

Loveland

This article series focuses on history of the 10th Mountain Division, the famous “soldiers on skis” who fought in the Italian mountains during World War II. Throughout the winter, the series will be exploring the forces behind the creation of the 10th Mountain Division, why and how it was founded, their achievements during the war, and significant impacts the veterans had on the ski and wilderness industry after the war.

Throughout the 1930s, there was incredible growth in the ski industry as wealthy skiers and transportation advances helped to produce a modern, centralized ski industry in Colorado, and intensified after WWII with the return of the 10th Mountain Division.

Skiing at Loveland Basin began when J.C. Blickensderfer installed a simple rope tow for local enthusiasts in 1936. By the following season, Al Bennett had upgraded the tow with a Ford Model T engine. The Loveland Lodge was built along with four ski tows, but by the 1940s skiing was frozen due to the war in many areas, except the 10th's own training ground, Ski Cooper.

By 1945, Al Bennett had returned to Loveland to continue operations. Wilfred “Slim” Davis, a 10th Mountain Division veteran who worked for the U.S. Forest Service after the war, was instrumental in helping Bennett establish Loveland as a ski area. Davis was an innovator of ski area design, slope layout, avalanche control and ski safety. He was responsible for establishing special use permits to allow private ski developments on public land, an indispensable asset to the industry.

The business was sold to stockholders in 1955, and Pete Seibert, also a 10th veteran and future founder of Vail, was named General Manager of Loveland. In the same decade, two new ski lifts were built.

Another member of the 10th and a native of Steamboat, Gordon “Gordy” Wren, became Loveland’s General Manager during the 1959-60 season. He trained for the 1940 Olympics prior to their cancellation, joined the 10th Mountain Division to teach mountain warfare, survival skills and rock climbing, and placed fifth in special jumping at the 1948 Winter Games.

Wren, Davis and Seibert were not the only 10th Mountain Division men at Loveland after the war. Earl Clark began his mountaineering career in 1936, and after serving in the 1st Battalion, 87th Mountain Infantry as a Lieutenant and officer supervisor of military ski training, he moved to Denver. A member of the National Ski Patrol, Clark patrolled at Loveland, Berthoud Pass, Winter Park and Arapahoe Basin. Grant Ford, also a Lieutenant in the 10th, returned to Colorado after finishing college and began competing, patrolling, officiating and organizing skiing. He was very active in the development of both Loveland and Hidden Valley ski areas.

Additionally, Clif Taylor began his professional ski career in the 1940s before joining the 10th. He taught skiing at Loveland, Winter Park, Aspen and Mad River Glen (Vermont) after the war. From the 1960s to 80s, Taylor promoted his Graduated Length Method process for skiing and designed equipment for this program. After appearing at a German conference, many ski schools in Austria, France and Switzerland adopted the method.

Loveland Valley Ski Area opened in 1961 in conjunction with Loveland Basin. By the mid-1960s, construction on Eisenhower Tunnel began directly underneath the ski area, helping to make Loveland easily accessible to skiers all over the state.

During the 1980s and 90s, Loveland acquired the technology for snowmaking, upgraded and expanded the lodge and improved chairlifts and capacity. Today, the area is a local's favorite and known as one of the first resorts in the West to open each season. With the care, knowledge and passion for the outdoors from the men of the 10th Mountain Division, Loveland has since grown into one of Colorado's top ski resorts.

Sources:

- David Leach's 2005 senior thesis for Middlebury College, "The Impact of the Tenth Mountain Division on the Development of a Modern Ski Industry in Colorado and Vermont: 1930-1965."
- "Fire on the Mountain," First Run Features/Gage & Gage Productions, 1995.
- Colorado Ski & Snowboard Museum archives