

Fifteenth anniversary memories of their DOC responses to 9-11 posted by NY Correction History Facebook Group Members



DOC ESU member assigned to rescue/recovery at the WTC. [Image & caption data from 2002 Medal Day journal's inside back cover.]



More than a dozen posted memories.

To mark the Fifteenth Anniversary of the September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center (situated within walking distance of 60 Hudson St., then NYC Department of Correction's headquarters), Tom McCarthy, the "admin" of the New York Correction History group on Facebook, posted this invitation to the membership on August 12, 2016:

CALLING ALL DOC-ers ON THE JOB 9/11/01 AND/OR WHO DEALT WITH ITS AFTERMATH: SHARE HERE YOUR PERSONAL STORY AND HELP DETAIL DOC'S RESPONSE.

More than two dozen members registered their approval of the discussion invitation. Approximately a dozen posted memories of their DOC 9-11 related experiences. Excerpts are presented here in the order received because the postings include some cross discussion that requires the comments be shown in sequence. The reader will find postings become more detailed as the discussion progresses. WTC and 9-11 related images from the Facebook pages of those members posting comments are interspersed throughout this current presentation as are images from other 9-11 presentations on this website. Links to those other presentations on the website appear at the end of this presentation.



**David Wilson:
"That is me in that picture."**

[His reference was to the top-of-page image (above) of the C.O. searching WTC debris. That photo accompanied the FB group admin's invitation to members to share their DOC 9-11 memories. The image originally appeared in the DOC Medal Day 2002 journal.]

**FB Group Admin:
David, tell us about you in that scene, your memories associated with it and your other 9/11-related work.**

Another 9-11 site scene is featured on David Wilson's FB page.

Robert Castro:

Tom, I was the Inventory Control Officer in the Central Storehouse at the time. I'm sure you're only asking for the good things that Officers provided at Ground Zero. Unfortunately, I have stories that would spin your head [what] many others participated in down there.



A 9-11 related image from Robert Castro's FB page.

Paul Rivera:

I will always remember coming to work from Long Island on the highway by Shea Stadium; all the traffic was at a stand still looking at the second plane slamming in WTC and then watching the WTC come down. That day at work all inmates were on their best behavior.



A 9-11 related image from Paul Rivera's FB page.

I will always remember working at the morgue at NY University, having 18-wheeler refrigerator trucks full of bodies and body parts. Smelling death for over three months. Having the Salvation Army members serving us hand and foot with meals as we continued working ambulance after ambulance arriving with human remains.

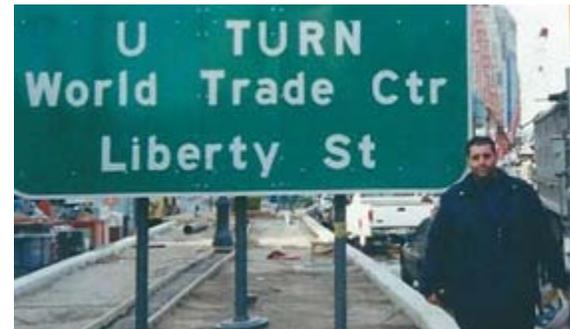
Yet, there were still crazy people calling in bomb scares, and [then] everyone had to stop working and leave the area.

I would like to thank the DOC for giving me the opportunity to service my country

at its time of need! UNBELIEVABLE !!!

Oney Russotto:

Tom, I work in support services. I worked the morgue for a few days after 9/11 and then worked in the pit until January.



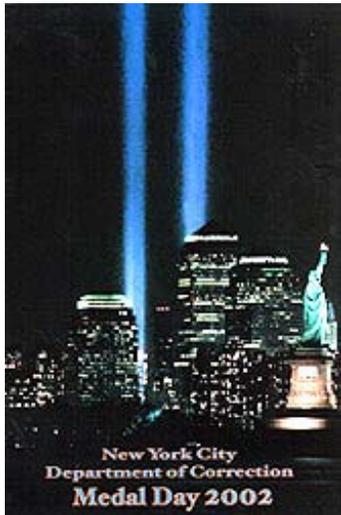
A WTC-related image from Oney Russotto's FB page.

