

Press Release

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Fort Drum Public Affairs

## Around and About Fort Drum: Mountainfest

FORT DRUM, N.Y. (June 23, 2025) -- Fort Drum's annual party on the hill is but a few days away and before this year's Mountainfest goes into the record books, let's take a look at how it began.

On July 3, 1986, the 10th Mountain Division celebrated what might be considered its first Mountainfest. The event was billed as the Division Organizational Day for Soldiers to recognize the first anniversary since being reactivated at Fort Drum, as well as serving as an Independence Day celebration.

Among the activities was a pass in review, with 2,000 Soldiers participating, and military displays under camouflage netting to showcase the Army's latest equipment. Soldiers competed in a 10K road march, and the division commander, Maj. Gen. William Carpenter, presented the Soldier of the Year award and other unit awards at Wheeler-Sack Army Airfield.

Throughout the afternoon, individual units celebrated with picnics and family-oriented events.

The festivities came at a time when the installation was undergoing a massive \$1 billion construction project transforming it from largely a National Guard and Reserve training post to home for the 10th Mountain Division (LI). Troops were still arriving at Fort Drum in stages (until 1989) as barracks and housing were being built to accommodate thousands of new community members in the tri-county area.

The following year coincided again with July 4th festivities at Fort Drum, so it included the same combination of military and family-friendly events. It wasn't until 1988 when it officially was recognized as Mountain Fest – closer to what it would become known for, but not quite.

Soldiers began their day with a 12-mile road march, and squad skills tests for the Top Mountain Squad Competition. The division also participated in a pass in review with flag bearers representing each state and territory. Held at Wheeler-Sack Army Airfield, this would later become known as Salute to the Nation.

During the review, volunteers from the Fort Drum community were recognized, and 44 members of the 10th Mountain Division Association – some of the original alpine warriors from World War II – led the pass in review.

By 1989, the Directorate of Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) had a greater presence at Mountainfest festivities. New events included a Versa Climber competition at the recently constructed Physical Conditioning Center. Child and Youth Service staff hosted a family barbecue at the Youth Activities Center. Other events included a table tennis and pool tournament for family members.

Fort Drum was still in its latter construction phase, so the Directorate of Plans, Training, Mobilization and Security added an open house for community members to see the progress being made on post. This included a look at the new barracks and battalion area. People could also visit a community health fair outside the Main Post Exchange, featuring information booths from Fort Drum Medical Department Activity and local hospitals.

The 1990 event expanded even further as MWR organized midway activities, a flea market and health fair. Community members could opt for a post bus tour, while entertainment on Division Hill featured a "Star Search" competition, performances from local school bands and the 10th Mountain Division Band before the fireworks finale. Soldiers competed in skills events throughout the week leading up to a top squad competition.

In 1991, the Salute to the Nation featured an Operation Desert Storm tribute to honor veterans of the Persian Gulf conflict. The event included a mass formation of 8,000 Soldiers, an artillery salute and display of state and territory flags, followed by a demonstration by the Golden Knights parachute team.

In addition to midway activities, attendees were entertained with a high school band concert, a martial arts demonstration and a talent show.

In 1993, Mountainfest kicked off with a 10K and one-mile fun run, followed by a sports tournament. Soldiers also competed in a squad competition, and an orienteering challenge. The 10th Mountain Division performed a concert before the fireworks display concluded the event on July 3.

Among the highlights in 1994 were an arts and crafts fair inside the Nash Boulevard Gymnasium, a flea market, petting zoo, and car and boat show. Other events included a massive military static display across Division Hill, including vehicles, equipment and weapons systems like the Stinger and Vulcan.

Soldiers participated in the Salute to the Nation as flag bearers, while the 10th Mountain Division Band added to the pageantry. Members of the Light Fighters School (today's Mountain Training Group) conducted two rappelling demonstrations.

In 1995, the commanding general joined family members of Pfc. John Magrath, the 10th Mountain Division's first Medal of Honor recipient, for a memorial plaque unveiling during Salute to the Nation.

The Annual Remembrance Ceremony has long served as the first event during Mountainfest

week, as a way for community members to join with Gold Star family members at Memorial Park to honor the sacrifices of fallen Soldiers. The guest speakers for the event have ranged from senior Army leaders, distinguished veterans and Gold Star family members.

Some elements of Mountainfest have held steady over the years – a robust, family-friendly midway, military static displays, Salute to the Nation, and musical entertainment.

Since 2011, the Salute to the Troops Tribute concert has drawn a crowd of thousands to close out Mountainfest. In 2019, attendees witnessed a new attraction – 10th Mountain Division Live. This largescale military demonstration featured the might of ground troops and vehicles combined with aerial support to tell the 10th Mountain Division story from its origins as mountain troopers to the modern-day light infantry.

Due to the COVID pandemic in 2020, Mountainfest was cancelled for the first time as a public event, but 10th Mountain Division Soldiers celebrated with a four-mile run, a Humvee Rodeo, and an aerial sky-diving performance by the Black Daggers.

Fort Drum and 10th Mountain Division (LI) officials conducted the Annual Remembrance Ceremony and the 10th Mountain Division Warrior Legend Hall of Fame ceremony, which honored several individuals whose lives of service greatly impacted the division. The Hall of Fame inductee plaques are hung inside Hays Hall and the 10th Mountain Division and Fort Drum Museum, and includes names such as Pfc. John D. Magrath, Sgt. 1st Class Jared Monti, Command Sgt. Maj. Richard Merritt, Gen. Lloyd Austin, and Lt. Gen. George P. Hays.

The 2022 Mountainfest week recognized some distinguished figures in 10th Mountain Division history with the memorialization of the Soldier Recovery Unit barracks in honor of Robert Dole; the Magrath Sports Complex track and field in honor of Bill Bowerman; and the access control point on Mount Belvedere Boulevard in honor of Col. Michael Plummer.

Mountainfest has grown bigger and better over time, and it seems to always present something new for attendees. No spoilers on what that might be year, that's a story for another time!

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Photo Captions:

When the 10th Mountain Division (LI) reactivated and made Fort Drum its home, Soldiers celebrated their heritage with a division-wide organizational day in 1986. This was largely Soldier-centric but evolved over the years to include more family-friendly, community activities. (Graphic by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)

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