



# Journal of the New England Ski Museum

Fall 2016

Issue Number 102

## The Mountain Troops and Mountain Culture in Postwar America Part Two of the Museum's 2016 Exhibit

By Jeff Leich



New England Ski Museum

*Mountain and winter training was held for two full winters at Camp Hale, with ample experimentation with off-road and over snow transportation alternatives like this dogsled team. With the conclusion of the harsh 3-week D-Series maneuvers in March and April 1944, when temperatures dropped as low as -25 degrees F, alpine training came to an abrupt end as the 10th was sent to the plains of Texas for the summer. By early January, all three regiments had crossed the Atlantic to the Italian front.*

### The 10<sup>th</sup> Under Fire: Italy, 1945

The first combat mission assigned to the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division on their arrival at the front lines in Italy, in a location roughly 75 kilometers southwest of Bologna and 90 kilometers northwest of Florence, was paradoxically the most dramatic, most celebrated, but least costly of the brutal battles they would fight.

In 1944 German forces in Italy had been pushed farther and farther north as a series of their defensive lines were breached. Those Allied advances had stalled along the so-called Winter Line at the end of that year, and at the beginning of 1945 the last series of ridges south of the Po River valley, an important objective given its industrial and agricultural resources, remained in German hands. Allied armies in the Italian theater had recently lost manpower to advances in other theaters. The new theater commander, General Mark Clark, envisioned a straight-ahead

attack through the greatest German concentration of defenses, directly north from Florence toward Bologna along the main artery, Highway 65.

General Lucien Truscott, commander of the Fifth Army, favored attacking along a lesser, hillier route to the west, Highway 64, and convinced Clark to allow him to attempt it before the offensive reverted to Highway 65.<sup>1</sup> The key to the Highway 64 corridor was the Mount Belvedere massif and connected peaks to its northeast that looked down on the road. Mount Belvedere itself was in full view of even higher ground just to the west, a ridge of five connected summits with a dramatically steep escarpment facing Belvedere that the Americans came to call Riva Ridge, after a gap near the southern end of the crest. Mount Belvedere had been assaulted and held briefly by Allied troops in the fall of 1944, but German counterattacks bolstered by artillery fire directed from observers on Riva's summits had beaten them back.<sup>2</sup>

*Continued on page 5*

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# New England Ski Museum

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## Mission

New England Ski Museum collects, conserves, and exhibits elements of ski history for the purposes of research, education, and inspiration.

Specifically, the Museum:

- ❖ collects and preserves examples of ski equipment, clothing, art, and ephemera;
- ❖ collects and preserves photographic records, films, and historic documents of skiing;
- ❖ maintains a reference library of ski literature, including books and periodicals;
- ❖ collects and preserves memorabilia of the 10th Mountain Division;
- ❖ maintains an oral history library of notable skiers;
- ❖ provides exhibitions about the history of skiing and its importance to social and economic development; and
- ❖ provides education programs for its community.

## Paul Valar Society

### Have you considered including New England Ski Museum in your estate plan?

By including a financial bequest to the Museum in their estate planning, Paul Valar Society members continue the Museum's mission to preserve the history and heritage of skiing beyond their lifetime. The Society takes its name from Paul Valar, the charismatic and influential ski school director and coach who was the first president of the New England Ski Museum.

If you have made provision for the Museum in your planning, we would appreciate knowing that so we can thank you. Bequests need not meet any particular threshold, and the amount of the bequest need not be shared with the Museum. If you are considering such a step in concert with your financial advisor, a Museum board member or senior staffer can provide more information.

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We welcome your questions, comments, and letters.

Jeff Leich, Editor

*Black Mountain Graphic Design, Franconia, NH*

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As a lifelong New Englander I treasure the fact that we have four very distinct seasons and I look forward to and love every one of them, but let's face it: there is something truly special about the fall. The sight and smell of turning leaves eventually means only one thing, that snow and skiing are just around the corner.

We all feel it, and tell me that it doesn't take you back to the care free days of childhood. I got a fantastic dose of that tingling feeling driving to Sugarbush, Vermont just a couple weeks ago for our Annual Meeting and Spirit of Skiing Award. As I crossed the White River on I-89 I got my first glimpse of snow this year on the higher peaks. Sure enough, when I got to the height of land near the Brookfield exit there was an honest 6 inches of snow, and boy oh boy did it look like winter! You know the feeling!

It was the perfect segue to our Spirit of Skiing Award to honor the Cochrans, America's First Family of Skiing! Barbara Ann, Lindy, Marilyn, and Bob were all there including their kids and even a grandson! Rick Moulton, Board member, put together a fantastic video that featured Mickey and Ginny Cochran and their four kids. The energy, warmth and love for the entire Cochran family in that room was truly astonishing! While Mickey and Ginny are gone, the legacy that the two of them left behind is incredible. Their dream continues to this day at the hands of their kids and grandkids, not only benefiting thousands of local youths but top end college racers as well. It continues to amaze me that every year we give much thought to who the next deserving recipient of this Award should be, and every year these gatherings become more and more special. All of these honorees without a doubt bring home the fact that for them skiing is not just a sport but a way of life!

As you know we've been talking a lot about the New England Ski Museum expanding to North Conway, New Hampshire and opening its Eastern Slope Branch. While we are very excited about this wonderful opportunity I want to make one thing very clear, and that is that we will not be leaving our location in Franconia. Franconia is where it all began and we have deep roots there-- it is our home! Expanding to North Conway will greatly enhance

our reach and visibility and allow us to better fill our mission of preserving skiing's past for future generations. The outpouring of support and enthusiasm in the Mount Washington Valley has been amazing! Thanks to a number of very generous charitable foundations and individuals we have raised more than \$800,000 in cash and pledges! That means that while we still have work to do, we are nearly half way home.

Speaking of generosity, our annual giving campaign has been very strong this year and I'm happy to report that we have had about twelve individuals become Life Members over the past year and a half! From me and on behalf of the Museum we thank all of you very, very much for your ongoing support!

Before I close, I want to welcome our newest officers, Tim Scott and Kathy Sweeney, voted in during the recent annual meeting. Tim has had a long career in development and has been an enormous help with our Capital Campaign Committee. His ski resume extends back to the 1960s, and he is quite the Mount Washington Valley historian in his own right. Tim will be assuming the position of Secretary, taking over for E. John B. Allen, who will remain on the Board and as our official historian. Kathy Sweeney has also been heavily involved with the Capital Campaign Committee and is an avid skier in winter and golfer in summer. We are very fortunate to have someone with Kathy's experience as owner of her CPA firm as our new Treasurer. Kathy will be replacing Tor Brunvand who recently resigned to concentrate on the increasing demands of his business, the Silver Fox Inn in Waterville Valley. As we welcome our new officers, we cannot overstate how much we appreciate the many years of service provided by John Allen and Tor Brunvand to the Museum.

Also joining the Board of Directors will be Sean Doll, head of the Lyndon State College Mountain Recreation Management program. You may remember Sean as an important cog in our early Bretton Woods Nordic Marathons, when he worked for the Omni/Mount Washington Hotel. With his Ph.D. under his belt now, Sean oversees dozens of students who will be the next generation of ski industry professionals.

But enough about us! Get your skis tuned up; winter is here!



This time of year is always filled with anticipation and hope for skiers. Leaves turning, cool days, new equipment and ski trip plans are all in our thoughts.

At the museum we are concluding our first 12 months of fundraising for our expansion project in North Conway, New Hampshire. It has been a fantastic year for the campaign. We are moving past the \$810,000 mark in pledges and

donations towards our ultimate goal of \$1,700,000. The outpouring of support has been amazing. To all of you who have embraced our vision with your generous donations a hearty THANK YOU!

Our location will be right in the heart of North Conway's busy Main

Street guaranteeing maximum visibility. The Gibson Woodbury Charitable Foundation has provided this incredible location, exterior renovations along with a long-term lease that will be finalized this December. We have contracted with the HER Design firm of Marblehead, Massachusetts and their initial exhibit design plans are fantastic. HER is one of the nation's top museum design firms. This exciting expansion coupled with our long-time Franconia location will build a solid and sustainable future for your museum. These are exciting times!

We will be entering into the public phase of the campaign this winter. There will be many fundraising activities throughout the North Country. We still have a LONG way to go and would welcome any support you can bring to this project. There are still exciting naming opportunities available and many ways you can help. Please contact the museum for donation information. We need your help.

