Press Release

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Fort Drum Public Affairs

Fort Drum officials name conference room after first 10th Mountain Division Soldier to report for duty

FORT DRUM, N.Y. -- Fort Drum officials and invited guests gathered inside Hays Hall on June 21 to dedicate the command group conference room in honor of an original 10th Mountain Division Soldier.

Charles B. McLane, from Manchester, New Hampshire, was a standout athlete at Dartmouth College where he captained the ski team and was a U.S. Eastern Amateur Ski Association combined winner and Eastern slalom champion.

He also participated in the Pan-American ski races in Chile and helped the American team to bring home a victory.

McLane enlisted in the Army on Nov. 12, 1941, and, as one of the nation’s top skiers, he would be a natural fit for the Army’s new division of mountaineers and ski troopers.

The corporal reported for duty at Fort Lewis, Washington, just after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Wearing his college ski team sweater and carrying a suitcase, pair of skis and his War Department orders, McLane confounded the military police upon his arrival. They never heard of the mountain troops, and neither did the major at Corps Headquarters who made inquiries into McLane’s orders.

After several phone calls, the officer said to McLane: “Lad, you are the Mountain Infantry. You’re a one-man regiment.”

But others would soon follow, and in several weeks the Soldiers became infamous on the pages of The New Yorker introducing them to the nation as “Minnie’s Ski Troops.” McLane, assigned to the 87th Regiment, spent weeks translating skiing prowess into military maneuvers. This meant being able to navigate the slopes with heavy rucksack and rifle in tow.

The 90-pound load the Soldiers suffered on countless maneuvers made its way into a song (“Ninety Pounds of Rucksack”) that became the division’s unofficial anthem. As a member of the 87th Mountain Infantry Glee Club, McLane would regale the troops with that and other popular tunes that made light of their hardships.

McLane attended Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning, Georgia, and returned to the 87th as a second lieutenant. He continued to serve with the 10th Mountain Division at Camp Hale, Colorado, through 1944 and then transferred to the Army’s Psychological Warfare Division. McLane served in Europe as an intelligence officer. In the early 1950s, he served as cultural attaché at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow.

After the war, McLane earned his doctorate in public law and government from Columbia University. He became a professor at Dartmouth College in 1957, where he taught Russian civilization. He and his wife also authored books on the social and economic history of the Maine coast islands. McLane, 88, died in Hanover, New Hampshire, on Feb. 23, 2008.

Command Sgt. Maj. Nema Mobarakzadeh, 10th Mountain Division (LI) and Fort Drum senior enlisted adviser, addressed the audience at the plaque unveiling for the conference room.

“Like so many veterans of our great division, (McLane) lived his life worthy of emulation and recognition,” he said. “There aren’t any units that have a history that rivals ours, and surely there aren’t many that can narrow their roots to a single Soldier. We are fortunate to know our legacy, and we will work every day to honor those who came before us, to include Charles Bancroft McLane.”

McLane’s son, Alec, attended the ceremony honoring his father.

“It’s actually quite an honor for me to be here, and very unexpected,” he said. “The whole thing is very interesting to me because I knew my father served with the 87th and he just called it the ski troops. But I didn’t know it was part of the 10th Mountain Division, and he was there for the beginning of that.”

The conference room features photos, artifacts and storyboard along every wall that helps tell that story and about the people who served in the division.

“My father did love to ski,” McLane said. “And he figured if he was going to join the war effort, he was going to go in as a skier.”

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Photo Captions:

McLane Memorialization\_01 - Alec McLane, son of Charles B. McLane, joins Command Sgt. Maj. Nema Mobarakzadeh, 10th Mountain Division (LI) and Fort Drum senior enlisted adviser, for the unveiling of the plaque outside the Charles Bancroft McLane Conference Room on June 21 inside Hays Hall. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)

McLane Memorialization\_02/03 - The Charles Bancroft McLane Conference Room was named after the first Soldier to report to duty with the 10th Mountain Division at Fort Lewis, Washington, during a memorialization ceremony June 21 inside Hays Hall. Charles B. McLane captained the ski team at Dartmouth College and competed at the Pan-American ski races in Chile before he enlisted in the Army in 1941. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)