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Susan Hagen, Mary Carouba. *Women at Ground Zero: Stories of Courage and Compassion.* Indianapolis: Alpha Books, 2002. xx + 313 pp. $22.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-02-864422-6.

Reviewed by Noonie Fortin (Retired USAR First Sergeant)
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Real Heroines

As a native New Yorker, a former volunteer Firefighter/Emergency Medical Technician, and a retired Army Reserve Veteran, it was difficult to witness the events that unfolded on and following September 11, 2001. Since then I have had trouble writing my own feelings about that time in our lives. When asked to review this particular book, I wondered what these women had to do with the topic of women in the military. I was not sure it would be possible to open the cover of the book, but am glad that I did. I came to realize that several women interviewed for this book had been or still were in the military. But all of them were so much more. With my background, I had a very hard time reading each chapter since I actually felt everything these women went through without actually having been there.

The authors have done an excellent job of bringing to life the fact that women also served, were injured, or killed at Ground Zero in New York City. They knew women had to be there and went in search of them. Most people forget that women are also members of the fire, police, and medical departments around the country. These authors have brought them to life in more ways than one. My only complaint is they did not interview enough of them, and more civilians should have been included as well. By civilians I mean those women who worked for agencies other than the city departments. I think more of them should have been included especially since they did not receive any compensation from the city for their injuries or sadly deaths.

Women At Ground Zero: Stories of Courage and Compassion, by Susan Hagen and Mary Carouba, is a collection of interviews with women shortly after September 11. Hagen, herself a Firefighter/EMT in California, is also a former news journalist and writer, while Carouba is an investigative social worker in Northern California. The photographer is Joyce Benna from the San Francisco area. Between the three of them they have brought these women's stories and photographs to the forefront.

Hagen and Carouba interviewed women from the New York Police Department (NYPD), Fire Department of New York (FDNY), Port Authority of New York, New Jersey Police Department (PAPD), and civilians who were there on September 11 and in the following days. The authors have included chapters about thirty women as well as three who died that day while in the service of saving others: Captain Kathy Mazza (PAPD), Moira Smith (NYPD), and Yamel Merino (EMT). Although the authors recognized women were there that day, the media did not cover them. Hagen and Carouba did not "want the women … to fade into the background of American History" (p. xii) nor did they want "future generations of children … believing that only men are strong, brave and heroic" (p. xii). Without having "a single name in hand" (p. xii), the authors traveled to New York City "to find them ourselves" (p. xii), which they did.

The authors provide statistical numbers of women in the NYPD, FDNY, PAPD, civilian agencies, etc.; include information about women in other areas of the country; and provide interviews with members of civilian groups who were there trying to help. As always in history, "women volunteered to do anything and everything they could to help" (p. xvi).

The average age of the men or women in combat is typically quite young, say late-teens or early twenties. However, for these women at Ground Zero, the average age was much higher. Many were in their mid-thirties.

Beat partners, Carol Paukner and Tracy Donahoo, were assigned to the NYPD's Transit Division, District 2 in Lower Manhattan. Donahoo was a rookie officer at the time. After the first plane hit, they responded to a call "for an unknown condition" only to find the "streets covered with debris" (p. 4). They helped direct people and vehicles in the chaos that ensued. Paukner told Donahoo where to meet her if they became separated, which they did. Shortly afterward Paukner was blown "into the glass partition" (p. 5) of a store then "through the exit" (p.

6), but she managed to find someone else who she held onto in order to protect both of them. She finally made it to safety, with all of this occurring before the first tower fell. Paukner tore her rotator cuff as well as her knee; her neck, foot, and eyes were injured and she developed a lung infection, while everyone she knew who worked in that area was killed.

Donahoo had been "a waitress and a bartender" before becoming a police officer, but she "wanted to do something important to help people, like being a … cop" (p. 119). That morning she found herself "flying. I must have gone 20 feet" (p. 121). Her "mouth, ears, and eyes filled with debris" (p. 121). But she got herself up and again began helping people towards safety. Everyone at Donahoo's command thought that she and Paukner were dead. Donahoo's ear was cut, she had burns on her skin and her corneas were scratched, but she continued to do her job. "Before this, I wasn't sure I wanted to be a cop…. But during and after September 11, I knew that this is what I'm supposed to be doing…. I'm glad I was there. We saved thousands of people" (p. 124).

