

505 R.C.T. WWII

Regimental Combat Team



3630 Tarrant Dr.
Dallas, TX 75229

DATED MATERIAL

AUGUST 2015

The Panther



Message from the President:

From Barbara Fortenbaugh, President of Family and Friends 505th RCT Assn:

Nothing says bigger is better when it comes to the 505 RCT/508 PIR combined reunion. We had a small turnout at the 2014 reunion, BUT the time spent with our WWII veteran heroes was PRICELESS. A heartfelt THANK YOU to Ellen for the great job she did in organizing the reunion. There were sad moments, thinking about the passing of Ray Fary, and hearing about Duke Boswell's cardiac arrest. But thankfully Irene Fary is recovering from her injuries, and Duke from his cardiac arrest.

On Friday we went to Lancaster Airport and watched the Airborne Heritage Platoon perform a parachute jump. Then the highlight of the day for me - going for a ride in a WWII C-47. I carried on a steady conversation with dad in heaven during the ride. Then a few of the veterans and Ellen went for a ride in the P-51 Mustang. What a day!

On Tuesday after the reunion Ellen and I went to say our good bye's to COL (R) Ed Sayre who passed away two days later at the age of 98. Ed always had a special place in my heart, I met him as a child, and we always looked forward to continuing the friendship over the years.

In the future months we will be looking for new ideas from the members of the veterans and the family and friends organizations on how to increase participation in events such as the reunion. We would love your input by letting us know your thoughts and suggestions, both positive and negative. My email is WillowBSF@aol.com for anyone interested in sending your thoughts/suggestions to me. Our next combined reunion will be held next year in San Antonio, Texas thanks to 508 Family and Friends members Bill and LaNell Hamilton who volunteered to organize and plan it. We would love to see more of our family and friends members there.

To all our members who are experiencing health problems, we hope you have brighter days ahead. We also hope you have the best, healthiest and safest holiday season.

As always, I am so thankful to be part of the 505 RCT "family". I cherish the friendships I have made over the years. As a veteran myself, it is with pride that I say "thank you and I salute you" to our veterans.

Airborne!

**Barbara (McKeage) Fortenbaugh, President 505 RCT Family and Friends
Proud daughter of Don McKeage, F Co, 2/505 PIR, 82d Airborne Division**



Calling All WW II Veterans to San Antonio

The 2015 Reunion will take place in San Antonio, TX and will be hosted by LaNell and Bill Hamilton. The reunion will take place October 28, 2015 thru November 1, 2015 at the El Tropicana Hotel located at 110 Lexington Ave.; San Antonio, TX 212-223-9461. Ask for the 505/508 82nd Airborne Reunion.

Scheduled activities will include:

- 1) A visit to Ft. Sam Houston where we will visit the Quadrangle and Museum there followed by lunch;
- 2) A visit to the museum at Stimson Field which may include a parachute jump;
- 3) A barge ride along the San Antonio River which will include dinner.
- 4) On Saturday morning a trolley will be available for tours of downtown San Antonio, the King William area, the Alamo or shopping.
- 5) Saturday night banquet

Chris Harris, Vice President of the *F&F 508th*, has graciously offered to coordinate with WWII Veterans and their families to ensure that all veterans who want to attend in October do so. Whether it be help addressing logistical needs such as local transport to/from airports, escort services within airports, and special hotel needs or help with financial constraints, contact Chris and he will promptly respond. Chris can be reached on his cell phone at (310) 729-2745 or by email harris.chris.j@att.net.

2015 marks the 70th Anniversary of the end of WWII, so let's get as many Greatest Generation veterans to San Antonio as possible for a most memorable reunion!

A reunion form is included with the newsletter.

NEW PLAQUE UNVEILED

On June 7, the Assoc. Amis des Vétérans Américains (Friends of American Veterans Assoc) unveiled a large plaque in special tribute to the 82nd Airborne paratroopers who fought at the La Fiere bridge and causeway and the Chef du Pont bridge and causeway from June 6 – 9, 1944. The plaque was placed on the base of the Iron Mike statue located at the AVA Memorial site of La Fiere bridge.

