



WE REMEMBER ★ WE HONOR ★ WE WILL NEVER FORGET

FEBRUARY 2026: SPECIAL EDITION OBSERVING THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF 9/11

Fort McCoy remembers 9/11, 25 years later, with 2026 Memorial Run, Stair Climb on post

STORY & PHOTOS BY SCOTT T. STURKOL
Public Affairs Staff

Nearly 100 people gathered at 6 a.m. Sept. 11 at Fort McCoy to remember the lives lost during the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, and to honor the generations of Americans who answered the call to serve in the 25 years since that day.

The 2026 running of the 9/11 Memorial Run and Stair Climb brought Soldiers, military retirees, veterans, Fort McCoy employees, and others together on Patriot Day for a morning of remembrance, reflection, and service.

Before participants began the event, Chaplain (Lt. Col.) Walter McCall, Fort McCoy Garrison chaplain, offered an invocation focused on the selflessness of those who responded to the attacks and those who served in the conflicts that followed.

“I’m thankful for everyone that came out today,” McCall said. “I was there and so let’s make sure we make this a day to honor our fallen on this Patriots Day.”

McCall encouraged participants to use the run and stair climb as an opportunity to remember the firefighters and other emergency responders who rushed toward danger as others fled to safety.

“We ask that as we run, that we run in remembrance of those who got out of their vehicles, the firefighter who got out of the vehicle, who ran ... to be able to help and save others as he perished,” McCall said.

The stair climb is particularly symbolic because it recalls the thousands of first responders who climbed the stairs of the World Trade Center towers after the attacks. At Fort McCoy, participants use the physical challenge of the event to remember the determination and sacrifice demonstrated by those responders.

McCall also connected the remembrance to the military service that followed Sept. 11.



Fort McCoy community members participate in the 2026 running of the 9/11 Memorial Run and Stair Climb in the early morning hours of Sept. 11 at Fort McCoy.

“We also want to thank you for also that we honor today in our run today that those of many countless service members that served in the war, in the global war on terrorism,” he said.

He said the training and sacrifice of today’s military should continue the legacy of those who served following the attacks.

“May our sacrifice, may our training today prepare us, Lord, to keep that legacy to train and win our nation’s wars,” McCoy said.

Following the invocation, Col. Sarah Fraticelli, commander of U.S. Army Garrison-Fort McCoy, welcomed participants and reflected on the significance of the 25th anniversary.

“Thanks for being here and thanks for gathering as one on the 25th anniversary of September 11th,” Fraticelli said. “It’s hard to believe it’s been 25 years.”

For those who experienced the attacks as they happened, Fraticelli said the memories remain vivid.

“I know all of us that have those memories will always remember the morning that we found out and where we were,” she said. “And that marks really my generation, the beginning of my service.”

Fraticelli said the anniversary was an opportunity to remember the innocent people who lost their lives in New York City, at the Pentagon and near Shanksville, Penn., as well as the first responders and service members who placed themselves in harm’s way.

“Today we’re here to remember the ... firefighters, the police, medical workers, and soldiers who rushed into danger without hesitation,” Fraticelli said. “And the generation of service members who really put their lives at risk in the months and years that followed.”

Before participants moved to the starting line, Fraticelli asked everyone to pause and reflect.

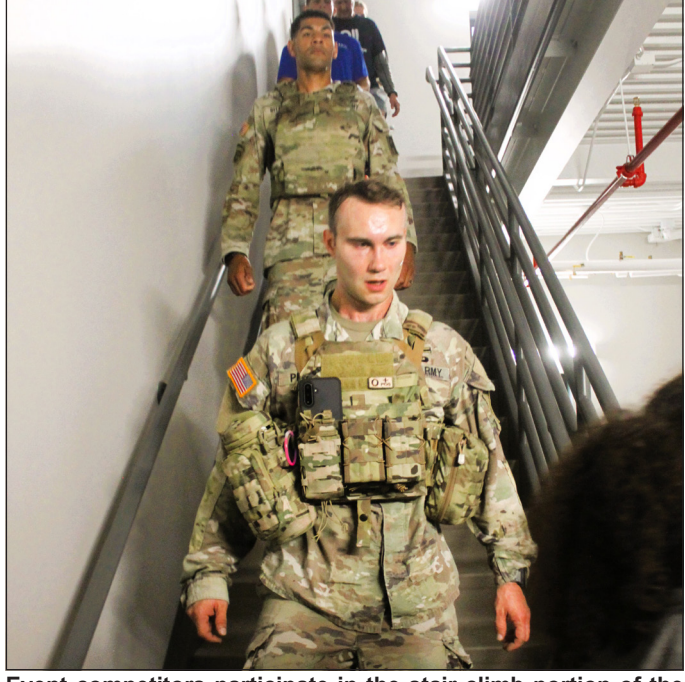
“Please join me in a moment of silence and reflection to honor the fallen, their families, and all who continue to defend our nation,” she said.

After the moment of silence, Fraticelli encouraged participants to approach the event with purpose.

“Be safe, support one another, and let’s run with a purpose this morning,” she said.

A day of remembrance

Sept. 11 is observed nationally as Patriot Day, a day to remember the people killed in the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.



Event competitors participate in the stair climb portion of the observance Sept. 11 in one of Fort McCoy’s newest four-story barracks buildings in the 1600 block of the cantonment area at Fort McCoy.

Weight they carry: Fort McCoy firefighters honor those lost on 9/11

STORY & PHOTOS BY SCOTT T. STURKOL
Public Affairs Staff

Twenty-five years after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, the memory of the emergency responders who ran toward danger that morning remains deeply connected to the work of firefighters who continue to answer calls for help today.

That connection was especially visible Sept. 11, 2026, at Fort McCoy as Firefighter/Emergency Medical Technician Brandon Perron and fellow Fort McCoy Directorate of Emergency Services Fire Department firefighters Stephen Darling and Luke Erickson participated in the installation’s annual 9/11 Memorial Run and Stair Climb.

Nearly 100 Soldiers, veterans, military retirees, Fort McCoy employees and others participated in the 2026 event, which included a 2.975-mile run/1.34-mile walk followed by a stair climb inside one of Fort McCoy’s four-story barracks buildings. The stair climb is designed as a physical remembrance of the thousands of emergency responders who climbed the stairs of the World Trade Center towers after the attacks.

For Perron, the event has become a deeply personal tradition.

Perron, a Sparta, Wis., native, was in fifth grade when the attacks occurred. In previous years, he explained that watching the events unfold helped inspire his decision to become a firefighter.

“I kind of knew at that point that firefighting was something that I wanted to do,” Perron said in a



Fort McCoy firefighters participate in the 2026 installation 9/11 Memorial Run and Stair Climb on Sept. 11 at Fort McCoy.

2025 Fort McCoy interview.

In 2024 and 2025, Perron completed the Fort McCoy event wearing his full firefighter turnout gear and carrying more than 100 pounds of equip-

ment. In 2025, it marked his second consecutive year completing the event in that manner.

The equipment was not simply extra weight.

Perron carried a high-rise pack and a New York

hook as a way of symbolically representing the equipment firefighters carried into the World Trade Center. The firefighters responding to the towers had to take breathing-air bottles, hose and other tools up hundreds of feet of stairs because elevators were unavailable or unsafe.

