

‘Chaos’ calls for civility: Mattis speaks at DBU

September 27, 2019

DALLAS—His call sign is Chaos but Gen. James Mattis is calling for civility.

Mattis, former U.S. Secretary of Defense, spoke at Dallas Baptist University about his new book, the need for leadership and the importance of civility in today’s culture.

“We need more friendliness in this country,” Mattis said.

Working in conjunction with the DMA Arts and Letters Live Series and the World Affairs Council of Dallas/Fort Worth, DBU’s Institute for Global Engagement presented “An Evening with General Mattis.”

In addition to about 1,500 people who attended, more than 200 ROTC cadets tuned in via livestream. Their training had them in Seagoville, but officials made sure the cadets had an opportunity to hear from a renowned soldier-scholar.

Mattis is traveling the country talking about his new book, *Call Sign Chaos*. Written with Bing West, an author and retired Marine, the book highlights Mattis’ four decades of service in the Marine Corps.

Basing solutions on a study of history

Chaos, Mattis’ Marine Corps call sign, originated from a cheeky compliment made by his staff. It stands for “Colonel has another outstanding solution.”

Mattis bases his solutions on lessons learned from his study of history.

"The most important 6 inches on the battlefield are between the ears," he said.

He likewise noted, "Life is too short to learn everything on your own."

In his book, he writes: "If you haven't read hundreds of books, you are functionally illiterate, and you will be incompetent, because your personal experiences alone aren't broad enough to sustain you. Any commander who claims he is 'too busy to read' is going to fill body bags with his troops as he learns the hard way."

In his remarks at DBU, Mattis interspersed references from history and quotes from great thinkers into his personal accounts from the battlefield.

Lessons in leadership

Leadership means "reaching the souls of your troops, instilling a sense of commitment and purpose in the face of challenges so severe that they cannot be put into words," Mattis said.

In his work, he elaborates on this concept, tracing it through areas of direct leadership, executive leadership and strategic leadership. Problem solving is key to leadership, he insisted.

"If you don't like problems, stay out of leadership," he said.

Another key lies in the ability to keep and maintain strong alliances with good friends, he noted.

"Nations with allies thrive, and those without wither," Mattis said. "It is better to have a friend with deep flaws than an adversary with enduring hostility."

That hostility has always been present with enemies, but it is increasingly

becoming a characteristic among citizens, he said. Mattis sees great value in strengthening friendships with allies and maintaining civility with fellow citizens.

He refused to comment on President Trump throughout the night, saying that he was “not going to add any more fuel on the fire.”

“We all know that we’re better than our current politics. Tribalism need not disrupt our experiment,” he said.