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## **EASTERN SLOPE EXPANSION CAMPAIGN**

*Donations and Pledges Received from October 1, 2015 to September 30, 2016*

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### **Double Platinum (\$50,000 and up)**

Gibson Woodbury Charitable Foundation  
Anthony Ruddy and Lisa Baumgartner  
Cal Conniff and Joan Stanley  
Christopher Doucette in Memory of J. Arthur Doucette

### **Platinum (\$25,000 and up)**

Anonymous  
Eastern Slope Inn and Attitash Mountain Village

### **Double Diamond (\$20,000 and up)**

Peter and Stefi Reed Hastings

### **Diamond (\$15,000 and up)**

Zeb's General Store Charitable Fund

### **Gold (\$10,000 and up)**

The Robert and Dorothy Goldberg Charitable Foundation  
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White Mountain Oil & Propane

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Brad and Alice Williams

Roland O'Neal in Memory of Damon O'Neal

### **\*Friend of Skiing (up to \$2,499)**

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Nicholas Paumgarten

David Sunshine and Carol Jordan

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Gerald R. Carrier

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Jeremy Davis and Scott Drake

Xander Paumgarten

Ted and Herta Sutton

Ellen Chandler

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Sandra Heath

\*All donors at the Bronze level (\$2,500 and up) will appear on the Donor Wall in the Eastern Slope Branch Museum



When the 10th was assembled on the front lines in Italy in January 1945, they were assigned to the high ground indicated on the map as Riva Ridge and Mount Belvedere. Theater commander Mark Clark planned to take the offensive in a frontal attack along the Highway 65 corridor, into the teeth of the strongest German defenses. Fifth Army commander Lucien Truscott convinced General Clark to attempt a thrust up the more rugged Highway 64 to the west, and the 10th was assigned the critical task of clearing the enemy from Riva Ridge and Mount Belvedere that overlooked that road.

*Continued from page 1*

The scarp facing Belvedere was steep though largely not vertical, with brush-choked gullies, ledges and ridges rising 2,000 vertical feet from the valley of the Dardagna River. The outposts of enemy artillery observers on its five summits were manned by German mountain troops of their 4<sup>th</sup> (Edelweiss) Mountain Battalion, who judged the cliffs to be unclimbable by their American opponents. Ordered by General Hays to assault the faces of Riva Ridge, the 86<sup>th</sup>'s commander Colonel Clarence E. Tomlinson, a non-climbing officer who had been with the division since Camp Swift, expressed doubts. Hays, commander of the only force of trained climbers in the U.S Army, persisted. Night patrols searched for climbing routes to the five summits, assisted by Italian partisans, and over a period of weeks the routes were pioneered, and in some cases were outfitted with fixed ropes.<sup>3</sup>

The assault by five companies of the 86<sup>th</sup> began on the night of February 18. The troops were ordered to take their respective summits shortly after 5 A.M., with no firing allowed until daylight. Despite the challenging ascent by soldiers encumbered by heavy loads of weapons and ammunition, up difficult pitches punctuated by occasional showers of loose rocks dislodged by the troopers above, when the foggy dawn of the 19<sup>th</sup> arrived, all five attacks had achieved complete surprise and occupied the enemy positions with only one initial casualty. German counterattacks followed quickly, and the five companies of the 86<sup>th</sup> engaged in the first extended combat the division experienced. Artillery support was called in, and in one case Major Albert Jackman, the staff officer involved with the mountain troops since 1940

and now executive officer of the 604<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery, radioed to confirm that a platoon of A Company on Pizzo di Campiano was aware of their close proximity to the enemy position on which they had called for howitzer fire. Resupply was initially difficult, over the same precipitous routes of the attack, but control was gradually established, at the cost of 21 killed and 52 wounded. The far left flank of the division, and the all-important high ground, had been secured in preparation for the main attack.<sup>4</sup>

Riva Ridge would not be finally controlled until February 25, but the night after its first capture, the Mount Belvedere assault began with the 87<sup>th</sup>, 85<sup>th</sup> and the two battalions of the 86<sup>th</sup> not engaged on Riva committed. In the offensive on the Belvedere—Mount Gorgolesco—Mount della Torraccia range of low mountains, the division suffered its first casualties in significant numbers. German minefields, ground forces and pre-sighted artillery cost the division more than 900 men killed or wounded before Mount della Torraccia was secured by February 25.<sup>5</sup>

A brief pause was followed by an offensive in early March as the division continued its attack in a northeastern direction through the sharp hills and steep valleys of the Apennines. The objectives of this push were the crossroads town of Castel d' Aiano and the high ground around it, especially Mount della Spe. It was in this phase of the campaign that one of the most respected and beloved members of the division, world champion ski jumper Torger Tokle, lost his life to friendly fire moments after destroying a machine gun position with a bazooka. Also



*The Apennines were snow-covered in January and early February as patrols of the 10th went out on reconnaissance. Some ski equipment had arrived, and some patrols were made on skis, but this was not a major element. In this photograph, PFC Fred Strauss surveys the wintry landscape on one of those early patrols. Strauss, of I Company 87th, was later killed in action in Italy.*

among the 667 casualties of the push for Castel d' Aiano were Pete Seibert, the future founder of Vail, severely wounded, and Larry Koehler, perhaps the first 10<sup>th</sup> soldier to espouse the century-old Garibaldi motto *sempre avanti*, or “always forward,” which was later adopted as the motto of the 85<sup>th</sup> regiment. Koehler's adherence to that dictum led him to volunteer for a dangerous patrol, on which he was killed. Discovering that Koehler was Jewish, German soldiers hung his body from a roof beam in full sight of his unit, infuriating his comrades.<sup>6</sup>

From March 5 through the first weeks of April, the front line was fixed around Mount della Spe and Castel d' Aiano, though German artillery fire, sometimes severe, was often directed at the troops on Mount della Spe and neighboring positions. With the success of the offensive so far, General Hays favored continued forward movement, but General Truscott held the 10<sup>th</sup> in place for fear that further advances by the aggressive force would trigger increased German defensive measures athwart Highway 64 that would impede the planned spring offensive.<sup>7</sup>

The Fifth Army's spring offensive began on April 14 with the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division and 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division attacking northeast into the Samoggia River watershed, a tributary of the Reno River which paralleled Highway 64. The three days of this thrust were the most costly for the division of the entire campaign, with 1,340 casualties. It was clear to the enemy that an offensive would be coming; their hardened positions withstood initial Allied aerial bombing runs, and German pre-sighted artillery was pitilessly effective against the advancing Americans. Hills

903, 909, 913—for their elevations in meters—and Rocca di Roffeno were the scenes of brutal fighting that ultimately pried open a gap in the enemy lines between the XIV Panzer Corps of General Frido von Senger und Etterlin and the adjoining German units of the LI (51<sup>st</sup>) Mountain Corps. “The enemy now had freedom of movement,” General von Senger wrote. “After their forces had passed through the village of Tole they entered a terrain that had always caused me anxiety, with its gentle and uncultivated slopes descending toward the Po, where armor could at once be operated.”<sup>8</sup>

The German general's unease about American armor was well-placed. On April 17, the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division, until then following Highway 64 and the Reno River, was ordered to cross into the Samoggia watershed at Tole, where it advanced to the left of the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain down in elevation as the Apennine hills gave way to the flat Po River valley. On April 19, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 85<sup>th</sup> took Mount San Michele, the last high point overlooking the route to the Po. With this loss, and a growing gap between German units in the Samoggia valley, increasing numbers of Germans laid down their arms and were sent to the rear as prisoners of war. “With every hill the enemy lost he was forced to defend less favorable ground,” General Truscott wrote. “We were looking down his throat for a change.” By April 20<sup>th</sup>, the first units of the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain, A Company of the 85<sup>th</sup>, entered the Po valley.<sup>9</sup>

With the mountains behind them, the 10<sup>th</sup> was ordered by General Mark Clark to pause for reorganization and allow other

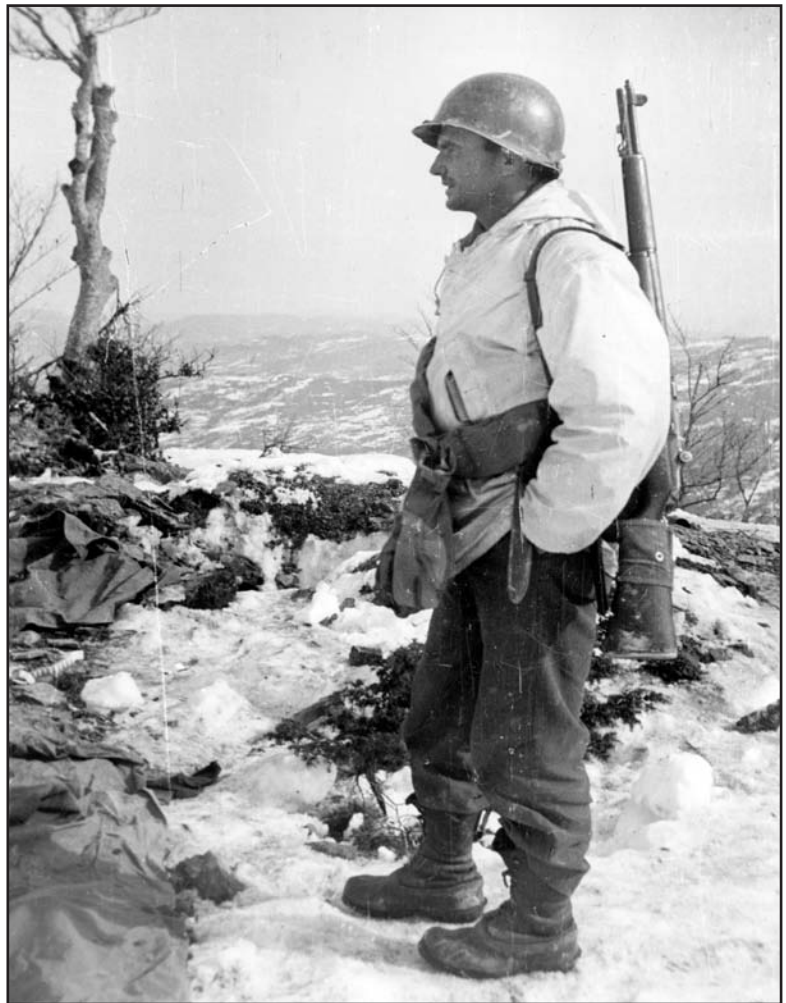
*Continued on page 11*



The Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

*A Weasel of the 10th Mountain Division on patrol in Italy in early 1945. A detachment of the 87th under Robert Tillotson and Paul Townsend had built a road up onto the Saskatchewan Glacier in the summer of 1942 so that the Studebaker products could be tested and refined, and the vehicles were used extensively at Camp Hale, and also in amphibious settings.*