FB Group Admin:

Oney, what did "work in morgue" and "work in pit" entail.

Those who weren't there can only imagine. You know the details.

History is in the details. You have hold of the details that can tell the history of DOC in the post 9/11 days, weeks, months. You were part of that history; share the story to preserve the history.



Reduced-size image of DOC's 2002 Medal Day journal front cover.

David Wilson:

I worked the overnight tour at WTC. There were two Captains and 20 Officers. We worked 1800 to 0600, six to seven days a week.

We also worked the Staten Island [landfill] site as a separate detail.

Working the overnight shift was tough on all of us. We basically used our sense of smell to make the recoveries we made.

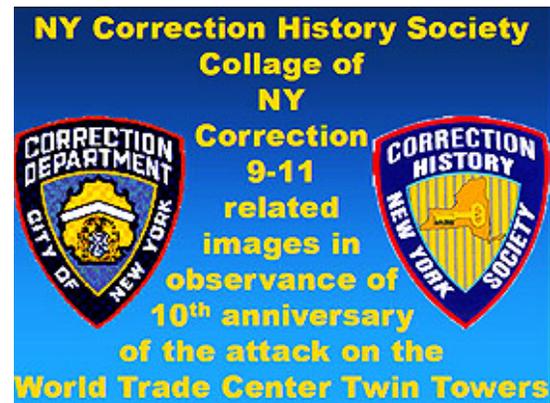
Myself and several other officers recovered two firemen near West Street which later yielded a further recovery of 12 more firemen deeper in the void.

The men and women on my tour work hard and represented our unit and the Department. We never asked for [Department] accolades nor did we get any. . .

Joyce Krebs:

True, Dave. I remember being handed a certificate at roll call for my service working midnights at the morgue after working my regular 3x11 shifts at BKDM. No [public] ceremony . . .

I also remember not but a few short years later, what a hulabaloo "welcome home" ceremony uniformed staff received after returning to NY from going to Louisiana and assisting after "Hurricane Katrina." I remember thinking how odd that was: Our country literally gets attacked by terrorists, not that many get [publicly] acknowledged by the Department for responding to it. A hurricane hits Louisiana, and staff was acknowledged as if they were returning "war heroes."



Reduced-size image of title slide of this website's 9-11 10th Anniversary PowerPoint.

Volunteer At Morgue

Jail Officers Take On Grueling Task

By WILLIAM VAN AUKEN | bringing on average 20 to 30 bodies home on each of the



NORMAN SEABROOK: 'Heartbreaking work.'

TERRY SKINNER: Overwhelmed by offers.

Extrated images of Page 1 Chief Leader 9/21/01 headline and Wm Van Auken byline combined with extracted story jump page photos of COBA president Norman Seabrook and uniformed Terry Skinner. Above extractions by FB group admin from full clipping image which was part of Skinner's 9-11 posting. Terry's caption: "Chief Leader News Story re: DOC response at Morgue." Click to access newspaper's on-line archives.

Terrence J. Skinner (with Jimmy Bross):

Re: Sept 11, 2001 Correction Volunteer Response

On Sept 11, 2001, after the WTC attack, the Department's Emergency Services Unit was assigned to assist with the WTC recovery effort. However, thousands of other Members of Service (MOS) were volunteering and being told there was nothing they could do.

On Wednesday, Sept. 12, 2001, those people were advised by the Department that the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner had submitted a request to the Mayor's Office of Emergency Management for help at the Medical Examiner's Office (Morgue). The volunteers would be tasked with helping to unload ambulances/trucks that were bringing in bodies/remains from people killed in the attack.

Volunteers began reporting to the Morgue that afternoon. I reported to the Morgue on the 4 x 12 tour on Sept 12, 2001. As one could imagine, it was chaotic. It smelled of death; the air was filled with dust, the area was cordoned off and people were scurrying around. There were policemen, firemen, medical personnel and correction officers all standing out in the [roadway] on 30th St. just off 1st Ave.

Sirens were heard throughout the area as responses all over the City were occurring. Crazy's were calling in bomb threats and anthrax threats. Everyone was on alert for another attack.

