



# 9/11 Reflections

by Major Thomas V. Applin

## IT WAS A DAY LIKE ANY OTHER.

A sunrise at daybreak;  
That obnoxious alarm;  
Dunkin' Donuts coffee and a bran muffin;  
A traffic jam;  
And the routine of work;  
    Pushing paper,  
    Returning phone calls,  
    Employee challenges,  
    Email.  
Yes. ... It was a day like any other!

Until 8:46!

And life was changed in an instant.

As I watched the computer monitor, each moment brought a new announcement; A plane crashes into one of the Twin Towers, then the second. Another hits the Pentagon while a fourth crashes into a field in western Pennsylvania. It seemed so surreal, and if the day had not started so much like any other day, I might have thought that it was all a dream.

The next few days were possessed with plan and action; relief teams to organize for response, supplies to acquire, donations to process, volunteers to utilize, canteens to deploy. Early mornings turned into late nights as everyone did whatever they could to assist the grieving families, friends, and co-workers who anxiously waited for some word of encouragement concerning their missing loved one.

By weeks end, I, like the rest of the nation, like you in fact, was overwhelmed by the fear, anger, and devastation of those who had lost loved ones. Their hopelessness, their tears, and their cries for resolution caused my spirit to pray for restoration.

The morning of September 11, 2001 began as would any other day for Major Thomas Applin. As the divisional secretary for the Empire State Division, one of his responsibilities was to provide emergency disaster services (EDS).

A few weeks after the terrorist attacks, Applin began writing his reflections in the form of poetry. "I feel things deeply; I needed some release from that whole experience," Applin said. He and his wife, Major Kathleen M. Applin, are nearing retirement after 38 years as Salvation Army officers and are currently the divisional secretary and the associate divisional secretary for Greater Cleveland in the NEOSA Division.

## RESTORATION

### **Twin Towers . . .**

Symbols of strength, prosperity and security . . .  
Human hands will raise you once again from the ashes  
For all to see.

### **Silver Birds . . .**

Symbols of mobility and freedom . . .  
Human owners will set bigger birds in your place and they will  
Fly freely to the ends of the Earth.

### **Five Sides . . .**

Symbol of power, might and protection . . .  
Human resolve will restore you from your rubble  
To rescue and protect this land of liberty.

### **Stars and Stripes . . .**

Symbol of heritage, honor, and sacrifice . . .  
Human sentiment will hoist you again to the sky  
To remind us that we are a privileged populace.

### **Screaming Sirens . . .**

Symbols of hope, safety, and recovery . . .  
Human ingenuity will reconstruct your melted rubber and  
mangled steel,  
For you to care and liberate once again.

### **Broken Heart . . . BROKEN Heart . . . BROKEN HEART!**

Symbol of loss, despair, and futility . . .  
Nothing human will suffice!  
Only the Divine can answer your painful emptiness.

Send your peace and comfort, God, that ALL might be restored  
and renewed!

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to  
you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and  
do not be afraid.” — JOHN 14:27(NIV)

*November gave me my opportunity to serve. For nearly a month, I had the opportunity to serve the heroes of the response.*

*Valiant heroes thoroughly searched the wreckage for any trace of remains. Always serving and supporting them were my friends, Salvation Army Officers, Soldiers, and Volunteers. I was never so proud of my "Army" for she once again reached out to a lost and suffering world, serving beyond her strength and resources, to be Christ in a hopeless situation. These words came as a tribute to my compassionate Salvation Army relief workers.*

## **HEROS IN BLUE**

I have often thought of heroes,

And I remember them to be . . .

Like cowboys on white stallions, galloping swiftly to rescue the innocent from the evil villains; or  
Like superheroes, dressed in cape and mask, arriving in just the nick of time to use their superpowers to save the world from destruction;  
Like athletes whose physical perfection allows them to run faster, jump higher, hit farther or throw longer than any athlete before them; or  
Like the mental masters who have solved the mysteries of the universe and answered questions long thought impossible.

But I have now met real heroes,

And I know of them to be . . .

Extraordinary men and women, walking in the Spirit, seeking to rescue the innocent and lost from the evil that has sought to destroy them;  
Clothed in uniforms, arriving in just the nick of time to use their compassion, care and commitment to bring healing to the hurts of destruction;  
Serving well beyond their limits of endurance, strength, and emotion in only a power that God can provide;  
Understanding that in this time, it is not words or spiritual discourse that answer the nagging questions of pain, but rather simple acts of kindness.

You are my heroes,

And I thank you for being  
People of God;  
Quick to respond; and  
Willing to serve.

*Months later, on the sixth month anniversary of 9/11, I paused to remember that disastrous day. As I remembered these words flooded my mind.*

**8:46**

I pause to pray.

My spirit is desperate to communicate with you God,  
yet I have no words.  
There are only thoughts. . . .

Thoughts of anger, loneliness, pain, fear, and desperation,  
all somewhat dulled, yet ever present.

Thoughts of the gallons of tears shed in grief.

Thoughts of the exhaustion of heroes in endless pursuit to find  
just one more speck of remain, and of heroes who serve those  
in this search.

Thoughts of the ultimate sacrifice of men and women who have  
lost their lives defeating the world's terrorist threat, and of those  
who continue on in their memory; still attempting to rid our  
world of this terror.

Thoughts of the unbridled goodwill of a nation; kind and  
compassionate, seeking in some way to relate to and support  
those in distress.

Thoughts of our pursuit to resume our lives, and the fear  
we may forget.

I pause to pray.

Be in my thoughts, O God, and let these thoughts be my prayer!

March 11, 2002

*On another trip to Ground Zero, I witnessed the recovery of the remains of a firefighter. I have witnessed many emotionally and spiritually moving experiences, yet most pale in comparison to this somber moment. Perhaps you can sense the importance of this event as I did through these words.*

*I still search for words to express the things I have witnessed. It truly is as Dickens states in Great Expectations, "It was the best of times; It was the worst of times ..." We have witnessed the worst of tragedy that our country has ever seen, yet somehow we have also seen a selfish and calloused country, rally to support the recovery.*

*Just two days ago, I stopped to consider the memory of 9/11. I ask the question, "How long will it be before we forget the tragedy of September 11?"*

## THE STORY

The story is told again, as it has been countless times  
since that fateful day:

A hush falls amidst the cacophony of recovery sounds and activity,  
as a fallen hero is tenderly lifted from his grave of steel and ash;  
Searching comrades cease their excavation, and rush to honor  
this one who has been lost yet anxiously longed for;  
As though marching to a silent cadence, an impromptu honor  
guard bears the flag draped remains on a simple wire gurney;  
Whimpers of grief are soon replaced by uncontrollable sobs, as  
the procession encounters the family and friends, having kept  
a constant vigil of hope for some word, some piece of evidence,  
some resolution concerning this one so loved and so missed.

The hero has been found, yet there is no finality to this  
extemporary wake, for the story will be told again and again  
until every hero is found!

## MEMORIAL DAY

What memorial will we place at the site of remembrance;

A basket of flowers,

A stone of words,

A trinket of memory,

A flag of honor,

A tear of sorrow,

Even a conversation and prayer  
from a broken heart.

Yet so many graves are left unattended. No one comes to  
remember!

Perhaps the best tribute to this senseless loss of life, is to  
perpetuate the memory.

The best remembrance is to refuse to forget!

My friends, may we in our influence, perpetuate the memory of  
the "Heroes of September." And may our love, compassion, and  
prayers support those they have left behind.