NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

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Honor the Bravest in life and death

We call them New York's Bravest, but firefighters call each other "brother." That is because only members of the brotherhood understand what it's like to risk your life daily. To drag burn victims from flaming buildings. To retrieve charred bodies from smoldering rubble.

It is ironic that HBO's World War II series, "Band of Brothers" began two days before the World Trade Center attack. Just as U.S. Marines rushed the beach at Normandy on D-Day, New York's band of brothers dashed up the steps of the collapsing, flaming front line of a new kind of war. Yet those heroic men who climbed the stairs of the twin towers had less chance of surviving than the Normandy Marines had of making it past Nazi machine guns.

Thousands of human beings were incinerated in the Sept. 11 terrorist attack. "I know where those bodies are," said one dust-coated firefighter working on the ongoing rescue efforts. "They are on my gloves, they are on my boots, they are on my uniform."

We honor these firefighters, the living and the dead. We thank them in person; we applaud them. And now, the Fire Department is asking us to attend their funerals. To stand in for the brothers who usually pay their respects en masse, but who are busy being heroes still, sifting through the mass grave in lower Manhattan.

Anyone who doubts their mettle should remember what happened at Thursday's funeral for William Henry of Rescue Co. 1. During the service at St. Francis of Assisi in Manhattan, a fire alarm rang. Five of the grieving and exhausted firefighters raced out of the church to answer the call.

They were needed, and so are we. The department wants the public to attend the funerals of the 34 firefighters who are confirmed dead. With another 309 firefighters still missing, more funerals will follow. They will be announced in the Daily News as the information is made available, and on the Fire Department's Web site, www.nyc.gov/fdny.

This is one way New York can express its heartfelt gratitude for the role these heroes played during the disastrous attack and its aftermath. We can stand up — and stand in — for them the way they have stood up and sacrificed for us.

So go, New York. Fill the houses of worship in and around the city and honor, one by one, these selfless fallen heroes.

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