

Press Release

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Fort Drum Public Affairs

Fort Drum museum makes military history accessible, relevant to Soldiers, community members

FORT DRUM, N.Y. -- At the core of the 10th Mountain Division and Fort Drum Museum's mission is a commitment to making military history more accessible and relevant to the community it serves.

Whether it is a formation of Soldiers, a group of school students, or families new to the North Country, the museum staff provides training and educational opportunities for everyone.

"We collect history, we preserve history, and then we present it to both Soldiers and the public," said Kent Bolke, museum director. "How we go about education is not just placing objects on display but presenting it in a way that gives it context, so people get a broader understanding of its historical relevance."

In recent months, the museum staff has created educational tours for Soldiers enrolled in the Mountain Training Group's Alpine Warrior Course and a technology class for students at the Fort Drum STARBASE Academy.

Another tour, designed for members of the Fort Drum Office of the Staff Judge Advocate, focused on the 1947 barracks fire on post that killed four officers and injured several more. This incident led to a historic legal precedent known as the Feres Doctrine.

Bolke said this history would resonate with Soldiers and civilians in the legal profession, but it could easily be formatted for young students.

"It all depends on the audience," Bolke said. "It's not dumbing down the information but presenting it at a level that they understand and making it interesting to that group. We can tailor a museum tour, and work with a particular set of exhibits based on their educational requirements."

In March, Bolke led a museum tour for a group of Pre-Technical Academy students from the Jefferson-Lewis BOCES in Watertown.

Holly Nichols, Global Studies teacher, said students were tasked with exploring the museum to find examples of the relationship between innovation and warfare. They needed to identify the items, describe the relationship and explain how it impacted the way military members fought.

“We’re learning about World War I and World War II in class,” she said. “And the New York State curriculum really focuses on innovation and how warfare is affected by it. I sent Mr. Bolke the assignment I developed, and he really tailored his presentation to that, which was fabulous.”

Nichols said the students have an interest in military history, which can be challenging to present in class without all the visual aids and insight that a museum can provide.

“To be here and actually see items they’ve read about, it really sticks with them,” she said. “The museum is an amazing resource to have. Students are always interested in Fort Drum itself, because we all share a connection to it, and this gives them a way to experience that.”

Doug Schmidt, museum curator, recently coordinated with 1st Sgt. Marcus Sherbino with 10th Division Sustainment Troops Battalion, 10th Mountain Division Sustainment Brigade, for a noncommissioned officer professional development (NCOPD) museum tour.

“One of the primary things I wanted the Soldiers to understand is NCO heritage and how our significance – over time – in ranks and positions have increased,” Sherbino said. “It’s about instilling that pride in Soldiers and appreciating the impact they have not only to the Army but to the country as well.”

Schmidt created a presentation and tour that guided Soldiers through the NCO history that included Sgt. Torger Tøkle, a famous Norwegian ski jumper who immigrated to the U.S. before World War II. His skill sets were instrumental in training the 10th Mountain Division Soldiers to ski and maneuver through winter terrain. Schmidt said Tøkle joining the Army would be comparable to an athlete like Tom Brady enlisting at the height of his football career.

He also spoke about Command Sgt. Maj. Southern “Buddy” Hewitt, the division’s first senior enlisted adviser after it was reactivated 40 years ago.

“At that time, the division was spread all over the country – some here, some were at Griffiss Air Force Base and Fort Benning – while the construction at Fort Drum was just getting started,” Schmidt said. “This was before cell phones, before the internet and all the technology we use today. So, there was a real challenge for CSM Hewitt to ensure his NCOs were training Soldiers to standard and everything else he was responsible for.”

Schmidt said the work to develop this NCOPD tour will pay dividends to the museum’s educational program, as it can be used to train other 10th Mountain Division (LI) units in the future.

Sherbino encouraged his Soldiers to revisit the museum when they have time, and bring friends or family members so they can share division history together.

“This is our history,” he said. “And, who knows, you might be on one of these walls someday like the picture of that NCO right over there. I served with him. I was there. That can be any one of us. So, let’s use this history to re-energize us, and push us forward.”

The 10th Mountain Division and Fort Drum Museum is located in Bldg. 2509 on Col. Reade Road, off Route 26. The museum is open from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, including Memorial Day weekend and entrance is free. For more information, call (315) 774-0391.

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Video Caption:

Museum 2025 – B-roll of 10th Mountain Division and Fort Drum Museum exhibits. (Video by Alexandra Cummings, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)

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