The Flight 93 Mission Statement Quilt

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In the days after September 11, 2001, many people struggled with how to respond to the tragedy. But not Suzi Bird—she immediately reached out to friends and family across the country and channeled their sadness and concern into creating a positive, life-affirming piece of fiber art. On September 12, 2001, Bird, a resident of Simi Valley, California, sent an email message to everyone she knew, requesting that they send quilt squares “to honor all who suffered as a result of 9.11.1.” She received so many squares that she made three quilts, one for each crash site.

The Shanksville quilt blends patriotic colors and symbols with hearts and angels: it honors those who lost their lives, but also embraces them. Quilts, traditionally objects of comfort and warmth, provide an excellent way to speak to this tragedy while offering a measure of solace and security. As Suzi

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3 Rachel Filene Seidman, “‘We Were Enlisted for the War’: Ladies’ Aid Societies and the Politics of Women’s Work during the Civil War,” in Making and Remaking of Pennsylvania’s Civil War, ed. William Blair and William Pencak, (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ., 2001), 68.
4 Gunn, 84.
6 Gunn, 85.
7 Ibid., 87.
8 Delaine is a light-weight woven wool/cotton fabric which is usually printed with a design.
10 This figure was computed by converting the purchasing power of money in 1864 to 2010. Consult www.measuringworth.com/ppowerus for a discussion of converting the value of money over time.
11 Milroy, 52.
12 Gunn, 88.
13 Ibid., 92-93.
14 Barbara Brackman, Quilts from the Civil War, (Lafayette, Calif.: C & T Publishing, 1997), 83.
16 Ibid., 87.
Bird wrote when she sent the quilt to the Shanksville Volunteer Fire Company, “This quilt is a message of love, compassion, and heartfelt sympathy to those who are left behind by those whose mortal bodies died here in Shanksville. Their memory will live forever. The threads that hold this quilt together are stitched by people who feel your pain and wish we could take it away. You will never be forgotten and are always in our prayers.”

On the left edge of the quilt near the center, Captain Stephen Ruda of the Los Angeles City Fire Department wrote on his square, “A Common Field One Day, A Field of Honor Forever.” This simple statement now begins the preamble to the mission statement of the Flight 93 National Memorial.

The Shanksville quilt is on display in the Flight 93 section of Stars & Stripes: An American Story, the flag exhibit at the Heinz History Center, through June 17, 2012.