





BY LISA DENSMORE BALLARD

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BOB ARNOLD,  
LISA DENSMORE BALLARD, NEW ENGLAND SKI  
MUSEUM, AND PASSION FOR SNOW FILM

# MOUNTAIN TROOPS

## PAST AND PRESENT

AN INTRINSIC PART OF SKIING  
HISTORY AND WORLD WAR II

**I**t's hard to be a skier and not have at least a passing knowledge of the US Army's 10th Mountain Division. Over 70 years ago, their success in Italy's Apennine Mountains helped the Allies win World War II. Afterward, 10th Mountain veterans played key roles in the development of all aspects of the ski industry in New Hampshire and the rest of the country. ▶

Members of the modern-day 10th Mountain Division with Hannes Schneider's grandson at the Cranmore Mountain Resort for the 2013 Hannes Schneider Meister Cup.

Inset: The original 10th Mountain Division training at Mount Rainier, circa 1942.

## THE 10TH MOUNTAIN DIVISION AT CRANMORE MOUNTAIN RESORT

Each March, members of the 10th Mountain Division, past and present, gather at the Cranmore Mountain Resort for the annual Hannes Schneider Meister Cup. The event benefits the New England Ski Museum and provides funding for the museum's Cal Conniff Grant Program. It's open to the public and is truly one of winter's biggest happenings in the White Mountains.

The festivities include an evening ski tour up the mountain, a team race, an ice-carving competition, a color guard, music by the Bavarian Brothers Band, a silent auction, a vintage skiwear fashion show, and fabulous food. The weekend concludes with the Harvey Dow Gibson Memorial Lecture on an aspect of ski history that relates to the region.

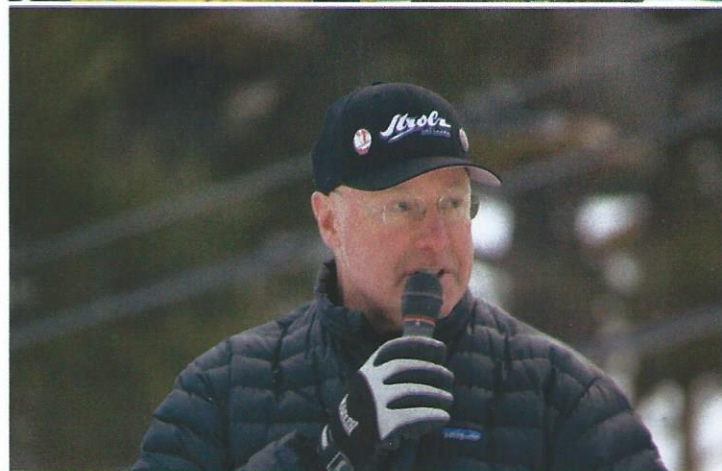
The ski tour is strictly social and commemorates the fact that Hannes Schneider developed his group-teaching methods before ski lifts were invented. The race is open to all types of skiers and snowboarders with special divisions for past and current members of the 10th Mountain Division and the Vermont National Guard's mountain warfare brigade.

This winter, the Meister Cup takes place on March 12, 2016, the 20th anniversary of this festive gathering. About 200 people are expected to compete in the Meister Cup race, with 2,000 people spectating and enjoying the rest of the program.

"It's a draw for those who care about ski history or who have deep roots at Cranmore, even if they have moved on to other mountains or no longer ski," says Jeff Leich, executive director of the New England Ski Museum. "The 10th Mountain vets and soldiers mingle with everyone. There's a lot going on. It's a great spring weekend!"



10th Mountain Division  
statue at Vail Village in  
Vail, Colorado.



Many of the Granite State's ski areas, including Attitash, Black Mountain, the Jackson Ski Touring Center, Cranmore Mountain Resort, the Dartmouth Skiway, Mount Sunapee, and Wildcat, were either founded by or had high-level staff who served in the 10th Mountain Division. The story of this much-lauded group of skiers and mountaineers, many of whom gave their lives for our country, is an intrinsic part of the sport of skiing.

