

CSA emphasizes Army 'Year of the NCO'

Don Kramer, Army News Service

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Newly promoted Sgt. Maj. Terry Dokey and his family react after his daughter applies the new rank while the Chief of Staff of the Army, Gen. George W. Casey Jr., stands by to congratulate him at Fort Lewis, Wash., April 7, 2009. Casey was at Fort Lewis to talk with Soldiers and their families. Photo by D. Myles Cullen.

FORT LEWIS, Wash. - No one on Fort Lewis should be unclear about this year's Army theme, "Year of the NCO," thanks to a recent high-level visit.

Army Chief of Staff Gen. George W. Casey Jr. took time Tuesday in a day filled with meetings to drive home the importance of appreciating the noncommissioned officers of the force.

Casey sent the message by recognizing 10 NCOs in a ceremony at Carey Theater. He presented five awards, promoted four NCOs, and appointed one to command sergeant major -- signaling the importance of the NCO Corps to current wartime operations and training.

The last "Year of the NCO," which recognized the noncommissioned officer corps at another important time in the Army's history, he said, was in 1989 under a predecessor, Gen. Carl E. Vuono. "We had been through 20 years of rebuilding the noncommissioned officer corps after Vietnam," Casey said. "It seemed to us that this was the same type of seminal period."

This year's theme was designed to accomplish three goals, the chief said.

"We set out to recognize (first) what our noncommissioned officers do for this Army every day around the world," Casey said. "Second, we wanted to inform the American people of what a national asset they have."

Whether he speaks to Congress or to the public, the chief said he goes out of his way to highlight the quality and dedication of the NCO Corps. "The last thing we wanted to do was institute a number of programs that will actually enhance the skills we give our noncommissioned officers to succeed in the 21st century security environment," he said. "We'll bring those programs on line over the course of this year."

At a time when the force is strained and stretched with multiple deployments in foreign theaters, the role of the NCO corps has never been more important, Casey said.

"To all noncommissioned officers (who) are present and their families," Casey said, "I would just like to say 'thank you' for what it is that you do for our Army and for our country every day."

The chief arrived at Fort Lewis Monday afternoon for what he called a "periodic visit."

Casey last came to Fort Lewis in November 2008 during the final stages of the I Corps Headquarters Mission Readiness Exercise. He said his trips away from the Pentagon are invaluable to him.

"I try to get out and talk to Soldiers, leaders, and their families just to get my own sense of what's going on here," he said. "Strange as it may seem, you don't always get the straight story in Washington, so it's wonderful just to come out here and see what's going on."

The chief filled his day interacting with and receiving feedback from Soldiers and family members in town-hall question-and-answer sessions. He said his stay on the installation and his interactions with its Soldiers filled him with pride.

"I must say I'm very much impressed with what I'm seeing in talking to Soldiers, leaders, and families around here today and also this morning at PT," Casey said. "The energy that exists out there among the men and women of our Army, exercises under the leadership of their sergeants -- it's a magnificent Army."