

FDNY, the “Bravest”

September 11

Our world changed forever five years ago on September 11, 2001. The horrific images from that awful day are seared in our memory; the events, the emotions, the people are held deep within our hearts.

Though September 11th has been officially designated as “Patriot Day” in memory of those who died, most people still refer to it as September 11. On this day each year, the President directs that the flag of the United States be flown at half-mast and displayed from individual American homes, the White House, and on all U.S. government buildings and establishments, at home and abroad. Americans are asked to observe a moment of silence beginning at 8:46 AM Eastern Daylight Time, marking the first plane crash on September 11. We will never forget the individuals who died that day and the families shattered by the tragic events.

It is difficult to comprehend the magnitude of personal sacrifices made by members of the Fire Department of the City of New York that day in what turned out to be a very un-routine line of duty, but 343 firefighters perished. A powerfully vivid reminder of the massive losses is the phalanx of 343 U.S. flags carried by New York firefighters in parades. It is an awesome image when wave after wave of the flags pass by. Spectators cry for those no longer here; they cheer for those who carry America’s flag and march as witnesses. It is a soul-stirring sight.

FDNY History

The FDNY has a long and distinguished history dating back to 1648 when the first fire ordinance was adopted by the Dutch settlement of New Amsterdam. Fines levied for dirty chimneys provided funds for the maintenance of buckets, hooks and ladders. The ordinance also established a fire watch of eight wardens and required that each male citizen stand his turn on watch. After the first wardens were appointed, an organization known as the “Prowlers” was formed. Often called the “rattle watch,” they patrolled the streets on the lookout for fire from nine o’clock at night until dawn.

When the colonists were organized in 1658, bucket brigades were formed and equipped with 250 leather buckets made by Dutch shoemakers of the colony. In 1664, the colony became a British settlement and was renamed New York. Following the Revolutionary War, the department was reorganized and incorporated as the **Fire Department of the City of New York**, thus **FDNY**.

The volunteer Fire Department continued to protect the lives and property of the citizens of the city until after the close of the Civil War when, in 1865, it was superseded by the paid Metropolitan Fire Department. When the steam engine was introduced, it spelled the end of the volunteer department in New York, for the steam apparatus eliminated the need for men to pump the water and the horses ended the problem of hauling engines by hand. In 1898, all fire forces were consolidated under the unified command of the first Commissioner of the Fire Department.

Following this amalgamation, many changes took place involving aspects of the job, including installation of high pressure systems, motorization of fire apparatus, creation of a Marine fleet, adoption of vastly improved working conditions, and the utilization of perfected radio communications.

Today the Fire Department protects more than 8,000,000 residents in an area of 320 square miles. The uniformed force consists of more than 11,400 fire officers and fire fighters. In addition, the department includes 2,800 Emergency Medical Technicians, Paramedics and Supervisors assigned to the Bureau of Emergency Medical Service (EMS).

Firefighters' Maltese Cross and scramble

The firefighter emblem or patch is the universal symbol of the Maltese Cross. Well, sort of! The Maltese Cross dates back to the time of the Crusades when, some historians relate, the Knights of St. John fought in the Holy Land against the Saracens who used flaming torches as weapons. Therefore, the Knights, who adopted the Maltese Cross as their symbol, were the first “firefighters.” Their heroic efforts were recognized by fellow crusaders as each hero was awarded a badge of honor – a cross similar to the one that firefighters wear today. Since the Knights of St. John lived for almost four centuries on the small island of Malta in the Mediterranean, the cross came to be known as the Maltese Cross. As it evolved over the centuries, these Knights became known for charitable work, and the four points of their cross came to symbolize Faith, Justice, Temperance, and Fortitude. Actually, if you look at a real Maltese Cross (symbol of the Christian warrior during the Crusades), you’ll see the shape of four “V”-shaped arms joined together at their bases, so that each arm has two points – each point representing a chivalric or religious virtue. The firefighters’ Maltese Cross emblem is not technically correct, since it differs in shape from the “real” Maltese Cross worn by the Knights of St. John. Nevertheless, the firefighters’ Maltese Cross is a symbol of protection, as well as a badge of honor.

