Press Release

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10th Mountain Division returns to its roots: Building teams, reclaiming mountain, alpine capabilities

FORT DRUM, N.Y. -- Military leaders know that some lessons can’t be taught but must be gleaned from the dirt that once held the shape of combat boots, covered the fallen, and stained the brows of those fighting their way forward.

An Army staff ride, by definition, serves as an opportunity to learn those “boots-on-the-ground” lessons.

When Maj. Gen. Gregory Anderson, 10th Mountain Division (LI) commander, assembled members of his division staff for a battlefield staff ride in Italy, Aug. 1-3, they walked the same terrain and climbed the same mountain routes as the original Mountain Soldiers during World War II. They honored the sacrifices made and drew inspiration from the ingenuity and adaptability demonstrated in combat.

But they also spoke of a greater purpose.

“We are tying into our history on the very ground where it was made,” Anderson said. “And that’s very powerful, and it’s inspiring, because it’s a bridge to where we are now and where we are going. This gives us the strength to move forward as a division as we return to our roots and get back those light infantry, mountaineering, alpine and cold-weather capabilities.”

The division first activated in 1943 as the 10th Light Division (Alpine), and they were quickly heralded as “America’s Ski Troops” with photos of Soldiers on skis gracing magazine covers and newspapers nationwide. Their mountaineering skills and cold-weather survivability training, that proved advantageous on the Italian Apennine Mountains, built their reputation as an unstoppable force in rugged, high-altitude terrain.

When the division reactivated as a light infantry unit in 1985, it was designed to meet a range of worldwide missions, able to deploy more rapidly than other conventional forces. The modern-day 10th Mountain Division (LI) earned their own reputation – for readiness. Now known as the most deployed division since 9/11 – amassing dozens of deployments over 20 years of combat in Afghanistan and Iraq, in addition to supporting several other named overseas operations – it’s often said, “the sun never sets on the 10th Mountain Division patch.”

As the Army shifts focus to the future fight – large-scale, multi-domain operations with a division-centric approach to defeating its adversaries – Anderson said the 10th Mountain Division is poised to lean into those alpine skill sets that defined them in battle 80 years ago to maintain the high-level of readiness the nation depends on them for.

“We’re getting mountaineering back in our DNA,” he told division staff members during a briefing. “Tough, self-reliant, problem-solving, NCO-led, small unit operations with a focus on field craft, and physical toughness – these are all the things that Soldiers need to develop to do the things they are asked tomorrow and the next day. And you need to visualize, think about it, and we will be discussing that going forward, because I’m going to count on this staff to drive the division toward that goal.”

Anderson said the battlefield staff ride also was an opportunity to connect division staff members who are relatively new in their positions and are currently spread out across the map.

“I had a brand-new division staff come in, with a nearly 100-percent turnover this summer,” he said. “This was an opportunity for them to actually have time to connect and share their own history with each other while learning about the division’s history. The idea was to walk the terrain, hear the stories, learn from each other, and build a team. They will never forget this.”

At the time of the staff ride, Lt. Col. Christopher Urynowicz had only been several weeks into his new position as the 10th Mountain Division G4 assistant chief of staff for sustainment. He had returned from a deployment with 1st Brigade Combat Team while the division staff was deploying to Europe.

“So this is the first time I’m meeting some of the people on division staff,” he said. “You’ve got to take advantage of times like this to make those relationships. And it’s also an opportunity to mentor majors and pass on notes and lessons learned along the way, and for them to educate me on what they’re doing because I’ve never been on division staff before. So, I’m learning from them just as much as they, hopefully, are learning from me.”

Lt. Col. Chad Corbin, 10th Mountain Division G2, said that a lot of what is happening in the world today is not without historical precedent, or as Mark Twain once wrote, “History never repeats itself, but it does often rhyme.”

“You can’t ignore the lessons we’ve learned over time, otherwise you become a dinosaur,” he said. “And you can’t change if you don’t understand what is anchoring you to the past. And if the things that anchor you in the past make sense and are legitimate, you can grow from there.”

Corbin said he was well-versed in division history before participating in the staff ride.

“I had read the history specifically because I wanted to be a part of this organization,” he said. “I spent my entire career as an MI (military intelligence) officer within light infantry and special operations. And my family, we consider ourselves mountaineers. So why not come to a unit that is bringing mountain and alpine back to the 10th Mountain Division?”

Corbin said that most Soldiers won’t have the experience of a battlefield staff ride to draw inspiration from, but the division is finding other ways to instill pride and spark imagination using the history of the division.

“How do you inculcate history? You have to do it from the beginning,” he said. “Like the Powder Keg Patching Ceremony during in-processing and having new Soldiers understand the importance of a symbol.”

Anderson is driving momentum toward an Alpine Warrior Culture for the 10th Mountain, which he defines as developing adaptable, resilient Soldiers who are ready to fight and win in any environment.