Trucks were pulling in with bodies in bags covered in ashes/dust. . . . They [were] brought on gurneys to an outdoor area near the Morgue entrance. There people opened the bags and removed the bodies for forensic examination by medical staff. Volunteers from multiple agencies assisted medical staff in this process.

With staff from multiple agencies working there, many as volunteers, there was no clear chain of command, other than medical staff saying where to put a body. DOC members of service were gathered together and advised that although this was a volunteer effort, we were uniformed members of service and as such did have a chain of command.



Above image was part of Terry Skinner's 9-11 posting. Captioned "Honoring a Fallen Member of Service."



Above image was part of Terry Skinner's 9-11 posting. Captioned "DOC Tent - 30th Street & 1st Ave (Morgue)."

We would work together, doing the same work but we would do so under the chain of command in an orderly and professional way.

Most people understood and went along without any problems.

We established teams, a team leader (usually a Captain) and five squad members. Anytime a truck or ambulance came in, a team would go out and handle the job (one team was enough to do the job and this prevented us from being on top of each other and in the way).

In doing this, we established order and through our behavior/performance, we established control of the area. We also decided that we

would do whatever task the Medical Examiner's Office needed. Sometimes, this meant unloading supply trucks or clearing out storage areas.

We also set up a small ceremony, with all of our service members coming out and standing at attention when a uniformed member of service's body was brought in to the morgue.

Our staff on the scene worked tirelessly and selflessly at the task throughout the night. They stood out as professionals amongst those in the area, (which we later learned was noticed and appreciated by the Medical Examiner's staff).

As the night wore on, we received word that more and more staff were volunteering at their commands, and wanted to know where to report once they were off duty. The Control Rooms had rosters of volunteers and were advised to standby, as we didn't know the scope of the operation.

I contacted [DOC hq] I asked if I could continue to coordinate the effort going forward (I had been the Commanding Officer of the Criminal Justice Bureau which was now effectively shut down because of the attack – the Courts had closed). They indicated I could and authorized use of a Transportation Bus to shuttle staff to the site at the start/completion of tours.



Above image was part of Terry Skinner's 9-11 posting. Captioned "Command Post."



*Above image was part of Terry Skinner's 9-11 posting.
Captioned "Officer Kathy Riley."*

For the most part, I had little to do regarding coordinating the volunteers. The Control Rooms had volunteer lists and we just had to limit the number of volunteers on the scene (so we weren't stepping on each other's toes). We briefed the new volunteers regarding the operation as they arrived.

We continued this way for two nights and then on Friday, Sept 14, [DOC hq] advised me that the work effort was changing from a volunteer effort to a Departmental Operation. They had been advised by the Mayor's Office of Emergency Management that the Medical Examiner's Office requested that we be in charge of the effort (evidently, they preferred the sense of order that we had created in performing the task).

I was to select staff: an Assistant Deputy Warden and three Captains, as well as about twenty Officers to work at the Morgue Command. These people would be supplemented with volunteers. I selected an Assistant Deputy Warden and three Captains who had volunteered and then they chose Officers for temporary assignment.

Then, being aware that my head was running and emotionally I was feeling screwed up, I asked that the Department's Employee Assistance Unit to send counselors to mingle with staff and ensure people were alright (off the record).