Captain Janice Olszewski and Lieutenant Amy Monroe are members of the FDNY and have known each other for a number of years. Olszewski is the third in the chain of command of the FDNY's Emergency Medical Services (EMS). Although she responded to the scene, she recounts that "my gear, my helmet, my turnout coat–everything was in my personal car back home" (p. 75). Olszewski joined up with others in the area and tried "to set up a traditional, sector triage area" (p. 76). She was on site almost forty-five minutes and began thinking they needed a larger safer area. Then, "I heard this indescribable roar. I felt it. It was a deep, loud, rumbling, thunderous booming" (p. 78). Everyone began running and then it became dark and quiet, "all I heard were the alarms that meant that firefighters were down and unable to move…. People were asking for help, but I couldn't see them. The stuff in the cloud was so thick .pulverized marble, concrete, glass, dust, ash, chemicals, and smoke. I couldn't breathe" (p. 79). Olszewski spotted a red traffic light and just kept walking towards it till she "busted out into the bright, brilliant, blue sunshine on Broadway" (p. 80). She hitched a ride on an ambulance and set up a new triage area ten blocks away on Broadway. She later went to the hospital to be treated for her injuries, all along thinking that everyone she knew was probably dead as well as all the people in the towers.

Monroe was at home that morning. After seeing the news on the television she headed to her Battalion. Upon arrival at the scene, she ran into Olszewski and they were standing next to each other when the collapse began. They began running together but became separated. Monroe was near St. Paul's Chapel, which was untouched. She knew to cover her face with her shirt to breathe and then heard a radio message stating, "Deploy the antidote kits for weapons of mass destruction" (p. 139). Monroe thought, "What the hell is this stuff we have all over us? Was it a bomb that went off on the plane? … What had we been exposed to" (p. 139)? One of the men she was with was "crying, throwing up, and very emotional. He couldn't breathe, and he was out of control" (p. 139). She wondered, "When are the rest of us going to start having these symptoms" (p. 140)? She arrived at the hospital, was decontaminated and checked for injuries. She remembers, "I was telling the supervisor … 'Janice Olszewski's dead. Everybody I was with is dead.' That's what I really believed in my mind" (p. 140). She learned later that Olszewski had survived. Monroe managed to go back to the scene, with her U.S. Army Reserve gear and she "went down to deploy with the FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) team" (p. 141). She "ceased to be working in my usual capacity as an EMS supervisor and began working on the Urban Search and Rescue team" (p. 141). Monroe's story becomes graphic at this point, but she also talked about her family and how they were affected by all of this. "My kids go to school downtown, and children from across the country have sent them stuffed animals. They come home with these things and I think, 'Oh my God, my kids are considered victims.' And they really are. All children in this country are victims" (p. 143). Monroe also stated, "I want to tell those little girls, 'You can do anything, too. You can be anything you want to be"' (p. 143).

After thirteen years in the Army and eight years with the PAPD, Susan Keane had already seen death and destruction, yet this was her worst day. Keane talked about her background and what led up to her experiences that day, during which she lost many friends and escaped death several times. "My survivor guilt is astronomical" (p. 64). She had "made it up as far as the sixth floor" in Tower One before turning around and heading back down the stairs (p. 64). She did not have "bunker gear, and the jet fumes and the smell of the fuel were too much. The water running down the stairs was black" (p. 64). When she got down as far as the mezzanine, "the windows blew in, everything went black, and we all got thrown. In the military, they blow things up around you so you're not afraid of it. You don't panic" (p. 65). Her military training kicked in, which probably saved her life as well as those of many others. She finally got outside, "but you couldn't tell the sidewalk from the street…. It lit-