*Peter Guimond of the 86th surveys the view from Riva Ridge after its capture on the night of February 18-19. The night climb by five companies of the 86th to take Riva Ridge deprived the Germans of their ability to call in artillery fire as the 10th advanced on the Mount Belvedere massif, and the audacity of the Riva attack became part of the legend of the 10th Mountain Division.*



The Denver Public Library, Western History Collection



*This portable tramway was erected by Company D of the 126th Mountain Engineers on February 21, just after the Riva Ridge action, to resupply troops still fighting off counterattacks on the ridge and to evacuate casualties, as seen here. The tramway was built on Mount Cappel Buso, one of the summits of Riva, and gained 602 vertical feet over a 2,000 foot distance. In the first day of operation, 50 casualties were evacuated, 30 of them wounded and the remainder killed in action. Five tons of ammunition and other supplies were ferried up the line. This was the first aerial tramway ever used in combat in the U.S. Army. Several weeks later, Company D erected a second tramway to connect two sides of Sprilla Road, cutting off a loop that extended into enemy territory, enabling a continuous supply route. Crossing a deep ravine, the tramway connected the towns of Castellaccio and Campidello and transported 200 wounded soldiers and tons of supplies from March 10 until April 2.*



*This photograph of a medical aid station on Mount Belvedere was taken on February 21, as the battle for Belvedere was ongoing. Groups of litter carriers are shown waiting to be sent to retrieve casualties, as troops move up in the background. A portion of Riva Ridge can be seen in the left background.*





*This group of about 200 Germans taken prisoner in March 1945 by the 10th in the Apennines was a foretaste of more enemy POWs that the division would take in April in the breakout into the Po River Valley and subsequent advance to Lake Garda.*



*General Mark Clark, commander of the 15th Army Group, on left, and General Hays of the 10th plan the spring offensive in April, 1945.*

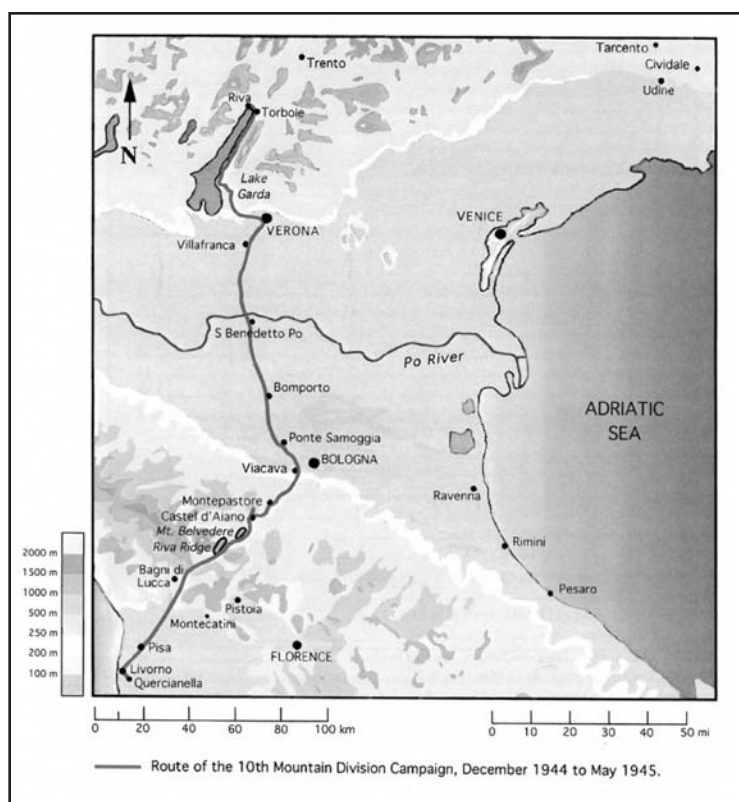


*As the spring offensive began on April 14, the 85th Mountain Infantry was on the left of the line as the entire division began its advance. This photograph depicts the 85th's sector on April 14, where some of the bitterest fighting occurred. Among the casualties of the 85th that day was Lieutenant Robert Dole, later Senate Majority leader and presidential candidate. Dole of I Company was severely wounded by shrapnel on Hill 913 above Castel d' Aiano.*



*The first unit of the 10th to cross the Po River was the 1st Battalion of the 87th, crossing under fire in assault boats crewed by engineers of the 126th Mountain Engineers. In fact it had been a warrant officer of the 126th named Heller who had come on a convoy of trucks carrying 50 assault boats bound for a different division and diverted them to the 10th, which was then the only Fifth Army unit on the banks of the Po. Here, Major General Willis Crittenger, General Hays with the two stars, and other officers observe the progress of the bridge construction on April 25.*

*After the Po River crossing on April 25, the 10th advanced rapidly north to the east shore of Lake Garda against weakening German resistance. The end of hostilities came on May 4 with most units of the division at the north end of Lake Garda. They were soon ordered to the Udine-Cividale area on the upper right of the map, as a peacekeeping force on the border of Italy and Yugoslavia. By August all units of the division were on board troopships bound for the U.S., and soon after they arrived home the Japanese surrender brought the war to an end.*



*National Association of the 10th Mountain Division*

*Continued from page 6*

divisions to pass through them to take the lead. This strategy was not to the liking of General Hays, who, interpreting a comment by General Truscott that “this is no time to relax” as a revision of his orders, continued the division’s rapid drive toward the bridges spanning the Po. Taking advantage of the flat terrain, Hays assembled as much motorized equipment as possible, leaving his artillery and using the artillery vehicles for troop transport and adding tanks and tank destroyers. He formed Task Force Duff, a mobile strike force commanded by assistant division commander Robinson Duff. Duff raced north, always against German resistance, capturing a bridge over a Po tributary intact, and reached the shores of the Po on April 22. The next day the 87<sup>th</sup> became the first element of the Fifth Army to cross the Po, on a pontoon bridge assembled from boats which an alert 10<sup>th</sup> warrant officer diverted from the 85<sup>th</sup> division, trailing several days behind the 10<sup>th</sup>. The division was now far out in front of the adjoining units of the Fifth Army on either flank, an exceedingly exposed position that would have been very precarious if not for the fact that by now enemy resistance was disintegrating.<sup>10</sup>

With the Po crossing behind them, the task force, now commanded by Colonel William Darby after Duff was wounded, continued the northward thrust toward the alpine passes of the Dolomites that led to Austria. There was widespread concern among Allied strategists that German forces would retire to an ‘alpine redoubt,’ mountainous terrain in the Alps where a war of last-ditch resistance could be carried on. If such would be

the end game of the war in Europe, blocking German forces in Italy from moving north through the mountain passes to join German remnants would be critical. Task Force Darby arrived at the shores of Lake Garda on April 26, marking the division’s departure from the flat alluvial terrain of the Po valley and into the mountainous crags that defined the beginning of the Italian Alps.

The 85<sup>th</sup> and 86<sup>th</sup> moved on April 27<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> along the east shore of Lake Garda, with confining cliffs rising directly up from the road, encountering determined resistance from von Senger’s XIV Panzer Corps, particularly in a series of six tunnels toward the northern end of the lake. Elements of the 85<sup>th</sup> regiment bypassed the tunnels via amphibious DUKW vehicles, and proceeded up the west side of the lake, while the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 86<sup>th</sup> moved east through the mountains to flank the strongpoints. As the surging units of the 10<sup>th</sup> converged on Torbole and Riva at the northern end of the lake, negotiations for an armistice in Italy, underway since February, were reaching their conclusion. The suicide of Adolph Hitler on April 30 surely subdued the willingness of the most committed German military figures to fight on: “I realized how much the death of Hitler had facilitated these developments...there would probably have been considerable opposition among large sections of the troops to an independent surrender by this army group” without the dictator’s demise, von Senger recalled in his memoirs. A cease-fire between the Allies and the German army in Italy took effect at 2 P.M. on May 2, and on May 4

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von Senger formally surrendered all German forces in Italy at General Mark Clark's headquarters in Florence.<sup>11</sup>

On his way to Florence for the surrender ceremony, von Senger was accompanied by General Hays, whose 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division, he said, "had been my most dangerous opponent. It was this division that had achieved the breakthrough that separated my corps from LI (51<sup>st</sup>) Corps."

