Press Release

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10th Mountain Division patching ceremony instills sense of pride, history in Soldiers

FORT DRUM, N.Y. -- A new way of welcoming Soldiers to the 10th Mountain Division (LI) and Fort Drum began Jan. 18 with a formal “Powder Keg” Patching Ceremony at the Command Sgt. Maj. Southern “Buddy” Hewitt Noncommissioned Officer Academy.

More than 120 Soldiers received the Mountain patch and tab from their respective brigade or tenant unit command teams. The ceremony also introduced Soldiers to 10th Mountain Division history and the origin of the patch.

Master Sgt. Daniel Fields, NCOA deputy commandant, said it was an honor to host the first patching ceremony at the academy and to welcome the newest members of the division.

“I think that this division has the most unique history in the Army,” he said. “And it’s because we are unlike any other division in the Army and our history is unlike any other, but also so clearly focused on preparing for what our missions on the horizon could be, it is important our Soldiers are received in such a way that they know from their first day what it means to wear the patch and be a part of this division.”

During the ceremony, Fields said that the original division Soldiers adopted an unofficial patch called the “Pando Commando” while training at Camp Hale, Colorado. It depicted a panda bear skiing down a slope with a rifle slung over its shoulder. The Institute of Heraldry rejected it for being too cartoonish.

On Nov. 6, 1944, the division was re-designated the 10th Mountain Division. Only then were the Soldiers authorized to wear the Mountain tab and the now iconic shoulder sleeve insignia. The “powder keg” patch features a base in the shape of a gunpowder keg to highlight the explosive power of the division. The crossed bayonets signify the primary Infantry role of the division, as well as the Roman numeral “X,” or 10. The design features crossed bayonets (the Roman numeral 10) on a field of blue that resembled a powder keg.

The ceremony followed the weekly Newcomers Brief, hosted by the 10th Mountain Reception Company. Typically, in-processing Soldiers arrive at the briefing already wearing the patch, which is unit-issued or available at the Post Exchange.

“It’s usually something that they would just slap on themselves,” said 1st Sgt. Luther York, 10th Mountain Reception Company first sergeant. “The 10th Mountain Division command sergeant major (Command Sgt. Maj. Nema Mobarakzadeh) wanted to change that and make this an impactful event for Soldiers. Personally, I think it’s pretty cool to be patched by senior leadership, shake their hand and be welcomed to the team. Even as a first sergeant if I were in-processing, I would enjoy that.”

York said that the patching ceremony will create that connection to division history and instill a sense of pride and purpose in Soldiers.

“Everybody talks about this being a storied division, but Soldiers don’t always know why,” he said. “Why does it matter that you are a part of the 10th Mountain Division? When they put on the powder keg patch with the Mountain tab, they should know there’s a reason why we want them in the 10th Mountain Division.”

Pfc. Nicholas LeBlanc, assigned to 2nd Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, said he was unaware that he would be part of this inaugural patching ceremony when he entered the auditorium that morning.

“I thought it was a little strange at first, but while the patch was put on my shoulder I felt the encouragement,” he said. “It gave me the feeling that I’m a part of something bigger than myself and that the 10th Mountain is more than just a division, it’s a brotherhood.”

LeBlanc, a Louisiana native, said it was surprising to see the auditorium lined on both sides with high-ranking Soldiers, waiting to welcome them to the division and show their support.

“It just made me feel good to be with this division,” he said.

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Photo Caption:

Soldiers from across the 10th Mountain Division (LI), newly arrived at Fort Drum, receive the “Powder Keg” patch and Mountain tab from senior leaders Jan. 18 during a patching ceremony at the Command Sgt. Maj. Southern “Buddy” Hewitt Noncommissioned Officer Academy. The ceremony followed the Newcomers Brief for in-processing Soldiers, and it was created to instill a sense of history, pride and purpose in Soldiers entering the 10th Mountain Division (LI). (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)