The AVA Assoc. is requesting donations to help pay for the plaque. If you would like to contribute to this project, donations are possible via PayPal at: contact@avanormandy.org. If you prefer to donate by check, you can send your check to me at:

Ellen Peters
3630 Townsend Dr.
Dallas, TX 75229-3805

The AVA Assoc. is the oldest association in France that honors American veterans. It was founded in 1945 by Mme. Simone Renaud, wife of the war time president of St. Mere Eglise. The current president, Maurice Renaud, is her youngest son.

TRAVELS WITH SULLY

Elizabeth Sullivan forwarded the below article about Bill that originally appeared in the Wesley Community Connection. "William ('Sully') Sullivan's exciting life has taken all over the world, but Kansas is one of the places that remembers him best.

Born in 1923, Sully grew up on Manhattan's West side, the son of parents born in County Cork, Ireland. In World War II, he served as a paratrooper in the Army's 82nd Airborne Division. He parachuted behind enemy lines just hours before the D-Day invasion in France. Sully and the other paratroopers knew that if the sea invasion failed, there would be no rescue for them.

A photo of Sully as a prisoner of war hangs on the wall of his room at Wesley Health Care Center. The picture was taken by the Germans because Sully became such a flight risk.



Despite five escape attempts, he remained a POW for eleven months. Finally, one month before the end of the war, he and other POWs left the camp, only to experience bedlam on the outside. The Russians were advancing and the scared and starving German citizens had little food or other necessities. 'It was sad to see the devastation and the suffering,' Sully says.

After the war, Sully worked for 40 years as a cameraman for ABC, the American Broadcasting Company. This led to travel all over the world for broadcasts of the Olympic Games. He operated his camera at Olympic Games in places like London, St. Moritz, Melbourne, Rome, Innsbruck, Tokyo, Grenoble and Mexico City. He met his wife, Elizabeth, while at the media village in Calgary, Alberta, Canada in 1988.

Between Olympics, Sully covered other critical historic events for ABC. He stood near the steps of the Alabama State Capitol in Montgomery taking photographs of the unfolding drama as Governor George Wallace tried to prevent the voter registration marches from Selma to Montgomery that took place 50 years ago this year. He also worked as the cameraman at the White House, covering the activities of President John F. Kennedy's family after his assassination in 1963.

Sully had seven Emmy awards for his camera work at ABC.

In the late 1980s, Sully and several of his friends of Irish descent sat in a pub in Daytona Beach, Florida, discussing their plans for St. Patrick's Day. His friends from Lawrence, Kansas, admitted that no events would take place there, so on the spot Sully founded the Lawrence St. Patrick's Day Parade. Now in its 27th year, the Parade Committee has planned annual activities such as the Charity Auction and the Shamrock Shuffle 5k run, as well as the sale of tee-shirts, and generous contributions from individuals and businesses have provided more than \$800,000 to local children's charities.

The quilt on Sully's bed at Wesley, a gift from the parade committee, is made from twenty different tee-shirts from his many years of involvement on the parade committee.

Smiling and friendly, Sully relates his stories in an unassuming way. It's his wife, Elizabeth, who fills in the details, proudly sharing the facts about the Emmy awards, the Selma march, and the White House experiences. 'He kept records of everything,' she says. 'It's all organized, but there is a lot of it!' "

Bill is doing well and will be returning home this week. Well wishes can be sent to him at:

77 Tabor Rd.

Mechanicville, NY 12118-3434

ED SAYRE MAKES FINAL JUMP

Col. (Ret) Ed Sayre – Ed passed away at his home in Breckinridge, TX on October 23, 2014. He funeral was on November 1 and was well attended including representatives from Ft. Bragg. Ed was born on Dec. 19, 1915 to Arthur Neul Sayre and Edna Yarbrow Sayre on an Indian reservation in New Mexico near the Hila River. His early years were spent living on his family's horse ranch near Silver City, N.M. The family moved to Breckenridge after hearing of the oil strike. In 1940, Ed joined the Breckenridge National Guard Company L 36th Division that was activated at the start of WWII. In April 1940, Ed passed the Army Officers test and became a Second Lt. after hearing of paratroopers, he volunteered for parachute training at Ft. Benning. Ed was personally selected by then Col. Gavin to join the 505th PIR and was originally Executive Officer of B Co. and later promoted to Captain and made Commanding Officer of A Co. He led A Company into Sicily and Italy receiving the Distinguished Service Cross for taking the regimental objective in Sicily with fewer than two hundred men. Ed was seriously wounded in Italy, but later rejoined the regiment in Berlin.