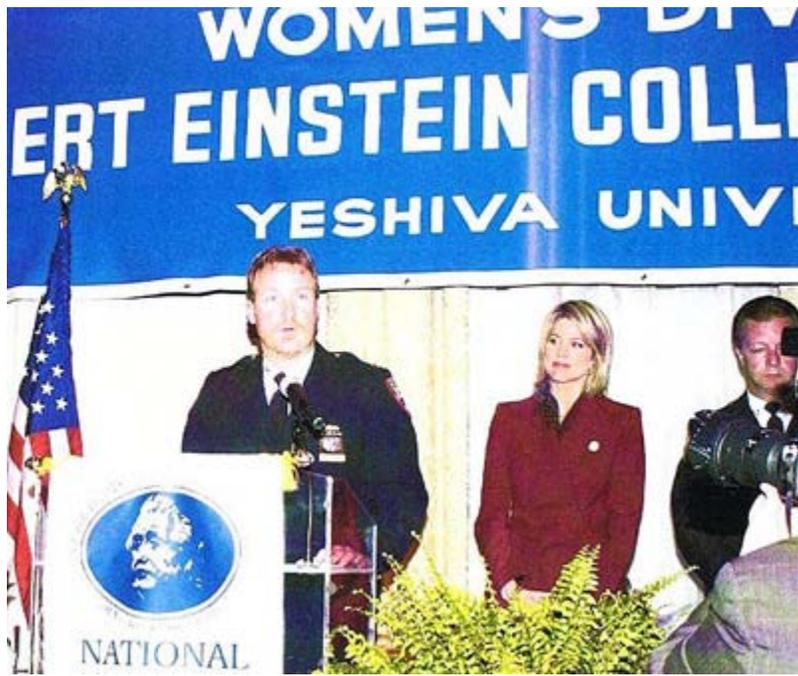
I also called the Union's counseling group, COPE and asked that they come (knowing that many would prefer speaking to the Union's people rather than the Department's).

I also requested and got a priest assigned to the effort. Further, I arranged for the Salvation Army to conduct prayer sessions for us.

We were now operating out of a tent and had another tent set up for mustering/roll call, which we converted into a chapel. Our Support Services Division had run electricity into the tent (tapping into a street light).



*Above image was part of Terry Skinner's 9-11 posting.
Captioned "Daily Mass at the Morgue."*



*Above image was part of Terry Skinner's 9-11 posting.
Captioned "DWIC Skinner accepting Spirit of Achievement
Award on behalf of DOC members."*

This allowed us to bring in computers, phones and a fax machine. The tent became an operating office and a rest area for staff working at the site (volunteers usually came after their regular tours and many times were exhausted).

We also had a team of dedicated volunteers from New Jersey Corrections that worked with us for quite some time. They worked their shifts in New Jersey, then traveled to NY and volunteered at the Morgue.

In November, 2001, when a plane crashed in Rockaway, all [DOC] morgue staff were ordered in and responded to deal with the situation. Some staff responded to Floyd Bennett Field and set up a temporary morgue. Others worked at the Morgue and assisted in bringing in the bodies, which had to be kept separate from all bodies brought in from Ground Zero or the Staten

Island [landfill] site.

In December, 2001, some of our officers contacted the NYU Pediatric Unit (at the hospital next to the Morgue) and arranged to bring Christmas to children in the hospital, to have an Officer play Santa, bringing in gifts. Also, for Christmas Dinner, my wife, my children and I volunteered through the Red Cross and served dinner to recovery workers at Ground Zero.

The DOC Morgue Command, operated Sept. 12, 2001 – Jan. 20, 2002.

A noteworthy point was that, although DOC Members of Service who worked at the Morgue eventually received compensation for the time during which they volunteered (due to federal reimbursement, members of service were later compensated for time recorded at the site), at the time they volunteered, they did so with no expectation of being paid. Further, all staff assigned at the Morgue Command were recommended for Departmental recognition medals; none received them. Their work was as selfless and honorable as could be.



*Above image was part of Terry Skinner's 9-11 posting.
Captioned: "CNN anchor Paula Zahn with (front left to right)
Officers Bross, Higgins, Mercado and Babin. DWIC Skinner in
rear next to Paula Zahn."*



Above image was part of Terry Skinner's 9-11 posting. Captioned; 'Spirit of Achievement Awards.'

Finally, a small number of staff members did receive recognition awards for their service from the National Women's Division of the Albert Einstein College of Medicine at a Spirit of Achievement luncheon in May, 2002.

That was done by individuals at the Medical Examiner's Office. There were a number of celebrities present who participated in the ceremony. Paula Zahn of CNN presented the awards to DOC staff. Those staff members accepted the awards on behalf of all correction staff who had worked at the Morgue.

Jimmy Bross, Carol De Blasio-Tortorici, Richard Oliveri, Reggo Wilson: Folks, if I left anything out, please add to/correct this. Also, please tag others who were involved. It was a true honor

working with the men and women who volunteered their services. God bless!

