

SOCIETY HONORS THOSE WHO LOST THEIR LIVES

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Standing in front of a small crowd gathered Tuesday evening in the College of William & Mary's sunken gardens, on the very ground where French troops set up camp during the Revolutionary War, 21-year-old Kristina Surface fought through tears to talk about a high school friend who was killed by a homemade bomb in Iraq last year.

He was a boy, "a little guy," the college junior said, who spent several months in a gym "beefing up" for the Marine Corps.

He was a man she agreed to marry if, when older, neither of them had potential mates.

And he was an honorable person who believed that by joining the military and shipping off to the Middle East, he was "allowing someone's daddy to stay home," Surface said.

Surface volunteered to speak at the second annual Day of Remembrance ceremony hosted by the Veterans Society of William and Mary. The society was formed last year to foster better cultural awareness of the military on campus and to help military veterans-turned-college students make the transition from the battlefield to the classroom.

While this year's remembrance ceremony - which included personal stories of students whose friends and loved ones had died in Iraq or had been killed in military training accidents - was held on the eve of the fifth anniversary of the war in Iraq, society members said the nonpolitical event aimed to recognize all military veterans from all wars.

"The willingness of some Americans to engage in genuinely sacrificial service ... are crucial to our survival as a nation and its continued success," the college's interim president, W. Taylor Reveley III, said at the event. "We are tremendously grateful for those of you who have served and are serving."

Talk of the war in Iraq, however, crept into a great deal of the ceremony because, Surface said, "it's the war that defines our generation."

The war in Iraq, said Marine Reserve Cpl. Alex Wright, "is the point of reference we have. These are the stories we know."

Jane Honeycutt, a law student at the college, spoke about her fiance, also a Marine, who was killed in a military training accident.

Jeff Webb's dog tags hung loosely around Honeycutt's neck. She, too, fought through waves of emotion as she described the man she planned to marry and how he, after striking up a conversation with a homeless man, enlisted in the military.

That homeless man, Honeycutt said, told Webb he was a Vietnam War veteran. Webb was inspired by him to don a uniform to repay the previous generations who "fought for our freedoms."