

Commanding general stresses importance of Hometown News Release Program

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It didn't take the death of his father for the III Corps and Fort Hood commanding general to realize the essence of his dad's love.

But his dad's love confirmed Lt. Gen. Thomas A. Schwartz' own feelings about the value of an often overlooked Army program.

About nine months ago, Schwartz went to his father's safety deposit box not knowing what to expect...who would?

To his complete surprise, he found newspaper clippings which chronicled almost 30 years of military service. Not his old man's service - see, dad only obtained the rank of private first class. Finding himself removed for a moment, Schwartz was taken aback in a private moment.

"I guess what he was trying to say was, 'Hey son ... I was proud of you and proud of all these things you did,'" he said. "'And I'm so proud ... I'm going to keep these in my keepsake safe for all of my life.'"

Certain his father periodically reviewed the safeguarded articles, Schwartz couldn't help thinking, "I didn't know he was doing that. But it just goes to show you the importance of the Army's Hometown News Release Program."

All soldiers have seen "The Form," the DD Form 2266. When promotions or awards come, the form is waiting, ready to be filled in. Often, the form remains ... waiting, with blank spaces, neglected by soldiers who either don't have the time, or don't understand what the program is about.

Schwartz remembers filling out the forms all the time. His father collected articles of his graduation from West

Point, promotions on several occasions, to include brigadier general and his being assigned to Korea.

"Coincidentally, even when I was a young officer and was asked about Home-Towners ... 'Do you want to fill this out and send it home?,' I always felt ... 'Yes, I do.' I always felt positive about the program," Schwartz said.

For that reason, Schwartz wants the program energized and revitalized at Fort Hood.

"We need to do our soldiers a favor and pursue this program, encourage and cajole ... maybe a little bit," he explained, "to do some great stories on our soldiers and share them with America. Maybe in a certain sense, we owe it to them."

To get great stories about Fort Hood soldiers into their hometown newspapers, Schwartz is going to rely on unit commanders and first sergeants.

"First sergeants, senior leaders and officers should understand the Hometown News Release Program a little better because they have the maturity and experience," he explained.

"Leaders at all levels need to capitalize on this opportunity of the Hometown. Tell the story of the great soldiers. When he or she does something that's significant and outstanding, get it on a Hometown ... get it home.

"It's important to remember that the Hometown News Release Program might seem like a little deal to us," Schwartz continued, "but it's probably a big deal to the people back home. Your service to your country — the pride they feel, the pride they share in who you are and what you're doing sometimes doesn't register to us because we take it for granted.

"We're just out here doing the things the Army asks us to do, and serving our country that we're so proud of, but we have the opportunity for an article to appear in the local hometown

newspaper," Schwartz continued, "which, in my case, my promotion and even some things I had done early on in the Army, my father had cut out, unbeknownst to me, and was saving these articles about his son and his progression in the Army and about things that he had done, and put them in a safety deposit box.

"That meant they were special to him ... meaning that the articles I found when my father died were things that meant the most to him. And see, these articles ... now, this makes me feel sad ... but these articles were special to him. It taught me how important Hometowners are number one, but also not to take them for granted (and) number two, that we need to do these kind of things."

With that said, it is easy to see Schwartz feels emotionally about the HTNR program — something few others might be able to feel. "The people back home want to be part of what we're doing because we're so far away, and I think that says something about the Hometown News Release Program," he said.

Anyone who has ever heard Schwartz speak publicly knows about his "Team of Teams" philosophy. Team of Teams definitely has a tie to the HTNR program.

"The Hometown News Release Program helps the people back home understand us a little bit better, but they tie us together as a Team of Teams," he explained.

"See ... when I talk Team of Teams around this post, I'm not just talking about the Army Team. I'm not just talking about the Army and Civilian Team, I'm talking about the Army and the community," he said.

"The community the Army lives in and the community back home — we're a part of all of that, and we need to tell our story about how we feel, and about what we're

doing so that they understand us better back home, and so they feel more connected to us.

“I think that’s another thing about HTNRs ... they allow the people out there who don’t live near an Army post, and the people out there in so many places in America, to be connected to what we’re doing and be proud of us, so, we need to keep that in mind.”

Mentioning the HTNR program to Schwartz causes him to think of his dad.

“Just thinking about talking about this today ... I didn’t really remember the story of my father. But, it was eye-opening, and it really made me very sad. It was about nine months ago, and he was 80. It’s always kind of surprising when you open up something that you didn’t know existed and it has special things in there. So, that meant a lot to me.

“When I opened my father’s

safety deposit box, I felt proud. I really did,” Schwartz recalled. “I felt proud because my service was being captured by my father, and I could feel his pride in me ... in the things that I have done with my life and the sacrifices that we make in the military for our country in the wars we serve in and all the things we do. Well, I guess he was trying to capture that too.”

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