

# US Fed News

## STORY TIME - CHILDREN LISTEN, PARTICIPATE, LEARN

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FORT RUCKER, Ala., Feb. 17 -- The U.S. Army issued the following news release:

Children here experienced the post's first "Tell Me a Story" event Feb. 13 thanks to the Military Child Education Coalition and Child, Youth and School Services at The Commons.

Maj. Gen. Anthony G. Crutchfield, U.S. Army Aviation Center of Excellence and Fort Rucker commanding general, read "Mercedes and the Chocolate Pilot: A True Story of the Berlin Airlift" by Margot Theis Raven, to a group of about 40 children and parents while projections of the book's illustrations were displayed behind him.

The book is based on the true story of Lt. **Gail Halvorsen**, a U.S. military fixed-wing pilot during the post-World War II Berlin Airlift, and Mercedes, a young West Berlin girl who lived in Germany during the Russian blockade of 1948.

Halvorsen, without the permission of his superiors, dropped candy tied to tiny, handmade parachutes from his aircraft as he flew over the blocked-off area where Mercedes and many other children lived.

Crutchfield said the story, while different from the wars of today, is still poignant and addresses some issues children of deployed parents today might be dealing with.

"Children today, after 10 years of war, feel some of that same uncertainty (after deployments) and anxiety that Mercedes may have felt," he said. "It's a great story of compassion. It can show children how to be more compassionate about others' feelings."

While the story's subject matter and setting might seem a little complex for younger children, Crutchfield said the reaction he got from the children and parents was exactly what he'd hoped for.

"I thought there had to be some way to translate the story to make it entertaining and easier to understand," he said. "I got them involved with the story by (having them act out certain parts). It was an overwhelming reaction. They really stayed involved in the story."

Kim Crutchfield, the commanding general's wife, helped organize the event. She and John Jennings, School Liaison officer and Youth Education Support Services director, worked together to put the reading together.

"I've organized these things before and, as a former teacher, I was really excited to do it again," Kim said. "We've gotten such a positive reaction from this one, we want to do another. We can do up to three a year."

The date for the next event has not been set, but Jennings said he hopes to have an even bigger venue for the next one.

"After the response we got to the preregistration I was kind of kicking myself for the small venue," he said. "The next time we'll go for something bigger."

Some parents were also impressed with the event and hope more will happen in the future.

"We really liked it," said Kristy McDermed, military spouse, who brought her son Kael, 4. "I have two other children who are younger and it was nice to be able to do something with (Kael)."

McDermed said she thought the story was a great choice for the first event and was happy each Family who attended received a free copy of the book.

"I loved the story and loved that it was about pilots," she said. "My husband is currently in flight school. He's been flying in an aircraft for about seven weeks and it was great to have a story we could all relate to."

For more information on "Tell Me a Story" and other upcoming events, call 255-9812.

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