“It’s to honor the 343 firefighters who perished on 9/11 and those who have perished since because of cancer related issues,” Perron said in 2024. “But it’s also just in the totality of the circumstances that everybody who has either fought in the wars following and lost their lives or the civilians who lost their lives. Police officers ... everybody who was involved with 9/11 ... just to honor and respect them for what they’ve gone through and what their families are going through currently.”

That remembrance extends far beyond the 343 members of the Fire Department of the City of New York who died that day.

Remembering New York’s emergency responders

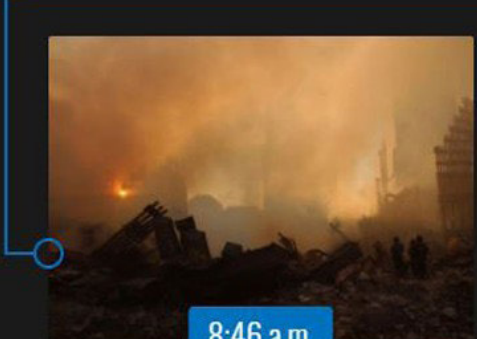
The attacks on the World Trade Center produced what was one of the largest emergency mobilizations in New York City history.

Firefighters, police officers and emergency medical personnel from throughout the New York area responded to the World Trade Center. They faced an almost unimaginable rescue mission as thousands of civilians attempted to escape the burning

(See **FIREFIGHTERS**, Insert Page 2)

TIMELINE OF ATTACKS ON SEPT. 11, 2001

According to history.com, on Sept. 11, 2001, 19 militants associated with the Islamic extremist group al Qaeda hijacked four airplanes and carried out suicide attacks against targets in the United States. Two of the planes were flown into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, a third plane hit the Pentagon, and a fourth plane crashed in a field in Shanksville, Penn. Almost 3,000 people were killed during the 9-11 terrorist attacks, which triggered major U.S. initiatives to combat terrorism and defined the presidency of George W. Bush.



8:46 a.m.

The World Trade Center North Tower
American Airlines Flight 11



9:02 a.m.

The World Trade Center South Tower
United Airlines Flight 175



9:37 a.m.

The Pentagon
American Airlines Flight 77



10:03 a.m.

Shanksville, Pennsylvania
United Airlines Flight 93

REMEMBERING 9/11 25 YEARS LATER

FIREFIGHTERS

from Page 1

towers. After American Airlines Flight 11 struck the North Tower at 8:46 a.m., and United Airlines Flight 175 struck the South Tower at 9:03 a.m., emergency responders moved toward the buildings while civilians moved away.

Firefighters entered the towers to search for and evacuate civilians. Police officers helped direct people toward safety. Emergency medical personnel treated injured people and established medical operations around the disaster site.

Then the towers collapsed, and 343 FDNY firefighters died on 9/11, 23 members of the New York City Police Department died, and 37 members of the Port Authority Police Department died.

In all, 411 emergency workers were killed in the attacks. Those numbers represent individuals — firefighters, police officers, paramedics, emergency medical technicians and other responders — who reported for duty that morning and answered a call unlike anything they had encountered before.

For the FDNY, the loss was particularly devastating. Fire companies from throughout New York City responded to the World Trade Center. Firefighters climbed upward into the towers carrying the equipment necessary to perform rescues and fight fires.

Many never came back down. Their sacrifice also continued long after Sept. 11, 2001. Thousands of first responders and survivors have experienced illnesses associated with exposure to the toxic dust and debris at the World Trade Center site. Numerous emergency responders have died in the years since from illnesses attributed to their service at Ground Zero.

That continuing loss is part of what Perron has sought to recognize through his participation at Fort McCoy.

A legacy carried forward

That idea — answering the call when others need help — is familiar to the Fort McCoy Fire Department.

The installation's firefighters protect a nearly 60,000-acre Army training center, but their emergency-response mission also reaches beyond the installation through mutual-aid agreements with surrounding communities.

Fort McCoy firefighters have provided assistance during structure fires, vehicle accidents, water rescues, wildland fires and other emergencies throughout the region.

The department's capabilities have also expanded well beyond traditional structural firefighting.

For nearly 15 years, Fort McCoy has maintained a specialized scuba dive team, providing a technical-rescue capability that is uncommon among Army fire departments. The team conducts surface and underwater rescue and recovery operations and provides mutual-aid support to surrounding communities.

Its specialized equipment includes dry suits, full-face masks and wireless underwater communications systems. Firefighters regularly train for open-water and ice-rescue operations at Fort McCoy's lakes.

That training has translated into real-world response.

In January 2019, Fort McCoy firefighters responded to an emergency at Perch Lake in Sparta after children fell through the ice, including one who went beneath the surface. Seven firefighters on duty responded, while three additional firefighters came from home to support the dive team.

The department also regularly trains in technical rescue, including rope rescue and high- and low-angle operations.

Fort McCoy maintains aircraft-rescue firefighting capabilities near the Sparta-Fort McCoy Airport, giving the department specialized capabilities for aviation emergencies.

Service beyond the gates

One of the clearest examples of the department's commitment to surrounding communities came during the catastrophic flooding of August 2018.



Fort McCoy firefighters participate in the 2026 9/11 Memorial Run and Stair Climb on Sept. 11 at Fort McCoy.

After portions of the region received as much as 12 inches of rain, flash flooding overwhelmed communities near Fort McCoy.

Fort McCoy firefighters were called to provide mutual aid.

They responded with personnel, boats and vehicles to Sparta, Melvina and Leon. The department deployed eight firefighters, three boats and four support vehicles during the flood-rescue operations.

Firefighters used boats to reach residents trapped by rapidly rising water.

In one case, crews helped evacuate a senior citizen and her granddaughter from a home as floodwater rushed through the area. In another, firefighters used boats to reach residents who were unable to leave their homes.

Overall, emergency responders working in Leon, Sparta, and Melvina helped save 57 people and 27 pets.

Among the Fort McCoy firefighters participating in those flood-rescue operations was Luke Erickson, who joined Perron and Darling for the 2026 9/11 Memorial Run and Stair Climb.

That connection gives the 2026 event an especially meaningful dimension.

Erickson has not only trained to respond to emergencies. He has answered the call during an actual disaster, helping people in danger in communities surrounding Fort McCoy.

Equipment built for the mission

The Fort McCoy Fire Department's equipment reflects the breadth of its emergency-response mission.

During the 2018 floods, firefighters used boats capable of navigating dangerous floodwaters. The department's skimmer boat is a 20-foot, water-jet-propelled boat capable of operating in shallow water.

The department's dive equipment allows firefighters to conduct underwater searches in conditions ranging from open water to beneath the ice.

During annual ice-diving training, divers use dry suits and full-face masks while remaining connected by tether and communications lines to firefighters on the surface. This allows the team to practice lost-diver and underwater-search scenarios under controlled conditions.

The department also maintains specialized wildland firefighting equipment.

In March 2026, Fort McCoy firefighters responded to a wildland fire in the installation's North Impact Area after training munitions ignited dry vegetation. Nine firefighters deployed with four brush trucks and a wildland utility terrain vehicle.

The brush trucks carried water tanks, pumps, hoses and wildland tools, while the UTV provided a smaller, highly maneuverable firefighting platform for areas larger vehicles could not easily reach.

