

MEMORIAL ADDRESS

R. David Paulison, United States Fire Administrator

Fallen Firefighters Memorial Ceremonies

Emmitsburg, MD

October 3, 2004

Good morning and thank you for inviting me to participate in this, the 2004 National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Services. I am truly honored, indeed, humbled, to stand before you, and *with* you, here today.

Before making my comments I would like to take a moment to thank Under Secretary Michael Brown for joining us here today. Under Secretary Brown has been and remains a staunch ally of the fire service community, and all of us appreciate your efforts on our behalf. Thank you Mike, and please know our thoughts and best wishes go with you as you continue to successfully lead this nation's response and recovery efforts through a challenging disaster season. Not only in Florida – although one must go back to before the Civil War to find record of a single state being struck 4 times in one year by major hurricanes -- but in so many other areas affected this year.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank Hal Bruno and the Fallen Firefighters Foundation Board of Directors, for your efforts this year. In particular, I would like to thank you for your continuing efforts to make this such a special place for all firefighters, and in particular the families of the over 2700 fallen heroes named here. When this memorial was authorized and established in 1981 by President Reagan, no one anticipated what a profound and transforming impact it would eventually have on the fire service community. Your continuing efforts to improve the memorial and to more prominently display the names of this nation's fallen firefighters, are a testament to your unwavering commitment and dedication to always remember those firefighters who lost their lives in service to their communities. Thank you Hal, the foundation Board members, Ron Siarnicki, and your dedicated staff. The firefighters whose names we place on this wall would be proud of your efforts to ensure the families they have left behind will never be forgotten. Thank you.

I would also like to take a moment to thank the many volunteers that selflessly give their time and efforts to ensure the fire service has this special opportunity to join with the families of the fallen each year. Your countless hours of support allow this nation to come together to recognize these fallen firefighters, lost to us in 2003. It will be a perfect year when we don't need to meet here at all, but it will take dedication and hard work to make that happen in my lifetime

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the members of the USFA staff, who have also volunteered so many hours preparing for and hosting this gathering. Deputy U.S. Fire Administrator Charlie Dickinson has been in charge of the planning and operations for the past year, and he has been supported by many others from my staff whom have also given their time and expertise to this memorial service. My thanks to my dear friend Charlie Dickinson and the USFA staff for your contributions. They have not gone unnoticed.

I made mention earlier to having to go back to before the Civil war to find a time when a state has been struck by 4 major hurricanes in one year. The year was actually 1851. None of us were around then, but I do know one thing for sure: I know the firefighters of 1851 were, just like you, on the front lines, serving, and making sacrifices for their fellow Americans. Then, as now, firefighters can always be found on the front lines.

Since the very founding of our great nation in 1776, firefighters have been a critical part of every community and to the residents that called their community.....home. It is a well-known fact that most of our founding fathers and signers of the Constitution of the United States were firefighters. Brave individuals willing to stand between the dangers of fire, and the people those fires threatened.

Since earliest colonial times, we have seen the fire service go from leather buckets, to hand drawn wagons. From hand drawn wagons to horse drawn steam engines. From these primitive fire protection vehicles to the very state of the art vehicles of you see parked around these grounds today.

We have gone from no breathing apparatus to support a firefighter, to light weight composite materials and breathing apparatus now capable of sustaining firefighters for enough time to accomplish their assigned tasks, and enabling them to work in what were once impossible fire conditions. We have gone from summoning firefighters by lanterns on roof tops or bells ringing through the streets, to advanced communications systems capable of handling and providing notifications and alerts for large and complex fires response operations.

Those earliest firefighters wore what they had on their backs to staff these bucket brigades. What an improvement it must have been when firefighters had access to rubber coats and leather helmets. Today, firefighters are dressed very similar to the astronauts that explore our solar system.

