

Americans Pay Tribute to 9/11 Victims Whose Families 'Lost a Piece of Their Heart That Day'

Americans continue to remember the victims of the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks with ceremonies honoring the heroes and the dead in the tragic event. The ceremonies have been very moving.

In 2017, as classical music drifted across the 9/11 Memorial plaza in lower Manhattan, family members and first responders slowly read the names and delivered personal memories of the almost 3,000 victims killed in the worst attack on U.S. soil since the 1941 bombing of Pearl Harbor.

Relatives in the crowd embraced and some held photos of loved ones and signs that read: "Never to be forgotten," "We miss you" and "Gone too soon."

Tom Acquarviva's 29-year-old son Paul was one of 658 employees of financial services firm Cantor Fitzgerald who perished after the first plane struck the north tower just below where they worked on the 101st to 105th floors.

"Not a day goes by that we don't remember him," Acquarviva told Reuters.

Angela Checo honored her brother, Pedro Francisco, 35, who was a vice president at investment and wealth manager Fiduciary Trust on the 96th floor of the south tower.

"He was coming down but forgot someone and went back upstairs to save them," Checo said. "That's why he never made it down."

The ceremony paused for six moments of silence: four to mark the exact times four hijacked planes were crashed into the

World Trade Center, the Pentagon near Washington D.C., and a Pennsylvania field. The last two record when the North and South towers of the Trade Center crumpled.

It was held by two reflecting pools with waterfalls that now stand in the towers' former footprints, and watched over by an honor guard of police and firefighters.

More than 340 firefighters and 60 police were killed on the that sunny Tuesday morning in 2001. Many of the first responders died while running up stairs in the hope of reaching victims trapped on the towers' higher floors.

"Piece of Their Heart"

At the Pentagon, a trumpet played as U.S. President Barack Obama took part in a wreath-laying ceremony.

"Fifteen years may seem like a long time. But for the families who lost a piece of their heart that day, I imagine it can seem like just yesterday," Obama said.

No public officials spoke at the New York ceremony, in keeping with a tradition that began in 2012. But many dignitaries attended, including Republican presidential hopeful Donald Trump and his Democratic rival Hillary Clinton.

Trump said in a statement that it was a day of sadness and remembrance but also of resolve.

"Our solemn duty on behalf of all those who perished ... is to work together as one nation to keep all of our people safe from an enemy that seeks nothing less than to destroy our way of life," Trump said.

Clinton said in a statement that the horror of Sept. 11, 2001 would never be forgotten, and paid tribute to the victims and first responders.

She fell ill after about 90 minutes at the service, becoming

“overheated,” aides said, and was taken to her daughter Chelsea’s apartment in Manhattan. She emerged later and told reporters she was “feeling great.”

Tribute in Light

Houses of worship throughout the city had tolled their bells at 8:46 a.m. EDT (1246 GMT), the time American Airlines Flight 11 slammed into the North Tower.

A second pause came at 9:03 a.m. (1303 GMT), when United Airlines Flight 175 struck the South Tower. American Airlines Flight 77 hit the Pentagon at 9:37 a.m. (1337 GMT), then the South Tower collapsed at 9:59 a.m. (1359 GMT).

At 10:03 a.m. (1403 GMT) United Flight 93 crashed near Shanksville, Pennsylvania, and the final moment of silence was observed at 10:28 a.m. (1428 GMT) when the North Tower fell.

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As evening falls across New York City on Sunday, scores of 7,000-watt xenon light bulbs will project two giant beams of blue light into the night sky to represent the fallen twin towers, fading away at dawn.

The “Tribute in Light” was first set up in 2002, six months after the attacks, and has become part of the annual memorial service. The beams reach four miles (6.4 km) into the sky and can be seen as far as 60 miles (96.6 km) away on a clear night, organizers say.

In the twin towers’ place now rises the 104-story 1 World Trade Center. Also known as the Freedom Tower, it is the tallest skyscraper in the Western Hemisphere, at 1,776 feet (541 meters). Fifteen years after the attack, the U.S. government marked its return to the site on Friday, moving its

New York City offices there.

Nineteen hijackers died in the attack, later claimed by Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda, which led directly to the U.S. war in Afghanistan and indirectly to the invasion of Iraq.

In Kabul, the top American commander in Afghanistan, General John Nicholson, paid tribute to members of the NATO-led coalition and Afghan security forces who had been killed since the Taliban regime fell.

But in an address which touched on his own experience as an officer in Afghanistan, stretching back a decade, he also underlined how far from peace the country remains.

“As we know, sadly, the number of terrorist groups has only grown since 9/11,” he said. “Of the 98 groups now designated globally, 20 are in this region, the Afpak region.” {eo}

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