Firefighters established a firebreak using back-burn operations and contained the fire in less than two hours without requiring outside mutual aid.

Earlier in 2026, Fort McCoy firefighters also provided mutual-aid assistance during a fire in Tomah.

Each response is different. The equipment changes. The circumstances change. The people needing help change. But the mission remains the same.

Remembering through service

For Darling, Erickson, and Perron, participating in the 2026 event placed them among the many Fort McCoy Soldiers, veterans, employees and community members who came together to remember Sept. 11.

For these three firefighters, however, the morning carried an additional meaning. They are members of the profession that was so profoundly affected that morning 25 years ago.

They wear protective equipment.

They train for emergencies that can change in seconds. They climb toward danger while others are trying to get away. And they understand the weight of the tools they carry.

Perron's participation in previous years made that symbolism especially visible. Carrying more than 100 pounds of firefighter equipment up the stairs was a physical representation of what firefighters faced inside the World Trade Center.

In 2026, he was joined by Darling and Erickson. Together, the three Fort McCoy firefighters honored the fallen by doing something firefighters have done for generations: showing up, carrying the equipment, climbing the stairs and answering the call.

The Fort McCoy 9/11 Memorial Run and Stair Climb cannot recreate what happened in New York City on Sept. 11, 2001.

It does something more important. It remembers. It remembers the civilians who never made it home. It remembers the firefighters, police officers, paramedics and other emergency responders who ran toward danger. It remembers the families who lost loved ones.

And it reminds those who continue to serve that the legacy of those responders lives not only in memorials and ceremonies, but in the everyday actions of people willing to help others in their greatest moments of need.

Twenty-five years later, three Fort McCoy firefighters carried that legacy up the stairs. And with every step, they carried the memory of those who never came back down.

During Fort McCoy Prayer Breakfast, chaplain holds remembrance for 9/11 sacrifices, resilience 25 years later

STORY & PHOTO BY SCOTT T. STURKOL

Public Affairs Staff

Twenty-five years after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, Fort McCoy community members gathered Sept. 11, 2026, to remember those who lost their lives, honor those who responded, and reflect on the resilience that continues to shape the nation.

During Fort McCoy's 2026 Retiree Appreciation Day Prayer Breakfast, Chaplain (Lt. Col.) Walter McCall, Fort McCoy Garrison chaplain with the Religious Support Office, led a remembrance presentation that combined historical military records, personal reflection, and a message of hope. His presentation included a video recalling the attacks and a review of a historical report documenting the Army Reserve's response to the events of 9/11.

McCall's presentation connected the sacrifices of the first responders and military personnel who served that day with the continuing importance of community, healing, and resilience.

Preserving Army Reserve's 9/11 history

McCall explained that the 311th Military History Detachment was tasked with documenting the events in New York City, while the 90th Military History Detachment covered the Pentagon response in Washington, D.C.

The Army Reserve's Office of Army Reserve History subsequently published two reports in 2003, including *The Role of the Army Reserve in the 11 September Attacks: New York City*, prepared by the 311th Military History Detachment. The reports documented the Army Reserve's response through narrative accounts, photographs, and interviews with Reservists involved in the aftermath.

While reviewing the historical material, McCall highlighted a foreword written by Lt. Gen. Thomas J. Plewes, Chief of the Army Reserve. Plewes served as chief from May 25, 1998, to May 24, 2002. The foreword in the New York report is dated May 21, 2002, rather than 2003.

McCall said reading Plewes' words helped him visualize the events of Sept. 11 and recognize the courage demonstrated by soldiers and civilians.

The foreword describes the attacks as an unimaginable national tragedy and recognizes the courage and selflessness of ordinary Americans and Army Reserve personnel. It also remembers Army Reserve soldiers who died while responding in their civilian roles, including firefighters and personnel working at the World Trade Center and Pentagon.

Remembering those who responded

McCall reviewed individual stories of Army Reserve personnel who lost their lives during the attacks.

McCall also highlighted the story of retired Col. Rick Rescorla, a Vietnam veteran and security director for Morgan Stanley at the World Trade Center. Rescorla helped evacuate thousands of employees and returned to search for people who remained in the building before losing his life.

The stories illustrated the individual acts of courage and selflessness that characterized the response to the attacks.

McCall also described the Army Reserve's broader response, which extended beyond the initial rescue efforts. Army Reserve personnel supported



Chaplain (Lt. Col.) Walter McCall leads his own presentation Sept. 11, 2026, that recalls the 25th anniversary of Sept. 11, 2001, during the 2026 Fort McCoy Retiree Appreciation Day event in building 905 at Fort McCoy.

emergency operations, provided security, assisted civilian agencies, and mobilized to support recovery efforts.

The 311th Quartermaster Company (Mortuary Affairs), based in Aguadilla, Puerto Rico, deployed volunteers to the Pentagon within 72 hours of the attacks. Soldiers worked to recover human remains and personal effects from the debris.

The Survivor Tree: A message of hope

After discussing the lives lost and the Army Reserve's response, McCall transitioned to a message about hope and resilience through the story of the Survivor Tree at the World Trade Center Memorial.

The Callery pear tree had been planted in the World Trade Center plaza in 1970. During the attacks, the tree was crushed beneath steel, concrete, and burning debris. In October 2001, recovery workers discovered the damaged tree with a small cluster of green leaves.

Workers transported the tree to a nursery in the Bronx, where arborists cared for its damaged roots and helped it recover. In December 2010, the tree was returned to Lower Manhattan and replanted at the 9/11 Memorial.

McCall used the tree's survival as a metaphor for people who have experienced trauma, loss, and hardship.

"Hope does not require complete fullness to begin," he said. "It only requires a spark."

He explained that even when people feel fractured, the presence of life and the ability to endure can provide the beginning of recovery.

McCall identified three spiritual lessons from the Survivor Tree:

— Sprouting from devastation: Even after pro-

found loss and trauma, the possibility of renewal remains.

— The necessity of the nursery: Healing requires community support, care, and trusted people who help others recover.

— Carrying a scar without being defined by it: Resilience does not mean erasing the past but allowing purposeful growth to continue despite the scars.

McCall emphasized that military service members, veterans, civilians, contractors, and families can all carry visible and unseen burdens. He encouraged those attending to seek support through chaplains, behavioral health professionals, battle buddies, coworkers, family members, and veteran service organizations.

"Resilience is not an absence of scars," McCall said. "It is a courageous decision to allow smooth, purposeful growth to flourish above all."

Honoring sacrifice, looking to future

As his presentation concluded, McCall recognized the 2,977 people killed in the Sept. 11 attacks, including the 184 people who died at the Pentagon. He also honored the military personnel who lost their lives during the conflicts that followed and the Gold Star families who continue to carry the weight of those sacrifices.

Addressing the retirees and veterans attending the breakfast, McCall expressed gratitude for their service and contributions to the nation.

He also recognized current Soldiers, Department of the Army civilians, contractors, and families, describing each as an essential part of the military community and its continued readiness.

"To our retirees and veterans in all branches, thank you for stepping into the breach when the na-

tion needed you most," McCall said. "You remain a permanent, revered part of this garrison family."

McCall concluded by asking attendees to stand for the playing of Taps, providing a solemn close to the remembrance and an opportunity to reflect on the lives lost, the sacrifices made, and the responsibility to preserve their memory.

