Media Advisory

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Fort Drum Public Affairs

Fort Drum community members join Gold Star families at Annual Remembrance Ceremony

FORT DRUM, N.Y. (June 18, 2024) -- Fort Drum community members joined Gold Star families to honor the life and legacy of loved ones who died in military service to the nation, during the Annual Remembrance Ceremony on June 17 in Memorial Park.

“We are so incredibly grateful to our Gold Star family members for joining us today,” said Maj. Gen. Scott Naumann, 10th Mountain Division (LI) and Fort Drum commander. “It is a true gift to hear them speak the names of our fallen with pride, to share stories – because it really does connect us to our heritage and it inspires us moving forward.”

Memorial Park serves as a testament to the courage and selfless service of 10th Mountain Division (LI) Soldiers across decades of campaigns. There are 23 bronze plaques etched with the names of service members who have died since Hurricane Andrew relief operations in 1992 through Operation Freedom Sentinel in 2021.

“I’ve always felt that in some way our fallen preside over every gathering here in a way that defies an easy explanation but, at the same time, is universally understood,” Naumann said. “We cannot see them, yet they continue to offer the guiding hand we often need. These memorial statues behind me remind us we are not alone in this climb of ours.”

Naumann said this is an occasion to also recognize families throughout the North Country who have lost military members and embrace them into the Fort Drum community.

He noted two training deaths at Fort Drum during the Vietnam War-era, two years apart, but both involving officers from the 174th Tactical Fighter Group in Syracuse.

On Oct. 19, 1972, Air Force Capt. Richard Monson, age 30, was part of a four-plane formation participating in maneuvers over Range 35. They were in the process of regrouping at about 2,000 feet when Monson’s plane nosed toward the ground and crashed.

On Oct. 5, 1974, Air Force Capt. William Havener met the same fate when his A-37B plane crashed on the training range. Havener had flown more than 200 combat missions over two deployments to Vietnam, and he received the Distinguished Flying Cross for his service.

“Occurring well before the 10th Mountain Division was reactivated in its modern form here at Fort Drum, it still seems unfathomable that their stories weren’t among those passed down until they were common knowledge,” Naumann said. “The fact is though, these stories found us when we weren’t even looking. In fact, we were caught off a bit when a Gold Star family member first reached out last summer to see where his father died on Fort Drum when his plane crashed.”

That Gold Star family member was Bill Havener Jr., son of the late William Havener, who was escorted by Fort Drum Range Branch and U.S. Air Force personnel to the training area last July.

“It occurred to me after hearing these stories that the scope for this ceremony is bigger than our division alone,” Naumann said. “While 10th Mountain Gold Star families are forever members of our Fort Drum family, this installation is home to an even greater legacy of service, including veterans and Gold Star family members who may have never worn the 10th Mountain patch, but they are also a part of our family, and they remind us why we are so proud to call Fort Drum home.”

As guest speaker, Havener spoke about his father’s journey from being raised on a farm to becoming a fighter pilot. Like many military families, he can remember the stacks of packing boxes preceding the move to a new duty station, and that feeling of never settling at one place long.

But then he shared the moment that only other Gold Star families can relate to, when a military officer and chaplain arrived at the front door to deliver tragic news about their loved ones.

“They called us into the house, and I remember that I did not want to go inside,” he said. “It was like a black hole opened up and snatched my father and took him away. None of us could believe it. Our family clung to each other so we would not be sucked into the abyss.”

Havener spoke about his grief, finding resilience and strength in family and finally, closure. He began collecting family stories and learned more about his father’s history, which he compiled into a booklet.

“He was a great family man,” Havener said. “He loved the outdoors, he loved fishing – he was everyone’s favorite person. Everyone I know in our family says he was their favorite, and it’s very difficult for them to talk about him. It brings up a lot of emotions about how his life ended.”

Then he made formal inquiries through every means available about his father’s training accident, which led to his visit on post.

“It wasn’t until this last year when I really understood how the accident happened and understood the process that the Air Force Safety Center goes through to protect all of their pilots,” he said. “They use the information gathered during mishaps to protect everyone.”

During the site visit, a chaplain led them in prayer, read a poem that Havener wrote, and they shared what he called a genuinely moving experience.

“When we went out to the site where the accident happened, I really felt my father was there with us,” Havener said. “He’s been with us all along, but I think he was especially present with us when we were there.”

A few years ago, Havener and his wife attended an Amy Grant concert in Syracuse when the performer asked first responders, military members, and veterans to stand and be recognized. Then she asked for Gold Star family members to stand.

“I had never really thought of myself as a Gold Star family member,” he said. “My wife touched my hand and said, ‘Stand up, Bill. This is for you.’”

Perhaps not as loud as that concert, but equally meaningful, Havener received a second round of applause during the Annual Remembrance Ceremony.

“I’m very happy that the 10th Mountain Division has welcomed us into their family,” he said. “They honored my father as much as any other who lost their lives in service.”

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For further information regarding this release, email [katherine.e.wright12.civ@army.mil](mailto:katherine.e.wright12.civ@army.mil)

Photo Captions:

2024 Annual Remembrance Ceremony\_02 - Bill Havener Jr., son of the late Air Force Capt. William Havener, addresses the audience during the Annual Remembrance Ceremony on June 17 in Memorial Park. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)

2024 Annual Remembrance Ceremony\_04 – Soldiers from across the 10th Mountain Division (LI) lays wreaths in front of the bronze plaques during the Annual Remembrance Ceremony on June 17 in Memorial Park. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)

2024 Annual Remembrance Ceremony\_08 - A Gold Star flag is flown with the American flag outside Hays Hall on June 17, in recognition of the Gold Star family members in attendance during Mountainfest week and the Annual Remembrance Ceremony in Memorial Park. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)