

Dempsey Salutes ThanksUSA Organization

By Claudette Roulo
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, July 12, 2012 – After briefly bursting into song before addressing supporters and scholarship recipients at the ThanksUSA Treasure Our Troops gala held July 11 at the Newseum here, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Army Gen. Martin E.

Dempsey called the event one of the most interesting he attends.



Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, gives the keynote speech at the 2012 ThanksUSA "Treasure Our Troops Gala" at the Newseum in Washington, D.C., July 11, 2012. ThanksUSA is a nonprofit organization that provides two-year, four-year and vocational education scholarships based upon financial need to the children and spouses of active-duty military personnel. DOD photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Sun L. Vega
(Click photo for screen-resolution image); [high-resolution image](#) available.

"I say that because of what it says to America that a ten year old and an eight year old saw a problem and decided to do something about it," Dempsey said.

ThanksUSA is a nonprofit group that distributes need-based scholarships to the children and spouses of active duty U.S. military members, according to the organization's website. ThanksUSA was founded by Kelsi and Rachel Okun in 2006, when they were eight and ten years old, respectively. Since then, the program has awarded 2,500 scholarships totaling almost \$7.5 million.

Dempsey noted that as he started speaking it was early morning in Afghanistan, and many service members deployed there were just

beginning their work day.

"They're part of the armed forces of the United States, doing the nation's bidding, wherever that takes them and regardless of the personal risk and the sacrifices that we ask of them and their families," Dempsey said.

"I'm often asked, 'What holds all this together? How do they persevere year after year and deployment after deployment?' And the answer is actually fairly simple. It all holds together because of trust," he continued. "Soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen trust each other. They trust their leaders. They trust the civilian leaders of our nation. And they trust their fellow citizens. If they didn't, they'd never leave their base camps, they'd never strap themselves into a cockpit, they'd never man the deck of an aircraft carrier, and they'd never descend beneath the waves. Trust is what holds our military family together."

The Okun family embraced the spirit of service, Dempsey said, and in doing so set a powerful example for America.

Dempsey cited the example of Army Gen. Omar Bradley, who on July 11, 1944, created the plan that allowed Allied troops to push forward out of Normandy and advance into Europe.

“On June 6th, 1944, we conducted the Normandy invasion. We seized the beachhead, but then, frankly, we bogged down a little bit because the terrain was extraordinarily difficult,” Dempsey said. “But ... today in history, that many years ago, Omar Bradley created and designed his breakout plan.”

“Several years ago, seeing the challenges faced by servicemen and women and their families serving during this extended conflict, Rachel and Kelsi had a breakout moment of their own,” he continued. “They founded ThanksUSA. ... They’ve strengthened the bond of trust between America and its military, and for that we are deeply, deeply grateful and enormously proud.”

Returning to the events of Normandy, Dempsey paraphrased a piece from the Columbus Star newspaper in 1944.

“‘Today is a fitting day to ask ourselves, am I doing enough?’ If I met a man who was there at Normandy today, could I look him squarely in the face and say I did my share? Well, let me tell you, ThanksUSA and those honored here tonight can answer that question with a resounding yes,” Dempsey said.

Noting his reputation for singing at public events, Dempsey wrapped up his comments by inviting Rachel and Kelsi to join him onstage to sing “God Bless America.”

“If you know the song, you should join in, and if you don’t, you should be ashamed of yourself,” he added.

Biographies:

[Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey](#)

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Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, center, poses for a picture with Shandiin Sam, right, a ThanksUSA scholarship recipient from Arizona, and her mother, left, July 11, 2012, during the ThanksUSA "Treasure Our Troops Gala" at the Newseum in Washington, D.C. The nonprofit organization provides scholarships based upon financial need to the children and spouses of active-duty military personnel. DOD photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Sun L. Vega.

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