The current Cross worn today on shirts, hats, or patches often has a round circle in the center covering the bases of the “V”-shaped arms. That center is called a “scramble” and has more symbols of a firefighter – the fireman’s ax and pike pole, a fireman’s helmet, a ladder, and a hose nozzle or trumpet. Scrambles become more intricate as they are made to represent not just the department but the battalion, the company, the squad, and special-units, such as Hazmat, Search and Rescue, and Emergency Medical Technicians.

FDNY Merchandise

Glendale and ParadeStore.com sell many items specifically for the firefighting community – flags with the Maltese Cross and scramble, patches, ball caps, tee shirts, and gear bags – as well as commemorative patches in tribute to America’s heroes, super heroes, and the fallen heroes of September 11. Check them out at <http://www.paradestore.com>.

Emergency Medical Service

Emergency medical technicians are often attached to fire companies. As noted above, the FDNY includes 2,800 Emergency Medical Technicians, Paramedics and Supervisors assigned to the Bureau of Emergency Medical Service (EMS).

On March 17, 1996, the New York City Fire Department became not only the primary provider of pre-hospital emergency care in the five boroughs, but the largest fire department-based EMS in the country. Many of the improvements in pre-hospital medical care that have been implemented since then have been a direct result of this merger. These advances have impacted the EMS Command as well as the Fire Department.

EMS Star of Life

The EMS Star of Life was designed by Leo R. Schwartz, Chief of the EMS Branch, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). It was created after the American Red Cross objected in 1973 to the use of an orange cross on a square background of reflective white. It was, they complained, too close to their organization's logo. The six-bar cross was adapted from the medical identification symbol of the American Medical Association.

The symbol of the Emergency Medical Technician is the Caduceus, the recognizable medical symbol of the snake coiled around a staff inside the vertical bar in the center of the blue Star of Life. It represents Medicine and Healing. Each of the bars represents the six functions of EMS: Detection, Reporting, Response, On-scene Care, Care in Transit, and Transfer to Definitive Care.

The legend of the logo ...

The snake and staff in the center of the symbol portray the staff of Asclepius who, according to Greek mythology, was the son of Apollo, god of light, truth and prophecy. Supposedly Asclepius learned the art of healing from the centaur Chiron. But Zeus, king of the gods, was fearful that because of Asclepius knowledge, all men might be rendered immortal. Rather than have this occur, Zeus slew Asclepius with a thunderbolt. Later, Asclepius was worshipped as a god and people slept in his temples. Rumor had it that he could cure the sick with prescribed remedies during their dreams.

Asclepius was usually shown in a standing position, dressed in a long cloak, holding a staff with a serpent coiled around it. The staff has since come to represent medicine's only symbol. In the Caduceus, used by physicians and the military medical corps, the staff is winged and has two serpents intertwined. Even though this does not hold any medical relevance in origin, it represents the magic wand of the Greek deity, Hermes, messenger of the gods.

Star of Life ID

The Star of Life is used as a means of identification for medical equipment and supplies and to point to the location of qualified medical care services and access to such

facilities. It is also used on EMS personnel items, such as shoulder badges, plaques, buckles, books, pamphlets, manuals, reports or other printed material, patches worn only by personnel who have satisfactorily completed DOT training courses or approved equivalents, and for persons who by title and function administer, directly supervise, or participate in all or part of national, state, or community EMS programs. The Star of Life symbol may be worn by administrative personnel, project directors and staff, councils and advisory groups. If shoulder patches are worn, they should be the plain blue Star of Life on a white square or round background. The function, identifying letters or words, should be printed on bars and attached across the bottom separately. The edges of the basic patch and functional bars should be embroidered.

EMS Flags

Glendale and ParadeStore.com sell both EMS and Star of Life flags: 3' x 5' for outdoor use or for indoor and parade use, with or without fringe. Check them out at <http://www.paradestore.com>.

The rest of the story ...

If you're interested in learning more about the FDNY's history and heritage, employment, training, events and ceremonies, memorials, statistics, resources, as well as viewing a photo gallery archive, the department website is at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/fdny/html/home2.shtml>.