

Local 10th Mountain Division Veterans

The 10th mountain division of World War II had an impact on skiing greater than many people realize. There are many veterans in our local area who have had an impact on the community around us, but local veterans from the 10th mountain division, like Russell Berg and Joe Duskey, have had some of the biggest impacts on our community. In all, 22 Marathon County men decided to join the 10th. From Camp Hale in Colorado, to the peaks of Italy and back home, their lives were changed forever.

Their training was intense at Camp Hale in Colorado. They were there to train and acclimate to the elevation and temperature that they were anticipating in battle. Russell Berg recalled skiing all day until it was time to sleep, then “we dug into the snow and put pine boughs in the bottom, and we had good sleeping bags”(Everest)¹. The soldiers of the 10th would sometimes be out for three weeks without a shower or heat. This rigorous training was designed to both test their abilities and get them ready for the harsh conditions they’d be fighting in. According to Berg, the training at Camp Hale was “tougher than the front lines down at Italy” (Everest). The 10th

¹ *World War II: More Stories From Our Veterans, Russell “Spike” Berg*, DC Everest Area Schools Publication, (2004).

mountain division, including those 22 Marathon County men, were going to be ready for the war.

They first saw action at Mt. Belvedere and Reaver Ridge. The Germans held Mt. Belvedere and the 10th Mountain division was part of the force tasked with taking it from them. To do so, members of the 10th scaled the backside of the mountain with ropes. Russell Berg was a part of the attack that went up after that group. He recalled "quite a few shells coming in"(Everest). Though there was heavy artillery, the Americans and the 10th were able to take the mountain. That artillery took a toll on the division though. I spoke with Gary Gisselman², a Marathon County Historical Society member. According to Gisselman, the 10th mountain division suffered 923 casualties in this battle. Gisselman told me of the 22 from Marathon County, three of them died in the war- Joe Duskey, Gerald Wiren, and James Luedtke. Four more were injured, including Russell Berg. Nevertheless, the veterans of the 10th had a large effect on their home ski resorts and communities upon their return.

Most of the returning veterans of the 10th mountain division had positive impacts on their home ski resorts. Some taught ski lessons, while others joined their local ski patrol. Russell Berg was

² Interview with Marathon County Historical Society Member Gary Gisselman,(February 16 2022).

one of those who taught ski lessons upon his return. He “was on the original Rib Hill for about 25 years” (Everest). He helped to grow the population of competent skiers in the area. Even the fallen soldiers of the 10th had a lasting effect on the local area. Joe Duskey’s ultimate sacrifice was recognized on the Rib Mountain Ski Area for 20 years by having a run named in his honor. An additional memorial was added in the ski lodge for Duskey by some of his high school friends. This display included the uniform, the skis, and other memorabilia. The Joe Duskey Club wanted everyone to know “Joe Duskey was a war hero”. (Lehmann).³ The 10th Mountain division has had a lasting effect on the community and ski hill in our local area.

While not many people outside the skiing community are aware of the 10th Mountain Division, those within it realize the lasting legacy that the veterans have left us. They have helped shape both the skiers on the mountains, and the runs they ski on. Without the 10th mountain division, Granite Peak, and ski resorts around the country would likely look much different.

³ Lehmann, Emerson, *Club Honoring Wausau Soldier, Gave His Life in WWII, Has Met Regularly for 70 Years*, WSAW.com (September 6, 2019).