Press Release

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Fort Drum gate memorialization honors service and legacy of a modern 10th Mountain Division patriarch

FORT DRUM, N.Y. (Aug. 29, 2022) -- The Mount Belvedere Gate was officially renamed the Col. Michael Plummer Gate during a memorialization ceremony Aug. 29 among friends, family and colleagues of the late 10th Mountain Division (LI) chief of staff.

Plummer was considered a patriarch of the modern 10th Mountain Division – from shepherding the concept of the Army’s new light infantry division into reality to spearheading the efforts which brought the 10th Mountain Division to the North Country in 1984.

He was born May 11, 1938, in San Francisco, and was a 1960 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Plummer served two tours in Vietnam with the 101st Airborne Division and Military Assistance Command.

He returned to West Point to instruct in the Physical Education Department from June 1968 to 1971, and then he served as assistant secretary to general staff, 8th Army.

In June 1973, Plummer led the XVIII Airborne Corps G-1 Plans staff, and later he served as 3rd Brigade executive officer in the 82nd Airborne Division. He was named 82nd Airborne Division chief of staff in November 1980, and then he moved to the Pentagon as the Department of the Army deputy director for human resources.

Plummer drafted the Light Infantry Division White Paper in 1984 that called for more light infantry units, which was instrumental in the Army’s decision to create a new light infantry force structure. As a member of the Army planning cell at Fort Gilliam, Georgia, Plummer worked to find a home base for a new light infantry division capable of mountain warfare. His reconnaissance led him to Fort Drum.

By the end of 1984, Plummer would move here as the first chief of staff for the 10th Mountain Division, which was reactivated on Feb. 3, 1985. Plummer’s invaluable experience and leadership contributed to the organization of the new division and in the $1 billion construction project.

Plummer also served as the first “Commando” brigade commander, when he was reassigned to Fort Benning, Georgia, to lead 2nd Brigade from October 1985 to April 1988. He would oversee the training and movement of the new brigade to Fort Drum.

He was assigned as assistant division commander of support for the 10th Mountain Division (LI) from August 1988 until his retirement in June 1990. A month later, Plummer was recalled to active duty and served a second time as division chief of staff until he retired, again, in 1991. Over the years, Plummer was credited with being the driving force that integrated the division with the North Country community, and his efforts to serve Soldiers and their families were innumerable.

Col. Scott Wence, 2nd Brigade Combat Team commander and current Commando 6 spoke about the original Commando 6 at the memorialization ceremony.

“Legends are easy to talk about because their actions do the talking for them,” he said.

Wence was a newly commissioned second lieutenant at his first duty station when he met Plummer in 1999.

“Everybody knew Mike Plummer,” he said. “It was clear that he was the driving force in the integration of this division.”

Wence said it was easy to learn from Plummer, but the one thing he didn’t agree with him on was how to approach retirement.

“I think the colonel and I have a different view on what retirement is,” he said. “Col. Plummer retired, but he didn’t slow down one bit. As a civilian, he would essentially work harder than when he was in uniform.”

He played a pivotal role as president of Future Visions International, a consulting, strategic planning and leadership development company, to create mutual understanding and respect between Fort Drum and the neighboring communities. His company was instrumental in developing the strategic plan for the Fort Drum Regional Liaison Organization (FDRLO), and he participated in campaigns to keep the installation off the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) list.

Between 1992 and 2013, Plummer served at different times as president, chairman of the board and executive director of the National Association of the 10th Mountain Division, as well as president of the association’s Fort Drum chapter from 1992-2017.

Through the Association, a 10th Mountain Division Scholarship Fund was established in 2006 to support division Soldiers and family members. A 10th Mountain Division Wounded Warrior Fund also was created. Plummer advocated and oversaw the design of the Heroes Walk at Memorial Park across from Hays Hall, which honors Soldiers who died while deployed with the 10th Mountain Division since its reactivation in 1985. He also was part of the Military Mountaineer Monument committee, and he led the fundraising effort for the 9/11 Memorial in front of Clark Hall.

Among his many proud achievements, Plummer developed and launched the “Adopt a 10th Mountain Platoon” program in 1991. He enlisted support from the surrounding communities and from others around the world to send letters and care packages to deployed, platoon-sized units serving overseas. Through his affiliation with the Association of the United States Army (AUSA), his initiative inspired similar outreach efforts in communities nationwide.

He served two decades as senior adviser to the AUSA National Resolutions Committee, whose mission is to lobby Congress for better Soldier benefits, such as salary, health care and retirement pay. As a member of the Watertown Rotary Club, Plummer was a key partner in establishing a Purple Heart Scholarship Fund in 2004, that has provided $3,000 scholarships to local Purple Heart recipients and their immediate family members.

Plummer received the Newman’s Own Award in 2001 for creative military quality of life improvements. In 2006, he was named Fort Drum Man of the Mountain, and he was among the inaugural inductees in the 10th Mountain Warrior Legends Hall of Fame in 2020.

Regarding his thoughts on community service, Plummer had said: “We are all part of the community. We all benefit from the community. Therefore, we should all contribute to the community.”

In speaking with Plummer’s friends and colleagues, Wence said that the former chief of staff had a passion for accomplishing tasks that inspired and encouraged others to do the same.

“As described by friends, he was larger than life and a one-of-a-kind guy who can’t be replaced,” he said. “So today it is fitting we dedicate this gate in his honor.”

Maj. Gen. (P) Milford H. Beagle Jr., 10th Mountain Division (LI) and Fort Drum commander, said that the memorialization of an installation gate happens only once, and bestowing this recognition to Plummer is an honor for the Fort Drum and North Country communities.

“I count myself fortunate to have seen, to have known and to have witnessed the blessing we call Col. Plummer,” Beagle said. “He made the impossible possible.”

The last time an installation gate was memorialized was in 2014, when the main access gate was named the Lt. Gen. Paul Cerjan Gate to honor another individual who had contributed greatly to the development of the installation.

Beagle said it is often said that the creation of the modern-day division at Fort Drum was realized by a Cerjan, a Plummer and a Carpenter (Maj. Gen. Bill Carpenter).

“I often tell our teammates here that the creators of our modern division had to be pure geniuses,” he said. “And the person it took to synchronize that team had to have the intellect of Einstein, he had to have the patience of Job and he absolutely had the vision of Gandhi. That person was Col. Mike Plummer.”

Photos to support this story can be found at:

https://www.dvidshub.net/news/428261/fort-drum-gate-memorialization-honors-service-and-legacy-modern-10th-mountain-division-patriarch

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