Press Release

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Fort Drum Public Affairs

Dole Barracks memorialization at Fort Drum honors late U.S. senator, 10th Mountain Division war veteran

FORT DRUM, N.Y. (Sept. 1, 2022) -- The barracks that houses service members assigned to the Soldier Recovery Unit at Fort Drum was memorialized Aug. 31 in honor of the late Sen. Robert Dole – an original member of the 10th Mountain Division during World War II – at a ceremony outside the facility.

“It is fairly well known, at least among those who are familiar with 10th Mountain Division history, about the impact and significance that Sen. Dole had on the 10th Mountain Division,” said Col. Matthew Mapes, Fort Drum Medical Department Activity commander. “Not only as a Soldier serving in World War II and leading his men in direct combat in Italy, but also as a member of Congress, ensuring the reactivated division would return as the 10th Mountain Division and the division patch would include the Mountain tab.”

Mapes said it was fitting that the unit Dole was assigned to, the 85th Mountain Infantry Regiment, would have a presence at Fort Drum decades later when the Army established Warrior Transition Battalions. The 3rd Battalion, 85th Mountain Infantry Regiment was active on post until July 2020 when it was reflagged as the Fort Drum Soldier Recovery Unit.

Dole, son of Doran and Bina Dole, was born July 22, 1923, and grew up in Russell, Kansas. He studied medicine at the University of Kansas, where he played football and basketball and ran track. The war raging in Europe was little more than newsreels that Dole and his classmates watched before the feature film at the local theater.

In his memoir, “One Soldier’s Story,” Dole wrote that a year after the Pearl Harbor bombing, he was still in school, but barely. It was difficult to concentrate on anything other than the war when so many friends and classmates were enlisting or being drafted. At age 19, Dole decided to enlist in the Army Reserve Corps in 1942, and he took the oath of induction at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas City, in June 1943.

The following month he left for basic training at Camp Barkley, Texas, and for basic training and he was assigned to the Army Medical Corps. In 1944, he completed the Army Specialized Training Program in Brooklyn College, New York, where he studied engineering. Dole was assigned to an anti-tank unit in Camp Polk, Louisiana, and then attended Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning, Georgia. Upon completion, the newly commissioned officer boarded a ship across the Atlantic with orders for Italy. Dole remained at the 24th Replacement Depot outside Rome for more than a month before he was ordered to join the 10th Mountain Division.

Dole wrote: “My commanding officer didn’t tell me much about my assignment, just that the 10th Mountain Division had recently been involved in some intense battles in their successful efforts to take the strategic location of Mount Belvedere, south of Florence.”

The Kansas native had seen only one mountain in his life thus far, and now he was to lead a battle-hardened platoon of mountain troops.

Dole and his troops were situated in the village of Castel d’Aiano, which had been occupied by the Germans for much of the war and was liberated by the Americans on March 4, 1945. Although he listened to his noncommissioned officers and valued their advice, Dole chose to take point during patrols. He wasn’t looking to be a hero, but he believed that leaders should lead from the front.

On March 18, his platoon drew fire during a night patrol, and Dole sustained a leg injury from a grenade fragment. In his memoir, he wrote: “I’ll never know whether that grenade was thrown by me or someone else in our platoon, and it really doesn’t matter. Several other guys and I were injured by the blast, but fortunately, all of us were able to be patched up and put back together.”

A little over a month later, Dole would receive a second Purple Heart for a much graver combat injury when the 85th Regiment launched its portion of the spring offensive to the Po River Valley. On April 14, 1945, Dole and his platoon were moving toward Hill 913, about a mile away from Castel d’Aiano, with orders to secure its summit and eliminate any German resistance along the way. While silently maneuvering into the valley, two of his Soldiers stepped on land mines, after which the Germans let loose a barrage of artillery and machine gun fire on them from a farmhouse.

While shells exploded around them, Dole attempted to pull his radioman – who was either dead or severely wounded – to cover, but then was hit himself by enemy fire in his right shoulder and back.