Twenty-five years after the attacks, his presentation connected the historical record of the Army Reserve's response with a continuing message: remembering the past, supporting one another, and finding hope through resilience.

Fort McCoy's motto beginning in 2026 is "Training the Total Force and Shaping the Future since 1909." The installation's mission: "Fort McCoy strengthens Total Force Readiness by serving as a training center, Mobilization Force Generation Installation, and Strategic Support Area enabling warfighter lethality to deploy, fight, and win our nation's wars."

And Fort McCoy's vision is, "To be the premier training center supporting the most capable, combat-ready, and lethal armed forces." Located in the heart of the upper Midwest, Fort McCoy is the only U.S. Army installation in Wisconsin. The installation has provided support and facilities for the field and classroom training of more than 100,000 military personnel from all services nearly every year since 1984.

Learn more about Fort McCoy online at <https://home.army.mil/mccoy>, on Facebook by searching "ftmccoy," on Flickr at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/fortmccoywi/>, and on X (formerly Twitter) by searching "usagmccoy." Also try downloading the My Army Post app to your smartphone and set "Fort McCoy" or another installation as your preferred base. Fort McCoy is also part of Army's Installation Management Command where "We Are The Army's Home."

REMEMBERING 9/11 25 YEARS LATER

THIS MONTH IN FORT MCCOY HISTORY

Fort McCoy was established in 1909. Here’s a look at the installation’s history from September 2026 and back. This month the section is featuring Fort McCoy news and observances of Patriot Day and the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the United States.

25 Years Ago — September 2001
FROM THE SEPT. 28, 2001, EDITION OF THE TRIAD NEWSPAPER: *The Days After (Photos on Page 1 remember 9/11 attacks by Rob Schuette, Newspaper Associate Editor)* — Photos on Page 1 of The Triad newspaper documenting what was happening at Fort McCoy in the days immediately following 9/11.

The photo caption of three photos reads: “The days after: American flags at Fort McCoy, including the one (above) near building 100, Post Headquarters flew at half-staff through Sept. 22, to honor the people who died in the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks at the Pentagon and World Trade Centers. Fort McCoy Police Officer Donald Bruley (center, right) checks a motorist’s ID at Gate 15 as part of security measures to protect the installation community. People enter Chapel No. 1 (bottom right) to participate in a National Day of Prayer Sept. 14 for the people killed and injured in the terrorist attacks. Members of the Fort McCoy work force can find more information about Sept. 11 and its aftermath by going to the Fort McCoy Corporate Network and clicking on the “Sept. 11, 2001, Related News” category.”

FROM THE SEPT. 28, 2001, EDITION OF THE TRIAD NEWSPAPER: *Reserve components to guard America’s homeland (By Staff Sgt. Marcia Triggs, Army News Service)* — As President Bush’s campaign to end terrorism gets under way, reserve components prepare to secure America’s borders, air space and the nation’s interest.

About 10,000 Army National Guard and Army Reserve troops will be activated to support “Noble Eagle,” America’s homeland defense and civil support operations, officials said.

President Bush authorized the call-up of 50,000 Reserve troops, but service chiefs said they only need 35,000.

Along with the call-up of troops, the Department of Defense announced a mortgage rate cap under the “Soldiers and Sailors Civil Relief Act.” Also, Donald Rumsfeld, defense secretary, delegated “stop-loss” authority to the heads of the military departments.

Stop-loss was last used during Operation Allied Force over Kosovo in 1999. It’s a program that allows military branches to retain individuals on active duty beyond their date of separation.

Those affected by the order generally cannot retire or leave the service as long as reserves are called to active duty or until relieved by the president, whichever is earlier.

The Army has no immediate plans to implement stop-loss.

Housing and Urban Development issued a letter to all Federal Housing Administration-approved lenders advising them of their obligations under the 1940s Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Civil Relief Act, said Mel Martinez, HUD secretary.

The act requires that all lenders reduce interest rates on mortgages to no more than 6 percent for all soldiers who are called on active duty. The lenders also are prohibited from foreclosing against any military personnel during and immediately following their tour of active duty.

Active-duty personnel also may qualify for the interest rate cap if they incurred their mortgage debt prior to their active-duty date, Martinez said.

Martinez also is taking additional steps and encouraging mortgage lenders to postpone principal payments on all service members during their tour of active duty.

The relief act also helps military renters, too, by ensuring that they cannot be evicted from their property or by allowing them to terminate lease arrangements, without repercussion.

In 1991, during the Persian Gulf War, the relief act also was re-instituted. For more information, HUD has activated a toll-free number, (888) 297-8685.

The nation’s spirit was tested Sept. 11, and now the National Guard feels pressed to protect the citizens of this nation, said Lt. Gen. Roger Schultz, the Army National Guard director.

“You don’t find the nation’s spirit in buildings. We will rebuild buildings, and over time, we will recover,” said Lt. Gen. Roger Schultz, the Army National Guard director.

National Guard troops have been assisting in the recovery effort in New York City since the day the two jetliners crashed into the twin towers at the World Trade Center, causing them to collapse.

National Guard civil and support teams were among the first on the scene to check for chemical, biological and radiological hazards. These teams were designed to be quickly dispatched to emergency sites that may have hazardous chemicals, Schultz said. Guard members will continuously support the recovery effort until it’s complete, Schultz added.

Along with the efforts in New York, National Guardsmen will be strategically placed for homeland defense.

Schultz said homeland defense is guarding the nation, and the kinds of units that might be called up include air defense, airlift, intelligence support, military police, medical, logistics, engineers, search and rescue, civil affairs, chaplains and so forth.

“The mission of homeland defense is steadily



5 YEARS AGO: A news clip from the Sept. 10, 2021, edition of The Real McCoy newspaper is shown highlighting the 20th anniversary of 9/11. See this special issue at https://d34w7g4gy10iej.cloudfront.net/pubs/pdf_58880.pdf.

emerging,” Schultz said.

“But it will not take away any of the responsibilities of our state-elected officials. There will always be a local authority, and a first response, such as police and fire departments.”

What makes the National Guard unique is that they answer to civil authorities, Schultz said.

“We’re in 2,700 communities. We know our first responders, we grew up with them, we work with them, we live with them. Our first responsibility is to the community,” Schultz said.

Along with the civil support the National Guard has given, its members also have traveled to 77 countries this year for training and contingency operations, Schultz said.

“We’re standing by 365 days a year,” Schultz said. “We belong to the communities.”

20 Years Ago — September 2006
FROM THE SEPT. 22, 2006, EDITON OF THE TRIAD NEWSPAPER: *Combat Support Hospital unit prepares to deploy (By Lori Witscheber, Triad Contributor)* — **EDITOR’S NOTE: This story highlights a unit deploying to support the Global War on Terrorism, which was part of mobilization efforts at Fort McCoy from 2001-2011 because of the 9/11 attacks.**

The 399th Combat Support Hospital (CSH), an Army Reserve unit headquartered in Bedford, Mass., has trained to the Army standard at Fort McCoy and is ready to provide combat health support in the Operation Iraqi Freedom Theater of operations.

The approximately 445 members of the 399th, which is 30-percent cross-leveled, have trained on medical and Soldier skills since arriving at Fort McCoy in June.

