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U.S. Army Europe Commander supports children's education program with reading of Berlin Airlift tale

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U.S. Army Europe Public Affairs Office

HEIDELBERG, Germany – Children and parents who participated in a “Tell Me a Story” event at Patrick Henry Village Elementary School here Feb. 1 were treated to a reading by a special guest – Gen. Carter F. Ham, commander of U.S. Army Europe.

Ham, as featured guest reader, read the children's book, *Mercedes and the Chocolate Pilot*, to a gymnasium full of children and families.

Mercedes, written by Margot Theis Raven, takes place during the 15-month Berlin Airlift of 1948-49, during which American and British pilots dropped more than 2.3 million tons of supplies to the western sectors of Berlin that had been blockaded by the

Soviets. The pilot of the book's title is real-life Airlift pilot Lt. Gail Halvorsen, who started what he called “Operation Little Vittles” and began dropping handkerchief parachutes carrying candy to blockaded German children. In Raven's story, Mercedes writes to the “Chocolate Pilot” to ask him to drop candy at her house, and the two become lifelong friends.



SPC FABIAN ORTEGA

Gen. Carter F. Ham, commander of U.S. Army Europe, reads the children's book, “Mercedes and the Chocolate Pilot,” to a group of children at Patrick Henry Village Elementary School in Heidelberg, Germany, Feb. 1.

The full title of the reading program, “Tell Me a Story: Making Connections and Finding Support Through Literature,” reflect its goal of empowering military children by using literature and their own stories to foster resilience, according to officials with the Military Child Education Coalition, the group that sponsored the event. The event also included hands-on learning activities and snacks, and each participating Family received a copy of the book.

“General Ham showed his support for the program by coming out, and it’s great for the kids to see him supporting the program in this way,” said Deanna Anest, lead member of the Heidelberg-Mannheim Parent to Parent team, who coordinated the event. “General Ham did a wonderful job reading to the children, they loved it.”

The general’s reading was followed by a presentation from Lt. Col. Douglas Mastriano, a NATO intelligence officer who spoke to children and Families about the parallels between Raven’s tale and today’s operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Mastriano shared photos and stories about an outreach program in Iraq and described the similarities between Halvorsen and the U.S. and NATO servicemembers who participated in the outreach program.

“We like to tie our stories in with real-world events. It brings a sense of realism to the readings,” said Anest. “Some of the children have parents who have been to Iraq or Afghanistan.”

After Mastriano’s presentation, Ham signed copies of the book for participants.



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