Dole wrote: “My body responded before my brain had time to process what was happening. As the mortar round, exploding shell or machine gun blast – whatever it was, I’ll never know – ripped into my body, I recoiled, lifted off the ground a bit, twisted in the air, and fell face down in the dirt.”

Unable to feel anything below his neck, Dole went into shock as his Soldiers moved him to cover. Dole managed to assess the situation and crawled back out to see who was dead, wounded or alive. Before losing consciousness, Dole dragged two of his injured comrades out of harm’s way.

After Hill 913 was secured, the dead and wounded were taken off the battlefield. At the 15th Evacuation Hospital, Dole was among 10 division Soldiers requiring emergency operations. Immobilized in a cast from chin to hips, Dole was given a positive prognosis despite the fact that doctors could not determine the extent of his spinal injury.

Dole was still recovering at the evacuation hospital when the war ended, and he was transferred to a larger hospital in Casablanca in May 1945, before returning to the U.S. the next month. He was admitted to Winter General Hospital in Topeka, Kansas, where doctors had to remove his kidney while he lapsed in and out of consciousness from fever.

He lost the use of his right arm, but he slowly regained feeling in his left arm and legs. After three years of recovery and nine operations, Dole was able to walk again.

Dole once confided to a fellow patient and future congressman, Daniel Inouye, that after being medically discharged from the Army, he would graduate law school, become an attorney, run for state legislature and then Congress.

And that is exactly what he did. Dole served in the Kansas House of Representatives before being elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. Then he spent more than a quarter of a century in the U.S. Senate, where he served as chairman of the Senate Finance Committee in the 1980s, and he ran for president three times – winning the nomination in 1996. By the end of his career Dole casted more than 12,000 votes in Congress, and he was instrumental in passing the Americans with Disabilities Act, which provided benefits and services to many veterans and paved the way for future legislation.

With the reactivation of the 10th Mountain Division in 1985, the Army had planned to rename the unit as the “10th Division.” Dole advocated on behalf of World War II veterans who wanted the unit to retain its legacy, as well as the wearing of the mountain tab to honor the division’s origin.

Dole spoke at the reactivation ceremony on Feb. 13, 1985, at Fort Drum, and he recalled the original 10th Mountain Division’s “Climb to Glory.”

“For one who fought in that battle as part of the 10th Mountain, who spilled some of his own blood and a left a bit of himself forever behind, I like to think that no single group played a prouder role in the long campaign that started in Sicily and rolled to its victorious conclusion nearly 600 days later – the prolonged and bloody battle to set Italy free.”

Dole served as honorary co-chair of the committee that brought the Military Mountaineer Monument to Fort Drum. He penned a letter that was read at the dedication ceremony on Oct. 4, 1991, which included the following:

“All of us are proud of the bond that has grown between the veterans of the original 10th and the officers and Soldiers of today’s 10th Mountain Division. It is with pride that we veterans look on the elite group of light infantry that is today’s 10th and we are sure that you will carry on the tradition and accomplishments that have been the proud history of the 10th Mountain Division. This monument joining the World War II mountaineers with the Soldiers of today’s 10th is a fitting tribute to the bond that is our shared history.”

Dole was among the first inductees to the 10th Mountain Warrior Legends Hall of Fame in 2020. In a letter he wrote for the occasion, Dole said:

“Tenth Mountain Division Soldiers are a special breed. Heroes like you help make America the greatest nation on earth. Your selflessness, service and sacrifice will never be forgotten.”

Mapes said that Dole and his wife, Elizabeth, were frequent visitors at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, where they spent time with wounded service members. Before the unveiling of the Dole Barracks plaque, Mapes concluded with a quote from Dole’s autobiography:

“To visit Soldiers who have been injured, or anyone who is dealing with a disability that confines him or her to a hospital bed, can be emotionally draining. But it’s hard to overestimate how important and meaningful such visits can be. Some people avoid visiting someone who is incapacitated because they worry that they won’t know what to say. Truth is, you probably don’t need to say much of anything. You can be a tremendous encouragement to someone just by being there.”

Pictures to support this story can be found here:

www.dvidshub.net/news/428496/dole-barracks-memorialization-fort-drum-honors-late-us-senator-10th-mountain-division-war-veteran

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