Lt. Col. Joseph S. Blansfield, Task Force Chief Nurse of the 399th, said the CSH will provide services to Soldiers and Iraqi personnel.

“A CSH really is the first full hospital that a casualty would arrive at in a battlefield scenario,” said Blansfield. “We have an emergency room, operating room, intensive care wards, pharmacies, etc.”

The CSH will have a split-base operation, with the unit running a hospital in the north and south.

To prepare for its mission in-country, the unit has undergone long days of Theater Immersion training.

Theater Immersion is a training approach advocated by First U.S. Army Commanding General Lt. Gen. Russel Honoré, and it is the cornerstone for priming Soldiers for deployment. Theater Immersion training places Soldiers in an environment with situations that replicate, as realistically as possible, those they will experience overseas.

To mirror the Forward Operating Base (FOB) environment Soldiers will occupy in country, the unit lived in tents at Tactical Training Base Freedom, which was surrounded by concertina wire, entry control points and guard towers. Soldiers traveled in convoys and encountered role players posing as civilians on the battlefield or opposing forces. The training is repetitive and intense.

The ultimate goal is to have Soldiers respond intuitively to threats and situations they encounter.

“And the game was just plain fun, just as it was intended to be,” Chesser said.

Angelini said the ball game series is a great relationship for the post and the city. “It is especially appropriate to have the game on the anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks, and dedicating the game to the 9/11 victims and their families.”

“The games are a good time to get together and enjoy the camaraderie,” Angelini said. “It is also a good way to say ‘goodbye’ to Colonel Chesser as he retires from the Army next spring.”

Some of that support came in the form of 30 members of the Sparta High School Band who played pep band tunes before the game, and, in the dignified role and attitude of the day, played the Star-Spangled Banner moments before the game’s first pitch was thrown.

Band co-director Joe Gantzner said his summer camp band students were practicing on a street at the high school and Angelini was momentarily stopped in traffic.

“He talked with us and suggested band members participate at the Army-Angelini’s game,” Gantzner said. “And so, it came to be.”

Chaplain (Col.) Tom Phelan, the Fort McCoy Site Support Chaplain, spoke for several minutes as part of the opening ceremonies for the game.

He commented upon that morning’s Religious Support Office service that had been held as the 10th anniversary remembrance of Sept. 11; included a few remarks from his sermon, and concluded with an invocation for the game that was similar to a prayer used at the service that morning. His comments were well-received by those in attendance.

Sparta resident Jim Wiggins gave several remarks to start the opening ceremonies, mostly on a “light-hearted” theme, yet observing the 9/11 connection and also thanking all participants for making the festivities enjoyable.

As for the game, Fort McCoy took a four-run lead in the top of the first inning, but Angelini’s countered with four in the bottom half. The Army got one run in the second, to none for the hosts that frame. McCoy scored two in the top of the third, but Angelini’s powered five across the plate in the bottom half, never to trail again.

One of McCoy’s bright spots was Master Sgt. Darrin Stallworth’s solo inside-the-park home run. Stallworth added a run-batted-in single in the eighth inning, but Angelini’s poked in four in the sixth, one in the seventh and five in the eighth.

A bases-loaded double by Jeff Ames in the eighth was followed by a bases-loaded triple by Ryan Roberts to cement the win for Angelini’s. Chesser did all of the Army’s pitching, with Angelini performing all of the mound chores for his team.

Fort McCoy team members included Sgt. Jason Vazquez, Sgt. Manuel Salema, 1st Lt. Shane Ramnarine, Capt. Matthew Wright, Capt. Ryan Pregel, Maj. Blaine Markuson, Master Sgt. Gerald Maynard, Spc. Nick Respicio, Lt. Col. Dan Andresen, 1st Sgt. Justin Maloney, Maj. Thomas Akerlund, Maj. Gen. Glenn Lesniak, Chesser and Stallworth.

Angelini’s team members were George Dealba, Jeff Ames, Trevor Jones, Craig DeBoer, Matt Johnson, Dale Stefen, Ryan Roberts, Steve Gorsche, Caleb Diercks, and Angelini.

12 Years Ago — September 2014
FROM THE SEPT. 26, 2014, EDITION OF THE REAL MCCOY NEWSPAPER: *NCO Academy Soldiers hold Sept. 11 remembrance ceremony (By Scott T. Sturkol, Editor)* — Thirteen years after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City, at the Pentagon in Virginia, and aboard United Flight 93, which crashed in a Pennsylvania field, Soldiers from the Staff Sgt. Todd R. Cornell Noncommissioned Officer Academy (NCOA) paused to remember the victims of those attacks.

The Sept. 11 remembrance ceremony was held at the NCOA Auditorium. More than 100 Family members, Department of Defense civilians, and Soldiers attended. NCOA Instructor Sgt. 1st Class Edward Horner was the narrator. First Sgt. Reginald Jefferson of the NCOA gave opening remarks.

“Thirteen years ago, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts,” Jefferson said. “Thousands of lives were suddenly ended by evil, despicable acts of terror. The pictures of airplanes fl ying into buildings, fires burning, and huge structures collapsing filled us with disbelief, terrible sadness, and a quiet, unyielding anger. Th ese acts of mass murder were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat, but they have failed. Our country is strong.”

Jefferson asked all in attendance to never forget what happened, to remember those who were lost, and to remember their families.

“This is a day when all Americans from every walk of life unite in our resolve for justice and peace,” Jefferson said. “America has stood down enemies before, and we will continue to do so. None of us will ever forget this day, yet we go forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in our world.”

On the auditorium’s big screen, a pair of videos and a photo slideshow displayed images of the aftermath on Sept. 11, 2001.

During the photo slideshow, Horner read excerpts of the last conversations some Sept. 11 victims had before they died with their loved ones. He also asked the audience, “Where were (See HISTORY, Insert Page 4)



Clarinets, saxophones and trombones make up part of the Sparta High School Band that played for the pre-game festivities, and the national anthem, at the Fort McCoy-Angelini’s softball game in Sparta.



Soldiers pause for a moment of reflection Sept. 11 during the Staff Sgt. Todd R. Cornell Noncommissioned Officer Academy remembrance ceremony. Known nationally as Patriot Day and the National Day of Remembrance, Sept. 11, 2014, was the 13th anniversary of the attacks on America.

NEWS

HISTORY

from Page 1

you that day?”

He said many service members have served in fighting the war on terrorism since 2001.

“From 2001 to present, more than two million service members have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan serving proudly in many roles both in combat and in garrison,” Horner said.

At the end of the ceremony, a moment of silence was held by all in the audience, then Jefferson had some final words.

“Thank you to all who came out to remember this day,” Jefferson said. “We will continue to remember all who this event affected.”

The NCOA ceremony echoed many that took place Armywide. The U.S. flag in front of building 100 flew at half-mast during the day.

In a message to the Fort McCoy workforce, Garrison Commander Col. Steven W. Nott reiterated the importance of remembering what happened in 2001.

“The unforgettable events of Sept. 11, 2001, united our nation with a resolve that our enemies believed had passed beyond our cultural capacity to embrace,” Nott said. “Our just response to these actions cost our nation dearly, and current events indicate the cost will grow ever higher.

