

ORANGE PEEL

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BROTHERS IN BATTLE

Brothers, as I sit here writing I am filled with both great sorrow and great pride. Having just returned from the tragedy in New York City as a member of the USAR team from Sacramento, I can tell you that the pictures you have seen do not adequately depict this great disaster. I can also tell you that our Brotherhood has been dealt a great blow. Our profession has suffered a tremendous loss. It is at this moment that I am the most proud of being a firefighter. Digging side by side with our brothers from NY and watching them search for their crewmates was heartbreaking. They never quit. They never, for even one second, gave up on the notion that they might find one of their own still alive. Think about how hard that must have been, take a second and think about the firefighters that are *your* crewmates. Think about those that you see off duty and whose kids play with your kids. Think about those that were in your wedding or are godparents to your children. Think about those that are your fathers or sisters or brothers or mothers. Think about those that are your best friends. Now imagine losing them. All of them. Losing them as they did what they were trained to do.

Losing them as they did what they loved to do. Losing them forever. Imagine having to search thru a rubble pile many stories high and many blocks wide, hoping to find one of them still alive. Hoping that somehow, someday, one of them had survived and all you had to do was find them. All the while knowing that as the minutes turned to hours and then to days the chances for a miracle grew smaller. That is what our brothers from New York are dealing with. I do not know how they were able to work so tirelessly except to say that they are, above all, firefighters. I guess that says it all.

Now you might hear that FDNY wanting nothing to do with the help that was sent. You might also hear that they refused to allow the USAR members on the pile. Well I can tell you that was not the case. They reacted the only way they knew how, they went to work. Yes, they did not accept us with open arms, but can you blame them. Their only concern was to find their fallen brothers. Diplomacy had no place in their world at this time. If you could have seen the pain and despair that filled their eyes as I did, you would understand. Though they were hurting, each member of FDNY, NYPD, and the other emergency agencies I worked with said Thank You. It was not a forced thank you. It was from the heart. It was from one brother to another. It made me feel good. It made me feel like we were all in this together.

In closing let me say this, do your job, do it right. Be proud of being a firefighter. Work hard to be the best you can be and you will honor those who gave their life doing it the right way. Never give up on the job, the brotherhood, or the memory of 9-11-01. Our fallen brothers deserve that.

To those brothers who gave their lives saving others, every time we see the American flag we will think of you. You represent what is the very best about our profession. You showed us why you are called "America's Bravest." We will never forget you.