erally looked like a war-torn country. We started climbing over debris … over a white Explorer … over a fire truck … half buried in the debris" (p. 68). With all this happening, "in the back of my mind were my two kids. Now I was coming out of military mode, and I was going into single-mother mode" (p. 69). She had "burn marks … my chest was red … there was stuff coming out of my body…. It was like shrapnel. It's still coming out…. I was coughing up black stuff, and there was black stuff coming out of my ears and my nose. There was so much stuff in my eyes" (p. 69). She was finally taken to a hospital where she refused to give up her weapon until an officer spoke with her and placed her hand on his shield to prove he was a fellow cop. "I had the classic symptoms of post-traumatic stress syndrome and survivor guilt…. I probably sleep an average of two hours at any given time, and I won't sleep upstairs…. I sleep downstairs … just a few feet from the door. I have to be able to get out. I'm still in escape mode" (pp. 70-71). Keane remembered one of the PAPD who died that day. "After every situation, she walked around and thanked everybody…. Kathy Mazza was a great woman to work with" (p. 71).

All too often the civilians get overlooked when there is a Mass Casualty Incident (MCI). These are often the medical personnel who work for hospitals in a city but are not members of the police, fire, or EMS departments. Many of these people are the EMTs who drive ambulances for the city hospitals. There were many civilian EMTs there that day and some of their stories are in this book. One of these EMTs is Mercedes Rivera. She was "right across the street from the World Trade Center" (p. 21). She and her partner grabbed their gear and immediately began treating people. "I was seeing debris falling, smoke, chaos, and fear" (p. 21). A captain told Rivera and the other EMTs to enter the World Trade Center. "I just remember the fear, the constant sounds of things falling, and the flying paper and debris…. I saw a burned woman in a sitting position in the lobby, as if she was still typing behind a desk…. She was already dead" (p. 22). They moved over to Seven World Trade. "A big, thunderous, crash that sounded just like an engine. We saw this big cloud … it turned black … debris rolling in" (p. 24). Rivera fell. "I got trampled by everybody…. My partner stepped on me, and then grabbed me by my belt" (p. 24). They had just gotten to safety when they heard "that big, thunderous, crashing sound again…. Purple smoke followed by black. It was like a tornado…. I waited for death…. Explosions everywhere, and then once again, complete silence" (pp. 26-27). Rivera found herself "looking for my co-workers…. Where are Byron and John? … Tito? … Jerry? … Mario? … Keith? … Yamel" (p. 27). Later she learned that Yamel Merino was among the dead that day. "We had escaped death three or four times that day" (p. 30). Rivera is one of those who feel the civilian EMTs were overlooked. They were not eligible for the same assistance or funds that the NYPD, FDNY, or PAPD were. "And it hurts. It really hurts. It doesn't make the healing process any easier" (p. 30).

Major Kally Eastman belonged to the Army Corps of Engineers. She found herself working hand in hand with the FEMA personnel. "We started bringing in people who were specially trained in infrastructure, public assistance, buildings, utility assessment, and debris removal…. I was one of the resident experts" (p. 239). The team not only had to deal "with a debris pile, but it was also a crime scene" (p. 240). She did not get into Ground Zero much, instead she was "responsible for performance windows, timeframes, setting reasonable expectations and goals" (p. 242). She made sure the debris was taken safely to another area for complete examination. She went "two weeks without knowing what was really going on…. I was focused on what I needed to do" (p. 242). She recalled that as a child her parents "were very good about letting my sisters and me do whatever we wanted to do and supporting whatever our choices were. That support is essential to getting women out of the traditional roles and into careers that are more nontraditional" (p. 243).

These women and many others saw crushed vehicles and dead bodies along with airplane and body parts. They witnessed more in a short period of time then most people do in a lifetime. Some of their stories were very graphic while others brushed over that part. They talked about what they saw and experienced as well as their injuries and feelings. It is no wonder they continue to have problems, yet, more importantly, most of them have all returned to the jobs they held on 11 September. They continue to serve their community. They are all heroines and definitely role models for young girls to follow in the years to come.

This is a book well worth reading and will tug at your heart–it did mine! You must be prepared for your emotions to run the gamut and to relive that day and the days that followed, over again through these women's eyes. But please do take the time to read *Women At Ground Zero: Stories of Courage and Compassion.*

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