



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 16, 2014

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Visiting 9/11 Memorial on Army's Birthday 'Apropos' for WTU Soldier and Desert Storm Vet

West Point, New York — The Sept. 11, 2001, terrorism attacks on America were enough to motivate Retired Maj. Charles Hansrote out of retirement, leaving behind, a loving wife and a comfortable life as an insurance claims adjuster in St. Charles, Ill.

"These people didn't deserve to die," he said, adding that he felt as an American Soldier, he had failed to protect them.

He wasn't going to let it happen again so in 2005, the Army let him put on the uniform he last wore in 1997. It wasn't Iraq or Afghanistan, but Fort Gordon, Ga. Still, he was serving and eventually did a tour of duty as both company commander and executive officer at Fort Gordon's Warrior Transition Unit. The 56-year old is now a Soldier assigned to the Warrior Transition Unit.

"I knew I was too old to participate in the fighting, but I knew I could still do something for the Army," the former Infantryman said.

This past Saturday -- on the morning of the Army's 239th birthday--Hansrote visited where it all started: the 9/11 Memorial Museum.

"Visiting the memorial on the Army's birthday means a lot to me," he said, his voice quivering with emotion outside the 9/11 Memorial Park. "I love my country. I love the Army. I've been in Army 26 years. All I ever wanted to do was serve my country."

When the New York City sky turned black that day, the Desert Storm veteran was at work catching a glimpse of what was happening on television. He immediately called his wife and told her what was going on. Together, they watched the second plane hit the towers.

"I knew at that point that our world had changed, and that young men and women were going to be in harms' way, again," he recalled. "These were civilians going to work. It was supposed to be like 'I'll see you tonight, honey.' They never made it back. Now you have families that are torn apart, kids growing up without parents. No one was ready for this," adding how thankful he is that the military has resources and immediate help for military Families to deal with tragedy and death. "Civilians have nothing."

Once inside the memorial museum, the 1980 Virginia Military Institute graduate looked around, gazing at the artifacts, briefly glancing at the posters of the "missing" people.

"These are mothers and fathers, sons and daughter," he whispered. "It's just so overwhelming and brings back such strong emotions. A lot of what we do is dangerous for sure. That's what we sign up for, but these people didn't deserve to die. It's hard to see this."

The display that impacted him the most, though, was the Victims Quilt, a 10-foot by 60-foot wall hanging that commemorates all those who died that day, including first responders, World Trade Center and Pentagon employees and the passengers on the hijacked airplanes.



"The quilt was awesome," he said, sharing that he was feeling the presence of those men and women who perished and the firemen and rescue people that went in to rescue them. "I never have seen anything like that. It's a beautiful quilt, a work of love. It was so impactful," adding that a picture of it should be in every school in America, comparing the history lesson of 9/11 to that of Pearl Harbor. "Everyone you talk to who lived in 1941 knows about Pearl Harbor. Even the littlest children who grew up during the war knew about it. If we don't teach our children about history, we won't be reinforcing the magnitude of it all. Parents need to understand how important it is to never forget. "

Ironically, visiting the memorial was on his bucket list, but how "apropos" he said it was that he was visiting it on the Army's birthday (239th). The trip, which was sponsored by the USO, was to honor the Army athletes who are participating in the 2014 Army Warrior Trials, June 15-19, U.S. Military Academy, West Point, N.Y.

"This is what service is all about," he said, "keeping the wolves away from us. We have something that everyone wants. That's why we're here; protecting the country from more incidents like this and why we sacrifice our lives. Self-sacrifice is a good measure of life. Whether you get a chance to fight or not, you're here to serve."

More than 100 wounded, ill and injured service members and Veterans from across the United States are at West Point to compete in the 2014 U.S. Army Warrior Trials, June 15-20. The event is hosted by the Warrior Transition Command, and the Army Warrior Trials and highlights athletes from the Army, Marines and Air Force facing off in archery, basketball, cycling, track and field, swimming, shooting, sitting volleyball and wheelchair basketball. Participants in the trials include athletes with spinal cord injuries, traumatic brain injuries, visual impairment, serious illnesses and amputations. Army athletes are competing for a spot on Team Army to go to the Warrior Games in Colorado this fall.

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CUTLINE: Maj. Charlie Hansrote reflects on 9/11 during his visit to the 9/11 Memorial Saturday, June 14, the Army's 239th birthday. Hansrote, along with other military athletes participating in the 2014 Army Trials, was in New York City, courtesy of the USO. The Army Warrior Transition Command is hosting the Army Warrior Trials June 15-19 at West Point, N.Y. More than 100 wounded, ill and injured Soldiers, Marines, Airmen and Veterans are facing off in archery, shooting, cycling, track and field, swimming, sitting volleyball, and wheelchair basketball. The Army Warrior Trials help determine the athletes who will represent Team Army in the 2014 Warrior Games slated for Sep. 28-Oct. 4, Colorado Springs, Colorado. (U.S. Army photo by Gloria Montgomery)

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Warrior Transition Command (WTC) is a major subordinate command under the U.S. Army Medical Command (MEDCOM). WTC's mission is to develop, coordinate and integrate the Army's Warrior Care and Transition Program (WCTP) for wounded, ill and injured soldiers, veterans and their families. For more information on WTC, visit the new WTC website, www.WTC.army.mil, follow on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/armyWTC> or join Facebook at <http://facebook.com/armyWTC>.

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