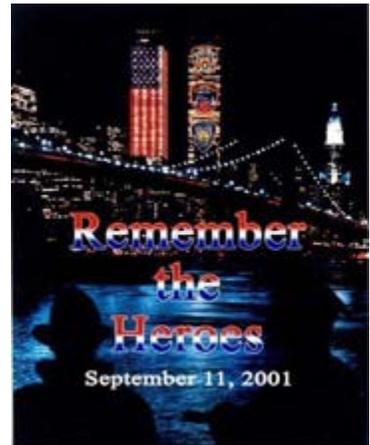
Carol De Blasio-Tortorici:

Deputy Warden Terrence J. Skinner, not only was it an honor working under your command, I will always be thankful for the privilege of helping to bring some closure to the families of those that perished on 9-11. I will never forget.

Joyce Krebs:

I remember reporting to "the tent" voluntarily working midnight shifts after completing my own 3 X 11 tour at my command.

I remember how many times, if the Transportation Division could not pick me up from the "Brooklyn House" (my command at that time), it was NYPD detectives from Bklyn North who would swing by to give me a ride, only because they were going that way to report for a midnight shift there as well! What a concerted effort on the part of all!



A 9-11 related image from Carol De Blasio-Tortorici's FB page.



Reduced-size image of one of 30 PowerPoint slides in this website's 10th Anniversary 9-11 PDF presentation.

I remember those correction officers who came from NJ to relieve us. They came from such a great distance to help too!

I see these photos that have been submitted inside "the tent," also captured some of the messages of "well wishers," their positive messages of hope, along with their thanks for all that we were doing. Every time I arrived to volunteer, there seemed to be more and more of those messages, sent mainly by students from elementary schools all throughout our nation, along with a letter from their class teacher(s). It was their inspirational messages that kept me going!

That, along with all those tireless volunteers who used to work helping to serve food or



The 9/11 Responders Remembered Park Wall unveiled on Saturday, Sept. 10, at 10:30 a.m. Retired NYC DOC captain, Dr. Errol Toulon Jr.,



serves as park president. It honors responders who died post-9/11 from 9/11-related ills.



Reduced image of 1 of 30 slides in this website's 10th Anniversary 9-11 presentation. In 2014 Dr. Toulon Jr. was named DOC Deputy Commissioner of Operations. At 10 a.m Sept. 17, 2016, wall names being added will be read. Below are NYC DOC-related wall names listed as of 9/11/16 on the park website:

DOC/ESU COs Joseph Rodriguez, Antonio Clark, Jeffery Taylor, Michael Muzio. DOC COs Robert Schor, Fernando Gonzalez, Polino Rexach, Michael J Swetokos, John Baez. NYC DOC INV Steven J Kapczak. DOC Civilian Freddie Wallace-Rakis.

coffee to us throughout the night.

So very many of them regular New Yorkers (many of whom I spoke to), who worked their 9 to 5 job (mainly in Manhattan), then would come down and volunteer their help each night, go home, and get ready to return to their 9 to 5 job the very next morning.

During that horrific time, that was how they lived their lives.

I remember being presented with a certificate, and a "WTC" commendation pin prior to a roll call in my command, along with some of my

fellow officers, for our efforts following the 9/11/01 attacks on the World Trade Center, which was presented by Chief John Mercado. Back then, that was how the Department acknowledged our efforts for what we did. . . .



Reduced image of 1 of 30 slides in this website's 10th Anniversary 9-11 presentation.

Only a very few within the Correction Department were acknowledged on Medals Day, 2002 for efforts relating to 9/11/01.

**Sad to see now, how many are so sickened, or whom have died as a result of that effort.
...**

I shall forever be grateful to those who were there for us volunteers working at the morgue: the clergy, Mr. McCann, etc. It is comforting to know we were never alone during such a dark time in our city's and our country's history.



Reduced image of 1 of 30 slides in this website's 10th Anniversary 9-11 presentation. The image for this slide came from retired DOC ESU CO Felix Aponte's Facebook page. Of the 30 slides in this website's 10th Anniversary 9-11 presentation, only this one had no words attached. None were needed then. Nor now.