He met and married Betty Mavrico in Germany in 1946. Ed retired from the Army in 1968 with over 30 years of service as a full Colonel.

His wife, Betty, also retired from the Army as a Lieutenant Colonel.

Ed was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, Silver Star, The Legion of Merit with 2 Oak Leaf Clusters, Bronze Star with 3 Oak Leaf Clusters, Combat Infantry Badge for WWII and Korea, Masters Parachutists Wings with over 300 jumps, and three Purple Hearts.

Ed's great-nephew, Kellet Sayre, gave a most heart felt eulogy at the service. The text appears below:

"As I look out into the crowd I can see a mix of emotions. This is to be expected at occasions such as these. However I am here to tell you that this should be a celebration of a very special life. We should all be proud and happy that we knew the man many of us called Uncle Ed. Edwin M. Sayre...Tough as nails. Anyone who knew him would use that phrase to describe him. While it is true he was tough as nails, he was so much more than that. He was intelligent, brutally honest, a leader, a mentor, and most notably rough around the edges. He had good reason to be rough around the edges as he endured and overcame hardships that some can't even imagine. He loved finding treasures on the side the road even if it was a fifty year old axe handle, never wasted anything, loved his dogs, adored his wife Aunt Betty, and taught many of us what the meaning of service truly meant.

He taught me the value of hard work while I worked on his ranch during the summers while growing up. There were some long days, hot weather, and some "corrective training" every now and then if I didn't do the job right. He was the inspiration for me joining the Army. He provided encouragement to me through letters while I was deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. In one letter he said "you have to respect men before they respect you." Those words proved invaluable. I lived by those words and it made me a better leader than I ever thought I could be. I have many memories of Uncle Ed, but there is one memory that is the most important. My earliest memory of Uncle Ed is an Uncle Ed classic. All of us

have some of these I am sure. Some of these classics may have included being thrown in the pond at a very early age to "learn" how to swim or about how he stitched his own hand without any medical aid after cutting it on a lawnmower blade....at the age of eighty something. My Uncle Ed classic has to do with none other than cow manure.

I was five or six years old and I am pretty sure it was my first time out with Uncle Ed without parental supervision. I was supposed to help feed some of his cattle. He picked me up in his white ford truck at Gam's house and then we went down the barn road to the feeding troughs. The truck comes to a halt in front of the feeding troughs and he looks right at me. "Now, Kelly whatever you do, do not step in cow manure. I don't want any of that stuff in my truck." This was despite the truck being covered in dog slobber. "Yes sir" I say super excited. My excitement level of helping him out was at a peak, so I open the door real fast, I jump out of that white truck, I take a step backwards and I feel a squish. I pause for a moment. I look down and low and behold I had just stepped in cow manure on my very first step out of the truck. I quickly try to remedy the situation by dragging my shoe through the dirt, but before I can get the manure off a giant shadow enveloped me. Uncle Ed's thundering impatient voice booms "Now boy, I told you not to step in any cow manure". He yelled at me. I froze in my tracks turned around to the giant behind me and immediately began to cry. This vain attempt to gain sympathy did not work, so I ran down the barn road back to mommy and away from the scary giant.

Some may think this was an act of a grumpy old man and he should not have yelled at a very excited five year old kid for accidently stepping in cow manure. I don't see it that way. I look back on that memory with fondness. There was something special about when I turned around with Uncle Ed's shadow over me. I didn't realize it then but I certainly did learn that during that brief moment before the tears I stood in the shadow of greatness. I stood in the shadow of integrity. I stood in the shadow of selfless service. I stood in the shadow of honor. I stood in the shadow of a hero whom did not ask for recognition. I stood in the shadow of three wars. I stood in the shadow of the countless men that gave their lives in those wars. I stood in the shadow of everything this country holds dear; life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness. I stood in the shadow of the Greatest Generation. I stood in the shadow of a great man. I am thankful every day that this country has men such as Uncle Ed.

