



Michelle Obama: Flight 93 crash site shows healing

By Jennifer C. Yates- The Associated Press -9/11/2010



First Lady Michelle Obama, second from right, and former First Lady Laura Bush, right, tour the construction site at the Flight 93 memorial with Gordon W. Felt, president of the Families of Flight 93, left, who lost his brother Edward Felt on the flight, and Joanne M. Hanley, superintendent of the Flight 93 National Memorial before a commemorative service at the temporary Flight 93 memorial in Shanksville, Pa., Saturday, Sept. 11, 2010. (AP Photo/Gene J. Puskar)

SHANKSVILLE, Pa. -- The victims of Flight 93 are an inspiration and all who visit the rural field where they died on Sept. 11, 2001, will now "see how a scar in the earth has healed," first lady Michelle Obama said Saturday at a memorial service at the crash site honoring the 40 passengers and crew.

Former first lady Laura Bush joined Obama in the rolling hills of western Pennsylvania, marking a rare joint public speaking appearance by two first ladies. Obama thanked her predecessor for helping the country through the difficult days following the attacks.

"May the memory of those who gave their lives here continue to be an

inspiration to you and an inspiration to all of America," Obama said to the thousands gathered on a wind-whipped temporary memorial for the annual service.

Many in the crowd toted American flags or bunches of flowers. Family members wore buttons bearing their loved ones' pictures.

"It was clear that these 40 individuals were no strangers to sacrifice," Obama told the crowd, citing the presence of veterans, coaches and volunteers among them.

"Being a hero is not just a matter of faith, it's a matter of choice."

Future generations would come to the site, she said, to "see how a scar in the earth has healed."

"It is truly my prayer today that all who come here will be filled with hope," she said.

Obama and Bush met privately with the victims' families before the service. Obama greeted each one with a hug and her condolences.

"To have VIPs of their stature come to share the memorial service to our loved ones means a considerable amount to the families," said Gordon Felt, the president of the Families of Flight 93, whose brother died aboard the flight.

Bush told the crowd that "Americans have no division" on this day.

"Nine years ago, in this skies above this field and in Washington and in New York City, we saw the worst of our enemy and the best of our nation," she said. "In the face of terror, Americans chose to overcome evil."

Former President George W. Bush issued a statement Saturday saying he and his wife were thinking of and praying for the 9/11 victims and their families.

"On September 11, 2001, Americans awoke to evil on our shores," he said. "We recall the many acts of heroism on that day, and we honor those who work tirelessly to prevent another attack."

A moment of silence at the service near Shanksville, Pa., was broken with relatives reading aloud the names of the dead and a bell tolling for each one.

Flight 93 was en route from Newark, N.J., to San Francisco on Sept. 11, 2001, when hijackers seized control and redirected the plane toward Washington, D.C. But passengers fought back and the hijackers responded by crashing the plane about 60 miles southwest of Pittsburgh.

This year's service was held at what is known as the Western Overlook, a place where the FBI, first responders and the media gathered in the hours and days after the crash. The service was moved there this year from another temporary site because of the construction work under way.

Next year, the annual service is expected to take place at a memorial plaza, which will be part of the permanent memorial. When finished, the 2,200-acre national park will have a 93-foot tower at the entrance with wind chimes for each of the victims and a grove of trees.

Gerald Bingham, 67, of Churchill, Tenn., who lost his son, Mark, in the crash, said it meant a lot to him to have both Obama and Bush there. He said it was important that people remember the victims and support efforts to build the memorial.

"This is a story that needs to be told," Bingham said. "It's something we can all take a lesson from what they did on that plane."

Asked about the controversies over construction of a mosque near ground zero in New York City, and over a Florida pastor's now-canceled plans to burn copies of the Quran to mark the Sept. 11 anniversary, Bingham said he had no time to worry about such things.

"We're trying to move forward here," he said.

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