

Tour of Duty run across 20 states in 31 days honors the fallen of Sept. 11

Denis Hamill

Tuesday, July 20th 2010, 4:00 AM

Sept. 11 feels like it has arrived each of the past eight years as fast as the killer planes that smashed into the towers.

In between, many of us have grown complacent.

Not these guys.

Not these guys who are our first responders, who remember that dark day on every tour of duty and try to keep the spirit of those who died alive before they fade into the yellowed pages of history.

One of these guys is a Port Authority cop from Brooklyn named Dan Steffens, who will be keeping the memory of our fallen alive on the ninth anniversary of 9/11 by participating in the Tour of Duty Run, a sweaty summer pant across America by

Australian and American first responders, leaving the Santa Monica Pier in Los Angeles at 8:46 a.m. on Aug. 12 and thudding some 4,600 miles across 20 states in 31 days and arriving at the World Trade Center site on the morning of Sept. 11.

Talk about above and beyond.

"This run is meant to remember all those who died on 9/11, especially the 411 first responders," says Steffens. "It's being organized by the Australian Fire Brigade and each dawn will be dedicated to the individuals whose lives were tragically taken in their tour of duty on 9/11. We run to remember their honor and sacrifice, to respect their courage, to appreciate their commitment to service and devotion to duty."

Along the American road they will stop at the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, the Flight 93 crash site in Shanksville, Pa., the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial in Washington, the Pentagon and the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial in Emmitsburg, Md.

"There are 36 runners involved: 16

Australian firefighters and 20 American police, firefighters and EMTs," says Steffens.

In addition to Steffens, there are six New Yorkers in the run, all members of the FDNY - Capt. Liam Flaherty and Firefighters Brian O'Grady, Brian Usher, Bryan Bean, Kevin O'Connor and James Dowdell, whose father, FDNY Lt. Kevin Dowdell, perished on 9/11.

"I was working for Bear Stearns on Sept. 11, 2001," says Steffens, "and I was mobilized with my New York Army National Guard unit to assist in the rescue/recovery operations down in Ground Zero."

There in the dust of the dead, Steffens saw the monstrous carnage first hand. Like most New Yorkers, he lost some friends that day.

In 2004, Steffens served in Iraq with the 369 Corps Support Battalion, aka the "Harlem Hellfighters."

"Late in 2007, I was notified by the Port Authority Police Department that I had been selected to go to the next phase of the application process," he says. "I'd taken the PAPD test in 2002 but kept working at

Bear Stearns and got promoted to VP of office services."