### HOW THE MOUNTAIN TROOPS CAME TO BE

The 10th Mountain Division was formed at the urging of two key figures in American skiing, Charles Minot "Minnie" Dole, founder of the National Ski Patrol, and Roger Langley, president of the National Ski Association. Dole and Langley feared that if England fell to the Nazis, New England would be their next target, with the attack following the colonial routes from Canada down the Champlain and Hudson Valleys. They worried, rightfully, that the United States would be grossly underprepared against the Axis army's highly trained mountain infantry, and so they convinced US Secretary of War Henry Stimson and General George Marshall to create a mountain division with the help of the National Ski Patrol.

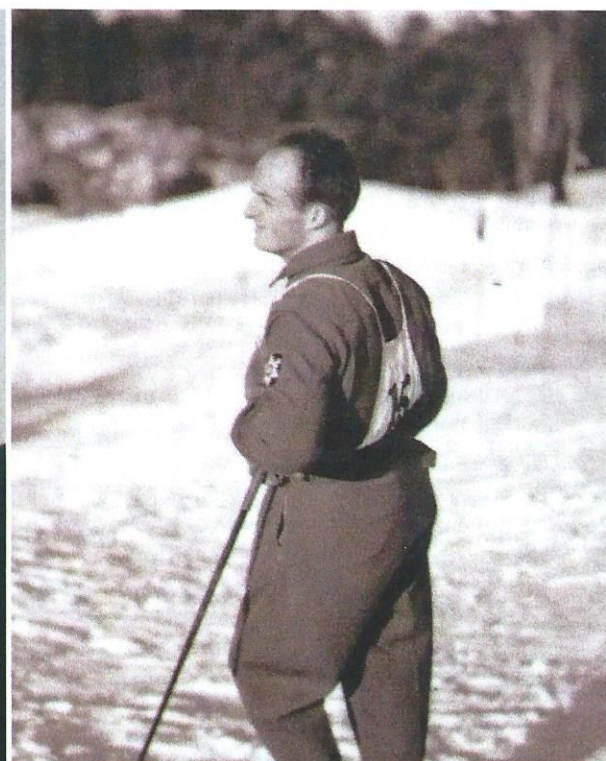
After the attack on Pearl Harbor, which catapulted the United States into World War II, most of the country's elite skiers and mountaineers asked to join or were recruited for the new 10th Mountain Division. Its ranks filled with many New Hampshire-ites, including Olympians and other accomplished members of the Dartmouth College and the University of New Hampshire ski teams; hundreds of other New England-based skiers; and expatriate European ski instructors who were teaching under Hannes Schneider in North Conway and at other early ski schools in the state.

The Division's roster read like a who's who in skiing, with such famed Granite State standouts as Dick Durrance, Toni Matt, Hannes Schneider's son Herbert, John Litchfield, and Walter

Clockwise from top left: Bob Arnold (left) and 10th Mountain Division veteran Dick Calvert at the 2014 Hannes Schneider Meister Cup. Ski industry veteran Cal Conniff watches the Meister Cup festivities with 10th Mountain Division veteran Nelson Bennett. New England Ski Museum Executive Director Jeff Leich with Meister Cup honoree Nelson Bennett, age 100. New England Ski Museum President Bo Adams speaks to the crowd during the Meister Cup activities at the Cranmore Mountain Resort.



“We all loved the mountains, climbing, camping, and skiing, except when it was minus 30 degrees and snowing,” remembers Dick. “At least at Camp Hale we were fighting weather instead of live artillery. I enjoyed the outdoor aspects of it and learned to rock climb. I was 125 pounds soaking wet and had to belay 200-pound guys.”