Uncle Ed, I do not mourn you, I celebrate you. I celebrate the times you made me do the job until I did it right. I celebrate the times you shared your war stories with me. I celebrate your written letters to me. I celebrate the life you lived and the sacrifices you made for this country. I celebrate your toughness. I celebrate your dogs that brought you joy. I celebrate your love for Aunt Betty. I celebrate everything you taught me and others over your life. I celebrate the time I got to stand in the shadow of greatness. Thank you for being you. "

PASSING OF FAMILY AND FRIENDS FOUNDER

James M. "Jim" Blankenship, 80, of Dalton, GA passed away on Thursday, May 28, 2015. He was preceded in death by his wife of 54 years, Jean Durden Blankenship. He is survived by his children, Kevin and Beth Blankenship, Dalton, GA; grandchildren, Collin Blankenship, Corbin Blankenship, Carlee Blankenship, and Caiden Blankenship; brother and sister-in-law, John G. and Pauline Blankenship, Asheville, NC; sister and brother-in-law, Nancy and Bruce Wells, Jackson, GA; brother-in-law and sister-in-law, James B. and Jeanette Durden, Monroe, GA; and several nieces, nephews, and cousins. Mr. Blankenship was born February 26, 1935 in Asheville, NC. He graduated from Enka High School, and was a professional photographer for 50 years until he retired. He was a member of Shadowbrook Baptist Church in Suwanee, GA. He was Historian for the 9th District Department of Georgia, American Legion Chattahoochee Post 251, Duluth, GA. Donations may be made to American Red Cross in memory of James Blankenship.

Condolences can be sent to Kevin at:
2135 Saint Thomas Way

Jim founded our Family and Friends Association 11 years ago and was a constant presence at the 505 reunions for many years. Being a professional photographer, Jim was responsible for the hundreds of reunion photos over the years. He will be greatly missed.

WWII VETS JUMP BACK IN TIME

By Chris Fletcher, Fort Jackson Leader

CAMDEN, S.C. (April 2, 2015) -- More than 20 World War II veterans celebrated completing the U.S. Army's first mass parachute drop at the 82nd Airborne Division Memorial Sunday.

Though the parachute drop 72 years ago was successful and helped pave the way for mass parachute operations in Africa and Europe, three paratroopers died during the training event. The magnitude of this initial jump was conveyed in a letter written by Barbara Gavin, the daughter of Lt. Gen. Jim Gavin, who commanded the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, or PIR.

"Training leads to perfection in performance, and without this jump in Camden, which is being commemorated here today, those combat jumps during the war might have had a different ending," read military historian Robert Anzuoni, from Gavin's letter to the audience of more than 100. Anzuoni also noted how Gavin felt for the paratroopers who sacrificed their lives in training so others could get it right in combat. "Today, I believe my father's spirit is there with you, honoring those three paratroopers who lost their lives taking part in this operation in Camden," Anzuoni read from Gavin's letter. "It led to four magnificent combat jumps of the 82nd Airborne Division in World War II."

Before the jump 72 years ago, the largest parachute drop consisted of a battalion-sized operation. The entire 505th PIR, three battalions from the 82nd, participated in the Camden parachute drop. Anzuoni said the parachute assault on Camden left no doubt about the feasibility of regimental-sized parachute operations.

Highlighting the event were vignettes and anecdotes from retired Command Sgt. Maj. Kenneth Merritt and former Maj. T. Moffat Burriss, both participants of the jump in Camden, S.C. and a number of combat jumps in World War II. "I had just made squad leader after being in the Army only five months," said Merritt, of his jump into South Carolina 72 years ago. "I was so determined to do something good; the first thing that happened was I lost my compass and my South Carolina map." Merritt added he was called up to see his supply officer after the training operation and told he would have to pay \$16.98 for the lost compass, which equaled one-third of his monthly basic pay.

U.S. Rep. Joe Wilson and retired Army Maj. Gen. Julian Burns also spoke at the event.

The commemoration allowed today's generation to jump into the past with World War II re-enactors dressed the part and period-piece equipment displays on hand for spectators.

