Our deepest thanks for those who made it happen  
Written by Larry L. Pierson

I have been to our National Fallen Firefighters Memorial in Emmittsburg, Md three times. On my first trip, more emotions came forth than expected when we stepped from the parking lot and onto the grass. It was a long awaited walk to feel the raised letters of the name of our fallen brother, Sammie J. Waddell, who was killed in the line of duty at a call we worked together in 1989.

When your are there, you have to touch the other names, stare at the monument and wonder how small turn of events at calls we have worked over the years could have placed our own names somewhere for others to touch. These trips were like pilgrimages, a small band of brothers driving about 500 miles, one way, to honor our fallen. The moments gave us a sense of national pride in our profession and a bond with thousands just like us. With such a long trip, few firefighters ever get to go visit the grounds.

May 6th, 2006  
The NC Fallen Firefighters Memorial dedication is held and it unveiled the product of spectacular efforts by a group of devoted individuals. Located in Nash Square, downtown Raleigh, the setting is perfect. Very large and old trees reside there and I would like to think they represent our long history, solid roots and a strong presence that gives shade and relief to others. It is not just a monument to go see, it’s a whole setting that says come and stay for a while, sit on a park bench, walk the paths and look at this monument from different angles. It occupies a dominant presence in our state’s capital and will be part of our culture for decades to come.

The pipes and drums sounded spellbinding. For a firefighter, the sound coming closer, getting louder as they march nearer sends chills over your body. So many departments from all over our state in class A uniforms, apparatus polished and the parade must have been a sight to see for those on the sidewalk. To see the entire fire service represented was fulfilling. Few firefighters probably realized how many wildland firefighters from the NC Forest Service had been lost in the line of duty over the years. The airport firefighters, industrial fire brigades, hazardous material workers, rescue technicians all share a place together.

So what does this place mean to me, to my department, your department and all of us? It means we have hallowed ground within a reasonable distance to visit and take new members, family or just go by our self to pay our respects through remembrance. I could spend some time describing each minute detail of the specialty plaques and other features but you must go see for yourself.
When you visit, you may run into another firefighter from somewhere, exchange some stories and just share our widespread brother and sisterhood. We begin to understand that others have experienced similar losses and coming together helps bring a sense of comfort. I mostly had our firefighter’s name in mind during the trip but 164 names total after arriving. While there, I noticed Greensboro FD’s apparatus and display of their fallen brothers. The photos of Raymond Cockman, Jesse Gray, and William Jackie Beard were quite honorably displayed by those who carry on their names. Department officials accepted many of the flags for Firefighters killed in the line of duty decades ago. Name after name, another department’s loss is our loss.

This writing has been more from my personal side and that of my departments but I think I can speak on behalf of every firefighter across the state. We are so deeply grateful to the creators, the organizers, the donors and anyone who helped make this happen. To the NC Fallen Firefighters Foundation, we tip our helmets and say “Thank you brothers”.

For everyone else, continue your support for the foundation. Donations are still needed to continue their work. Visit their website at www.ncfff.org