Clockwise from top left: Olympian and Dartmouth ski team member John Litchfield served in the 10th Mountain Division during World War II. 10th Mountain Division veteran Dick Calvert takes the gold at the 2014 US Alpine Masters Championships in the 90+ age group. Retiring from ski racing after last winter, he was the last of the original 10th Mountain Division skiers to step into a starting gate.

Dartmouth's Dick Durrance, the top American skier of the 1930s, helped train the original 10th Mountain Division troops. Dartmouth coach and Swiss champion Walter Prager joined the 10th Mountain Division during World War II. Members of the modern-day 10th Mountain Division at the Hannes Schneider Meister Cup compete on both skis and snowboards.

Prager. Now 92 and still skiing, Dick Calvert of Wolfeboro was among those recruits.

"I started skiing when I was 12 years old, at first with just a toe strap for a binding," says Dick. "When the war broke out, I wanted to join the Air Force, but I wore glasses and got turned down. A friend told me about the mountain troops and recommended I get in touch with Minnie Dole. I was assigned to Camp Hale before I got officially inducted. Minnie had a lot of influence."

### SPECIALIZED TRAINING

Some of the early 10th Mountain Division recruits were stationed in New Hampshire during the fall of 1942. They taught members of other military divisions how to rock climb and rappel down Cannon Mountain's cliffs, and they practiced forest ambush skills on the hiking trails on Mount Lafayette. However, most of the 10th Mountain Division's training took place at Camp Hale near Leadville, Colorado.

"We all loved the mountains, climbing, camping, and skiing, except when it was minus 30 degrees and snowing," remembers Dick. "At least at Camp Hale we were fighting weather instead of live artillery. I enjoyed the outdoor aspects of it and learned to rock climb. I was 125 pounds soaking wet and had to belay 200-pound guys."

As the United States had never had mountain troops prior to the formation of the 10th Mountain Division, there was much to figure out before the division could be deployed. A large part of their time at Camp Hale was dedicated to developing and testing military equipment for winter conditions in the mountains.

"Operations manuals were being written," said John Litchfield in the historical documentary *Passion for Snow*. "Transportation was unique. Motorized toboggans were being experimented with. Dog teams were being experimented with. All forms of communication, laying wire, because in the mountains radio is not effective."

### FIGHTING IN THE APENNINES

The 10th Mountain Division saw no action for most of World War II. Then, during the Christmas season of 1944,

# The Carriage Shed



Make Your Dream a Reality...  
with your own Custom Built Amish Structure



- BARNS -
- CERTIFIED HOMES -
- GARAGES -
- SHEDS -
- RUN-IN SHEDS -
- GAZEBOS -
- ARENAS -
- PLAYHOUSES -



- Delivery throughout the USA -



800-441-6057 • [www.CarriageShed.com](http://www.CarriageShed.com)  
1195 VA Cutoff Road, White River Junction, VT

## GRAND OPENING!

New Patients Welcome!



**Eileen Saunders, DMD**  
Pediatric Dentist  
Serving Patients up to 18 Years!

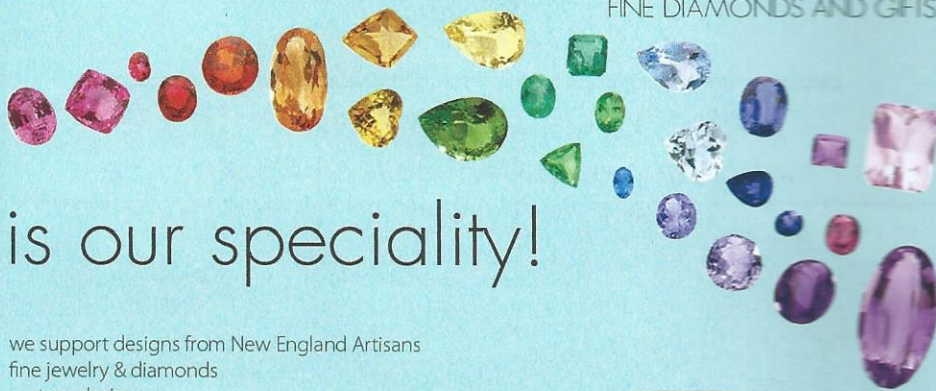


603.790.8130  
[uvpediatricdentistry.com](http://uvpediatricdentistry.com)

30 Airport Road • Suite 7  
West Lebanon, NH

all that glitters...