(The above is from the U.S. Army website)

Mail Box

Dear World War II veterans of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment,

I am trying to contact fellow paratroopers in F Company of the 505th who served with Private Charles S. Hodgins during World War II.

He entered the service from Maine, was living in Chattahoochee, Georgia in 1940, and had a young wife named Mary. Everyone in our family called him "Uncle Steve," so he may have gone by "Steve" rather than "Charles."

Hodgins is my great-grand-uncle. He was killed near Groesbeek, Holland on October 2, 1944 during a German counterattack during Operation Market Garden. Our family history had listed him as missing in action until 2007 when family members discovered his gravestone in the Margraten Cemetery.

I read Spencer Wurst's fine book, "Descending from the Clouds," but didn't see anything about Uncle Steve in it. My brother (a Marine infantry officer with two combat tours in Iraq) and I are working on a memoir and wanted to include some information about Uncle Steve.

Uncle Steve received a Purple Heart with two oak leaf clusters, and received his combat infantryman's badge in Sicily.

If anyone has any information about him, I'd sure be grateful to learn it. You can contact me at steve.jeremiah2911@gmail.com, or call me at 207-653-1111.

**Best regards, Steve Smith
Columbus, Ohio**

Do you have any of the following books listed below that you have read and no longer have a need for, I would like to purchase the book, all are out of print. I will pay for packaging and shipping as well.

- 1) Utah Beach to Cherbourg. By the Historical Division of the U.S.Army
- 2) The Left Corner of My Heart. The Saga of the 551st Parachute Infantry Battalion. By Dan Morgan
- 3) Rendevous at Rochelival. By, William "Bill" Tucker
- 4) Thirty Five Days in Normandy. By, William "Bill" Tucker
- 5) War and People by Allan C. Barger of the 505-PIR
- 6) Any personal memoirs of WW-II 505PIR veterans.

Contact Bob Schweikert @ 718-948-1350 or by e-mail ContactMeAt@aol.com

(Note: Bob is the webmaster for the 505th website)

TWO STORIES – SAME THEME

The below was sent to me by Col. (Ret.) Keith Nightingale last year on the anniversary of 9/11. As we approach another anniversary, I thought I would share it.

Yesterday, the anniversary of 9/11, I was standing in a parking lot and heard the unmistakable sound that is forever imbedded in our minds. Six UH1H's flew across the sky in what we used to call a staggered trail formation. They were the blue and yellow helicopters of the county fire department and had just come from some commemoration ceremony. I had never seen so many together since retirement. The sight and sound instantly brought me back to my own memories of both helicopters and 9/11.

Every generation has one or more cataclysmic events that forever flashes into the participants- the visualization of the moment. Years pass and yet the greatest degree of detail is recalled from the major event itself to its most minor nuances. For my parents it was Pearl Harbor and the death of FDR. Each could recall with the greatest clarity their exact location and circumstances in minute precise detail. The precise location, who they were talking to, what was said and what they were wearing or eating. Such is the effect of a searing emotional moment in time.

During Tet of 1968, I was the senior advisor to the 52d Ranger Battalion. On one of our many tasks during that very eventful period, we were in the process of clearing the Province Chief's compound at Baria, south of Saigon and north of Vung Tau. It was night and we were on an adjacent building rooftop. Green and red tracers were flying back and forth

and the sky was lit with the many fires, explosions and impacts of two sides determined to succeed in their opposing missions.

In an instant, one of the battalion commander's RTO's was grievously wounded and fell in a heap next to me. Using normal procedures, I called through the advisor chain for a medevac. In time, we heard the call from the ARVN medevac, actually a pair, flying in tandem for the pickup. I vectored them toward me and saw them approach-one low in bound the other somewhat higher. The inbound pilot saw the crisscrossing green tracers and abruptly pulled up telling the battalion commander on the Vietnamese channel that it was too hot to land.

I informed the advisory hq of this and requested an alternative medevac. Within fifteen minutes, a US medevac called in on my radio and announced his inbound. I signaled with a strobe which he acknowledged and swung into short final. At that moment, the VC unleashed a hail of automatic weapons fire toward our position and there were multiple streams of green coursing across our position. I saw the pilot abruptly do a quick power 90 degree turn and gain altitude. He, like his Vietnamese counterpart, said it was too hot to land.

