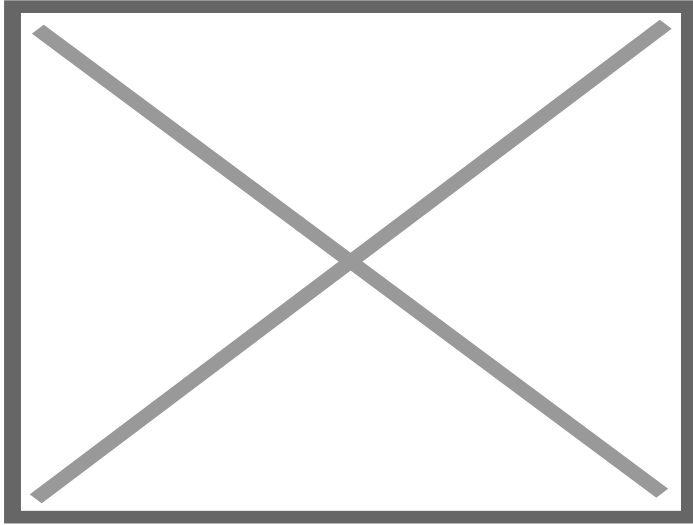


## Army concludes relief work at Ground Zero



SINCE SEPTEMBER 11, 2001



*BY CRAIG EVANS –*

Nearly nine months and three million meals after the attack on the World Trade Center, The Salvation Army's work at Ground Zero came to an end on May 30, as recovery operations at the site officially concluded.

In commemoration of its service, the Army was invited to participate in the May 30 closing ceremonies. Forming part of a solemn procession ten Salvation Army officers joined personnel including NY police and fire department representatives, Port Authority police, Red Cross representatives and others behind the truck removing the last steel column from "The Pit."

In addition, Salvation Army mobile canteens which responded in the immediate aftermath of the tragedy once again lined both sides of West Street as the flatbed proceeded to Kennedy Airport in Queens, where the last girder will be kept until a memorial is created.

The ceremony not only recognized the heroic efforts of New York City firemen, policemen, Port Authority workers and construction workers, it also drew attention to The Salvation Army's monumental relief effort at Ground Zero – one which required thousands of volunteers and officers to maintain over nine months.

## **Over 3 million meals**

The relief effort, “Operation: Compassion Under Fire,” was unprecedented in the history of emergency and disaster services for the Greater New York Division. Responding minutes after the tragedy, the Army began providing food, beverages and other supplies to rescue workers, continuing to provide physical and spiritual sustenance throughout the entire rescue and recovery operation.

Since 9/11, the Army has served 3,231,681 meals, requiring the efforts of 7,149 officers and staff, and 32,275 volunteers, representing almost one million volunteer hours.

Despite formidable logistical challenges, The Salvation Army’s efforts at Ground Zero were effectively carried out from the time the first mobile canteen arrived at the site. In the first two days, some 20 canteens from Greater New York, the Empire State Division, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Jersey and Pennsylvania responded to the disaster.

## **More than food**

But The Salvation Army dispersed much more than food during the relief operation. Quickly assessing the needs, Army personnel began distributing work boots, gas masks, Visine, lip balm, clothing and other items to workers. Perhaps even more importantly, Salvation Army counselors provided words of encouragement and comfort to rescue and recovery personnel working under incredibly difficult conditions.

Counseling tents and hydration stations were set up within feet of “The Pit” for easy access to workers. On many occasions, Salvation Army chaplains entered “The Pit” to pray for firemen and others as they recovered the bodies of victims.

The feeding program was bolstered by the arrival of a Salvation Army tractor trailer from Florida, converted into a full working kitchen where more than 10,000 hot meals could be prepared each day. The trailer and attached tent became known at Ground Zero as “Café Florida.”

## **“Taj Mahal”**

And then, beginning in December, the entire feeding operation at Ground Zero was turned over to The Salvation Army which moved into the 35,000 square foot tent, owned by the Environmental Protection Agency and located at Murray and West Streets, and which was nicknamed “The Taj Mahal” for its imposing presence.

“The Taj” became a sanctuary for workers, a place where they could enjoy delicious hot meals and escape the anxiety that accompanied their recovery work. Volunteers and Salvation Army personnel from all around the country helped to make the tent a place of comfort and solace.

And the food was of the finest quality as a result of the Restaurant Revitalization Program, an innovative and cooperative effort involving The Salvation Army, Whitsons Food Service and more than 100 local restaurants. The Salvation Army purchased meals from local restaurants and caterers

to help keep their businesses afloat. Whitsons, which provides food service for many Salvation Army programs in Greater New York, coordinated the program. Almost four million dollars were channeled to local restaurants.

### **Ministry continues**

The last meal served inside the tent at Ground Zero was on May 30 at 5 p.m. The removal of equipment and the dismantling of the tent began the next day as Battery Park City strives to recover from the tragedy. The two remaining hydration stations were also closed.

On Friday, May 31, The Salvation Army's warehouse at Hangar 5 at JFK Airport ceased operations; feeding and counseling programs at the New York City Medical Examiner's Office closed June 3. Operations at the Staten Island Fresh Kills landfill are scheduled to continue into June, with no definite closing date set as yet.

Although relief operations at service locations throughout the city will end in June, The Salvation Army will continue helping families directly impacted by the disaster through its Family Assistance Program. Overall, including site and family assistance, The Salvation Army has assisted nearly 4.5 million individuals.