

U.S. Army Europe and 7th Army

contact: paoci@eur.army.mil
phone: 49-6221-57-5815 / DSN 370-5815
fax: 49-6221-57-6376 / DSN 370-6376



RELEASE #2009-02-23-01 *2009: THE YEAR OF THE NCO* February 23, 2009

Diversity takes center stage at Kaiserslautern Black History Month observance

By **Christine June**

U.S. Army Garrison Kaiserslautern Public Affairs Office

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany -- Diversity made a strong showing at the U.S. Army Garrison Kaiserslautern's Black History Month celebration at the Kaiserslautern Community Activities Center on Daenner Kaserne here Feb. 17.



CHRISTINE JUNE

The Band, a group of Kaiserslautern-area military and civilian community members, performs the Black Eyed Peas' "Where is the Love?" at the U.S. Army Garrison Kaiserslautern Black History Month celebration, Feb. 17.

"Best Army in the world, and our one key strength is diversity," said Maj. Gen. Byron Bagby, the U.S. Army Europe chief of staff, in his remarks as the event's guest speaker. "Today our Army is strong because we leverage and draw strength from the rich diversity within our ranks."

During his speech, Pfc. Tanikia Washington, from the 257th Air Missile Defense Detachment on Rhine

Ordnance Barracks, said she looked around the room and saw that diversity right there.

"I saw a lot of people from different ethnic backgrounds. I saw Soldiers, Airmen, Sailors and civilians," said Washington, who said this was the first time she had attended a Black History Month observance. "It was just like what he was saying (in his speech)."

Bagby tied his comments to the 2009 Black History theme, “The Quest for Black Citizenship in the Americas,” by talking about Crispus Attucks, the black man who became the first casualty of the American Revolution when he was shot and killed in 1770 in what became known as the Boston Massacre.

Other historical figures -- the Army’s Buffalo Soldiers, Tuskegee Airmen and Little Rock Nine -- were laced into Bagby’s speech, some crossing over into personal accounts and all relating to strength in diversity.

“Buffalo Soldiers” is the nickname Native American tribes applied to several Army African-American regiments of the late 1800s. The Tuskegee Airmen enlisted during World War II to become America's first black military Airmen. Considered one of the key events in the American civil rights movements, the Little Rock Nine were a group of African-American students enrolled in Little Rock Central High School in 1957.

Bagby said several members of the Tuskegee Airmen and Little Rock Nine were guests at Black History Month observances when Bagby was a commander in the 101st Airborne Division in the late '90s.

“Diversity is about teamwork and many people with different backgrounds, specialties and ethnic groups coming together for a common cause to defend our nation,” said Bagby. “That, to me, is a strength that we should keep on leveraging.”

Music at the event was provided by the Vogelweh Gospel Choir and The Band -- a group of local military and civilian community members who play instruments or sing during their off-duty hours.

The band’s rendition of the Negro National Anthem "Lift Every Voice and Sing," written by James Weldon Johnson in 1890 and also known as the Negro National Anthem, received high praise from Bagby.

“Of all the times I’ve heard the Negro National Anthem performed in the past, this was best rendition,” the general said.

The free event also included a food sampling, with collard greens, black-eyed peas and banana pudding, and displays of books and artwork courtesy of the garrison’s libraries and a local vendor.



www.hqusareur.army.mil