

The Fayetteville Observer

Army's top general salutes Fayetteville

Published on Saturday, February 07, 2009

By Francis X. Gilpin

Staff writer

The Army's top general honored Fayetteville's mayor and other residents Friday for the hospitality Fayetteville shows soldiers at Fort Bragg and airmen at Pope Air Force Base.

Gen. George W. Casey Jr. presented Mayor Tony Chavonne with a Larry Selman print.

"The history of Fayetteville is interwoven with the history of our country's military," Chavonne told a gathering of civilians and military brass at the Army Special Operations Command Memorial Plaza on Fort Bragg.

"War is not a political word here in Fayetteville," said Chavonne, the son of a soldier. "War is where our friends and families go to protect the freedom that our country enjoys. The news of the wounded and the killed aren't merely faces and unfamiliar names. It's different when they're your friends — the ones you play with, shop with, the ones you pray with every day."

Casey, the Army chief of staff, visited Fort Bragg on Friday after national publicity surrounding the city's hosting of Boots and Booties, billed as the world's largest military baby shower, in November at the Crown Center.

"Mayor, those were absolutely wonderful words," said Casey. "It's quite easy to see where the caring in this whole community starts. Thank you for what you do here."

The four-star general presented Army certificates of appreciation to 17 local residents, including the mayor's wife, who helped put on the shower for about 1,000 expectant mothers from military households.

The artwork by Selman, who specializes in military illustrations, depicts the 7th Special Forces Group and the 82nd Airborne Division's Combat Aviation Brigade in combat in eastern Afghanistan in 2007. The units are stationed at Fort Bragg. Their members live in or around Fayetteville.

Casey said he hopes Chavonne will hang the Selman print at City Hall.
Hearing from spouses

The general recalled one of his previous visits to Fort Bragg, where he heard from Army spouses who were growing weary of the multiple deployments of their loved ones to Iraq and Afghanistan.

Casey said those sentiments voiced at Fort Bragg and other installations persuaded him that the Army had to beef up support services for families on the home front.

“We firmly believe the families are the strength of our soldiers, and our soldiers are the strength of our Army,” Casey said. “Fayetteville has always been way ahead of the curve on helping us take care of our soldiers and our families.”

After his prepared remarks, Casey called to the podium his old platoon sergeant from the early 1970s.

Retired Sgt. Maj. Thomas Charo Jr., a Fayetteville resident, shook his head in mild annoyance as he strode up to greet Casey before the dignitaries.

“We know what noncommissioned officers do for their soldiers,” Casey said. “But we don’t often recognize what noncommissioned officers do for their officers. I would not be the officer I am today were it not for staff sergeant — then — Thomas Charo, and what he taught me about leadership and about caring for soldiers.”

After the ceremony, Charo said he has known Casey for more than 30 years. The general is the godfather of Charo’s daughter.

“We’ve gotten real close,” Charo said.

Staff writer Francis X. Gilpin can be reached at gilpinf@fayobserver.com or 323-4848, ext. 372.



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Gen. Casey press conference

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