

**Remarks of
Commandant of the Marine Corps, General James T. Conway
National Time of Remembrance
Washington, D.C.
Sunday, May 20, 2007**

The Commandant of the Marine Corps paid tribute to children of fallen heroes from Operations IRAQI FREEDOM and ENDURING FREEDOM.

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I would like to initially direct my comments to the children.

Today, we honor a long line of patriots who have honored us by their sacrifice and their courage. One hundred forty six years ago, the first battle of the Civil War was about to take place on the banks of a small stream called Bull Run, about thirty miles from where we sit today. Like today, the country's future was not certain. That war, like ours, still had many years to go. But the hopes of a Nation rested on the broad shoulders of our countrymen.

A week before the Battle of Bull Run, Major Sullivan Ballou, an officer of the 2nd Rhode Island Volunteers, wrote home to his wife. He said in his letter:

“The indications are very strong that we shall move in a few days, perhaps tomorrow. And lest I should not be able to write you again, I feel impelled to write a few lines that may fall under your eyes when I am no more. ... I have no misgivings about or lack of confidence in the cause in which I am engaged, and my courage does not halt or falter. I know how American Civilization now leans upon a triumph of the government and how great a debt we owe to those who went before us through the blood and the suffering of the Revolution. And I am willing — perfectly willing — to lay down all my joys in this life to help maintain this government and to pay that debt.”

Major Ballou was killed in the first few hours of the Battle of Bull Run. To these children, I assure you that, like Major Ballou, your parents laid down their joys in this life in exchange for your freedom and your opportunity to enjoy democracy. They did not want to leave you, but they had a duty to perform, and they did it bravely. They wanted to protect the world that you live in, so you could grow up safe and secure. They paid the price — so that you and others would not have to.

I am sure that if your fathers or mothers were here today, they would want to tell you something quite similar to what Major Ballou said in closing to his wife, “I shall always be with you, in the brightest day and in the darkest night ... always, always.”

Ladies and gentlemen, medals are traditionally given to adults who demonstrate unusual courage. Today, medals have been presented to the children of the fallen in appreciation for the courage required of them to go through life without one of the parents who brought them into this world. Today, we recognize the sacrifices made by the children of those who have carried the fight to our enemies.