I looked at the wounded RTO, now being administered to by a medic who glanced up from his near hopeless task with imploring eyes. I again called on the advisory net, informed them of the action and basically pleaded for anything that flew. Suddenly, a distinct voice came on the net with the usual throbbing tones of a pilot on a helicopter. I will call him Chocolate Six because I do not recall his real callsign.

"This is Chocolate Six. Mark your position. I will pick him up. Over." I indicated a strobe which he rogered. I asked who he was and where he was. He responded that he was flying log missions for the 9th ID and the Aussies nearby at Nui Dat and had heard the several transmissions. I informed him that the wounded was a Vietnamese. He just said "I have your spot. Inbound. Standby." The green tracers continued their wavering multiple paths as he hove into view silhouetted by the various illuminations of an intense combat zone. We guided him in and he hovered on the rooftop skids just touching the tiles. The medic and another soldier essentially threw the wounded soldier in the now open door held open by a wide-eyed crew member with bullets lacing the scene. The pilot immediately pulled pitch and lifted almost straight up, did a 180 degree turn and receded into the darkness.

I thanked him and said asked where he was taking his charge. He responded that his crew chief said the man was nearly dead and he would go directly to 93d Evac at Long Binh. I said, "He is Vietnamese. They may not take him, Over." His response was, "He is going to 93d Evac. Out." We went back to business.

Three weeks later, the soldier returned to us, now north of Bien Hoa, to relate that he had been in the 93d for more than a week in intensive care and then transferred to the Vietnamese hospital in Saigon. The Vietnamese liaison at the hospital told him that the 93d had saved his life when he landed and that he was one of more than a hundred they processed that night and his nationality was lost in the chaos. The pilot and his unit remained unknown.

Then 9/11. On the morning of 9/11, I, as always, came into the kitchen, made the coffee and turned on CNN-probably about 0630 Pacific time. The screen showed the twin towers, one smoking and on fire and the other next to it. The reporters were unclear as to what was happening other than a plane had crashed into it. Then out from the right screen, a second plane was seen to flow to the left and then back to crash into the second building. At that point, the issue of "terrorists" was first raised. This was not an accident. Quickly, there was news regarding other lost flights over Pennsylvania and Washington. Los Angeles was identified as a possible target. The White House issued controlling statements and fighters were scrambled. In time, all Commercial flights were ordered to ground themselves. The Air Force would control the skies. Soon, the Pentagon was struck and a United flight crashed into a field in Pennsylvania. By now-probably Noon Pacific-the organization of the attacks began to emerge.

The news reporters said that several planes had hit the towers and terrorism was suspected. We sat and watched this unfold for the next hour plus. I had no thought of going to work and sat transfixed on the screen. First the fire and then

the collapse of the buildings. Somehow I sensed from the moment of the second crash that the buildings would collapse and responded matter of factly when they did so.

My focus evolved from distant interest to direct engagement. I knew that my firm frequently had people in the buildings and had personally been in them not many weeks prior. Customs, DEA, FBI and others-all our customers, routinely had our employees there. I needed to start accounting for people.

The CEO, and others began a series of telcons to get a grasp on our situation. The telephone and cell structure was overwhelmed and Email was problematical. I learned that a key customer, Cantor-Fitzgerald Bonds, was all but wiped out. However, the CEO, due to a requirement to take a family member to a doctor, had stayed in New Jersey rather than go to his office in the Towers. He contacted us and asked that we try and reconstitute his trading capability asap. I thought this at first a venal request under the circumstances. Later, after fielding calls and participating in telcons with Treasury, the NSC, World Bank and others recognized that re-starting the trading was a core component of how America "does business" and was essential to our response. All that day, I stayed home and used the cell phone and email to assist in our recovery. Finally, I was able to state that we had no people in the Towers. We then focused on the future.

That night, the evening news, showed a comparative FAA radar picture of the United States airspace at 6PM 10 Sept. The country was filled with bright dots-each an airplane-with major concentrations clustered around our great cities. The same radar picture at 6PM 11 Sept showed an almost dark nation. The very few pin points being Air Force fighter and AWACS patrols. Our Nation was at war.

