lived, a survivor of an event that few other nations could endure, much less a city. Flags flew in defiance all about. From the tenth floor in the very front of the damaged Two World Financial Center, another smaller flag, from the third floor to right, and another from the lamp post immediately to the front. From the destroyed and burned out hulk of the ladder truck, a flag waved proudly. From the transit bridges, scaffolding, and high above the skyline on the top of nearby buildings, flags were



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draped. From the aerials of trucks and arms of cranes, flags flapped. From the top of a large mound of debris in the midst of flying sparks, a flag was planted as searchers began to dig beneath. And, most importantly of all, from the helmets, uniforms, and hearts of the searchers, Old Glory waved in full beauty.

There are those who question why would God allow this to happen? The Reverend Billy Graham addressed that specific question during the national service. For myself, if one believes in the concept of 'free will,' it is easy to understand. It is not that God 'lets' such events happen; it is that Man inflicts such events upon himself. If there is a Devil, he is inculcated in Man for we, Homo sapiens, are the greatest form of evil in this life.

Charles Dickens noted in his 1859 classic, *A Tale of Two Cities*, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." One hundred and forty two years later, September 11, 2001 would not only symbolize that dichotomy, but would also best the Dickens' masterpiece, for...rather than a tale of two cities...it was, literally, the tale of one heroic city. A tale that demonstrated the worst that Man could wreak on Man; a tale that demonstrated the best that Man could do for Man. The cowardly act of attacking defenseless and unsuspecting civilians was overwhelmingly met by New York City's finest and bravest, the 'First Responders,' who literally sacrificed in the hundreds in their attempt to save others. They died in the line of duty. There is no greater love. There is no more rewarding sacrifice.

As I drove away from Caven Point early Friday morning, the same nine cars remained, unmoved since Tuesday...an automotive headstone testimonial to those who had taken the ferry to Battery Park that fateful morning of the 11th of September, never to return. We will mourn not only their loss, but also the loss of the thousands of others in New York, Virginia, and Pennsylvania.

However, while Old Glory flies at half-mast for those who died from such a barbaric and immoral act, such mourning must not be confused with our national resolve. Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, the unwilling Japanese architect of that surprise attack, prophetically voiced his concern that his actions had only "awaken a sleeping giant." International terrorists, it would have been in your best interests to be a student of history...history of the Second World War, in particular, and Yamamoto's prophecy, specifically. Be warned, for your time on the world stage is about to come to a violent close with the abrupt and violent awakening of this too long reluctant giant. The freedoms that you despise will continue and the nation you sought to cower has been united by your heinous act as it only has been united once before. President Bush noted in his address to the nation that you will be either "brought to justice or justice will be brought to you." Either way, by law, by cruise missile, or by 5.56mm steel jacketed bullet, the United States of America *shall* have justice. Soon, very soon, you will learn what true fear is.

John Lock is a 1982 graduate and former Assistant Professor of the United States Military Academy at West Point who retired from active duty as a Lieutenant Colonel in May 2002. He enlisted in the Army as a private in 1974 and served as a Non-Commissioned Officer until 1978. His commissioned assignments includes the 1st Armored Division, Nuremberg, West Germany, the 82d Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, N.C., Deputy Commander New York District US Army Corps of Engineers and Deputy/Acting Chief Engineer Stabilization Forces (SFOR), Sarajevo, Bosnia i Herzegovina.

His military and advanced civil education includes the Engineer Officer Basic Course, the Infantry Officer Advanced Course, the Combined Arms Services Staff School, the Command and General Staff College and a Master of Science from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI). His decorations include the Ranger Tab, Master Parachutists Wings and the Legion of Merit.

He is the author of four published books. In addition to ongoing writing projects, Lock also works as a consultant in support of architectural development and modeling and simulation for Army Transformation and Future Force advanced technologies.