With the May 2 cease-fire and subsequent German surrender, the 10<sup>th</sup>'s combat in Italy came to an end. Of the 19,780 troops in the mountain division in Italy, 975 were killed in action or died of their wounds, and 3,893 were wounded, a casualty rate of twenty five percent between mid-February and the end of April.<sup>12</sup> These grim numbers seemed to be harbingers of more bitter losses to come, as it was widely expected that the 10<sup>th</sup> would be sent to the Pacific theater for the imminent invasion of Japan.

Ahead of the anticipated transfer to the other side of the globe, the division was ordered into northeastern Italy, where the city of Trieste and areas along the border with Yugoslavia were threatened with encroachment by forces of Yugoslav leader Josef Broz Tito. New Zealand troops arrived in Trieste at the same time as Yugoslav units on May 2, and on May 8, Tito's troops also occupied the Austrian town of Klagenfurt. These aggressive advances were soon reined in by Stalin since they ran counter to an understanding among the Allies, but more Fifth Army units were dispatched to the northeastern area around Udine and Cividale in the Isonzo River valley, the scene of the massive

Italian defeat at Caporetto in the first war. The 10<sup>th</sup> became part of this movement in late May. What might have developed into a situation involving further combat for the division settled into a peacekeeping mission, albeit one that had edgy moments. Nevertheless, there was time for many of the troops to enjoy climbing and skiing with captured German mountain troop equipment in the nearby Dolomites, which reminded many of the peaks around Camp Hale.<sup>13</sup>

The Dolomite interlude, which had included ski races on Italy's Mount Mangart and Austria's Gross Glockner, came to an end in mid-July as the division was replaced by the 34<sup>th</sup> Division and moved in stages to Naples, where all elements of the division were on board ships by August 2. They were aware that after 30-day furloughs they would undergo several months of amphibious training, then be sent to Japan in March, 1946.<sup>14</sup>

The Japanese surrender on August 15 suddenly and profoundly altered the fate of the soldiers of the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division as they arrived back in the United States and were ordered to report to Camp Carson after their leave was up. There, most division members received their discharges, and were "reduced to (the) permanent rank of Mister," as Montgomery Atwater wrote to Minnie Dole.<sup>15</sup> The 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division was officially deactivated on November 30, 1945, and the nearly five-year project to build American mountain warfare capability diminished for a time in concert with the larger military establishment.

1 Thomas R. Brooks, *The War North of Rome, June 1944-May*

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## Endnotes

1945. (New York: Sarpedon, 1996), 350.

2 Charles J. Sanders, *The Boys of Winter*. (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2005), 128-129.

3 John Imbrie and Thomas R. Brooks, *10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division Campaign in Italy 1945*. (Forest Hills, NY: National Association of the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division, 2002), 6. Hal Burton, *The Ski Troops*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), 151-152.

4 John Imbrie and Thomas R. Brooks, *10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division Campaign in Italy 1945*. (Forest Hills, NY: National Association of the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division, 2002), 6.

5 John Imbrie and Thomas R. Brooks, *10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division Campaign in Italy 1945*. (Forest Hills, NY: National Association of the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division, 2002), 12.

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## The Mountain Troops and Mountain Culture in Postwar America: Outdoor Recreation

By Jeff Leich

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After the abrupt transition to civilian life following the November 1945 deactivation of the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division, some of its veterans drew upon the skills that had gotten them into the mountain unit, or that they had learned and refined in the service, and turned them into modes of living, and of making a living, in the mountain environment. In some cases these efforts resulted in thriving educational and business organizations that became part of the structure of the outdoor recreation field that would boom in the 1950s and later decades as the American economy provided increasing leisure time for many.

One of the cornerstone capabilities that allows today's western ski areas to operate safely is the expertise in the evaluation of avalanche potential and the control measures that ski patrols take to minimize the risk of snowslides within their boundaries. More than any other American Montgomery Meigs Atwater, known by all as Monty, founded the field of avalanche science in

this country, then trained a small network of collaborators and established a Forest Service seminar that dispersed the findings widely throughout the west.

Atwater was older than many in the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain, having been born in 1904. His father was a mining engineer, and Atwater grew up mostly in the west where he held jobs as a guide, trapper, ranch hand and football coach—precisely the sort of 'rugged outdoor type' that the 10<sup>th</sup> envisioned recruiting, even though he had graduated from Harvard in 1926.<sup>1</sup> He joined the division at Camp Hale, and while there carried on a substantial correspondence with Minnie Dole, in which he was free with his opinions on just what was going well, and otherwise, with the development of mountain troops. Dole was usually cognizant of what was happening at Camp Hale thanks to his network of informants like Atwater. A frequent Atwater criticism was the emphasis on ski technique unconnected to the needs of

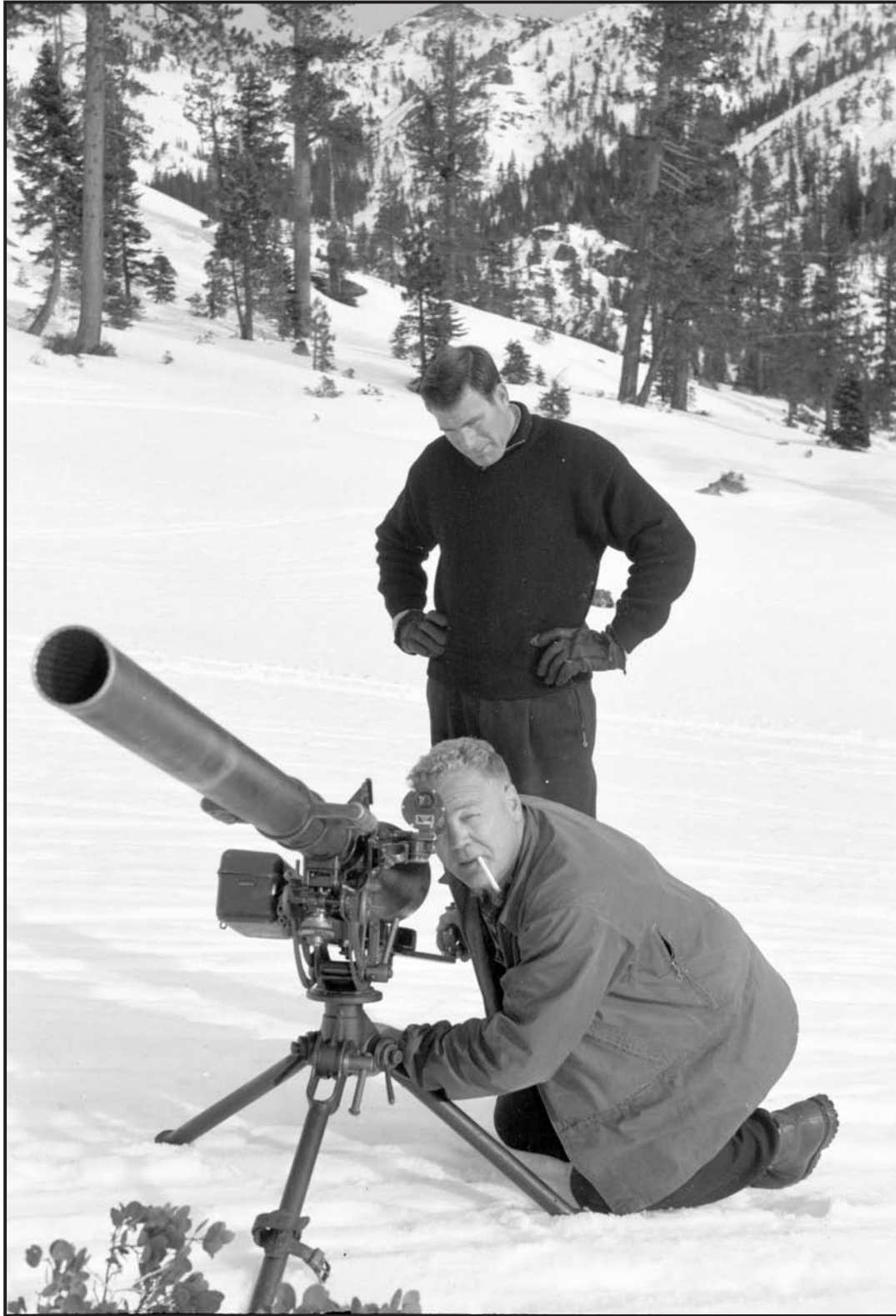
*Continued on page 16*



*Courtesy of Alta Ski Area*

*At Alta, Utah U.S. Forest Service snow ranger Monty Atwater, left, pioneered the use of artillery for avalanche control. Here Atwater and his superior, Felix Koziol, supervisor of the Wasatch National Forest watch as Utah National Guard Captain Ellis loads the World War I French 75 mm artillery piece that was used at Alta. Atwater was surely aware of the February 1943 incident at Slide Lake beneath Homestake Peak when howitzer fire from the Mountain Training Center's Pack Artillery brought down a huge avalanche, but little further development of the concept was carried out by the mountain troops, leaving the field to be explored by Atwater after the war.*

*Dorothy Crossley, New England Ski Museum*



*Monty Atwater moved to Squaw Valley, California several years ahead of the 1960 Winter Olympic Games to oversee snow safety there. Here he was able to obtain a 75 mm recoilless rifle, developed during World War II. “The day I heard about it, I knew that it was an ideal weapon for an avalanche hunter: accurate, powerful, simple and light,” Atwater wrote. In this photograph, Atwater aims the recoilless rifle while Squaw’s mountain manager John Motizia looks on.*



*New England Ski Museum*

*Gerry Cunningham was interested in outdoor equipment before he joined the 10th, where he served as a medic in the 86th. After the war, he and his wife Ann started Gerry Mountain Equipment in their Ward, Colorado home, producing packs, tents and clothing and selling through a mail order catalog. They opened a store in Boulder in 1958, the first of eight, and in the 1960s the business grew rapidly along with the popularity of camping and backpacking.*

military skiing. "A lot of our best skiers, who have been in the Army long enough to know better, still haven't got it through their heads that from a military standpoint skis are a means of taking firepower to places you can't take it on foot," Atwater wrote to Dole. "No more and no less."