My company, as a scientific technical corporation, donated considerable equipment and systems to the Ground Zero recovery effort pro bono. Key amongst these donations were tiny robotic devices designed to go in the smallest areas with cameras and sensors. These were provided to the rescue effort to search the huge areas of collapsed structures for trapped people, bodies and damage assessment. They crawled through cracks in the rubble where neither humans nor dogs could go and went underwater in the flooded subway tunnels to pinpoint leaks and casualties. They brought an entirely new dimension to the recovery process.

Because of our donations to the effort, we were invited to visit Ground Zero in early October under the hosting of the City of New York Police and Fire Departments. The following narrative describes that visit as best I recall.

It was mid afternoon in early October. Five of us drove from New Jersey to the Fulton Fish Market on the East River. During the drive, we started out with the usual banter of businessmen. As the drive progressed, we became progressively quieter to the point where when we crossed the Verrazano Bridge, we were pretty much silent and remained so for the remainder of the trip-each of us lost in our own thoughts and the visualization of what had occurred on the left horizon as we saw the shadows and dimensions of the city unfold.

Around 4 O'clock, at the pier at Fulton, we were met by a Mayor's representative and several police and fire officers. We went through subdued handshakes and conversation and boarded a police launch. The launch backed out to the East River and turned south skirting the piers of Manhattan and the decaying waterside of Brooklyn on our left. Each of us had perfunctory conversations with our hosts which uniformly segued into comments regarding where each of us were the moment/day the event occurred. Each of the hosts related of close friends and associates lost and how they were managing the family issues. Two of our five were retired military and we felt an immediate empathy for their experience. Oddly, one of the firemen was almost apologetic to me as he said-"You understand this. You must have seen much worse." I said "I don't believe I have seen anything like this." By the time we were crossing what was 25th St, conversation ceased and we fixed on the horizon of the inner city to the west now resting in the twilight of dusk.

The launch turned west at the tip of Manhattan and moved toward Battery Park. For the first time, one could begin to perceive the effect of the event. Though the lights were on in many buildings, there were also visible voids. The light was sufficient to discern the coating of grey white which seemed to permeate and coat everything. Windows were

visibly broken. There was not a single vehicle moving on the roads and almost no people. This got our attention. It was as if the greatest part of the most active city in America had ceased to operate. This was real. It wasn't a science fiction disaster movie. On the launch, there was the same silence and sense of awe that visits one when entering a great cathedral or the memorial at the USS Arizona—a distinct impression that something important happened here that needs to be acknowledged.

The launch tied into Battery Park and we silently followed our hosts as they led us through the park, along the deserted avenue and toward Ground Zero. It reminded me of Tet in Saigon when I moved with my unit through dense deserted urban sprawl in total silence devoid of the usual human backdrop. The absence of people was startling—especially when we walked alone on the sidewalks surrounded by the unoccupied mega structures that are the signature of New York. Our feet crunched the powdered concrete as if it were a light snow. Tiny puffs of grey would burst up from each step. Quickly, our shoes and pants became coated with the pulverized dust.

The fall rains had not yet arrived. Every cranny and corner was coated with a fine powdered grey-white dust from the event. Glass dust like ice crystals sparkled in the light. Every ledge had a quantity of the powdered corpse residue of the twin towers. The air did not have a fresh fall smell. Rather it was an ambiguous odor of dirt and construction associated with some huge building project. Everywhere, it was silent and devoid of the expected noises of a city. One could sense a vibration and indiscernible sounds but they were too imprecise. We walked on in the twilight with a modest sound of crunching, smoking feet, each in our own thoughts. Over this short distance, our hosts had amalgamated together to our front. They were not hosting, they were apart from us. We were now two parties—the leaders and the led. We turned a corner.

A scene that will always live with me. We had arrived at the corner of Ground Zero. Looking west and north, the scene was apocalyptic. I turned the corner looking down at the ground and had to raise my head to an almost uncomfortable angle to view the immense sensory depriving scene. In front of us was an immense pile of indiscernible rubble. The concrete window facades, at many angles and forms were fixating as light from the city outlined their wild juxtapositions. Light beams passed through the window frames and danced upon the shards and emitting steam. Only gradually could one discern the movement of people and things on this huge reeking pile. Smoke seeped from many locations losing itself in the darkening sky.

