

Scott Stearman/Victor Issa
Tenth Mountain Division Memorial, 1998
Painted bronze

Public art can take many roles, but oftentimes memorials and monuments first come to mind. The memorials dedicated to significant figures who played a vital role in a community either past, or present, shape its identity. The bronze sculpture honoring the Tenth Mountain Division marches 12 1/2 feet tall in Slifer Plaza. It pays tribute to the 18,000 brave soldiers who trained for the U.S. Army in harsh mountain conditions in nearby Camp Hale in preparation for alpine battle during World War II.

Upon their return to the United States, many of these veterans played a significant role in the shaping of the U.S. ski industry. One of Vail's founding fathers, Pete Seibert was a ski trooper, so it is fitting that a memorial commemorating the bravery and service of the Tenth Mountain Division found a home in Vail by the Covered Bridge. Many of the returning veterans mapped ski trails, became ski instructors, ski patrollers, members of the U.S. Ski Team, avalanche researchers, and ski gear technicians and designers, to name only a broad range of their contributions to the development of the ski industry in the United States and Vail.

This 7,000 pound bronze sculpture was conceived by Colorado artist Scott Stearman and Donald E. Traynor, the president of the Dured E. Townsend Memorial Fund and also a veteran of the Tenth Mountain Division. The sculpture depicts the ski trooper marching in the typical winter white camouflage gear, goggles, rifle, and ski equipment. Stearman's model for the ski trooper was then enlarged to the present work by bronze sculptor Victor Issa.

This memorial was commissioned by the Dured E. Townsend Memorial Fund of the Tenth Mountain Division and dedicated in November 1997. Dured E. Townsend was a Lieutenant Colonel in the U.S. Army and a Commanding Officer of the Tenth Mountain Division. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his heroic mission in the North Apennine Mountains of Italy in April 1945. Ultimately, 949 ski troopers were killed and 4,500 were injured during WWII.

To learn more about the legacy of the Tenth Mountain Division visit the Colorado Ski and Snowboard Museum. (www.skimuseum.net)

- Molly Eppard, Art in Public Places Coordinator