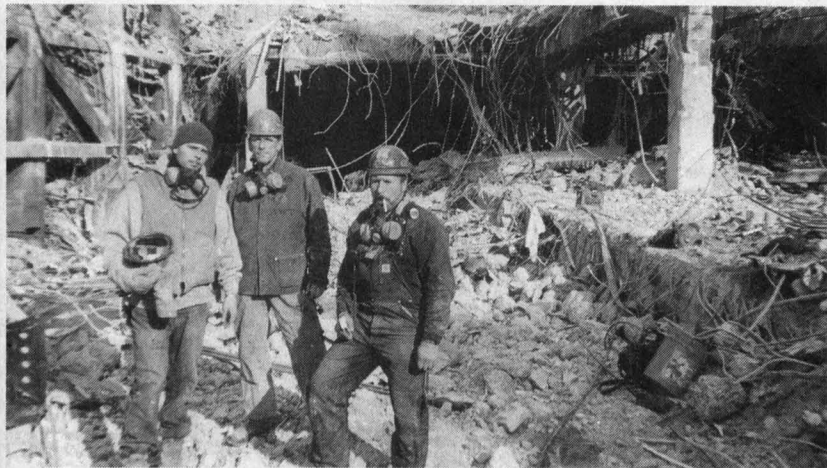


Like They Were Going to War



Spike TV

'Metal of Honor' follows the workers who cleared the World Trade Center site.

OF ALL THE 9/11-RELATED programs on TV as the fifth anniversary of the attacks approaches, "Metal of Honor" is particularly interesting, because it focuses on a group of people whose bravery in the aftermath has been ignored (Spike TV, Tuesday 9-10:30 p.m.). They are the ironworkers—many members of NY Local 40—whose job it was to walk into the still-fiery hell and begin dismantling the wreckage. In the first hours, this meant climbing mountains of twisted steel and debris stacked like pickup sticks, looking for survivors and using their special skills to clear paths for other rescuers while preventing more collapses and death.

They saw it all, alongside the more-famous firemen and police who rushed to the scene that morning, and stayed for months of physically and mentally grueling work. As some of them recall those days, we also see film of work on the site, giving us a new perspective from deep inside the "pile," as it was called. Their professional minds boggled at the sight of 20-ton steel beams twisted like pretzels, and their hearts sank as the initial adrenaline rush of looking for people to pull out alive was replaced by the grim knowledge that rescue would turn out to be mostly retrieval.

At that point, they explain here, another feeling took over—the desire to turn on their torches and do what only an

ironworker could do: take apart what remained of the building that they, their fathers, and even their grandfathers once built, and show the world that Americans never give up. "When I went to work every night," one man explains here, "it was like I was going to war." Nighttime was better, because there were no famous people coming down to the site, slowing down the job.

What many remember best, in fact, is the ordinary people who used to line the streets for blocks, waving flags and applauding workers on their way down to shifts at the site. It was especially gratifying to a usually unsung ironworker, somebody says: "They're cheering you—and we're not no sports players, we're not no president and we ain't celebrities. We're just ironworkers from Local 40. I cried like a baby."

Still Empty

Today, though, the strongest emotion for some does not come from memories so much as from current reality at the WTC site. "There should be a building here by now," somebody says, and his brother workers agree. As if to say: "Hey! You're not going to do this to us. We're going to come back, and we're go-

ing to be stronger than ever." Visiting the site now and seeing it still empty "blows my mind more than anything else."

Compared to all that, fantasy can bring a kind of relief. At this time of year, it's tempting to watch the parade of new fall shows and try and guess which ones will last more than a season, if that. Let's practice on Fox's new romantic drama "Standoff" (Tuesday, 9-10 p.m. ET).

One of its stars, playing an FBI crisis/hostage negotiator, is Ron Livingston—most recently famous as the conflicted Jack Berger on "Sex and the City," who broke up with Carrie on a Post-it. He looks just as attractive as Matt Flannery in "Standoff," and he's no longer a wimpy waverer. He's a take-charge guy with nerves of steel who will do anything to talk down a hostage-holder. In this week's pilot, he does it by telling a distraught father with a gun that his own life is a mess, because he's having an affair with his partner and probably will get fired for it. His partner, Emily Lehman (played by Rosemarie DeWitt), is not amused. In fact, although the physical chemistry between the two is obvious, it seems they are destined to spend the entire series trying to get their relationship on track.

FBI Lovers

The rest of the time every week—are FBI negotiators really that busy?—they spend dealing with crises. The central story Tuesday involves a U.S. senator's son who is posing as an Islamic suicide bomber at a Starbucks-like coffee shop. Yes, posing. Given the fears that the audience will bring to this particular situation, the tension feels genuine while it lasts. On reflection, though, it leaves a bad taste in the mouth.

Then there is that sinking feeling when it becomes clear that another element of the show is the cliché conflict between hostage negotiators—who always want to defuse the situation—and the bully boys of the SWAT team, always eager to put a bullet through the bad guy's head. In another original twist, our pair of FBI lovers also have to deal with a difficult boss.

Unlike the serial dramas on offer this