  
**JOZACH JEWELERS**  
FINE DIAMONDS AND GIFTS



is our speciality!

we support designs from New England Artisans  
fine jewelry & diamonds  
custom design  
estate jewelry  
appraisals  
repairs  
pottery & gifts

1 pleasant street  
claremont, nh  
603.542.2953  
joszachjewelers.net

hours:  
tues - fri 10-6  
sat 10-4



they were rushed to Italy's Apennine Mountains as the Battle of the Bulge raged across the Western Front. If the 10th Mountain troops could gain control of Nazi-held Mount Belvedere, the US could seal off the Alps. However, the Nazis had an unobstructed view from a high shoulder of Mount Belvedere, code-named "Riva Ridge," and believed their position was impenetrable.

"Riva Ridge was incredible, a 2,200 vertical foot escarpment," recalled Newcomb "Newc" Eldredge, a member of the 10th Mountain Division from Newport, during an interview for the film *Passion for Snow*. "The Germans thought that we would never take Riva Ridge. . . . We were green troops, but we were loaded with grenades, and we had fixed bayonets. That's cold steel, baby. That means you may get close to the enemy. You may have to gut 'em, so we weren't feeling too happy about this."

One night, a group of elite alpinists in the 10th Mountain Division courageously climbed the cliff in one of the most audacious feats in the history of mountain warfare. The next night, the rest of the division quietly crossed the valley and climbed Mount Belvedere.

The fighting was fierce, hand-to-hand in the dark, but by dawn, the Americans controlled the mountain. The 10th Mountain Division suffered over 1,000 casualties and 4,000 injuries, but they succeeded in keeping the German Army contained. Dick Calvert was one of the men on Riva Ridge during the battle.

"Two other divisions had tried to take Mount Belvedere but couldn't because the Germans on Riva Ridge controlled the high country," remembers Dick, the radio operator for the commanding officer of his battalion. "The scariest part was the artillery fire because you couldn't do anything about it. We had heavy casualties in a short period of time. It made me a fatalist. All I could think was what will be, will be."