“I ask us all to take a brief moment to reflect on the events of that terrible day and what it has meant to our families and our nation. I also want to thank you for all you do to contribute to our common defense.”

11 Years Ago — September 2015

FROM THE SEPT. 25, 2015, EDITION OF THE REAL MCCOY NEWSPAPER: *Remembering 9/11* (Photo shared) — A photo by Staff Sgt. Tamika Stinson shows Soldiers participating in a remembrance ceremony Sept. 11, 2015, in observance of the 14th anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States at the Staff Sgt. Todd R. Cornell (Fort McCoy) Noncommissioned Officer Academy.

The academy observed the remembrance with speakers recalling the events that took place, reviewing what has taken place since, and offering inspiration in moving forward.

5 Years Ago — September 2021

FROM THE SEPT. 10, 2021, SPECIAL EDITION OF THE REAL MCCOY NEWSPAPER: *Fort McCoy police veterans recall post-9/11 response* (By Scott T. Sturkol, Editor) — On the morning of Sept. 11, 2001, Fort McCoy was an open installation, and it was a bright, beautiful, blue sky kind of day.

That same morning, current Fort McCoy Police Chief Brian Bomstein was sleeping after working until 1 a.m. at a sawmill, and Deputy Police Chief Brian Lord was in Madison attending a criminal justice college class. By all accounts, it was a pretty normal September morning for all.

Then, at 8:46 a.m. Eastern time, a civilian jetliner slammed into the North Tower of New York’s World Trade Center. And just a short time later, at 9:02 a.m., another airplane slammed into the South Tower of the World Trade Center.

“I was woken up that morning by a phone call from a friend who told me to turn on the TV,” said Bomstein, who leads the Fort McCoy Directorate of Emergency Services Police Department. “Back then I worked 3 p.m. to 1 a.m. at a lumber mill, and I was an Army Reservist. My friend said, ‘Turn on the TV, I think we are under attack.’

Bomstein said he turned on the TV and “saw the two towers smoking.”

“I remember the news reporters saying that a third plane had crashed, and discussions began on the news that this appeared to be intentional,” he said. “I hung up the phone and immediately started packing my ruck sack. I knew we had been attacked, and we’re going to war. And on Oct. 1, 2001, I was activated and in-processed through Fort McCoy.”

When Bomstein was activated to active-duty service in October 2001, he was assigned to the 6015th Garrison Support Unit. On Sept. 11, however, Lord was called up to serve in the same unit that very day.

“I was sitting in that college class in Madison, and they wheeled in a television to show what was going on after the first plane hit a tower,” Lord said. “Then we watched the second plane strike the other tower. And shortly after the second plane strike, I received a phone call from my first sergeant directing movement to Fort McCoy. I arrived to our admin building that evening.”

After the first two plane crashes, a third plane hit the Pentagon at 9:37 a.m. And at 10:03 a.m., a fourth plane, which was kept from hitting another target by hijackers thanks to a brave stand by passengers, crashed into a field outside Shanksville, Pa.

Before that September morning was over, life had changed for all Americans. Life had changed for the world.

“Watching that unfold on TV brought a mix of emotions,” Lord said. “I went from being emotionally stunned and shocked to being infuriated.” Lord said he excused himself from class and very quickly was packed and on the road to Fort McCoy. He doesn’t remember exactly the time he arrived on post, but said he arrived by the late afternoon or early evening.

“That evening I was doing CQ (charge of quarters) duty in building 2014, which is no longer in existence at Fort McCoy,” Lord said. CQ is a tasked duty in which a service member is to guard the front entrance to a building — usually a barracks, according to the Army definition for the duty. It is often a 24-hour shift in which the two service members — usually one noncommissioned officer and a junior enlisted service member — sit at a desk to monitor incoming and outgoing traffic into the building.

For Lord, for the first month after the events of Sept. 11, 2001, he said the mission was a lot of “up and downs.” His unit worked on getting official orders, and people across the installation were reacting to a new security posture as the Fort McCoy cantonment area now had to be secured and gates had to be manned.

“The biggest thing I remember is coming to the post and seeing someone manning an access control point,” Lord said. “Before 9/11, that was never the case.”

REMEMBERING 9/11 ... 20 YEARS LATER

Fort McCoy police veterans recall post-9/11 response

BY SCOTT T. STURKOL
Public Affairs Staff

On the morning of Sept. 11, 2001, Fort McCoy was an open installation, and it was a bright, beautiful, blue sky kind of day.

That same morning, current Fort McCoy Police Chief Brian Bomstein was sleeping after working until 1 a.m. at a saw mill, and Deputy Police Chief Brian Lord was in Madison attending a criminal justice college class. By all accounts, it was a pretty normal September morning for all.

Then, at 8:46 a.m. Eastern time, a civilian jetliner slammed into the North Tower of New York’s World Trade Center. And just a short time later, at 9:02 a.m., another airplane slammed into the South Tower of the World Trade Center.

I was woken up that morning by a phone call from a friend who told me to turn on the TV,” said Bomstein, who leads the Fort McCoy Directorate of Emergency Services Police Department. “Back then I worked 3 p.m. to 1 a.m. at a lumber mill, and I was an Army Reservist. My friend said, ‘Turn on the TV, I think we are under attack.’

Bomstein said he turned on the TV and “saw the two towers smoking.”

I remember the news reporters saying that a third plane had crashed, and discussions began on the news that this appeared to be intentional,” he said. “I hung up the phone and immediately started packing my ruck sack. I knew we had been attacked, and we’re going to war. And on Oct. 1, 2001, I was activated and in-processed through Fort McCoy.”

When Bomstein was activated to active-duty service in October 2001, he was assigned to the 6015th Garrison Support Unit. On Sept. 11, however, Lord was called up to serve in the same unit that very day.

I was sitting in that college class in Madison, and they wheeled in a television to show what was going on after the first plane hit a tower,” Lord said. “Then we watched the second plane strike the other tower. And shortly after the second plane strike, I received a phone call from



Police Chief Brian Bomstein and Deputy Police Chief Brian Lord, both with the Fort McCoy Directorate of Emergency Services Police Department, are shown Sept. 2 at Fort McCoy. Both were part of the installation’s immediate response to the terrorist attacks and events of Sept. 11, 2001, in the United States. Both were assigned as Soldiers to the 6015th Garrison Support Unit at the time of the attacks.

Photo by Scott T. Sturkol

my first sergeant directing movement to Fort McCoy. I arrived to our admin building that evening.”

After the first two plane crashes, a third plane hit the Pentagon at 9:37 a.m. And at 10:03 a.m., a fourth plane, which was kept from hitting another

target by hijackers thanks to a brave stand by passengers, crashed into a field outside Shanksville, Pa.

Before that September morning was over, life had changed for all Americans. Life had changed for the world.

“Watching that unfold on TV brought a mix of emotions,” Lord said. “I went from being emotionally stunned and shocked to being infuriated.”

Lord said he excused himself from class and very quickly was packed and on the road to Fort McCoy. He doesn’t remember exactly the time he arrived on post, but said he arrived by the late afternoon or early evening.

See POLICE, insert page 4

U.S. Army Historical Photos

5 YEARS AGO: A news clip from the Sept. 10, 2021, edition of The Real McCoy newspaper is shown highlighting the 20th anniversary of 9/11. See this special issue at https://d34w7g4g-y10iej.cloudfront.net/pubs/pdf_58880.pdf.

