

University Faculty Council Chair's reflection January 2022

New Beginnings

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This month's segment is about *New Beginnings*. With every passing calendar year, we start a new one with recharged energies, renewed resolutions and hope afresh.

I am zooming with you today from Vail, Colorado. We all know the place as a ski resort in Rocky Mountains. And I have just learned something new about Vail during this journey: the resort was constituted as a ski destination by a group of World War II (WWII) veterans who were part of the US Army's 10th Mountain Division, after they returned from the war.



The idea to create the 10th Mountain Division was inspired by a stunning embarrassment of the Russian military that took place during the Winter War of 1939, when a small Finnish ski patrol defeated a larger, far better armed invading Soviet force. Charles Dole, the president of the US

National Ski Patrol at the time, took notice. To form America's first mountain warfare unit, the US Army enlisted Dole's help. He traveled the nation scouring ski clubs and universities to find experienced skiers who were up for the challenge. The unit first trained at Mt. Rainier in Washington before a garrison was built to accommodate the new Division in 1942 at Camp Hale, Colorado. During maneuvers, the 10th would lay down their skis on the snow, throw their sleeping bags on top of them and call it good for the night. This training created some of America's strongest soldiers, and they were called on to prove it.

In the winter of 1944, they were tasked with the seemingly impossible mission of penetrating a defensive line that Germany had set up in Italy's Apennine Mountains. Known as the Gothic Line, it was a line of defense that was crucial for keeping the Allied forces from advancing through Europe. From their vantage point high in the mountains, the Germans were able to prepare for attacks long before they happened, an advantage that made the line very well resourced and difficult to break through. With heavy gear in tow, the 10th had to climb steep cliff faces as silently as possible and during the night, not to alert German forces. Their stealth advance and perseverance ultimately payed off. Riva Ridge was captured in February of 1945, which allowed Allied forces to finally break the line and advance through Europe. The mission turned the members of the 10th Division into internationally recognized heroes virtually overnight.

After WWII, many soldiers from the 10th Mountain Division continued to do what they did best: skiing. As such, they established ski resorts across the US, including Arapahoe Basin, Aspen Mountain, Beaver Creek and Vail in Colorado.

Skiing is a purely recreational pursuit to most, but there was a time when the ability to navigate difficult, snowy terrain on skis helped America face one of the gravest threats the world has ever known.

The reason I am telling you this story is because I believe that every new beginning has its roots in the past. Every new delight, accomplishment or success may stem from prior suffering, efforts and tried perseverance. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr (whom we celebrated yesterday) once said, "Everything that we see is a shadow cast by that which we do not see."

So let's funnel the gratitude and joy we felt with our families during Thanksgiving and holiday season into a new start in the New Year 2022, with re-energized hope, with vigor and desire to move into a post-COVID era stronger, better and more resilient.

Thank you.