Press Release

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Noncommissioned Officer Academy at Fort Drum named after revered 10th Mountain Division senior enlisted adviser

FORT DRUM, N.Y. (Sept. 1, 2022) -- Command Sgt. Maj. (Ret.) Southern W. “Buddy” Hewitt Jr. once said, “There is no better job than leading America’s Soldiers into combat, and especially if you’re able to bring them out of there.”

This was the kind of direct, no-nonsense talk that made him a respected and valued leader in the 10th Mountain Division (LI). And it is the reverence, by so many, for the late senior enlisted adviser that led to the 10th Mountain Division (LI) Noncommissioned Officer Academy being named in Hewitt’s honor during a memorialization ceremony Aug. 31.

Hewitt was born July 20, 1938, to Southern Hewitt Sr. and Susie Baker Hewitt, in Florence, South Carolina. He enlisted in the Army in September 1955 at the age of 17.

During his first tour in Vietnam, Hewitt served as a squad leader with 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division. The unit notably fought in the infamous Battle of Ia Drang Valley, which was memorialized in the book, “We Were Soldiers Once … and Young.” More than 70 American Soldiers died in the fierce three-day battle. Even after being shot and having sustained two serious shrapnel injuries, Hewitt completed two tours in Southeast Asia before returning home.

According to his Silver Star citation, Hewitt distinguished himself while serving as platoon sergeant during a battle near Song Be. When the 3rd Platoon commander was mortally wounded, Hewitt took command and deployed the platoon to defensive positions. He carried two wounded Soldiers across an open field to medical treatment, then continued to lead the platoon. Although seriously wounded himself, Hewitt provided covering fire for personnel to evacuate the wounded. When the aid station was attacked, Hewitt was wounded a second time, forcing him to relinquish command.

Throughout his 35-year career, Hewitt served in multiple units and in all NCO leadership positions from squad leader to division command sergeant major. During his time in service, Hewitt was awarded the Combat Infantryman Badge, Parachutist Badge, Air Assault Badge and Pathfinder Badge, and he received three Bronze Stars, three Purple Hearts and the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry.

Hewitt became part of 10th Mountain Division history when Maj. Gen. William Carpenter selected him to serve as his senior enlisted adviser when the new light infantry division was being activated.

Hewitt had said that he met Carpenter at Fort Gillam, Georgia, and was told: “I’m not sure what the division’s name is yet, I’m not sure where we are going to put it, but I want you for my division sergeant major. And if I have to give you any guidance, I have picked the wrong guy to be the sergeant major.”

The command team arrived at Fort Drum in January 1985 and proceeded to assemble the division from scratch. Some division veterans initially thought that light infantry Soldiers should not wear their mountain patch, but the foundation of excellence set by Carpenter and Hewitt would prove them wrong.

One of Hewitt’s many accomplishments was implementing the annual Whiteface Mountain Run, which united the bonds between original Mountain Soldiers and those serving in the newly activated division.

On July 15, 1986, Hewitt ran in the 126-mile relay from Fort Drum to Whiteface Mountain Ski Center to celebrate the anniversary of the 10th Mountain Division activation in 1943. The Adirondacks resort was dedicated to the 10th Mountain Division when it opened in 1958, and at its summit is a commemorative plaque resting on a piece of stone from Mount Belvedere in Italy.

A year earlier, Hewitt conferred with Col. Mike Plummer, the division’s chief of staff, to create an event that would build a bond between 10th Mountain Division veterans and its current members. He said they approached Carpenter on the idea of a division march to Whiteface Mountain. The commander did not approve the request, but he favored an alternate proposal of having a smaller contingent run an overnight relay to the mountain. Hewitt said that seeing the plaque at the summit after the long trek was an emotional moment for everyone involved.

The following year’s run began with a team of 14 Headquarters and Headquarters Company Soldiers, led by Hewitt, who fashioned a wooden baton with the division crest to pass to the next group of runners. Other units that participated included 2nd Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment; 41st Engineer Battalion and 10th Medical Battalion. They completed the relay in 17 hours.

Each subsequent year, the relay garnered more participation and proved ever-poignant to Hewitt, who was left wondering how a billion-dollar investment in a new Army installation lacked any provision to honor the heritage of the division. This would be the inspiration for the post’s most recognizable monument – the Military Mountaineers Monument – and Hewitt served on the committee to bring it to Fort Drum.

Five years later, Hewitt spoke at the unveiling of the monument on Oct. 4, 1991, which was attended by former and current members of the 10th Mountain Division. With the monument towering behind him, and looking over the large crowd, Hewitt remarked, “This monument standing here today, I feel, is a bond as tight as we’ll ever get between the division today and the division of the past.”

During the NCOA memorialization ceremony, Command Sgt. Maj. Ronald Newman, commandant, said that naming the building after Hewitt ties directly into establishing the identity of the leadership academy.

“How do you establish an identity that creates an irreversible momentum and an insatiable hunger to lead? It must be tied to the right person,” he said. “The person who breaks his ankle while running with a Soldier through the woods, and then beats him to the finish line and responds with, “Is that the best you got?”

Newman said that stories such as that made the choice easy, but it was retired Command Sgt. Maj. Joe McLaughlin, who solidified it.

“He said, ‘Choose, Bud. Buddy’s the right guy,’” Newman said.

McLaughlin, who served as second commandant of the NCOA, recalled his first meeting with Hewitt in 1987 at Fort Drum.

“I had just arrived at the division, and as a platoon sergeant, some of my Soldiers decided to go on a run during physical training,” he said.

Hewitt was always outside during PT hours, and he had an encounter with McLaughlin’s Soldiers.

“When they came back, they said, ‘Hey, Sgt. Mac, a Soldier just chewed us out for being out of formation and out of uniform,” McLaughlin said. “I said, ‘Don’t worry about it, if it was somebody important I will probably hear about it sooner or later.’ Well, it was sooner rather than later.”

Suffice it to say, McLaughlin got an earful from the division’s senior enlisted adviser.

“It’s obvious that Hewitt was a ‘Soldier’s Soldier,’ he had high standards and he was a warrior in combat,” he said.

McLaughlin said that Hewitt’s legacy will serve to inspire and educate the thousands of Soldiers who graduate from the NCOA.

“I’m sure that CSM Hewitt is looking down at this ceremony here at Fort Drum – the home of his beloved 10th Mountain Division – with his family here to witness this historic event,” he said. “With a smile on his face and very proud to say to all future NCOs attending this academy, ‘Is that all you got?’”

Pictures to support this story can be found here:

www.dvidshub.net/news/428486/noncommissioned-officer-academy-fort-drum-named-after-revered-10th-mountain-division-senior-enlisted-adviser

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