Atwater was an aide to Brigadier General Frank L. Culin, Jr., then the assistant division commander, and he thought highly of his boss. Unlike many 10<sup>th</sup> officers, Culin took to the field. "You ought to see the expressions on some of these people when they come wheezing to the top of some mountain and find General Culin up there waiting for them—with yours truly, of course, grinning wolfishly in the background," Atwater wrote Dole. Later, Culin would command the 87<sup>th</sup> "Golden Acorn"

Division which saw action in Europe from the Ardennes to Plauen, Germany, near the Czech border. When Culin departed from Camp Hale, Atwater went with him as a staff officer.<sup>2</sup>

Atwater was wounded at the Battle of the Bulge with the 87<sup>th</sup> Division after he left the 10<sup>th</sup>, and as he recuperated he contemplated his next moves in a letter to Dole. "One of the things I'm sniffing around is Sverre Engen's job as avalanche detector at Alta (Utah). He's decided to give it up principally on account of his arthritis."<sup>3</sup> This indeed became Atwater's course, though he allowed that "there were dozens of better qualified ski mountaineers in the Tenth," but Atwater had his discharge and was available.<sup>4</sup>

<p><b>Gerry Tents</b> Gerry manufactures an outstanding line of extremely light and weatherproof camping and mountaineering tents. They are unique in design, giving the greatest amount of room possible per pound of tent. Year-Round II, Mountain II, Camponaire, and Fortnight have a sophisticated "bathtub" floor construction which rises 4-6 inches off the ground on every side and then attaches to the main wall of the tent. This presents no perimeter floor seam to the ground-water. Uniformly hugging fly-sheets come down nearly to the ground on two sides. All zippers are nylon. Tents come with pegs.</p>	<p><b>Gerry Year-Round II</b> Larger model of the original Year-Round. Accommodates 2, with room for gear in the floorless vestibule. Mosquito netting is zippered both down the center and across the bottom for maximum insect protection. Large zippered rear window affords easy cross ventilation. Front, square A-frame design allows ample head room while keeping weight to a minimum by sloping to a single "I" pole in the rear. The vestibule is made of breathable material to avoid trapping moisture, however, the tight weave and steep slope sheds rain effectively. Color is Blue. Weight 6 lbs. 4 oz. GETT06 Gerry Year-Round II \$110.00</p>	<p><b>Gerry Mountain II</b> A new A-frame tent for two people, which can be used in all four seasons. It is light enough for summer packing, but sturdy enough for winter use. This tent features a full zippered door in the storage alcove at one end, and a tunnel entrance at the other. A cookhole, high sidewalls, with pullouts, and interior spreader wands make this a great tent. Color is Blue and Orange. Weight: 6 lbs. 14 oz. GETT15 Gerry Mountain II \$150.00</p>

New England Ski Museum

*This page from a 1973 Eastern Mountain Sports catalog shows several Gerry tents. The Gerry Mountain II model shown on the right echoes the design of the mountain tent issued to the 10th. That model was made of poplin coated with a resin waterproofing material that did not allow moisture to disperse, leading to condensation and frost buildup on the interior. For that reason, many soldiers found it more comfortable to sleep in snow caves or trenches rather than the Army-issue tents. Gerry Cunningham was responsible for improvements to many items of outdoor gear that were first used for the mountain troops such as these tents.*



The Alta job was as a U.S. Forest Service snow ranger charged with securing the safety of skiers at the ski area in an area that had experienced deadly and devastating avalanches since it was a silver mining center in the 1800s.

Atwater's first avalanche rescue came soon after he arrived, on December 17, 1945. Along with his predecessor as snow ranger, Sverre Engen and his brother Alf, Atwater located a skier who was buried for two hours after an out of bounds slide, and successfully carried him to safety. That was the point at which he recalled that he "stopped being a guy with a fill-in job and declared a personal feud with avalanches."<sup>5</sup>

In the first few winters Atwater spent at Alta, his tools for reacting to his judgements of avalanche hazard were limited to declaring parts of the ski area off-limits, and to closing the canyon road from Salt Lake City. These actions were often unpopular with skiers and innkeepers. In 1948, he first experimented with dynamite in an attempt to nudge suspect snow slopes into preemptive slides, but soon switched to using war surplus tetrytol, which he found had a higher rate of detonation that was more effective.

Around 1952, when skier traffic was increasing and more terrain was on the verge of opening to lift served skiing, Atwater and his supervisor, Felix Koziol arranged for the Utah National



#### Ski Parkas

Ski parkas are a very seasonal item for us. Many of the fashion colors and styles are stocked in a very limited quantity. We hope that you will place your mail orders for these items before Christmas.

We rate the down insulation (loft) of our ski parkas at 1½ inch. This rating is higher than a sewn-through mountaineering parka with the same down fill because all ski parkas have at least one additional, wind-resistant layer of fabric.

#### The Gerry Tyrol Deluxe

A very warm, palm-length, down ski parka. Smooth outside nylon shell with concealed cuffs, nylon knit, and a two-way zipper for ventilation. One inside and two outside pockets and a nylon hood which hangs in back of neck. Snap-open belt loops hold the adjustable belt in place. Colors: Storm Blue, Brown and Vail Red. Men's only. S, M, ML, L, XL. Wt. 2 lbs. 5 oz. (M).  
GEAP02 Tyrol Deluxe \$69.00

#### The Gerry Dolly

This fashionable down ski parka was so popular last year that we are offering it again this season in nine colors and two new fabrics—polyester denim and Antron taffeta. The outside shell is Zepel treated for water and stain resistance. An inside pocket at the back of the neck conceals the hood when it is not in use. The Dolly also features concealed knit cuffs, an inside glove pocket and a #5 YKK 2-way zipper. A below-the-hip zipper with a flap and the concealed hand warmer pockets at the sides provide added warmth and comfort. An adjustable belt, snap breast pockets and a wide collar accentuate the Western styling. Colors: Antron taffeta: Storm Blue, Lemon, Red, Powder Blue. Denim: Blueberry, Raspberry, Violet. Stock is limited so order early. Wt. 2 lbs. 4 oz. (L). Sizes: S, M, L.  
GEAP12 Dolly \$75.00

#### The Gerry Slope Coat

Without a doubt the "Cadillac" of all ski parkas on the market today. A full-length, exceptionally warm down coat for your coldest ski days. Excellent car coat or stadium coat. Unique, molded snap Delrin clips for quick closure and a concealed nylon zipper for complete closure. One inside and two outside nylon-zippered pockets. It has a concealed down filled hood and nylon knit cuffs. Adjustable belt around waist. Men's colors: Storm Blue, Royal Blue, and Vail Red. Ladies' colors: Calif. Blue, Storm Blue, Vail Red and Charlie Brown. Men's sizes: S, M, ML, L, XL. Ladies sizes: S, M, L. Wt. 2 lbs. 10 oz. (L).  
GEAP01 Men's Slope Coat \$97.00  
GEAP10 Ladies' Slope Coat \$97.00

*Gerry's down-filled Slope Coat was their top of the line in ski parkas, and were seen at ski areas all over the country in the 1960s and 1970s.*



Richard A. Ricker, New England Ski Museum

*Raffi Bedayn grew up in the Bay Area of California, and was active with the Sierra Club in the 1930s, skiing, backpacking in the Sierras, and rock-climbing, at which he excelled. He participated in several first ascents in Yosemite, and was in the party that first climbed Shiprock, New Mexico. After his war service with the 87th, which included a stint as supply officer at the Seneca Rocks climbing school, he was a building contractor and manufactured aluminum climbing carabiners as well. Bedayn carabiners were a great improvement over the steel models used in the Army during the war, significantly lightening the gear rack that climbers carried. Bedayn filled an elder statesman role to a younger generation of Yosemite climbers in the early 1970s, acting as a bridge between the independent-minded alpinists whose lives revolved around climbing and the National Park Service overseers of Yosemite.*

Guard to conduct experiments with a World War I French 75 mm artillery piece firing rounds into gullies and snowfields that Atwater felt were due to avalanche. These tests led to more routine use of the artillery piece following significant snowfalls, expanding the options available to the snow rangers to open terrain for skiing.<sup>6</sup>

Atwater spent ten years with the Forest Service at Alta, working to systematize methods of avalanche prediction and mitigation. No scientist, Atwater nevertheless used his observational and descriptive skills to develop such concepts as precipitation intensity that are in use today. In the winter of 1949, he held the first training seminar on avalanches in the country at Alta, which evolved into the Alta Avalanche Research Center, through which the Forest Service disseminated the findings of Atwater and his research partner Ed LaChapelle to its snow rangers throughout the country. The renowned Swiss expert on avalanches, André Roch was present at the first training session, and advocated that the Forest Service establish several more avalanche research stations in other climatic regimes, leading the agency to open similar efforts at Berthoud Pass, Colorado and Stevens Pass, Washington.<sup>7</sup>

In 1956 Atwater relocated from Alta to Squaw Valley, California

ahead of the planned 1960 Olympic Winter Games, for which he would serve as chief of avalanche control procedures. The avalanche potential was just as fraught at the Olympic site as at Alta, if not more, and it was a triumph of the new art and science that the games came off safely. Following the Olympics, Atwater worked to develop an alternative to artillery called the Avalauncher, which fired explosive projectiles from a gas-powered launcher, a technology still in use at present.

