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# Remembering DSS Rescue Efforts in New York City on September 11, 2001

DIPNOTE: MILITARY AND SECURITY

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SEPTEMBER 11, 2018

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Firefighters make their way through the rubble after two airliners crashed into the World Trade Center in New York bringing down the landmark buildings, September 11, 2001.

So many images and memories linger from the days at Ground Zero in Lower Manhattan.

“Everywhere you walked you could hear the dust crumbling under your feet,” recalls Supervisory Special Agent Colin Sullivan. In September 2001, Sullivan was among 52 U.S. Department of State, Diplomatic Security Service (DSS) special agents who joined the massive surge of first responders who rushed to assist in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks that destroyed the World Trade Center.

“You always knew which direction the wind was blowing from,” recalled Sullivan, “because clean air blew in from the water and fumes and smoke-filled air came from the fires still burning in the pile.”

Other images include the recovery of the victims.

“Every time word got out that a fireman was coming down the pile with human remains, everyone would go silent,” Sullivan recalled.

DSS played a significant role in the aftermath of 9/11. Twenty three DSS New York Field Office agents and an additional two support personnel worked alongside dozens of special agents from DSS satellite and field offices up and down the East Coast. Agents delivered gasoline to fuel generators, transported exhausted firefighters and doctors, and escorted emergency/rescue equipment through tunnels closed to general traffic. DSS also expedited getting copies of World Trade Center blueprints from outside of the region to the site, transported Department of Energy and FEMA personnel to critical meetings, and delivered critical evidence to the FBI Joint Terrorist Task Force for analysis.

“As is so often the case with our agents’ every day assignments, they worked with devotion and determination, but without publicity or high visibility,” former DSS Special Agent Hinda Perdreaux, who was then assistant special agent in charge of the New York Field Office, wrote in the December 2001 edition of State magazine. (Read Perdreaux’s firsthand account [here](#)).



Hinda Perdreaux stands at a window of the DSS defacto headquarters at Ground Zero. This view allowed Perdreaux to ensure that West Street remained open and available for DSS vehicles to enter and exit the Ground Zero site. (Photo courtesy of Colin Sullivan)

DSS was well positioned to assist following the destruction of the Twin Towers because it was in the middle of preparations for the annual UN General Assembly (UNGA) meetings scheduled for later in September. UNGA is the largest regularly scheduled diplomatic gathering in the world and requires an extraordinary annual commitment by (DSS) to provide dignitary protection, real-time threat assessments, and secure operations by working with countless security, law enforcement, and first responder personnel. Most law



enforcement organizations preparing for UNGA had centered their command posts in lower Manhattan, at or near the World Trade Center and lost nearly all their vehicles and equipment in the attack. DSS offices and assets located in midtown were not damaged however, and agents brought these assets to bear in supporting the response.

Sullivan at the time was a relatively junior special agent and is currently the Director of the Diplomatic Security Command Center at DSS headquarters in Arlington, Virginia. In 2001, in New York, he assisted with search, rescue, and recovery, served as the primary DSS advance agent coordinating international dignitary visits to Ground Zero, and stayed in Manhattan through November when the postponed UNGA finally took place.



Colin Sullivan stands at West and Liberty Streets; the intersection that served as the main thoroughfare used to access the DSS staging area at Ground Zero, September 25, 2001. (Photo courtesy of Colin Sullivan)

It wasn't until 2015 — after Sullivan had been diagnosed with numerous medical issues — that he realized his two-plus months of around-the-clock exposure at Ground Zero had taken a toll on his health. One of his first thoughts was the welfare of the other 51 DSS agents; if he had experienced health problems, how many of his friends and former colleagues did too? Sullivan worked with DSS leadership to identify and contact personnel who served at Ground Zero to make them aware of available health screening and treatment programs. He learned that others were experiencing health issues that might be linked to the 2001 attacks. Since, he has helped to link them up with available services.

Following the attacks on the twin towers, DSS first responders volunteered without expectation of publicity or visibility, and their contributions went largely unnoticed. On this seventeen-year anniversary, DSS

remembers all who lost their lives and celebrates the men and women who served after the attack.



DSS Special Agent Jeff Thomas takes a needed break after returning from ferrying equipment and personnel to Ground Zero. Thomas was Special Agent in Charge of the temporary deployment of DSS agents to New York from Washington, D.C. and other DSS field offices. (Photo courtesy of Colin Sullivan)

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*Editor's Note: This entry also appears in the [U.S. Department of State's publication](#)  on Medium.*

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