

## CRITICS



Naja Productions/Spike TV

Members of Local 40, an ironworkers' union that helped in the cleanup of the World Trade Center, from the documentary "Metal of Honor."

## TELEVISION REVIEW

# Building Towers Is One Thing, Burying Them Another

By VIRGINIA HEFFERNAN

Almost as soon as the first eyewitness accounts of Sept. 11, 2001, in New York were published, some people complained that they were sick of personal stories. The stories might have seemed self-indulgent at the time, and not expansive or discursive enough for what was a national — even global — tragedy. But what did readers want? Editorials? Calls to arms?

Well, now we've had all those, and more. And still the first-person accounts, in which individuals come to terms with what seemed like an apocalypse, stand as uniquely compelling, honest and illuminating.

Tonight, in anticipation of the fifth anniversary of Sept. 11, Spike TV presents a team of men who had a particularly intimate and deeply felt reaction to the destruction of the World Trade Center: structural ironworkers. "Metal of Honor," a film by Rachel Maguire, is simple and profound, a treatment of events grounded not in emotion or politics, but in the stubborn materiality of the attack on New York City.

"The work's dirty, but the money's clean," one ironworker says of his job. Also on camera is his colleague Paul Gauden, a quietly heroic figure who helped build the Twin Towers, and then helped bury them. Before the program moves into a chronicle of the ground zero cleanup, several ironworkers remember the towers with awe. The two buildings, says one man, were "New York flexing its muscle."

For these men, for whom iron and steel are regularly an extension of their own strength, pride in the towers, together made of more than 200,000 tons of steel, seems like pride in their own bodies.

"That was our steel," says Tommy Harris, an ironworker. "That belonged to us."

Many of these men have skin that appears blistered and singed. In pho-

## Metal of Honor

The Ironworkers of 9/11

Spike, tonight at 9, Eastern and Pacific times; 8, Central time.

Filmmaker, Rachel Maguire.

## Nova

Building on Ground Zero

PBS, tonight at 8; check local listings.

Written and produced by Larry Klein. A BBC/WGBH, Boston, co-production.

tographs of the aftermath, amid the smoldering mangled steel and body parts of what they call "the pile," the ironworkers look like men working in hell.

The ironworkers of course are not police officers, firefighters or soldiers; by entering the inferno, they nonetheless did what they saw as their civic, union and human duty. They are not used to working with body bags, and many break down.

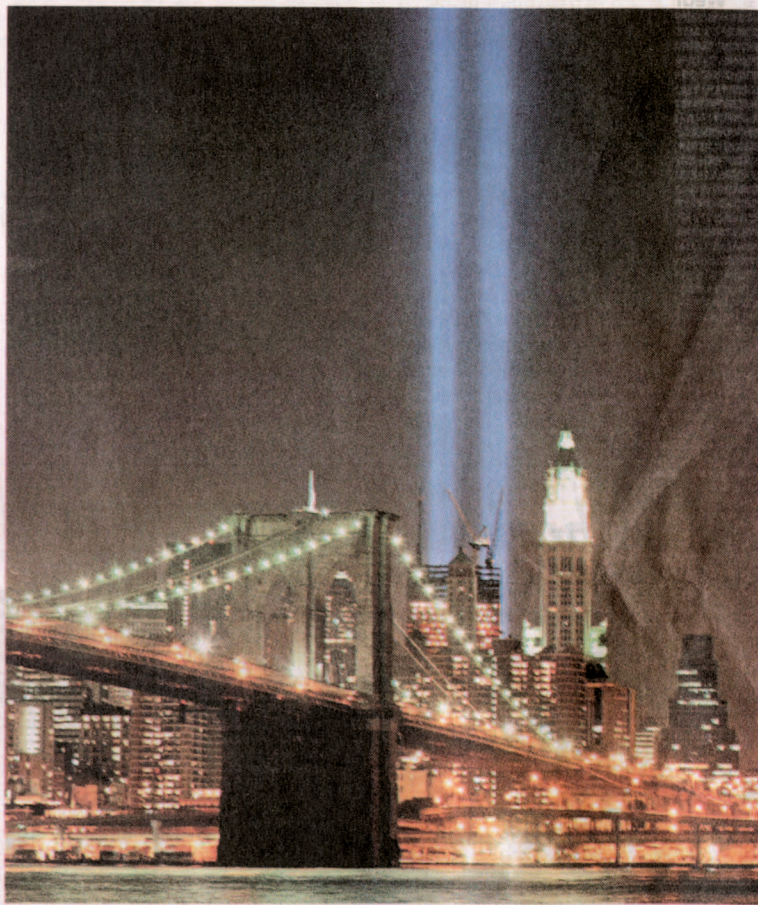
"It was like I was going to war," says Jim Gaffney, a foreman.

Mr. Harris also remembers the crowds that used to greet the men on their way to help with the clearing. The heyday of the unions seem to come back, briefly, as Mr. Harris recalls how he and his co-workers were cheered. "We ain't no sports players, we ain't no president, we ain't no celebrities," he says, shaking his head. "We just ironworkers from Local 40."

"I cried like a baby," Mr. Harris concludes. "And it's as simple as that."

## Building on Ground Zero

Nova's white-collar take on the twin towers, "Building on Ground Zero," lacks the simplicity and sincerity of Spike TV's documentary. Beginning with the overwritten voice-over that labels the World Trade Center a "towering icon of



PBS

The Tribute in Light for 9/11, from "Building on Ground Zero."

American economic might," PBS sticks close by W. Gene Corley, the aloof head of the engineering team that investigated the collapse of the towers. Graphics, charts and blueprints materialize; Mr. Corley and other engineers opine clinically.

There's no sobbing. Instead there's talk of transfer girders, trusses, kinetic energy, progressive collapses and the precedent set by the destruction of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. Once you give in to the program's pointy-headedness, though, the ped-

antry is not worthless. We learn that the towers had, engineers say, no structural flaws that caused them to collapse.

The hunt for flaws in the architecture of the buildings parallels the political and cultural self-scrutiny that's gone on in the United States for five years. Did Americans have it coming? The answer the engineers arrive at is a relief: Nothing the architect or engineers could have done would have changed the outcome of 9/11.