It is given to only a few to invent a field of endeavor that confers wide benefits to a segment of the population. Monty Atwater and his virtual creation of the process of American avalanche study and mitigation was one who achieved this prominence.

Gerry Cunningham was drafted from his Utica, New York home in 1942, receiving his draft notice just in time to cancel his honeymoon with his new bride Ann. Long before this, he had been interested in designing packs and other outdoor equipment, an outgrowth of his upbringing in a family that participated in skiing, camping and canoeing. In 1938 while in high school, he designed and stitched a belt pack for himself, and designed a teardrop-shaped climbing pack with two sections intended to keep the contents compact and well-distributed.



Aspen Historical Society

*Lieutenant Bill Bowerman of the 86th is depicted here skiing at Aspen on leave from Camp Hale in 1943 or 1944. He served in Italy and received the Bronze Star award, and after demobilization became the track coach at the University of Oregon. Along with one of his athletes, Phil Knight, Bowerman co-founded Blue Ribbon Sports in 1964, which soon became better known as Nike. Bowerman was “a Paul Newman-Steve McQueen mashup, a genius, a war hero, a master motivator with ice-blue eyes and a stare that could melt diamonds”, according to Knight.*

His interest in outdoor equipment made the widely-publicized mountain troops attractive. “We had been lured into the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division by promises of the latest gear of advanced design, much improved over the European equipment,” he recalled. On arriving for duty, first at Fort Lewis, he found a different reality. “Instead of light weight goose down sleeping bags, ...bags were filled with 50% down and 50% feather... instead of the light weight Scandinavian Primus stoves, were saddled with several pounds, turned out, no doubt in a hurry, by the Coleman Company.”<sup>8</sup>

Cunningham was with the mountain troops from Fort Lewis through the end of hostilities in Italy. He was part of the invasion of Kiska with Company I of the 87<sup>th</sup>, served at Camp Hale and Camp Swift with the 86<sup>th</sup> regiment’s medical company, then served in Italy.<sup>9</sup>

Following demobilization, Cunningham and his wife, seeking a place to settle, were steered to the Front Range mining town of Ward, Colorado by Cunningham’s Army tent mate Bob Schwartz. Here, they built a house and in 1945 began producing and selling outdoor gear, beginning with teardrop climbing packs and updated, lighter versions of the rucksacks and packboards that Gerry had used in the Army. He also sold the same 7/16”

climbing rope from Plymouth Cordage Company that the 10<sup>th</sup> had used, though in white rather than the Army’s olive drab.

The first of many Gerry gear catalogs was published in 1946, and mailed to 250 customers on a mailing list obtained through Cunningham’s sergeant in the 10<sup>th</sup>, Arthur Draper. Draper was a New York State forest ranger and ski writer before the war, well-connected in organized skiing, was able to supply the list, reportedly from the National Ski Patrol, to the new gear outfitter. For a logo for the company, Cunningham sketched a design featuring a sharp alpine peak while he was still in the Army in Italy. “Although I had never seen it, it turned out to be a replica of Sawtooth on the Continental Divide, which we were to see from our future Colorado home,” he recalled. This logo was stitched on his first clothing labels.

At first relying solely on the catalog for sales, in 1958 the Cunninghams opened a storefront in Boulder. At a time when mountaineering and backpacking were on the verge of an explosion in popularity in the 1960s, Gerry Mountain Equipment grew rapidly and became one of the foremost sources of lightweight clothing and equipment for the sport.

Gerry’s unique products ranged from lightweight tents that were



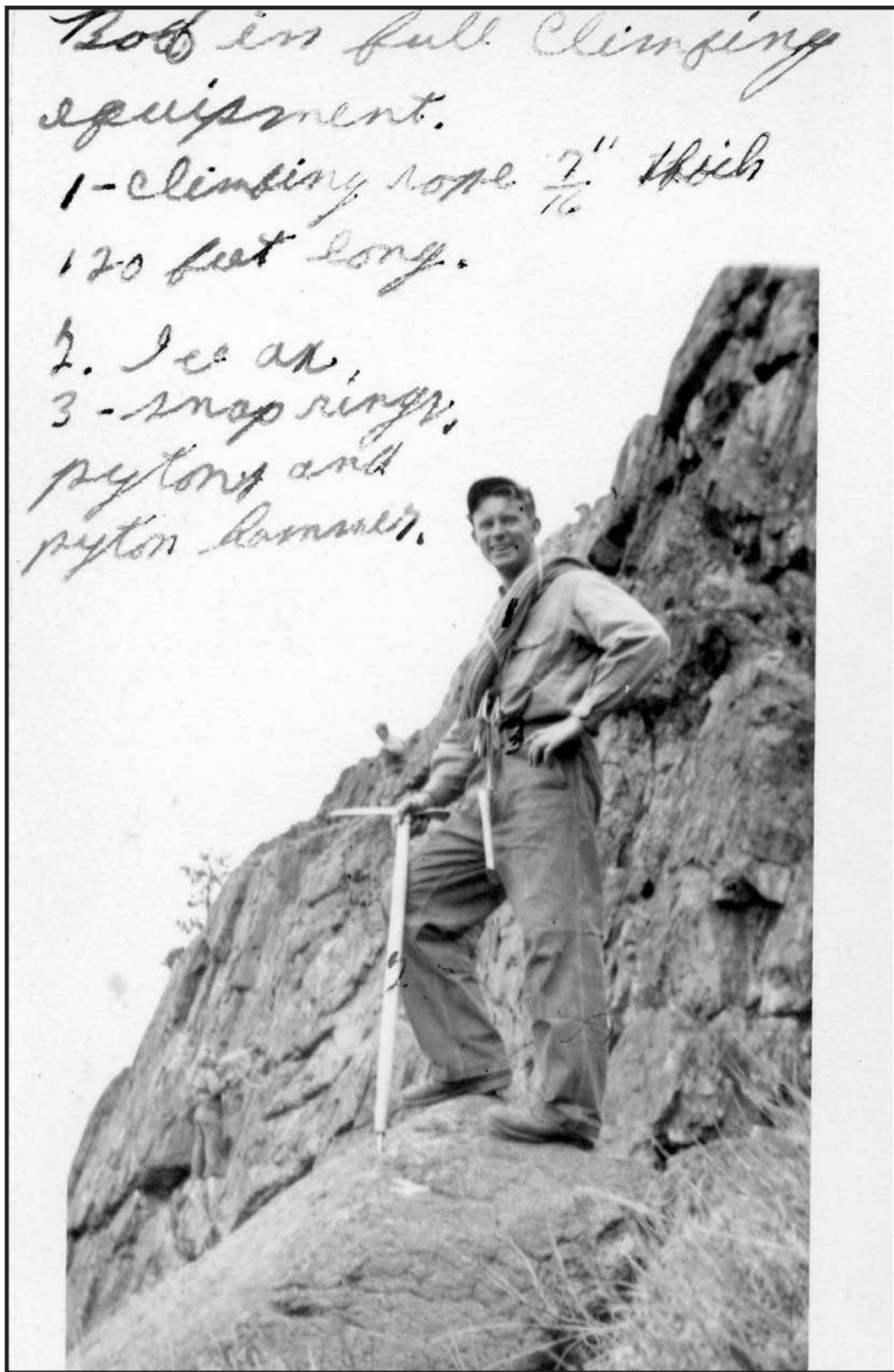
*Before the war, Hal Burton had helped Otto Schniebs cut a ski trail on Little Whiteface Mountain near Lake Placid. This entailed amending the New York state constitution to allow construction in the Adirondack Park. During service with the 10th Mountain, Burton was among the detachment sent to the Columbia Icefields in 1942, at the Seneca Rocks climbing school, then went to Italy as second in command of the 2662 detachment that taught British mountain troop replacements at Terminillo. Burton became a reporter for Newsday, and in 1971 wrote one of the first widely read books about the 10th Mountain Division, *The Ski Troops*.*

tested on Himalayan expeditions, the knee-length, down-filled Gerry Slope Coat that was ubiquitous on ski slopes in the 1960s and 1970s, the backpack Kiddie Pack designed for their third child Penny, and the humble but still-pervasive cord-lock that he invented and patented.<sup>10</sup>

Among his other early products, Gerry Cunningham worked on the design of carabiners beginning in 1947. Much better known as a carabiner producer, though, was another 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain veteran, Raffi Bedayn. Bedayn was a colleague of Bestor Robinson, David Brower and Dick Leonard, California climbers and Sierra Club members whose climbing experience and equipment knowledge was put to use by the Office of the Quartermaster General in the early days of the war. Brower, also later in the 10<sup>th</sup>, Robinson, Bedayn and John Dyer made the first ascent of New Mexico's Shiprock volcanic landform in 1939, in a four-day climb in which they spent one night on the cliff. Using pitons, expansion bolts for direct aid, the group was startled to find an unexplained bottle top at a crux pitch below the summit.<sup>11</sup>

While in the 10<sup>th</sup>, Raffi Bedayn was a rock-climbing instructor assigned to the Seneca Rocks, West Virginia climbing school, then served as a first lieutenant with company L, 87<sup>th</sup> Mountain Infantry, receiving a Bronze Star in action the Po Valley.

