

Ski country is grateful to 10th Mountain Division

■ Sen. Bob Dole's Army division returned from war and helped start a skiing boom.

New York Times News Service

KEYSTONE, Colo. — To the spring-break college crowd, snowboarders in baggy pants and ski bunnies in pink ear muffs, the sight must have seemed strange: a dozen aging men, wearing white camouflage, descending a ski run in a slow, serpentine formation, making the wide, graceful turns popular in the 1930s.

In World War II, these crack ski troops of the U.S. Army's 10th Mountain Division were known as the invisible men in white. After the war, they were the heart of an extraordinary boom in recreational skiing. From 200,000 skiers at the end of the war, the number has grown to about 10 million skiers in the United States, according to the industry.

Before the sun-creased septuagenarians schuss into the sunset, they are being hailed with a shower of ski passes, documentary movies, coffee-table books, memorial highways and ski-run dedications.

"For the second generation of the ski business, we can be especially grateful that they came home and founded many of the 500 ski areas in the country," John Rutter, a vice president of Keystone Resort, said recently as sun shone off packed powder at the resort's 11,640-foot summit. "They touched every ski area in the nation."

Moments later, a white-haired former drill instructor barked, "Hoods up, tips down," and the camouflaged veterans, as old as 84, glided under an arch of ski poles to dedicate another ski run to their old unit. Watching the reunion of a few of the division association's 3,500 members, Dean G. Carmichael, 70, the group's president, said in a choking voice: "I hope our name will live on long after we are gone from these slopes."

In a state with a young population and many new residents, Coloradans are waking up to the deep impact made on the Rockies by the 10,000 men who trained in the mountains 35 miles from here in World War II. Postwar demobilization did more to promote skiing than the simple flooding of sports stores with Army surplus skis, boots and parkas.

"The 10th Mountain Division introduced a lot of us to the Rocky Mountains, to the West," said one veteran, Peter W. Seibert, 71, "and to the desirability of the weather and snow here." A native of the White Mountains of New Hampshire, Seibert came back here after the war. In 1962, he opened the Vail ski resort, now the nation's largest. Other 10th Division veterans returned and started ski resorts at Aspen and Steamboat Springs.

"Tenth-Mountain vets founded 12 major ski areas, managed 17 others, and directed 33 ski schools," said Beth Gage, who last year produced and directed with her husband, George, a documentary film on the unit, "Fire on the Mountain."

Overall, 2,000 10th Division veterans moved to ski areas where they worked as instructors, patrolmen and managers, according to unit histori-

ans. In New England, unit veterans founded Sugarbush in Vermont, ran Waterville Valley, N.H., and directed ski schools in the Vermont resorts of Bromley and Stowe. The first publisher and the first three editors of Skiing Magazine were 10th Mountain veterans. Promoting mountain sports and conservation, division alumni include David Brower, who became executive director of the Sierra Club; Bill Bowerman, who founded Nike shoes; and Paul Petzoldt, who founded the National Outdoor Leadership School.

In politics, Francis Sargent became governor of Massachusetts, and Bob Dole became a senator from Kansas and the presumed Republican presidential nominee.

With the unit lending its name to a wilderness trail system in Colorado and stretches of highway in Colorado, New York and Texas, a veritable industry has grown up around telling the unit's tale. Barbara Walton, director of the 10th Mountain Division Resource Center at the Denver Public Library, said 40 books and three major movies had been brought out about the unit.

The 10th Division's story began in 1940 when Charles Dole, founder of the National Ski Patrol System in

1937, watched with admiration as Finnish ski troops exacted heavy casualties from Soviet troops who had invaded in a territorial dispute. Dole, no relation to the senator, wrote to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, urging him to set up a mountain division to protect "snow-bound America" from an invasion.

After being given the green light, Dole turned skiers into soldiers, rather than turning soldiers into skiers. Using the ski patrol for recruiting, he enlisted Ivy League ski team captains, exiled European athletes and cowboys of Scandinavian origin who had grown up herding cattle on cross-country skis.

Since few American teenagers could afford a \$2 lift ticket during the Depression, skiers tended to be from the upper class. The unit's photographer, John C. Jay, learned to ski at prep school, while his father ran the Pierce Arrow Motor Car Co.

As the war evolved, it became clear that German commandos were never going to parachute into the Rockies. Instead, in December 1944, the 10th Mountain Division, strengthened to 14,000 soldiers, with most of the additions non-skiers, crossed the Atlantic to join in the attack on German forces in the northern stretches of the Apennine Mountains in Italy.

Spearheading the campaign, division troops made a daring 2,000-foot ascent of Riva Ridge. They overran German units there, helping to break the back of the German defenses. But victory came at a great cost. In only five months of fighting the division had 992 killed and 4,154 wounded — a 37 percent casualty rate.

On the night of April 14, 1945, Lieutenant Dole, a 22-year-old replacement officer with only two months experience with the unit, was cut down by German machine-gun fire, suffering near-fatal wounds.



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