

Distinguished guests, Ms. Olivia Thompson, Essex Fells veterans, Neighbors and Friends, welcome to our Memorial Day Remembrance at Essex Fells Borough Hall.

One Day, One Week, and Fifty years ago today.

In a God forsaken place called the Binh Dinh Province in the Republic of Vietnam, while leading his men on a sweep and clear mission in what was later described as a “Viet Cong killing zone,” a soldier, an officer, from Essex Fells, lay mortally wounded. For his actions, courage, gallantry, and leadership that day, United States Army Lieutenant Robert H. Crum, Jr. was posthumously awarded the Silver Star with Gallantry Cross and Palm, the third highest honor our nation can bestow for gallantry in combat.

One Day, One Week, and Fifty years ago today.

Robbie Crum and his family lived at 55 Rensselaer Road. He attended the Essex Fells Elementary School and graduated the Eighth grade in 1955. In the Essex Fells School yearbook (which has a picture of Robbie on his bike in front of the school’s entrance – the picture looks like it could have been taken yesterday with almost any Essex Fells boy), it says “although he may be small, ...when he is around, you know it!” The yearbook revealed that Robbie wanted to join the service and stated, “Boy, this guy has some future ... we know he’ll do us proud.”

Rob then went on to attend the New Hampton School in Hampton, New Hampshire and graduated in 1959. From there, he attended and graduated from Wake Forest College where he received his commission. He joined the United States Army in 1965 as a Second Lieutenant, and on June 22, 1965, Robbie married the love of his life, his beloved Olivia, at a service held in the chapel at Fort Benning, Georgia.

Lt. Crum eventually served with the Jumping Mustangs – Company B, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Airborne, 8<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, United States Army.

He was then deployed to Vietnam 1966.

I would like to share with you Lieutenant Crum's citation that accompanies his Silver Star:

Second Lieutenant Crum distinguished himself by gallantry in action on the 21<sup>st</sup> May 1966, while serving as Platoon leader of the First Platoon on a sweep and clear mission near Binh Dinh Province, Republic of Vietnam. After being trapped in a deadly Viet Cong killing zone defended by heavily fortified positions, Second Lieutenant Crum directed the platoon in an assault against the positions. Although having sustained a shoulder wound, he continued to direct his men to cover the personnel in the area who had become casualties, demonstrating his fearless and courageous leadership to his men. He rallied his troops a second time to try to extract the casualties from the killing zone. Again he was wounded by enemy fire and relinquishing his command of the platoon and gave the order to "Take control and get these men out." His unimpeachable gallantry in combat against numerically superior enemy forces was in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflects great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army.

Last night, I was re-reading the chapter in Brigadier General Marshall's book, *Battles in the Monsoon*, that discusses the events of that day and Lieutenant Crum's role, along with that of my friend Sergeant David Dolby (MOH), and to say it was murderously chaotic is an understatement. The courage and bravery exhibited that day by the soldier from Essex Fells and the American forces was of the first order.

And as the Essex Fells School predicted, Robbie did us proud.

One Day, One Week, and Fifty years ago today.

Eleven years ago when we properly placed the tablet bearing Lieutenant Crum's name in Essex Fells' hallowed ground, Rob's sister, Stephanie, told me a bittersweet fact about her brother that I remember to this very day – that Rob was baptized on Pearl Harbor Day, killed on Armed Forces Day, and buried on Memorial Day.

Memorial Day. We speak of Memorial Day and we rightly and reverently remember those who made the supreme sacrifice for our liberties, our nation, and our very way of live. Let that always be so.

But, several years ago, at our ceremony here, I spoke about “the letter,” the letter that starts with the so very sad phrase, “It is with deep regret that I inform you of the death of ...” and the unfathomable grief and sense of loss suffered by the spouses and families, a grief that cannot be assuaged. The comments and observations I made back then have stuck with me ever since. And I began to think about how Memorial Day means more than just honoring and revering our war dead, but also to honor and revere those who lost their loved ones. These are the people who truly know what sacrifice is, for it is they who have lost their loved ones, who have had to go on and persevere, and whose lives have completely changed all in the name of duty and service to our country that cost their loved ones their lives. It is they who have made, and continue to make, a sacrifice for our nation each day and every day. For they did not die in defending our nation’s honor, but their loss is ever felt, and must be, of equal import. We must recognize that. They are the true, living face of Memorial Day.

As I mentioned, several years ago, we installed Lt. Crum’s tablet here at the base of the flagpole with the other four fallen warriors of Essex Fells. It was then that I met Olivia Crum Thompson, a woman of tremendous beauty, grace, and elegance. Since that ceremony, on Memorial Day, Olivia comes from Southern New Jersey with a friend to attend our remembrance and together we remember “her Robbie,” as she places flowers on his tablet. Words cannot express the admiration and love I have for this very special woman, this very special patriot and American, for who knows more about sacrifice than she? In her loyal heart, Robbie’s memory is enshrined. I am so honored and proud to call her my friend. Olivia, you will always have our town’s respect and love. You are the beautiful face of Memorial Day.