After the war, Bedayn manufactured and sold lightweight carabiners made from the aluminum alloy 7075 T6 that became near-universal in climbing shops and cliffs into the mid-1960s. They were used on the first successful Everest expedition in 1953, and on the first American expedition to summit the highest peak 10 years later. "Pricing of this item and quality control were not based on normal marketplace standards," wrote 10<sup>th</sup> veteran and American Alpine Club figure William Putnam, "but on that characteristic which won Raffi such a warm place among us, service to the climbing community". When a proposal to ban rock-climbing in Yosemite National Park and eliminate the climber's campground at Camp 4 there surfaced in 1973, Bedayn led the AAC effort to defeat the proposal and smooth relations between climbers and the Park Service. In recognition of his role as a mentor and father figure to younger Yosemite climbers in his later years, a memorial stone in his honor was placed at Camp 4 after his 1982 death.<sup>12</sup>



The Denver Public Library Western History Collection

Bob Morrell was one of the first Americans to be trained as an instructor of the Arlberg Technique of skiing, when the Hannes Schneider Ski School's Benno Rybizka gathered a group of young locals in the Eastern Slope region of New Hampshire to assist him in the late 1930s. Morrell and his brother Nate both joined the mountain troops. This snapshot with notes on his climbing equipment was likely taken at Camp Hale. Bob Morrell and his wife founded the Story Land amusement park in Glen, New Hampshire after the war, known to generations of New Englanders and still thriving.



Staff Sergeant Harold Sewall Williams, who was known to all he knew by his middle name, served with Company H of the 85th regiment through Camp Hale, Camp Swift, and Italy. In 1949 he purchased and renovated a rundown farmstead near Mad River Glen, Vermont and opened Ulla Lodge. Snowfall failed to materialize in the first few years of Williams' innkeeper period, and he took to placing ads in college publications claiming "Snow or no snow, Ulla is the place to go. House Party Atmosphere." The community forming around the new Mad River ski area included other 10th Mountain men such as ski school director Abbott "Bud" Phillips and fellow innkeeper Henry Perkins. Realizing the difficulty in reaching financial viability with a small ski lodge after four years, Williams sold the establishment in 1952, then managed a ski shop at Sugarbush for Sig Buchmayr. His persistence in carving out a career in skiing is representative of the experiences of many veterans of the 10th Mountain Division after the war.

## Endnotes

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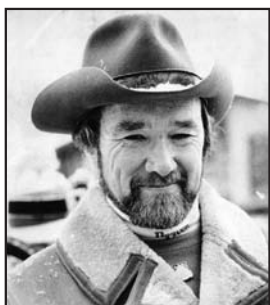
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## FIRST COMBAT ON BELVEDERE

*Robert W. Parker*, Excerpted with permission from *What'd You Do In the War, Dad?*

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*After the war, 87th Mountain Infantry regiment veteran Bob Parker had a long career in the ski business. He is best known as editor of Skiing magazine, and long-serving marketing executive and vice president at Vail and Beaver Creek. Parker's 2005 book What'd You Do In The War, Dad? features many vignettes of life in the 10th Mountain Division told from the soldier's point of view that escape historical studies of wider scope.*

### **Betrayed By A Sneeze!**

In a way, we in the Regimental Reconnaissance Platoon were lucky. Most of the men in the line companies got a sudden and brutal introduction to combat during their first day or night confrontation with the enemy. In our case, we conducted night patrols, manned observation posts, interrogated prisoners, and otherwise got some exposure to danger, and to the enemy, before being thrust into a direct combat situation.

Our first brush with the Germans and their accurate artillery happened shortly after we moved into some ancient stone houses and barns in the still-medieval town of Vidiciatico, on a north slope facing the twin massifs of Riva Ridge and Mount Belvedere. Our lieutenant immediately spotted the 11<sup>th</sup> century stone church steeple in the middle of town, thought it made a perfect location for an observation post, and assigned several of us to man an op in the north-facing embrasure in the tower's belfry.

Apparently one of us was careless about visible movement, or the glint of light on our binoculars, because in no time German shells zeroed in on the tower, destroyed its slate and wooden roof, and drove us to shelter down the rickety wooden stairs. Our regimental commander, Colonel Fowler, chewed out the lieutenant for unnecessarily endangering an historic structure, and ordered us to find another op. It was our first convincing exposure to German artillery fire, directed precisely by their observers atop Riva Ridge, our division's first battle objective.

Though not nearly as effective as the church tower, our future op's in old barns, houses, and on mountain ridges at least allowed us to keep track of any major movements of the enemy. But Colonel Fowler wanted more immediate intelligence. So our next assignment was night patrols; probing the locations of enemy lines.

I remember well our first patrol. Dressed warmly in layers of wool, shoe packs on our feet and white camouflage suits over all, we passed our own lines just after dark and suddenly were in no-mans-land. Here the frozen snow-covered terrain fell steeply beneath our feet, each step requiring a careful balancing act as we dropped into gullies, then climbed each opposite slope in the dark.

The man on point stopped frequently, feeling in front of himself with a stripped tree branch for trip wires or other obstacles, straining his ears for any suspicious sound. At first, dealing with the steep and broken terrain kept us warm. But during the many stops, the freezing night air began to seep into our clothing, making us wonder how long we could endure this exposure.

Then we began to climb, and the unmistakable profile of the enemy-occupied ridge loomed over us. As we waited for our lieutenant to choose our next move, one of the guys, after a heroic effort to suppress it, exploded in a loud sneeze.

### **All Hell Broke Loose**

In an instant, it seemed that all hell had broken loose. A machine gun on the ridge, firing frequently spaced incendiaries, raked the slope where we lay. Enemy guard dogs began barking. Then we heard the telltale "pop" of a flare opening over our heads.

Suddenly our nighttime world was as bright as day. The German flare, swaying under its parachute, seemed to take forever to descend. Meanwhile, flattened into the snow, we lay motionless, our white camouflage, we hoped, effectively hiding us from the Germans.

When the flare extinguished, and the machine gun fell silent, we lay for what seemed forever, beneath the enemy position. Apparently the Germans, unable to see any large mass of American troops in the winter darkness, had decided we were not a threat worth expending ammunition over.

Cautiously, the lieutenant crawled back among his men, whispering that we were through for the night. First crawling down hill, then stumbling back up the mountain behind a new point man, we returned to our own lines.

Here in the darkness we encountered a potentially dangerous moment. It was now past midnight, and the day's password had expired, and a new one was called for. Our point man, not remembering the new password, but cleverer than most, said aloud, "I don't know the new password, but I bet the Krauts never heard of Red Cliff, Colorado!"

Hearing the name of the tiny town nearest to our training grounds at Camp Hale, in inimitable American accents, the guards behind our barricades chuckled, and hollered, "Pass, patrol! But next time, you might not be so lucky!"

Back at regimental headquarters, our lieutenant identified the exact location of the German positions on a map, somewhere near Rocca Corneta, while the rest of us sacked out in a ramshackle hay barn. It was the first of many patrols, but none was ever burned so clearly on my memory as the night when we were almost betrayed by a sneeze.

### **First Combat on Belvedere**

The night after the 86<sup>th</sup> regiment's spectacular success on Riva Ridge on February 18<sup>th</sup>, we of the 87<sup>th</sup> and 85<sup>th</sup> regiments were committed to a second night attack, this one on Mount Belvedere in the neighborhood of Corona. I was assigned as first scout for the First Battalion, 87<sup>th</sup>, whose planned route led by Corona village on the Belvedere west ridge. It would be my initial combat experience, and night combat at that!

I remember waiting, hidden by the ancient stone buildings of Querciola, our new regimental headquarters, until night fell, then moving out ahead of B Company, at first over frozen snow. It was almost exactly over my route of several nights before. That

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night, directly under the dark outlines of the Corona buildings, I had nearly triggered a “bouncing betty” mine, which would have ended my scouting career then and there. But on February 19<sup>th</sup>, our route over frozen snow relieved my concern about German “schuh” mines. We soon had a lot more than mines to worry about.

