

## Dartmouth Leaders

### The 10th Mountain Division

Just as Dartmouth is synonymous with hiking, skiing, and canoeing/kayaking, and vice versa, Dartmouth and the 10th Mountain Division are nearly one and the same. This Army unit required athletic skill, intelligence, determination, and courage. For anyone familiar with Dartmouth and Trips, it is no surprise where they turned for leaders. The 10th Mountain Division was originally constituted as a unique mountain warfare unit. It was the only unit of its size in the U.S. Army to specialize in fighting in mountainous and arctic conditions, thus earning the division the "MOUNTAIN" tab. The 10th Mountain Division has been deactivated and reactivated and re-designated numerous times, but its most noteworthy period came after it was named the Mountain division in 1944 and participated in the mountains of Italy in some of the most hard-fought battles in some of the roughest terrain anywhere.

In the late 1930's, rock climbing and skiing were relatively new sports in the U.S. If America ever entered into a war on the European continent, some felt that there would be a need for men who could handle extremely cold and mountainous conditions. The Tenth was the sole U.S. Army division trained on snow and rock and the only one ever to have grown out of sports (mountaineering and skiing). Dubbed the "ski troops" by the press and popularized in magazines such as Life, the 10th Mountain Division remains the only military division recruited by a civilian organization, the National Ski Patrol System. The division had a huge percentage of professional and amateur athletes, college scholars, and potential officer candidates, and as the last U.S. division to enter the war in Europe, it suffered the highest number of casualties per combat day.

When the US decided it needed a mountain division, a winter division, a skiing division, it called disproportionately on Dartmouth to get the job done. Famed Dartmouth skier Dave Bradley had paid note of what the Finns had done in their Winter War against the Russian armored troops and reported it all to Charles Minot Dole, founder and President of the National Ski Patrol. Bradley, later a ski team manager, ski jump designer, writer, surgeon, and New Hampshire state legislator, suggested that Dartmouth ski coach Walter Prager be enlisted. Dole lobbied the War Department for an Army unit trained for fighting in winter and mountain warfare. The Army, fearful that its forces would not perform well in the event of a winter attack on the Northeastern coast, as well as knowledge that the German Army already had three mountain warfare divisions, approved the concept for a division. Some military leaders continued to express concern of the feasibility of a division-sized mountain warfare unit until late 1941 when they received reports that Greek mountain troops had held back superior numbers of unprepared Italian troops in the Albanian mountains during the Greco-Italian War. The Italian military had lost a disastrous 25,000 men in the campaign because of their lack of preparedness to fight in the mountains. On October 22, 1941, the Army decided to form the first battalion of mountain warfare troops for a new mountain division. The Ski Patrol would assist in its training. Across the country, there were many well educated men who served the nation in WWII, and there were many men from the mountains. But, the Dartmouth men had the ideal mix of those attributes and accounted for 107 members of the division. The high point in the war for the 10th Mountain Division was the assault of Riva Ridge in February of 1945. The German mountain soldiers believed the mountain to be

unclimbable – especially at night. It was a successful action and was followed by the capture of Belvedere in the Battle of Monte Castello. Senator Bob Dole, who was nearly mortally wounded in the assault, said that “We had two ski guys with us. I was no mountain guy, but they were. They dragged me to safety, and then stayed with me far too long, at least probably longer than they should have.” He didn’t say so, but these are the sorts of things that one learns on Trips.

The World War II exploits of the 10th Mountain Division of the U.S. Army are well documented and legendary. This is not however the conventional war story that has been told many times over. It is a unique tale of like-minded men who were brought together for a specific purpose, and who, in finding their love of outdoor sport enhanced by their war-time experience, were at the forefront in popularizing skiing and other outdoor sports in post-war America. These athlete-veterans tapped into broad demographic and economic changes affecting Americans, and profoundly shaped the American outdoor experience in the decades following World War II. Through hard work and force of character, they created what we know as the "ski industry" and founded almost every one of the American destination ski resorts.

### **Others Who Came Before Us**

When I selected those three iconic Dartmouth skiers for our last Newsletter, I knew I was going to be giving short shrift to others - from the earlier days - as well as many great Dartmouth skiers right up to the present. There were, after all, nine Dartmouth skiers - each of whom had a story to tell - on that 1940 team that couldn't compete when the Helsinki Olympics were canceled due to the war. But, the three men I chose were pioneers in so many ways and, for that reason alone, deserved special mention.

