Press Release

Release Nr:  2306-06

June 20, 2023

Fort Drum Public Affairs

Fort Drum community members, Gold Star families honor the 10th Mountain Division fallen during Annual Remembrance Ceremony

FORT DRUM, N.Y. -- Community members, Gold Star families and invited guests gathered in Fort Drum’s Memorial Park on June 20 for the Annual Remembrance Ceremony to honor fallen 10th Mountain Division (LI) Soldiers.

“It is and always will be our sacred duty to honor our fallen,” said Maj. Gen. Gregory Anderson, 10th Mountain Division (LI) and Fort Drum commander. “It is fundamental to who we are, and if we fail to perform this hallowed obligation, we will lose our way.”

Anderson met with Gold Star family members during a breakfast in their honor, and he said their presence gives greater meaning to the solemn tribute to 10th Mountain Division’s heroes.

“You have my heartfelt respect and gratitude for coming up here to help us remember your loved ones and what they mean to all of us today,” he said. “We cannot repay you, but your presence today helps to keep your loved ones alive in our hearts so we can reflect on what matters in life and what matters in the profession of service to others.”

During the ceremony, Anderson and Command Sgt. Maj. Nema Mobarakzadeh, 10th Mountain Division (LI) and Fort Drum senior enlisted adviser, placed a large wreath in front of the Military Mountaineers Monument. Other wreaths were placed by Soldiers in front of the bronze plaques that list the names of 10th Mountain Division and Fort Drum Soldiers who died in support of military operations around the world.

“We cannot repay the debts we owe to our fallen, but we can uphold their selfless sacrifice, remember them, care for their families and commit to our teammates and families to build the same love for the people around us here today that our fallen clearly had for the people in their lives,” Anderson said.

Retired Chaplain (Maj.) Jeff Struecker, a U.S. Army Ranger Hall of Fame inductee who deployed more than a dozen times overseas in his 22-year career, served as guest speaker during the ceremony.

He spoke about the 1993 operation to capture the Somali warlord Mohamed Farrah Aidid, made famous in the book and subsequent film “Black Hawk Down.” The raid ended in an 18-hour firefight with two Black Hawk helicopters shot down, 18 service members killed, and more than 70 wounded.

Struecker said the scene missing from the film is when the 10th Mountain Division’s 2nd Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment joined the fight.

“The battalion sergeant major is right in front of me, and he gathers his NCOs around and tells them what is being asked of them,” he said. “I listened to this sergeant major as he prepared his men to go out into the city streets, and fight and die right next to us. He said, ‘Men, those are Americans out there, and whatever it costs us, we’re going to get to them and we’re going to get them out of there.’”

Struecker said he was seated in a Humvee behind the 2-14th Infantry convoy all night long.

“And I spent all night long thinking about the 2-14 warriors in that battalion, in front of me,” he said. “They didn’t have the ammo I had, the training, the weapons, and the equipment I had, but they stood on that battlefield and fought with us all night long to bring us back. And the reason I am standing here before you today is to say I would not be alive if it was not for this division and the 2-14th Battalion.”

Struecker called a fellow Ranger, Keni Thomas, who also served during the Battle of Mogadishu. Thomas spoke of the battle that lasted throughout the night and into the day, as the Rangers fought their way out of the city. The task force had 135 Rangers on the ground, and 78 were wounded and 18 dead by nightfall.

“There’s only about 30 of us left to fight,” Thomas said. “But the guys in the vehicles kept coming and we needed – we counted on – the 10th Mountain guys. At 4 a.m., I was part of the link-up team and I go up to the first vehicle and a young guy jumps out. He’s a PFC (private first class) and I knew he wasn’t one of us.”

Thomas asked who this Soldier who was, and the 10th Mountain Division Soldier told him, “Hey, sir, I’m just a mechanic.”

“I looked at him, and said, ‘Hey buddy, you’re the guy that just came through that firefight that I’ve been listening to for 12 hours. Your weapon looks like you’ve been using it. Yeah, buddy, I don’t think you’re just a mechanic anymore. I think what you are is an American Soldier, and right now you are my hero. Let’s go.”

Thomas worked with the 2-14th Infantry Soldiers loading up the wounded on the vehicles. With no room left in the armored convoy, dozens of Rangers, Delta Force and 10th Mountain Division (LI) Soldiers ran roughly a mile to the rally point outside the city.

“For those of us who made it out, we will forever be thankful to those folks on the vehicles, because I could not have gotten my buddies out of there,” he said. “There’s a lot of things I could not have done without you all.”

For the many Soldiers attending the Annual Remembrance Ceremony, Thomas said he hoped they will remember one lesson from his story. He said no one is “just a,” referring to the young Soldier who once said he was just a mechanic.

“Stop selling yourself short and hold your head up high knowing you are an American Soldier, and you are the might that this country stakes its freedom upon,” Thomas said.

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Photo Captions:

Annual Remembrance1 - Soldiers from the 10th Mountain Division (LI) place wreaths in front of the bronze plaques that list the names of 10th Mountain Division and Fort Drum Soldiers who died in support of military operations around the world. Fort Drum community members, Gold Star families and invited guests gathered in Memorial Park on June 20 to honor fallen 10th Mountain Division (LI) Soldiers during the Annual Remembrance Ceremony. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)

Annual Remembrance2 - Maj. Gen. Gregory Anderson, 10th Mountain Division (LI) and Fort Drum commander, and Command Sgt. Maj. Nema Mobarakzadeh, 10th Mountain Division (LI) and Fort Drum senior enlisted adviser, place a wreath in front of the Military Mountaineers Monument during the Annual Remembrance Ceremony on June 20 in Memorial Park. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)

Annual Remembrance3 - Fort Drum community members, Gold Star families and invited guests gathered in Memorial Park on June 20 to honor fallen 10th Mountain Division (LI) Soldiers during the Annual Remembrance Ceremony. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)