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Salute to the Nation, live demo showcase 10th Mountain Division pride

FORT DRUM, N.Y.  – The Fort Drum and North Country communities got a sample of the sights and sounds of 10th Mountain Division (LI) Soldiers, artillery, aircraft and vehicles in action Sept. 1 during a live demonstration on Division Hill.

The 30-minute demo traced the history of the 10th Mountain Division from its origin as an elite mountain warfare unit to its current capabilities. Attendees watched ground forces clear an objective, followed by an air assault and artillery attack.

Spc. Aaron Shield, with B Company, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, was among the Soldiers representing the mountaineer troops on the field.

“I think it is good that we can show our community and our Soldiers where we came from and how the 10th Mountain Division started,” he said. “It’s fun, and we’re all happy to do this.”

Afterward, the Salute to the Nation ceremony presented a roll call of the 50 state and six territory flags in the order they joined the union.

Pfc. Austin Parks and Spc. Amanda Fowler, both with D Company, 7th Brigade Engineer Battalion, 1st Brigade Combat Team, represented their home states – Kansas and Oregon, respectively – during the ceremony.

“Participating in Salute to the Nation is really an honor, not only because I’m carrying my own state flag, but also to show that I’m proud to be part of this nation and proud to serve it,” Parks said.

“To me, this ceremony symbolizes that we are all from different areas but we all come together for one fight,” Fowler said. “It also reminds me of my home, and why I do what I do.”

This is her first year attending Mountainfest, and Fowler said that she is excited to attend the evening’s Salute to the Troops Tribute Concert.

“I haven’t been to a concert in two or three years, so it will be fun to get out with my family and everybody around,” she said.

Maj. Gen. Milford H. Beagle Jr., 10th Mountain Division (LI) and Fort Drum commander, thanked community members for attending the ceremony.

“All of you are here today because of what is great about our nation, and that is all of you,” he said. “You all represent why we serve. We witnessed some complex realities in the past few years and the past few weeks. Just to name a few: a global pandemic that remains persistent, (and) the loss of life – our most precious resource, our sons and daughters – as recent as last week in Afghanistan, despite 20-plus years of blood, sweat and tears. We should be grateful for where we work, where we live and where we play.”

Events preceding Mountainfest included the Annual Remembrance Ceremony, honoring the sacrifice of 10th Mountain Division Soldiers who died in service while deployed; a rededication ceremony at Atkins Functional Fitness Facility; the Mountain Warrior Legend Hall of Fame induction ceremony; and a Silver Star award ceremony.

“We come together not only to celebrate with our community and our teammates, but to remind us of our purpose,” Beagle said, “and remember those we have lost in the pursuit of our duties at home and abroad. We did not forget that this week. We have many of our Gold Star families with us this week, so think about the sacrifices that their loved ones have made over 20-plus years of war and beyond.”

The sounds of aircraft flying overhead and the howitzers firing rounds heard during the live demonstration are familiar to community members during training exercises.

“The noises that we make during training are the sounds of freedom,” Beagle said. “You heard some of those sounds today. The training we conduct is to ensure we remain ready for whatever our nation calls us to do, whenever our nation calls us to do it. When we deploy, we fulfill our obligation to our nation, which is to fight and win our nation’s wars. Our community and our nation will never ask us if we are ready. They will expect it. And that’s what we do in the 10th Mountain Division.”

Beagle said that the 10th Mountain Division (LI) is blessed to serve in the North Country and to call it home.

“When we are here, this is our home,” he said, “because of our community, because of the division and because of the people in it. That’s what makes the 10th Mountain Division special. I know that I speak for many others when I say that the feeling you get when you live in the North Country makes you feel at home regardless of where you call home.”

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