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Army's only black 4-star general speaks on Black History at Bamberg

WARD

By Sgt. Keith M. Anderson
16th SB Public Affairs

BAMBERG, Germany — Gen. William E. Ward, commander, US Africa Command, Stuttgart, Germany, spoke to leaders and Soldiers of the 16th Sustainment Brigade, and others, during a Black History Month observance at the Warner Club here Feb. 14.

“We are here today in acknowledgement of — and to celebrate — this rich diversity and rich culture that is, indeed, America,” Ward said. “And it is something, I think, as a nation we ought to be very proud of. And as a community of people we ought to take into account what it means for others around the world.”

The four-star general, currently the Army's only African-American four-star and leader of a major command, for that matter the only four-star equivalent (O-10) in the entire Department of Defense, said it is important to acknowledge the progress made by minorities, and their contributions to the nation.

“Do you know that in our profession, as we are engaged in conflict and turmoil globally, when it comes to a life-saving measure, blood transfusions, that is now a part of the medical treatment and is now saving lives globally — it is because it was a black man that gave us that technology.”

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The general was referring to Dr. Charles Drew, a pioneer in blood collection and plasma processing, who developed mass production techniques for blood transfusions during World War II, and helped save many lives, according to the American Red Cross.

“By war's end, millions of donations had been received by the Red Cross, donations that made possible the saving of thousands of lives of wounded US servicemen, lives that would have been lost in earlier wars when blood therapy was unknown,” according to the Red Cross website.

Pfc. Brishon Merriweather, property book office clerk, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 16th Special Troops Battalion, 16th SB, appreciated the chance to hear Ward speak on Black History Month.

“Actually I volunteered to help out, hang up coats, but I wanted to hear the general speak,” Merriweather said. “It meant a lot. He’s the only African-American four-star general in the Army and he came to my post.”

Pvt. Shakita Cuffee, ammunition specialist, HHC, 16th STB, said the general’s comments highlighted the importance of the observance.

“I think it is important to celebrate Black History month because a lot of people may not have known a lot of the stuff he was talking about, like African-American contributions to different fields, and the importance of diversity,” Cuffee said.

The Portsmouth, Va., native, who got to meet the general during the reception after the observance, said she thought the Army was doing well in including Soldiers of many different backgrounds into the fold.

“It’s not just white or black, there are many different cultures in the Army,” Cuffee said.

The general also told the story of Lt. Col. Gregory Gadson, an African-American Soldier

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injured in Iraq May 22, 2007, who became an inspiration to the NY Giants.

Gadson, who had served under Ward, and who had played football for Army as a linebacker during the late '80s, had a personal connection to the Giants receiver coach, Mike Sullivan, a former teammate at Army, and had spoke to the team at Sullivan's request.

Gadson, who had to have 70 pints of blood, and two legs amputated after riding over a roadside bomb in Baghdad, first spoke to the team on Sept. 22, 2007, the evening before their third game, against the Washington Redskins, about the importance of not giving up.

Before the talk, the Giants were 0-2 and had allowed Dallas and Green Bay to score a combined 80 points. After the talk, the Giants, along with honorary co-captains Gadson and his son Jalen, finished the regular season 10-6 and went on to win Super Bowl XLII, in which they beat the undefeated New England Patriots 17-14.

Ward summarized his observance remarks with a universal message.

"The universality that individuals, human beings, have value, have worth, is not because they are of a certain hue or color, it's because that in the eyes of God, a man or woman brings to this earth all the goodness that He envisioned, as we each were created," Ward said.

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(Photo by Sgt. Keith M. Anderson)

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Pvt. Shakita Cuffee, ammunition specialist, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 16th Special Troops Battalion, 16th Sustainment Brigade, meets Gen. William E. Ward, commander, US Africa Command, Stuttgart, Germany, during a reception after the Black History Month observance at the Warner Club, Bamberg, Feb. 14. The four-star general, currently the Army's only African-American four-star and leader of a major command,

spoke to leaders and Soldiers of the 16th SB, and others, to celebrate and acknowledge the Army's diversity and contributions by African-Americans.