

Borne out of winter warfare training during World War II, the 10th Mountain Division was deactivated on Nov. 30, 1945. Although reactivated in 1948 as a training division during the Cold War, this infantry lay dormant until the 1980s.

Officially reactivated for service on Feb. 13, 1985 at Fort Drum, New York, today's 10th Mountain Division is a non-mechanized light infantry division, part of the 18th Airborne Corps. Designed to be rapidly deployed anywhere in the world, their specialty is fighting in harsh terrain, originating from WWII's mountain troops who trained and fought in some of the worst weather.

Expected and able to complete a wide range of missions, the modern 10th's equipment is reduced in size and weight for strategic and tactical mobility. Their ability to fight in harsh terrain is not overlooked: the 10th is the most deployed division in the Army. As former commander, Maj. Gen. Lloyd Austin III says, "We're still called upon on a daily basis to do the nearly impossible."

Starting in the 1990s, modern 10th Mountain Division elements have been deployed for operations including: Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm in the Gulf War in 1990; assistance to Florida after Hurricane Andrew in 1992; Somalia for Operation Restore Hope in 1993; and Haiti and Bosnia for Operations Uphold Democracy and Task Force Eagle.

Since the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks, they have been deployed frequently, playing significant roles in Iraq and Afghanistan. As part of Operation Enduring Freedom from 2001-02, they were responsible for securing remote areas of Afghanistan.

The 10th returned to Afghanistan in 2003, deployed the division's aviation brigade from 2003-04 and parts of the division from 2006-07. After a year rest, the division was sent to Iraq in April 2008 for larger-scale operations, and returned to Afghanistan in early 2009.

The men who trained at Camp Hale and fought the Germans in Italy paved the way for the modern 10th Mountain Division, but the generations are united in their rarity. "This is a unique division. There was never one like it before and there never will be one like it again," says veteran Jim Barr.

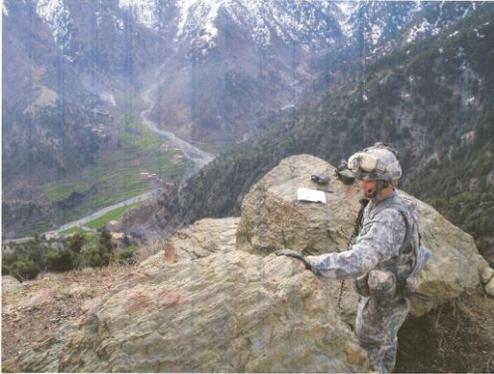
In 1988, the veterans from WWII and Camp Hale helped create the International Federation of Mountain Soldiers, a worldwide alliance of mountain troops. And on Feb. 18, 1995, 50 years after the Riva Ridge operation, 10th veterans traversed the ridge again. As Howard Koch recalls, "The climb was more difficult this time. We didn't realize how tough it was the last time, I guess!" German, Italian and American mountain soldiers all joined together to dedicate the International Peace Path.

On Tennessee Pass, not far from Camp Hale, lies a red granite monument dedicated in 1959 to the 10th Mountain Division. Etched on the monument are the names of the 992 men who did not survive. A memorial service is conducted annually on Memorial Day.



Although many of the 10th veterans are no longer with us, and the average age is now 90, the veterans still gather for their annual ski reunion. Veterans start at Ski Cooper, the training site for Camp Hale troops and still in use today, and continue on to ski resorts in Summit and Eagle Counties. This year marked the 34th Annual Colorado 10th Mountain Division Reunion, and they were joined by the Warren Miller Film Crew to capture their tales and experiences.

The stories of the 10th are incredible, and their influence on the ski industry in Colorado after the war is immeasurable. We are forever grateful for their knowledge, expertise, abilities and determination. In honor of all 10th Mountain Division soldiers, past and present, thank you.



Sources:

- “Fire on the Mountain,” First Run Features/Gage & Gage Productions, 1995.
- “The Last Ridge,” Abbie Kealy, 2007.
- Colorado Ski & Snowboard Museum archives