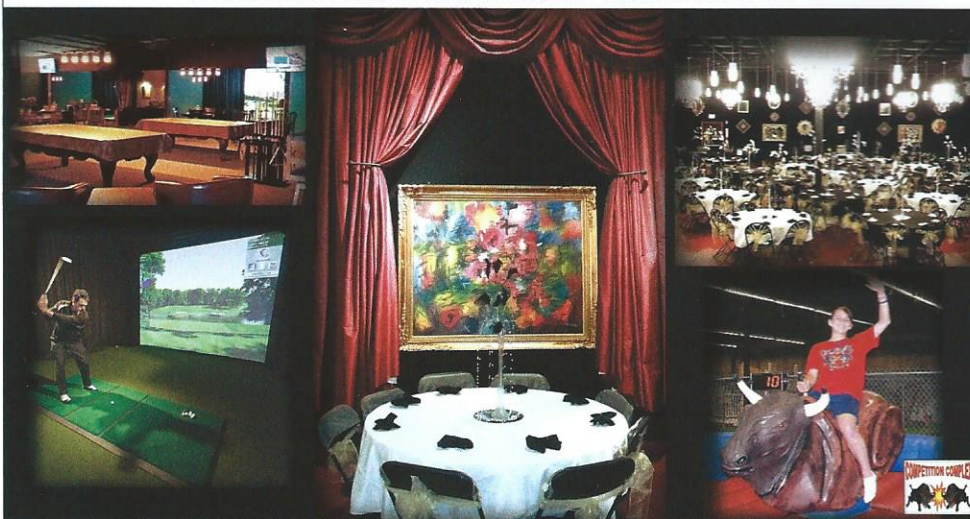
### KEEPING THE MEMORY ALIVE

The surviving members of the 10th Mountain Division returned home after the war, some to get their college degrees and others to return to their jobs, but a number of them went to work in the developing ski industry, starting ski resorts, ski shops, ski schools, and ski patrols. For example, one-time Bartlett resident Pete Seibert founded Vail in



## THE MOUNTAIN MEADOW EVENT CENTER

### ENTERTAINMENT FOR ALL YOUR NEEDS



Indoor Golf • Pool & Darts • Lounge & Bar • Corporate Events  
Live Entertainment • Open Mic Comedy & Karaoke • Wing Nights

**Canaan, NH • MountainMeadowEventCenter.com • 603.769.4093**



**HOME TO THE FAMOUS, COMPETITION COMPLEX!**

Indoor play area, fun for everyone! Only 8 miles off of Exit 17, I-89



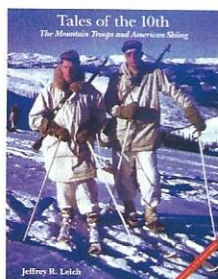
Colorado, and Dartmouth racer and Newport native Bob Skinner established Bob Skinner's Ski and Sports Shop, which has serviced Mount Sunapee skiers for over 50 years.

Despite the tragedies of war, the members of the 10th Mountain Division retained their love of skiing. They also returned with a special bond with each other. While few of the original 10th Mountain Division troops are alive today, their descendants keep their memory alive through the 10th Mountain Division Association. The association keeps members of this elite mountain troop in touch with each other and funds scholarships for their children and grandchildren across the country.

"We had a newspaper at Camp Hale called *The Blizzard*," says Dick. "Instead of pin-up girls, it contained pin-up mountains. It still exists. Today, the sun doesn't set on the 10th Mountain Division, which is now part of Special Forces. They're spread out all over the world, but the common bond is still the mountains." 🌲

### MORE INFO

For more information, to become a patron, or to sign up for the 2016 Hannes Schneider Meister Cup, go to [www.meistercup.org](http://www.meistercup.org), or contact the New England Ski Museum, [www.skimuseum.org](http://www.skimuseum.org).



To learn more about the 10th Mountain Division, check out the book, *Tales of the 10th: The Mountain Troops and American Skiing*, 2nd Edition, by Jeffrey Leich (New England Ski Museum, 2008) and the Emmy-nominated documentary film *Passion for Snow*, both at [www.skimuseum.org](http://www.skimuseum.org), or contact the 10th Mountain Division Association, [www.10thmtndivassoc.org](http://www.10thmtndivassoc.org).



### ONLINE EXTRA

For additional photos, go online to [www.uppervalleyimage.com](http://www.uppervalleyimage.com).

# OLD HAMPSHIRE DESIGNS, INC.

Building fine custom homes in the Dartmouth Lake Sunapee region since 1984

603.526.6945 • [oldhampshiredesigns.com](http://oldhampshiredesigns.com) • [ohd@oldhampshiredesigns.com](mailto:ohd@oldhampshiredesigns.com)

# FLAT ROCK

F.L.E. AND STONE, LLC

**SO MUCH MORE THAN OUR NAME**

603-542-0678  
181 Washington Street  
Claremont, NH 03743  
[flatrocktileandstone@yahoo.com](mailto:flatrocktileandstone@yahoo.com)  
**Superior Craftsmanship & Service**

**Hours: Tuesday - Saturday 9am - 5pm**

**Carpet • Vinyl • Hardwood • Tile • Area Rugs • Countertops**  
**Fully Stocked Latricrete Dealer • Free Estimates**