“The momentum is happening, and it is in motion as we speak,” he said. “Command Sgt. Maj. (Nema) Mobar has a great plan to develop our NCOs in the mountain expertise that we need, and I’m excited about where it’s going. If we can get our mountain skills back, the light infantry skills just follow through because it’s about toughness, overcoming obstacles, and teamwork.”

Anderson cited training opportunities, such as Arctic Forge 23 in Finland and mountaineering training at the Rio Blanco Mountain School in Chile, that are developing Soldiers’ mountaineering and alpine competencies. The division also will send Soldiers to Bulgaria, Croatia, and Slovenia this year for mountain warfare training courses.

Closer to home, the division is establishing basic and advanced military mountaineering training in the Adirondacks, and the 1st Lt. John McCown Light Fighters School offers an Alpine Operations Course.

“Sometimes you’re in the mountains and you must deal with extreme cold weather,” he said. “Or you have those cold-weather conditions but an entirely different terrain. It’s the ability to overcome and survive.”

“If your own actual survival is part of your daily problem, based on the extremities of the environment, you breed a different Soldier,” he continued. “They learn to survive in environments that would otherwise kill them if they don’t take into account altitude, temperature, precipitation, food, and warmth. It's the ultimate in confidence development, problem-solving and team building. Only teams survive, only experts survive in these environments and where it translates into light infantry operations.”

When it comes to mastering the basic skills of warfighting, Anderson said the challenges that Mountain Soldiers encountered 80 years ago in the Apennine Mountains of Italy are not unlike what the Army faces today.

“It comes down to building teams and building Soldiers,” he said. “You have to build their confidence and build their expertise. Whether you trained at Camp Hale (Colorado) or you are training at Fort Drum or in the Adirondacks, it may be different environments, but the task is the same.”

“The model for building elite, confident, capable, tough infantry is the same, whether it was in World War II or today,” he continued. “Modern technology is not a replacement for tough light infantry. The tools that come out today can only help them and enhance their ability. It doesn't replace the need for what we are training them to do.”

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Additional coverage of the staff ride can be found here: [https://www.army.mil/article/268993/10th\_mountain\_division\_battlefield\_staff\_ride\_in\_italy\_serves\_to\_inspire](https://usg01.safelinks.protection.office365.us/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.army.mil%2Farticle%2F268993%2F10th_mountain_division_battlefield_staff_ride_in_italy_serves_to_inspire&data=05%7C01%7Clisa.r.albrecht.civ%40army.mil%7C883f28aa0ac947bb4f4308db99a8e3a3%7Cfae6d70f954b481192b60530d6f84c43%7C0%7C0%7C638272722876522467%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=EFk%2FfAFh17nhfOQ3qYa8k06uz8rkdRCG14C3Dk4Nvag%3D&reserved=0)

Additional photos from the staff ride can be found on our Flickr page: [10th Mountain Division Battlefield Staff Ride in Italy | Flickr](https://usg01.safelinks.protection.office365.us/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.flickr.com%2Fphotos%2Fdrum10thmountain%2Falbums%2F72177720310343655&data=05%7C01%7Clisa.r.albrecht.civ%40army.mil%7C883f28aa0ac947bb4f4308db99a8e3a3%7Cfae6d70f954b481192b60530d6f84c43%7C0%7C0%7C638272722876522467%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=ZBw4JMFqSNEsNUGbOcxskcBsWEFl3ID2%2F7eb9QjNdKI%3D&reserved=0)

Photos Captions:

10MD Staff Ride 1 - Maj. Gen. Gregory Anderson and Command Sgt. Major Nema Mobar hold the 10th Mountain Division flag following a climb up Riva Ridge during the battlefield staff ride in Italy, Aug. 1-3. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)

10MD Staff Ride 2 - During each stop of the three-day battlefield staff ride in Italy, Maj. Gen. Gregory Anderson, 10th Mountain Division (LI) commander, reinforces his objectives of enhancing the understanding of what Mountain Soldiers endured in combat 80 years ago as the division currently is returning to its roots in light infantry, mountaineering and alpine capabilities. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)

10MD Staff Ride 3 - In 1945, the 10th Mountain Division’s legacy was carved into the North Apennine mountains and across the Po Valley in Italy during World War II. Nearly 80 years later, 10th Mountain Division (LI) leaders traversed the same terrain during a battlefield staff ride, Aug. 1-3. From hiking a steep, narrow route up Riva Ridge, witnessing firsthand the strategic vantage point that Mount Belvedere had to controlling the infamous German defense of the Gothic Line, and standing at the edge of Po River, the group learned how the original Mountain Soldiers demonstrated their mettle in combat through teamwork, ingenuity, and adaptability. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)

For further information regarding this release, contact Fort Drum Public Affairs at 315-772-9043 or [katherine.e.wright12.civ@army.mil](mailto:katherine.e.wright12.civ@army.mil)