Suddenly the muted sound of our shoepacks crunching the hard snow was drowned by the staccato sound of German machine and burp guns, and the blackness was torn by German tracers, searching the slopes where we stood. Everyone flattened himself in the snow, staring up at the ridge where the guns continued to blaze. A small tree just in front of me was cut in two by a bullet, and plopped onto my helmet. It was time to find shelter.

Ahead of and to the left I could barely sense a small ravine. On my stomach, I crawled into its shelter, and found a lieutenant and several B Company soldiers huddled below the German line of fire. None of us had fired yet—our orders were “bayonets, not bullets” until we closed with the enemy.

### *They Can't Reach Us*

Over the noise of gunfire, I hollered to the lieutenant. “They can't reach us under the terrace wall, except with grenades. Let's crawl ahead, then move up slope to the right.” One by one we first crawled, then crouching climbed the slope, with German fire still streaking the night sky overhead. As we filed out of a gully into open fields, the fire from the German positions at Corona lessened, but more mortar and machine gun fire descended upon us from higher on the ridge as we joined the rest of the company, and swung east up Belvedere proper.

The rest of that night remains a blur of cold, gunfire, mortar shells, German grenades and huddling behind any kind of cover as we advanced, paused, took cover, then advanced again. As we climbed, I occasionally heard strangled cries and sensed, rather than saw, men falling beside me. I was no longer a scout, but just part of a long line of advancing dark shapes, itching to fire our weapons but ordered not to.

For what seemed like an hour, we had to halt, while other units moved up beside our scattered formation. Then we moved out again, always stumbling in the dark, always climbing, firing now at phantom shapes ahead, struggling with the barbed wire the Germans has strung to slow us down. Suddenly, as the skies lightened to the east, we found ourselves on the flattened summit ridge of the mountain. The Germans, for the moment at least, had been driven back. B Company men began digging in on the ridge's north slope, and I looked for and found an officer among the still indistinct torn and muddy uniforms.

“Sir,” I began, but he raised a tired hand and grinned through the pall of dirt on his face. “I know, you have to return to headquarters. Just tell them, B Company has reached its objective. It's too soon to report on casualties, and Kraut positions. You'd better get out of here, they're sure to counter attack soon!”

He turned back to his men, and I started down the mountain. I still had my carbine, but somewhere in the night I had lost my helmet. Just before the summit, I had given a medic my mountain jacket, to cover a wounded line company man. So as I half ran down the mountain, my uniform was a shirt and sweater, mountain pants, and the Navy watch cap I'd worn under my helmet against the

winter cold. As it turned out, not the right clothing to identify me as an American soldier.

And the lieutenant had been right, there would be a counter attack. Three quarters of my way down the shoulder of Belvedere, German artillery opened up from the dark valley to the north. Clearly intended to stop the progress of troops coming up to reinforce our first wave, the barrage caught me turning south into the open fields around Corona. As round after round of 105 shells exploded around me, I had no choice but to flatten myself in the dirt, get up, run a yard or so, then flatten myself again. The frozen dirt of the fields soon caked my clothes, face and hands, even my carbine with instant mud.

### *One Last 105*

As I lay in a shell hole, trying to summon the will to move on, one last 105 shell screamed in and exploded three or four feet to my left. The barrage was over, but instead of the blessed silence I expected, my head rang with the explosion, and echoed with a shrill buzzing that has persisted, though not as loudly, to this day.

Somehow, I picked myself out of the shell hole, and moved on. All that existed in my mind was getting to headquarters, and reporting what I knew. But my introduction to warfare wasn't quite over.

As I stumbled down the sloping field into the woods below, a group of GIs came out of the woods in combat formation, the point man carrying an ugly looking BAR. He, and every man in the lead squad swung their guns up, and someone hollered “Halt!”

I suddenly knew how I must have looked to these men, themselves on the way up the mountain to join in the battle. I dropped my carbine, and raised my arms. More frightened than I'd been all night, I was about to say “I'm American!”, knowing every one of them wanted to kill me, sure that I was a German. Then a voice from the squad's rear hollered “It's OK—I know him!”

### *The Voice That Saved Me*

One by one, the men lowered their guns, and the voice that had saved me materialized into my friend Sammy, now a PFC with L Company. “Where the hell you been?” he demanded, and when I managed to croak “On the top of Belvedere”, he shrugged, and motioned me on. The unit parted to let me though, then continued on their way into combat. I learned later that L Company and one other would have, over the next two and a half months, the highest combat casualties in the 87<sup>th</sup>.

After reporting to headquarters in Querciola, I submitted to a cursory physical from our regimental surgeon, then hitched a ride in a six-by-six back to Vidiciatico. As I watched the long lines of GIs plodding up the road towards our front lines, I thanked my lucky stars I was in Recon, where I would only periodically be exposed to the worst of this war, the kind of danger they would experience almost every day they were in combat.

Years later, I learned from Sammy how he knew it was me, there on the shoulder of Mount Belvedere. “Other people must have told you this before,” he began. “Nobody, I mean nobody, has a walk like yours. Like a New England farmer, stumbling behind a plow!” Not very flattering, but just enough to save my life, that morning of February 20, 1945.





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## EXHIBIT ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS FOR THE MOUNTAIN TROOPS AND MOUNTAIN CULTURE IN POSTWAR AMERICA

*The New England Ski Museum extends sincere thanks to these people and organizations who  
contributed time, knowledge and expertise to this exhibition.*

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The Membership of New England Ski Museum

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*7-1-2016 to 9-30-2016*

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## DONATIONS TO THE MUSEUM

*July 1, 2016 to September 30, 2016*

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*These friends of the Museum made donations separate from membership dues during the dates shown. The list includes gifts to the Annual Fund Drive and general donations. We extend our gratitude for your generous support, which is critical to our success.*

### Up to \$99

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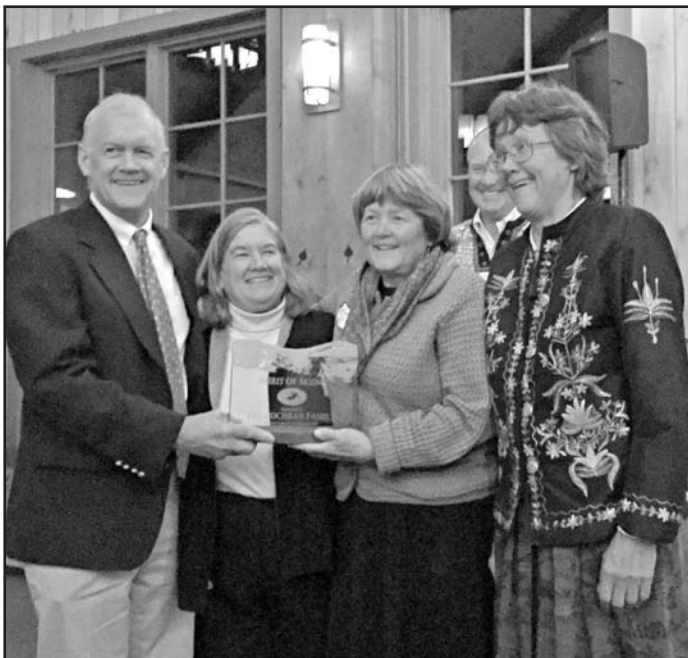
## PEOPLE AND EVENTS OF NEW ENGLAND SKI MUSEUM



Museum member Gary Powell visited in August and displayed an apparatus that he created and produces that connects to snowmaking guns to enhance the efficiency of the process. Cannon Mountain will deploy a number of these devices this winter.



US Ski Team member and downhill specialist Steve Nyman stopped by the museum in late September. Nyman grew up in Utah, where his father was ski school director at Sundance.



Members of the Cochran Family with the Spirit of Skiing Award presented to them at the 2017 Annual Meeting held at Sugarbush Resort. From left to right they are Bob Cochran, Barbara Ann Cochran, Lindy Kelley, and Marilyn Cochran Brown. President Bo Adams looks on from behind the podium. Karin Martel photo



US Ski and Snowboard Hall of Fame board member Mike Bisner, left, with Barbara Friedsam and John Egan of Sugarbush Resort at the 2017 annual meeting and Spirit of Skiing presentation.

Karin Martel photo



## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Holiday Party**  
*Thursday December 29, 2016*  
New England Ski Museum, 5 to 7 PM

**Bretton Woods Nordic Marathon**  
*Saturday March 11, 2017*  
Omni Mount Washington Resort

**Hannes Schneider Meister Cup Race**  
*Saturday March 11, 2017*  
Cranmore Mountain Resort

## CURRENT EXHIBITS

*Through June, 2017*

New England Ski Museum, Franconia Notch, NH  
*The Mountain Troops and Mountain Culture in Postwar America*

Bethel Historical Society, Bethel, Maine  
*The Mountains of Maine: Skiing in the Pine Tree State*

Bretton Woods Resort Base Lodge, Bretton Woods NH  
*Green Mountains, White Gold: Origins of Vermont Skiing*

Intervale Scenic Vista, Route 16, Intervale NH  
*Skiing in the Mount Washington Valley*

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New England Ski Museum is officially  
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### Membership Levels

100% Tax deductible

- Life: \$1,000 Single payment
- Sustaining: \$125/Year
- Supporting: \$75/Year
- Family: \$50/Year
- Individual: \$35/Year
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- Access to the Library by appointment

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