Post-Sept. 11, the only gate open on the cantonment area was the old Main Gate, Lord said. And other things changed throughout the cantonment area as well thanks to stepped-up force-protection measures.

“I think at that time, with everything going on, it was a learn-as-you-go process for everybody,” Lord said. “The physical resources, at first, didn’t exist for the mission we were being asked to perform. This included enough people and vehicles. We really had no vehicles to speak of.”

Bomstein said he and Lord didn’t know each other before 9/11. But slowly after being mobilized together to work on the post, that changed. He said they both worked many long days doing their best to protect resources and to support the ever-changing mission on the installation.

“I remember us working to complete a lot of Soldier readiness processing, and much more,” Bomstein said. “I also remember them moving quite a bit around post. One of the buildings we worked from was building 1761, which is now used for the JLTIV (Joint-Light Tactical Vehicle) training.”

Within a year of being activated at Fort McCoy as a Reservist, Bomstein said he was hired on as a civilian police officer with the Fort McCoy Police Department. “They had some openings, and I got hired,” he said.

Bomstein served two years full time as a Soldier after 9/11 before becoming a full-time officer at the end of his second military tour in 2003.

It was much the same for Lord. During activation time on McCoy, he served two one-year tours with military police for his unit. Then by 2005, he was a full-time Fort McCoy police officer.

Now, 20 years after their friendship and service together started at Fort McCoy, Bomstein and Lord said they both would have never thought they would ascend to be the chief and deputy chief of the Fort McCoy police force. They both also said they won’t ever forget that day and all the changes that have happened at Fort McCoy since.

“I don’t think 20 years ago that I would have ever envisioned myself in this line of work,” Lord said. “I think we both worked hard to get where we’re at, and I know we’ll never forget.”

“That was a pretty powerful day,” Bomstein said. “I am like many people who play that day back over and over in my head. It was one of those landmark times in history that I think people will never forget. ... It’s also something that you can look back at and see how that one (day) literally changed the trajectory of your life.”

Since 9/11, Fort McCoy has a closed and secured cantonment area and upgraded security measures are set up on range areas as well. The post also had a new Main Gate area built, new police and fire department buildings and the Central Issue Facility built, dozens of range and training areas upgraded, and more.

The installation also has served as a unit deployment mobilization hub the last 20 years. Most recent was the mobilization of two units during exercise Pershing Strike ‘21.

“I think we’re both glad to have been a part of the installation’s 9/11 response, but also proud to still be serving here today,” Bomstein said. Bomstein left the Army Reserve in 2006 to focus full time on civilian police duties that have included leading the Fort McCoy Special Reaction Team. Lord retired from the Army Reserve in 2019. Prior to that, he had attended the Army Airborne School and Military Police Investigations and Army Equal Opportunity Advisor courses.

Both Bomstein and Lord assumed their current positions in 2020.

FROM THE SEPT. 24, 2021, EDITION, OF THE REAL MCCOY NEWSPAPER: *Fort McCoy observes Patriot Day; remembers 20th anniversary of 9/11 in special ceremony* (By Scott T. Sturkol, Edi-

tor) — The words, “TO HONOR ALL WHO HAVE SERVED” that are etched into Veterans Memorial Plaza in the historic Commemorative Area served as the backdrop for the 2021 Fort McCoy observance Sept. 10 of Patriot Day and the 20th anniversary of the terrorist attacks on America on Sept. 11, 2001.

The scaled back ceremony included Police Chief Brian Bomstein and Assistant Fire Chief Brady Brever, both with the Fort McCoy Directorate of Emergency Services, serving as masters of ceremonies. It also included Fort McCoy Garrison Commander Col. Michael Poss and Maj. Gen. Darrell Guthrie, commanding general of the 88th Readiness Division and Fort McCoy’s senior commander, both providing remarks about the significance of the day.

On Sept. 11, 2001, 19 militants associated with the Islamic extremist group al Qaeda hijacked four airplanes and carried out suicide attacks against targets in the United States, history shows. Two of the planes were flown into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, a third plane hit the Pentagon, and a fourth plane crashed in a field in Shanksville, Penn. Almost 3,000 people were killed during the 9-11 terrorist attacks

“Thank you for attending. Thank you for remembering the 20th anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks,” Poss said during his remarks that followed an acapella rendition of the Star-Spangled Banner by retired Army Master Sgt. Mary Guthrie to start the ceremony. “The attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon are among the most significant events to happen to us in our lifetimes. Me, as well as millions of other U.S. citizens, remember where we were and how we felt on that somber day.

“I, for one, was a bank manager, and I was just coming out of budget meetings when I was told the news,” Poss said. “A little over a year later, my unit was preparing for deployment. It certainly was a catalyst for upcoming events because I have stayed on full-time service ever since.”

The weather during the ceremony at Fort McCoy was much like the weather on Sept. 11, 2001 — a bright, sunny September day. Poss said it is important to remember what happened.

“Today we honor the service members, civilians, and first responders who lost their lives during the terrorist attacks,” Poss said. “And not only do we honor those who lost their lives that fateful day, we also remember all those who have served our great nation since to keep our country secure and free. Thousands of us have witnessed the tragedies and hardships of war firsthand. And many gave their lives in the defense of these causes. The significance of the 9/11 attacks has not dulled after 20 years.”

Guthrie also reflected on the importance of always remembering what happened on 9/11.

“Over the past 20 years, hundreds and indeed thousands, of military members have served in Afghanistan,” Guthrie said. “The shared experience of Sept. 11 also unified millions of Americans to support our Soldiers, civilians, and family members. Many of today’s Soldiers either joined or were inspired and have served our country ... because of 9/11.”

The patriotic feel of the event was possibly furthered when Capt. Nataanel Maria with the 181st Multi-Functional Training Brigade sang an acapella rendition of “America the Beautiful” after the speeches by Poss and Maj. Gen. Guthrie.

The event participants were also likely reminded of the seriousness of what happened 20 years ago when Sgt. Ryan Tatum, what was the 181st, trumpeted the somber notes of “Taps” as the event concluded.

HOME.ARMY.MIL/MCCOY

SPECIAL 9/11 ANNIVERSARY INSERT TO THE REAL MCCOY, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 2021 3

20 YEARS SINCE 9-11-2001

World Trade Center survivor shares story with post community

BY ANNEE McILAN
Public Affairs Staff

As part of the 20-year commemoration of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the United States, Fort McCoy honored a presentation by the last survivor to be pulled out of the World Trade Center debris.

Genelle Guzman-McMillan shared her experiences with Fort McCoy community members Sept. 1, 2021, at the Noncommissioned Officer Academy (NCOA). The event was organized by the NCOA and Fort McCoy Army Community Service.

Guzman-McMillan was working for the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which was located on the 11th floor of the north tower of the World Trade Center, at the time of the attacks. The north tower was the first building to be hit but the second to collapse.

She said that when the first plane hit her building, she at first thought it was an earthquake, having been through earthquakes in her native country of Trinidad and Tobago. She said a small plane had hit the building, she said she was thinking which the World Trade Center was hit or not.