But one thing still remains unchanged from the 1700's to today. Regardless of the equipment, clothing, nozzles, vehicles...regardless of all of these advances....it still takes men and women acting quickly, acting bravely and entering buildings to handle the emergencies....others are fleeing from. Men and women willing to place themselves between the threat of fire, and those threatened by fire. No fire ever went out, or emergency ever went away, simply

because a truck showed up with state of the art equipment. It takes people; firefighters, dedicated to the safety and well being of their community.

Today, there are (1.3 million) one point three million firefighters carrying pagers, working in firehouses, simply waiting and preparing for the next alarm...the next call for help by a resident of their community. 1.3 million firefighters protecting this nation.

Like our brave and heroic soldiers currently standing watch this moment in far away lands to protect his nation, so it is true across the 33,000 fire departments of this nation. To accomplish these missions and responses we so richly speak of, we use the terms: divisions, companies, and battalions. We talk of special ops teams and talk of task forces. All of these terms representing a group of talented people; individuals coming together to make this nation safer for other all Americans.

There is however one term we rarely use, yet it strikes at the very core of our individual existence in the fire service...regardless of where you live and fight fires in the United States. The term is "family." As every new firefighter discovers early in the service, the firefighters of this nation are a family.

Every firefighter knows, the moment they step into a firehouse, they belong to a family. Firefighters you see, are extremely fortunate. We have our primary families, but will over time find great comfort and companionship in our second families. Our fellow firefighters.

Webster's Dictionary defines family as a group of people living under one roof, with a common history and heritage. Since 1776, we have known the history of firefighting, and our heritage is here again before us as we recognize these 110 firefighters and their sacrifice.

Today, we come together not as a company, division or battalion. Today we assemble here, as a family. This is family who experienced together the many successes in 2003, but unfortunately the tragic loss of 110 of our fellow firefighters.

The world will always remember the ultimate price paid by the 343 firefighters of New York, just three short years ago. They are here too, on their own plaque, and will always be joined together by name forever. It has not gone unnoticed however, that as many firefighters have been lost since September 11th, as were lost on that single day.

As we have annually and solemnly done since 1981, we once again assemble on these hallowed grounds, as a family. Many of the firefighters here today and watching via satellite, may have personally known one of the firefighters we are

honoring today. We, as a family, know that we have lost more than good people, we have lost true heroes.

We are all keenly aware of each family's loss, and recognize that none of us feel that loss as strongly or as painfully as each family. But when a fellow firefighter falls in the line of duty, we all feel that loss; within our departments, our communities, the fire service, and as a Nation. . . . When a firefighter loses his or her life in the line of duty, we, the members of the fire service, not only lose someone who has *proven* heroic, we lose someone who would have *continued* to make a difference.

There are many children here today. They have heard the cry of the pipes and beat of drums. They have seen our symbol of freedom and unity, draped and folded over a firefighter's final resting place. The difference, however, is that these fallen heroes may have been their mom or dad. And, while we gather here for a couple of days each year to fondly remember and reflect, these hero's children will experience this poignant loss for the rest of their lives.

The family left the firehouse together, only, not everyone came back. As a result, the entire lifetime of a child, a spouse, a loved one....has been changed forever.

In the future, a number of the children here today will seek to follow in their mom or dad's footsteps and join the family of firefighters. When they do, and when they go out that firehouse door on a call with their family of firefighters, I sincerely hope that we will have reached a level of safety and capability such that everyone will come home after the alarm. Every One Goes Home! That is our enduring goal.

The 110 firefighters that we solemnly recognize and remember this weekend, will now join the over 2700 heroes who are remembered already, here, and in perpetuity, at this Memorial.

To the firefighters and their families; we recommit our allegiance. For it is a rare and noble cause that we recognize: the hero's unswerving devotion to their fellow firefighters, and unwavering commitment to protecting, at any cost, people and residents they do not even know. This allegiance to the fire service family.....this loyalty..... this devotion inspires all of us to contribute to the greater good of this great nation. Firefighters called to become heroes, rescuers, servants of their fellow citizens. **We are truly a noble family!**

May God shed his grace and peace on these families and the firefighters of this nation, and may God Bless America. Thank you.