Upon further reflection, however, I want to highlight three more Dartmouth men - icons in their own ways. **Bill Beck '53** was a US National Team member from 1951-57. He tied Chick Igaya for the gold medal in the US national downhill in 1955. His 5th place finish in the downhill at the 1952 Oslo Olympics was the US best in the event until it was tied in 1980 by Pete Patterson (brother of Susie Patterson Gillette, Ned's widow) and not exceeded until Bill Johnson's gold medal in 1984. Beck was the US team captain at the '56 Olympics and Head Men’s Coach in 1960. After retiring from competition, he built a successful ski equipment business. **Brooks Dodge '51** (and Harvard Business School '57) grew up in Pinkham Notch, began skiing at two, and started racing at seven. A member of the US FIS teams in 1950 and 1954 and Olympic teams in 1952 and 1956, Dodge was a pioneer in the world of Extreme Skiing and the founder of the Wildcat Ski Area. **Tom Corcoran '54** (and Harvard Business School '59) finished 4th in the Giant Slalom in the 1960 Olympics at Squaw Valley, the best US men’s alpine result to that point and the best in the event until Bode Miller's silver in 2002. Corcoran founded the Waterville Valley Ski Area and started the NASTAR ski racing program that many of us have enjoyed. Several months before his death in 2017, he announced that "I need to ski" and was flown north from South Carolina. Although suffering with failing health at age 85, he reportedly "still had it" on the slopes. Generally modest and unassuming, it is important to note that these three were leaders of Dartmouth skiing, US skiing at an International level, and the skiing industry in general. They left their own trail in the snow.

## Mount Everest

When Swiss-American climber Norman Dyhrenfurth was named leader of the 1963 first American Mount Everest expedition, he sought out a core group of Dartmouth men to join the climb. (I trust by now that the reader is beginning to see a pattern here!) These climbers had a wealth of climbing experience. The National Geographic Society Committee had already proposed that Barry Bishop '53, its Director of the Committee for Research and Exploration, be included. A skilled climber with a warm heart, Bishop had done acclimatization research near Everest with Sir Edmund Hillary and wanted to do studies on the summit. In the early and mid-fifties, Barry Corbet '58 and Jake Breitenbach '57 had driven around the Grand Tetons in Corbet's rusting 1948 Hudson. They climbed six peaks in six days, following the path of Jack Durrance '39 (yes, brother and uncle), the founder in 1936 of the Dartmouth Mountaineering Club. These two were joined at a local Tetons guide service by Dave Dingman '58, who had completed ascents in the Andes and of Mount McKinley. The final Dartmouth climber was farm boy, football player, and geologist Barry Prather '61, an experienced glaciologist on the Juneau Icefield Research Project and a climber who had lived for an amazing 53 consecutive days on the summit of Mount Rainier.

As misfortune would have it, tragedy struck on the second day of the crossing of the Khumbu Icefall when Breitenbach was crushed beneath a falling wall of ice. The expedition continued, climaxing with Jim Whittaker and Nawang Gomba reaching the summit on May 1. Later ascents met success by the South Col, the new Southeast Ridge, and the new West Ridge route. When four climbers were forced to bivouac at 28,000 feet, Dingman revived them the next morning and helped them descend to camp. Corbet and another climber would lose their toes to frostbite.

In a most curious postscript, the four surviving Dartmouth climbers were recruited by the CIA while we were students at the College. Their mission was to install a plutonium fuel cell surveillance device on the summit of 25,645-foot Nanda Devi to spy on a Chinese nuclear missile test site. For the climbers, their subsequent return to normal life was at least as dangerous as the climb itself had been. Corbet was paralyzed from the waist down in a helicopter crash while making a ski film - undaunted, he took up kayaking and founded a magazine, *New Mobility*, for the disabled. In 1969, Breitenbach's body emerged from the Khumbu glacier and he was buried in the Tengboche monastery, in view of Everest. Later, the fifth highest mountain in Idaho was named for him - its 12,140 height is the same as his burial site. Prather, in 1987, and Bishop, in 1994, were killed in car accidents. Only Dingman, a medic in Vietnam and later a family doctor, survives.

Other Dartmouth climbers to summit Mount Everest include (along with many others) Ned Gillette '67, who circumnavigated the mountain on skis in 1981 and summited in 1992, and Andy Harvard '71, who led or participated in four expeditions and achieved a first ascent of the East Face in 1984.