A few people left immediately, while others in her office, including Guzman-McMillan, tried to figure out what was happening first. She said they recently had an emergency drill, and because the alarms and emergency lights weren't going off, she thought it couldn't be that bad. It wasn't until they turned on the news in a conference room and saw the images being broadcast that they realized how bad things were.

Guzman-McMillan said the couldn't believe the images she was seeing of what she was being told when she called home. “We, the little island girl in a terrorist attack,” she asked.

Emergency personnel told them over the phone to stay put, rescue workers would come find them. They checked stairwells to see if they were clear and tried to keep smoke out of their office with wetted jackets and resources.

“The building shook again. It wobbled. And that’s when ... the office building collapsed,” Guzman-McMillan said. “I thought, ‘Oh no. We’re going down. ... We’re not getting out of here.’”

One of the managers decided they couldn’t stay any longer for emergency personnel, and their coworkers checked the stairwells again to find one with smoking lights that seemed clear. About 15 of them began making their way down the staircases.

Guzman-McMillan said she was wearing high-heeled boots that day — her friend and coworker Rosa Gonzalez kept telling her to take them off but she couldn’t leave faster — her boots kept them on, wanting something to protect her feet when she got outside.

As one person, they passed firefighters heading upstairs to check the upper floors, who asked them to keep heading outside.

Someone heard the 15th floor, she said, she finally had to pause to take off her shoes because her feet were burning so badly. That was one of the second tower collapsed.

“The dust, the darkness ... everything was crazy,” she said. “It happened so fast.”

She lost both of Gonzalez during the collapse, whose hand she held most of the way down. She said she covered her head as best she could and told herself she was having a bad dream. When she came to herself again, she realized she couldn’t move. Her body was pinned in an odd position and her legs felt like they were being crushed. She said she could feel dust pushing into her back, and her head was trapped between two pillars.

“I keep hearing creak. I keep hearing the rubble. I keep hearing the footsteps. I keep hearing the voices of the people who were trapped. The hand’s owner said his name was Paul and began encouraging her to hold on and reassuring her that she was going to make it through. When she said to him, ‘I’m not going to make it through,’ he said, ‘You’re not going to make it through,’ and she didn’t reach through the rubble and grab the man who was trapped. The man who was trapped to fall asleep on the rubble and he was the last person to make it out of the rubble alive.”

Guzman-McMillan said she doesn’t know why she made it out when so many others, especially her friends and coworkers, didn’t, but she is grateful for her second chance. She said she put her faith in God after her survival and shares her story with others. She ended her presentation with a prayer, asking God to share his grace and plan with those around her.

According to her biography at her website, www.genellemcillan.com, Guzman-McMillan is an active member of the Brooklyn Tabernacle Church and serves as a volunteer for the American Red Cross and the 9/11 Tribute Center. She also is the recipient of several awards and proclamations by mayors and senators of New York since Sept. 11, 2001, including receiving a Medal of Honor from the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.

She told her she had to speak up so that rescuers would find her.

The hand let go of her before the rescuers reached her, and Guzman-McMillan said she never found out who Paul was, leading her to believe he was a guardian angel. She spent months in the hospital afterward, medical workers thought at one point that her leg might need to be amputated. News of the coronavirus she’d left the office with made it through the collapse, and she didn’t find out until much later that she was the last person to make it out of the rubble alive.

Guzman-McMillan said she doesn’t know why she made it out when so many others, especially her friends and coworkers, didn’t, but she is grateful for her second chance. She said she put her faith in God after her survival and shares her story with others. She ended her presentation with a prayer, asking God to share his grace and plan with those around her.

Coast Guard crew members patrolled the harbor after the collapse of the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, 2001, in New York.

An aerial view of the still-smoldering World Trade Center complex is shown Sept. 26, 2001, 15 days after terrorists attacked the Twin Towers with hijacked jetliners.

5 YEARS AGO: A news clip from the Sept. 10, 2021, edition of The Real McCoy newspaper is shown highlighting the 20th anniversary of 9/11. See this special issue at https://d34w7g4g-y10iej.cloudfront.net/pubs/pdf_58880.pdf.

Fort McCoy Prayer Breakfast speaker reflects, remembers 9/11

STORY & PHOTO BY SCOTT T. STURKOL
Public Affairs Staff

Twenty-five years after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, the Fort McCoy community gathered Sept. 11, 2026, for a Prayer Breakfast that connected remembrance of that day with the enduring values of service, sacrifice, faith and leadership.

Hosted by the Fort McCoy Religious Support Office in Building 905, the breakfast brought together military members, civilian employees, retirees, veterans and leaders for prayer, reflection and fellowship. The 2026 Prayer Breakfast fell on the 25th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, giving special meaning to the morning’s theme of remembrance. The attacks killed 2,977 people at the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and in Somerset County, Pennsylvania.

Guest speaker Tomas “Tom” Thibodeau, Distinguished Professor of Servant Leadership at Viterbo University, opened his remarks by calling prayer “a school of love” and reminding those

gathered that human beings are blessed with “blood, memory and hope.”

“Today is a day of sacred remembrance,” Thibodeau said.

He then asked the audience to consider a simple question:

“Where were you? Who told you? Who were you with? How did you feel on 9-11-2001?”

Thibodeau said he had been asking people those questions in the weeks leading to the anniversary and consistently saw people become solemn, reflective and quiet as they recalled their experiences.

“The Jewish Talmud teaches us that when in pain, we cry out, we sing, and we become silent,” he said.

Thibodeau asked the audience to observe a minute of silence to remember those whose lives were affected by the attacks, as well as those who responded by serving others. He described the anniversary as a moment when Americans remember both loss and love, sorrow and sacrifice, confusion and compassion, hurt and heroism.

“Paradoxically, 9-11 was 25 years ago, and at the same time feels like only yesterday,” he said.

The National September 11 Memorial & Museum likewise marked the 25th anniversary in 2026 with a national emphasis on remembrance, reflection and ensuring that younger generations understand the significance and legacy of the attacks. The Memorial’s anniversary observance included the reading of victims’ names and moments of silence corresponding to key moments.

Remembering those who serve

Thibodeau’s remarks then moved from remembering 9/11 to a broader discussion of the importance of service.

“All of our lives are predicated on the service of other people,” he said.

He shared stories about his father, who left the University of Wisconsin in 1941 to join the Army Air Corps and served during World War II in the Aleutian Islands, and his father-in-law, a Wisconsin native who joined the Navy as a

teenager and was at Pearl Harbor.

Thibodeau said the service of those who came before him helped make his own life possible. “All of those people have gone before us whose service, love made visible, have made our lives possible,” he said.

He extended that message to the Soldiers and other members of the Fort McCoy community and the Retiree Appreciation Day event attending breakfast. “You have made so many other people’s lives and dreams possible because of your commitment and dedication,” Thibodeau said. “Good work, hard work, noble work, sacred work, thank you for doing it so well.”

He also recognized the families who support military service, emphasizing that when a service member deploys, the family serves alongside them.

“We send a Soldier, we send a family,” he said. See more online at <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/575173/fort-mccoy-prayer-breakfast-speaker-reflects-service-leadership-25-years-remembering-9-11>.



Tomas “Tom” Thibodeau, Distinguished Professor of Servant Leadership at Viterbo University, gives his remarks Sept. 11 during the Fort McCoy Prayer Breakfast during Retiree Appreciation Day in building 905 at Fort McCoy.