Fifteen years have passed; seems as if it were only yesterday. ...

WEBMASTER/ADMIN NOTE:

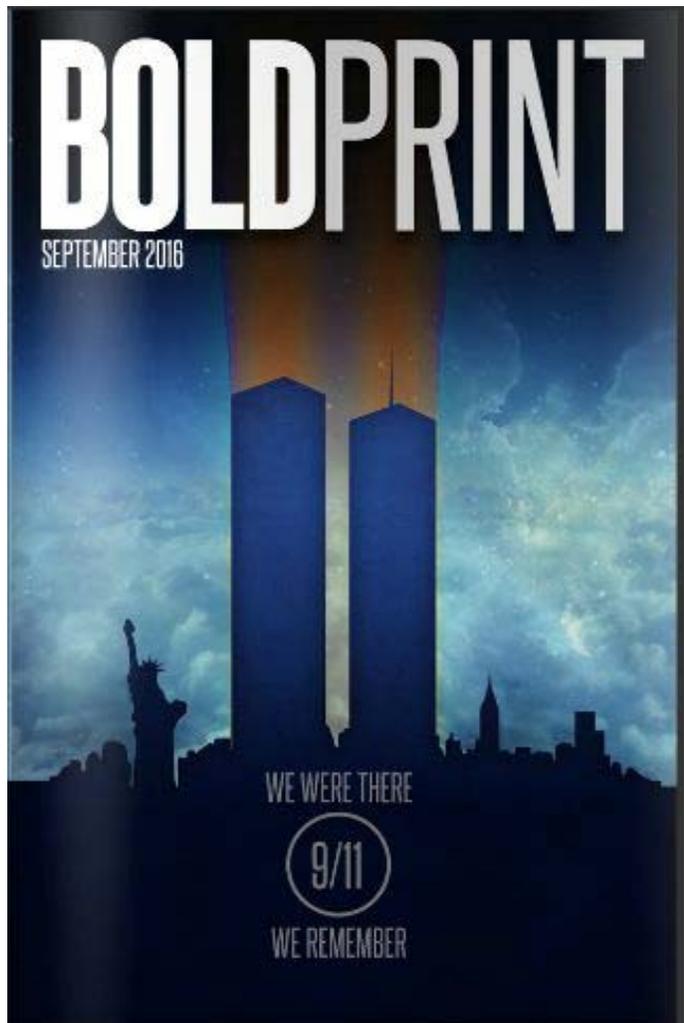
CorrectionHistory.Org and its NY Correction History Facebook Group extension thank those members who shared, through this 15th anniversary presentation, memories of their DOC 9-11 response experience.

In a real sense, no expression of thanks or token of recognition can ever suffice to match the debt of gratitude owed to them and to the other 9-11 and post-9-11 responders.

Although that debt can never be satisfied, NYC DOC continues efforts to give public recognition of the services and sacrifices rendered by DOC responders in the wake of the WTC attack.

Its latest outreach in that direction includes a DOC Office of Public Information-produced video *We Were There* and the Sept. issue of *BoldPrint*.

Click image right to access issue. Links to YouTube segments from the video appear on the list of relevant links below:



Above image is front cover of Sept. 2016 issue of NYC DOC on-line publication BoldPrint. Click to access. DOC's caption for its Facebook link to the issue reads: "In honor of 9/11, DOC pays homage to the men and women who performed acts of bravery as first responders on the days, weeks & months following the devastation."

- [NYC DOC's 2016 Video on 15th Anniversary of 9-11: "We Were There"](#)
- [New York Correction History Facebook group](#). You don't have to be a member of the group to view discussion postings and attached images. Our Facebook pages are open to viewing by any Facebook subscriber. Posting comments and images on the group page is limited to group members. Apply to the group admin for membership as per usual Facebook process.
- [Excerpts from the NYC Correction Department's Medal Day 2002 ceremony journal](#)
- [NY Correction History Society Collage of NY Correction 9-11 related images in observance of 10th anniversary of the attack on the World Trade Center Twin Towers](#)
- [Patch #37: Correction Emergency Service Unit 9-11-01 NYCD](#)
- [Return to NYCHS home page.](#)