I told some of you that I was going to have with me today a special guest, but unfortunately, he unexpectedly took ill last Friday and is not able to travel outside of Kentucky. Master Sergeant Thomas Nettles served under Lieutenant Crum on May 22, 1966 and he wanted to be here, this year particularly, to address you all – in uniform – and discuss the sort of magnificent leader and commanding officer that Lieutenant Robert Crum was. I have had the pleasure of Sergeant Nettles’ company on several occasions. He is, by his own words, “one hard-drinking, hard living, tough son of a bitch!” On that terrible day - One Day, One Week and Fifty years ago today - then Private Nettles was severely wounded during that fire fight when he took a bullet – or two - to his head, entering through his jaw and

exiting near his ear. Thankfully he survived this traumatic injury and he has the facial scars to prove it. He does, however, suffer from some hearing loss, so when he speaks, at times, he speaks very loudly and very colorfully. I would have loved for you all to have heard from his recollections about his commanding officer from Essex Fells. Sergeant Nettles is also an American warrior of the first order and another beautiful face of Memorial Day.

And so my dear friends, with this Memorial Day, let us remember, revere, and respect our fallen heroes, as well as the loved ones they have left behind as we give thanks to them all as Americans.

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In a drizzling rain on November 17, 1946, the Borough of Essex Fells conducted its first ceremony remembering its war dead. An honor guard stood at attention while thirty veterans in uniform flanked the group. More than 100 people attended the ceremony. Then Mayor Holton told the gathering:

“The citizens of our community have gathered here to dedicate the tablets which you see to the members of your respective families who gave their lives ... We want you to feel by its very simplicity our ceremony is intensely personal and respectful.”

Mayor Holton continued:

“From our little community, [many] individuals left in the various services of our country. Why it was ordained that [these] individuals should not return we do not know – But what we do know [is that each soldier] answered the call because they believed it was their duty. In their own thoughts nothing less would have satisfied them.”

He concluded:

“We want the families of these men to whom we make this dedication to realize that the citizens of this Borough honor and respect them for the sacrifice each of them has made.”

Today, we again honor, respect and remember our fallen soldiers:

David James Stanley  
United States Maritime Service  
Lost at Sea  
June 1, 1943

2d Lieutenant N. Austin Hanau, Jr.  
Air Corps, Army of the United States  
Died in Action  
June 1, 1944

Commander John Kremer, Jr.  
United States Naval Reserve  
Died in Action  
December 30, 1944

1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant William B. Bell  
Ranger 75<sup>th</sup> Infantry – Airborne  
Died in Action – Vietnam  
March 27, 1969 and

Second Lieutenant Robert H. Crum, Jr.  
United States Army  
Died in Action – Republic of Vietnam  
May 22, 1966

We remember that these men are our heroes of freedom. These young soldiers and airmen, who were actually just boys when they served our country in its time of need, paid the supreme sacrifice by giving up their tomorrows so we could have our todays. And all that they would ask of us is to remember them and to remember that the cost of liberty and freedom is very dear.

General George Patton wrote that “Wars may be fought with weapons, but they are won by men. It is the spirit of the men ... that gains the victory.”

Where do we get such men? We get them from the bustling streets of our cities, we get them from the great plains of the mid-west, we get them from the farms of the South, from the bayous, and from the Rocky Mountains, and we get them from small towns and villages, and we get them from places like Essex Fells.

On this day, I can't help but think that in their last moments of their lives, each of these four men thought of their families and of their home. As any veteran will tell you, one's home is what anchors a soldier regardless of what horrors of war he experiences. Home is his connection to a saner, peaceful existence. Home is his focal point and his sanctuary, and for these boys, home is Essex Fells and Essex Fells still remains, their home.

I can think of no greater tribute to our five fallen soldiers and airmen than to once again call forward our Borough's veterans and to thank them and let them know how proud we are of them for their sacrifice, courage and devotion to our country. Their service to our county back then, and their presence here today, reminds us that duty, honor and country are very real ideals held sacred in Essex Fells. Please hold your applause and appreciation until the last soldier joins the ranks with his comrades as each comes forward and identifies himself, branch of service and years of service.

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Ladies and Gentlemen – I am proud and honored to present to you, the men and woman of Essex Fells who have honorably and proudly served their country. These are our veterans, these are our heroes, and each have our thanks and appreciation.

Each year at this ceremony, I read a letter that is considered one of the most beautifully ever composed. It was written to a Mrs. Bixby in Boston:

Dear Madam:

I have been shown in the files of the War Department a statement of the Adjunct General of Massachusetts that you are the mother of five sons who have died gloriously on the field of battle. I feel how weak and fruitless must be any words of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering to you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the Republic they had died to save. I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom.

Yours very sincerely and respectfully,

## Abraham Lincoln

Like Mrs. Bixby, Essex Fells lost five sons on the field of battle: Robert H. Crum, Jr., John Kremer, Jr., David James Stanley, William Brent Bell, and Nathaniel Austin Hanau, Jr. Each died gloriously and are laid upon the altar of freedom. Each displayed great courage, love of country, and steadfast dedication. They made the supreme sacrifice for us, for our Borough, and for our country. Nothing can compensate the families of these brave men for the tragic loss they suffered; but please know that they have the eternal thanks, gratitude, respect, and admiration of all of the citizens of Essex Fells.

Never let a day go by that, as we pass Borough Hall, we do not divert our eyes for a moment to look at this blessed plot, this hallowed ground, and remember the heroes whose names lie here. They went to war and answered our nation's call to liberate and not to conquer. Remember that when they got up that morning, they did not plan to die that day, so allow them dignity in death. You tread lightly there, for we beat the drum slowly for them.

This is a day of remembrance;  
This is a day of reverence; and  
This is a day that belongs to them.

God bless you all, God bless Essex Fells, and God bless these United States.