This immense mass overwhelmed the senses. It was a JMW Turner painting giving a huge emotional impression but indiscernible detail. I stood still and tried to focus my mind. What am I looking at?

We were dumbstruck at the street corner and just stared at the scope of the scene. Imagine a detached observer at Omaha Beach or Gettysburg. Gradually, as we hunted for some anchor to the senses, the bits and pieces became more apparent. This is rebar. That's a concrete flooring piece. A window frame. A pipe. A chair. A purse. A shoe. Parts of a tie. Parts of a telephone. The debris field of the Titanic on a far larger scale.

The whole was subdivided into many individual piles of great magnitude. Each had its complement of extraction, lifting and dozing machinery and assemblage of people. To my eye, each had its tiny lines of workers and lights focusing on a single point within the whole like so many shiny maggots working their way across a steaming, decayed corpse. To one side-northeast, an unbroken line of vehicles pointed toward the pile and another—composed of ambulances and open rubble haulers—away. For such a huge gathering of people and equipment, it was remarkably quiet.

How immensely inconsequential we seemed against the whole. The people seemed so tiny compared to the mass they worked. One had to remind oneself that these were people we were looking at as they were so easily lost within the twisting's and obscurations of the debris, smoke, steam and wavering light.

As we moved forward and adjusted to the scene, we each focused on a piece of the whole—still silently led by our hosts who would occasionally relate a location or issue of a lost friend or element. Often, they would cease talking and be lost in thought and then only gradually return to association with us. We hardly noticed and took no offense

After the instant impression and confusion had passed, it evolved that each pile within the mass had a rhythm and order. That provided a comfort. Everyone had some sort of light activated marker-an armband, a fire coat striping or a glow tape hat. These would randomly flash and recede as various sources hit them. The effect was of continuously waving ribbons of light throughout the mass. Larger lights stabbed through the broken facades constantly throwing alternating surreal shadows and bright focal points on the piles.

The workers arranged themselves in a line snaking through the rubble between the point of excavation and the ambulances that awaited the results like fireflies against the night sky. At the point of excavation, a group of people-and usually one or more dogs-were on their knees looking into the abyss. A yellow claw grasp situated itself on the pile with the claw directly over the point of interest. The claw operator would respond to silent signals from the excavation leader. Twice in my presence, the leader called for a halt and the machines coughed into silence and the dogs descended into the dark. On each occasion, after some lifting and moving material, a body or parts were extracted. At each moment, the vehicles all stopped, the people on the pile stood erect and several individuals would move forward, go into the hole and emerge later with a body bag.

At that point, some form of silent signal was passed and this immense body of people and machinery within this huge mass would cease moving while the cortege passed down the glowing snaking line of workers to pass their burden to the waiting ambulance. Most people affected some form of salute as the group passed and many crossed themselves as they returned to their tasks though no order or comment was discerned. The effort had a sanctity that only such an event can impart. The immensity of the scene made the human presence appear minor and insignificant.

We watched this for several hours. I never left my pile and only occasionally looked at the rest of the scene. Our hosts were equally transfixed and stood mute with us. After several hours, now about 10 pm, they indicated we should depart. We walked silently back to the launch and were lost in our own thoughts as the boat plowed its way between the now illuminated skylines and docked. We rode in utter silence back to our hotel lost in our own thoughts. This was a day of days.

Standing in that parking lot yesterday, looking at those helicopters fly by, I was flooded with old memories. But more than anything, I was mindful that one of the greatest aspects of our Nation is that we seem to have an inexhaustible reservoir of people who are willing to climb up the stairs when everyone else is running down and dropping the collective when others are pulling it.

FOR SALE

Original copies of "Ready" are available for \$274.35 including postage and handling. Contact Ellen Peters at (214) 632-1360 or 3630 Townsend Dr.; Dallas, TX 75229-3805. Original 505 hats are available for \$15.00.

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DEDICATION

This and all Panther newsletters are dedicated in loving memory to our original Panther editor, Don McKeage.