



Final Salute: Maj. Gen. Castro retires after 33 years

Maj. Gen. Randal R. Castro bid his farewell to the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) and the Army in front of a packed auditorium in the Defense Threat Reduction Center, Fort Belvoir, Va., on July 3, 2008. Despite the holiday weekend, almost 400 people came to the event.

“I’ve been in this auditorium quite a few times, and I don’t ever remember it being as full as it is this morning,” said DTRA Director Dr. James A. Tegnalia in his opening remarks.

Lieutenant General Robert Van Antwerp, the Commanding General of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, presided over the ceremony and opened his remarks with a quotation appropriate for the occasion, “This is a celebration of life today: a life well lived, a family well loved, duty well served and honor well preserved.” Those words seem aptly applied to Castro’s life, personal and professional, both of which were highlighted in his retirement events.

To the untrained eye, the occasion celebrated the end of Castro’s 33-year military career, but the underlying theme seemed to be the most important team in his life: his family. In fact, not only did his military career begin 33 years ago, but so did his marriage to his childhood sweetheart, Judy. It was clear that Castro, possibly best known for his “team of teams” philosophy, cherished this team even more dearly than just his DTRA team, and that fact rang true throughout his retirement festivities.

As the second in a line of three combat engineers, Castro thanked both his father and his son for their service to our country. “Want to know why I’m a combat engineer? Guess!” Castro told the crowd at his retirement ceremony. “My father taught me to be a combat engineer.”

His son Jason, also a combat engineer and captain in the Army, recently returned from a 15-month tour in Iraq, where he led a company assigned to the Improvised Explosive Device route clearance mission. Capt. Castro safely brought each of his soldiers home from their tour.

But that is not to say that the Castro family is unfamiliar with loss— Castro choked up while presenting his mother with a yellow rose in honor of his brother, who was killed in combat.

Even in the face of such loss, Castro’s remarks indicated how highly he thought of the Army.

“Without a doubt, we are the greatest army in the history of the world,” Castro confidently declared.

While serving at Fort Leonard Wood, Castro helped to build a partnership with the Special Olympics, hosting an event in his final year there. “These kids were transformed from kids with really special needs into true champions,” he remembered. “What I learned from that was that if you treat people like winners, they will be winners; if you treat them like champions, they will be.”

Castro, known for his story telling abilities, told the crowd that at the close of the event, one Special Olympics athlete ran up to him and asked him how much it would cost to join the Army. He believes that he and his soldiers had left such an impression on this young man that he would have paid to be part of that camaraderie. Being in the military was worth paying for. It was clear that this story held a lot of meaning for the out-going deputy director. Admittedly, that camaraderie is one of the very reasons that he opted to continue his service year after year.

Castro left with the parting thought that every employee at DTRA helps in the effort to combat weapons of mass destruction. Each member of this team is valuable, from the director to the cleaning crew. He then personally recognized two members of the cleaning crew.

He has described himself as “enamored with people” and his actions throughout his distinguished career clearly demonstrate this fact. “He truly does love his people, and it was just an amazing thing to watch,” said Air Force Maj. Rob Pedersen, his executive officer of two years. “He is the greatest soldier I’ve ever met.”

Castro genuinely had the ability to inspire people to perform to their fullest capabilities, Tegnelia said, reminiscing on the general’s time at DTRA.

“Talent can win a game, but teams win championships, and everywhere you go, everything he’s touched, he’s won championships,” Van Antwerp said of Castro, playing off of the former deputy director’s “team of teams” philosophy.

One of Castro’s favorite moments at DTRA was “being able to go to our test ranges and see where the very first atomic bomb was set off. It just so happens that we did all of the atomic testing, and my dad, when he was a second lieutenant engineer in the Army, was also at the same test site and was one of the soldiers that they had involved in one of these atomic tests. It was neat to be able to be where my dad was when he was sent there.”

When asked about the future of the agency, Castro explained that “the threat is increasing, and as it increases, the importance of DTRA will increase...I think the next threat of terrorism, the use of WMD or CBRN, is significant. It’s certainly greater now than it was before 9/11. And as it increases as a threat, the reliance of this country and the combatant commands on DTRA to help solve that will become greater and greater every single day.”

What does the future have in store for this accomplished general? “I don’t have any specific plans, but I know this: I have loved my time in the Army, and I truly loved every job that I’ve had. And this next part of my life, I’m going to love that too.”

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