Media Advisory

Release No: 2406-05

June 18, 2024

Fort Drum Public Affairs

Italian miniseries premieres at Fort Drum, honors 10th Mountain Division’s WWII history

FORT DRUM, N.Y. (June 18, 2024) -- Fort Drum Soldiers and community members packed the Multipurpose Auditorium theater June 17 to watch the U.S. premiere of the Italian miniseries “Mountainmen: Gothic Line 1945.”

Set in the Apennine Mountains in Italy where the 10th Mountain Division fought during World War II, the three-part series recounts the experiences of a group of Soldiers – documented through the personal memories of living veterans.

Andrea Gandolfi, founder and deputy director of the Memorie d’Italia Museum, in Iola, Italy, helped to produce the series with his brother Guiliano.

“For all of us, it is a crowning achievement of a job done with passion,” he told the audience. “The miniseries is the first film produced by Italians concerning the 10th Mountain Division in the Italian theater during the Second World War. The goal is to pass on the memories and honor the Soldiers who have fought and who have lost their lives to free Italy from the Nazis.”

Last August, Andrea Gandolfi welcomed former division commander Maj. Gen. Gregory Anderson and members of his staff at the Iola museum, where he spoke about the miniseries.

Gandolfi said years of research went into the making of the miniseries, including interviews with World War II veterans that appear in the final episode. It was filmed in 45 days, with more than 80 actors and 20 support staff, at locations where actual battles were fought in the provinces of Modena and Pistoia, among others.

An early scene in the miniseries shows the camaraderie among Soldiers from G Company, 85th Mountain Infantry Regiment, as they share a meal and sing “90 Pounds of Rucksack.” The audience learns about this “band of brothers” through the eyes, and narration, of Edward Nickerson – the last Soldier to see Pfc. John Magrath alive.

The heroics of Magrath, the 10th Mountain Division’s first Medal of Honor recipient, is depicted on film as he cleared one enemy machine-gun nest after another in a daring solo run on Hill 909. Sent to retrieve Magrath for radio duties, Nickerson was greeted by the 20-year-old Connecticut native with an enthusiastic: “I’ve been having fun!”

Director Luciano La Valle said that when he began his research in 2016, he was immediately drawn to Magrath’s story. He decided to focus on that particular company of Soldiers for his script.

“It was very important to get in touch with the veterans,” he said. “Of Company G, only two remain. They both gave me incredible help, because they explained everything. We learned something new every time that we go forward with our research.

“But one thing that we wanted to understand is the brotherhood that these men had,” La Valle continued. “Not only in this period of the war, but also after. And this was incredible. And I’m sure that it is the same kind of brotherhood that every one of you have. I’m sure.”

Maj. Gen. Scott Naumann, 10th Mountain Division (LI) and Fort Drum commander, thanked Gandolfi and La Valle for their contributions to preserve 10th Mountain Division history.

“I’ve always thought that in order to be prepared for the future, you’ve got to be connected to your past,” he said. “I was just struck by the accuracy, the attention to detail, and the passion that went into this. I mean, those weren’t props. Those were actual pieces of our uniform, our kit, and our equipment that were used in World War II. It’s just phenomenal.”

Naumann noted the accuracy in the scene where Magrath changed the barrel on the German machine gun, and the interactions between Soldiers in foxholes.

“You captured so well those moments of, frankly, boredom that are punctuated by high-intensity combat,” he said. “You captured it all so well. Thank you for celebrating our story, which is your story, so well.”

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Photo Captions:

Mountainmen –

Andrea Gandolfi, executive producer of “Mountainmen: Gothic Line 1945” addresses the audience inside the Multipurpose Auditorium before the U.S. premiere of the Italian miniseries June 17 at Fort Drum. Gandolfi is also founder and deputy director of the Memorie d’Italia Museum, in Iola, Italy, where he met former division commander, Maj. Gen. Gregory Anderson, last August and spoke about the miniseries. (Photo by Capt. Eric-James Estrada, 27th Public Affairs Detachment)