

I want to dedicate these brief remarks to the lives and the memories of Private First Class John D. Hart and Lance Corp. Travis R. Desiato -- both native sons of this town, and both deeply missed by their families and friends.

In October 2003, John, then 20, died in Tiza, Iraq, when his vehicle was ambushed by militants using rocket-propelled grenades.

In November 2004, Travis, aged 19, died in Fallujah, Iraq, as he went room to room in a house to clear it of insurgents.

I also want to give a personal salute to the people in attendance from Hanscom AFB and the Bedford Veterans Hospital.

In honoring Americans who die in war, we come face to face with the unsolvable math of sacrifice: The family living in the house next to yours pays the ultimate price – loss of a son or a daughter, a Mom or a Dad – while your own family pays almost nothing. Or maybe it's the other way around.

Along with the lack of proportion, for the family next door the conflict becomes all too real. Whereas, for your family, the war may be newspaper fodder -- someone else's story.

The gulf between these two realities can seem unbridgeable. If you're lucky enough to be spared, how do you inhabit the experience of the family that takes the hit?

Still, we try. Vietnam was perhaps a low point: A gulf opened up -- between the few who knew the conflict intimately and the rest of us. Since then we've worked hard, on all sides, to narrow the gap. Whatever our feelings about the wisdom of the most recent conflicts in which our country has engaged, we have recaptured our sense of commitment to the men and women who put their lives at risk for us.

We've learned, that is, to move past politics and honor the disproportionality of sacrifice.

This heightened state of recognition existed even before this year's Marathon Day bombings, but the April 15th attack brought home the mortal stakes at issue in our highly imperfect but still unavoidable engagement with terrorism. The struggle with extremism is no longer just a far-off confusion, no longer just a foreign war.

As in the American Revolution, as in the Civil War, conflict, every now and again, will come home.

Who could know, in advance, how we would respond? Shocked? Stunned? Quieted? Cowed?

Who could have guessed that we would rise to the occasion with gallantry and resilience?

Let us take note of the refusal, on the part of those injured on the 15th, to hide or to shrink away. Witness, in recent newspapers, the pictures of determined survivors, surgical stumps and all, talking soberly but with insistence of their plans to recover, adapt, and get on with their lives.

The word "maimed" doesn't mesh with the mental picture we have of these people. "Maimed" connotes a subtle sense of defeat, even of shame. But these individuals are not defeated and they are not ashamed.

When the war comes home, if only for a moment – when it isn't something happening "over there" – all of us are changed. The wall between "us" and "them," between soldier and civilian, measured in experience and sacrifice, comes down just a little bit.

We all went through – and we've all come through -- Marathon Day. And, in the aftermath, we see close-up glimpses of families near us who must mourn ... who must rally, and somehow get past this.

So, on this Memorial Day in particular, we are determined, more than ever, to remember the dead and nurture the living. We will take this passion and extend it in protective reverence over the men and women, here and abroad, who fight to protect all of us.

Thank you.