

## Vail Visionaries

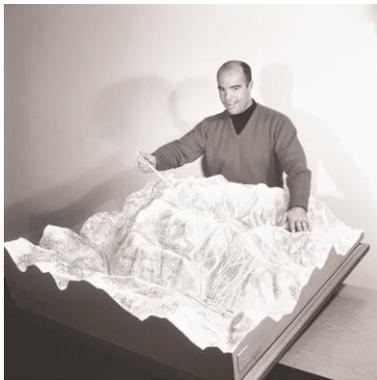
### Seibert, other men of 10<sup>th</sup> develop world-class resort

If it weren't for the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division, many of Colorado's ski resorts would not have been founded and taken off after World War II. When Pete Seibert returned from fighting in Italy with the 10<sup>th</sup>, he and Earl Eaton founded and created one of the top ski resorts in the country: Vail.

Pete Seibert learned to ski in local meadows growing up in Massachusetts. From an early age, Seibert knew he wanted to start a ski area. Coming to Colorado to train with the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division at Camp Hale, he fell in love with the state, like many others. He was wounded while fighting in the war, spent 17 months in the hospital and began skiing again, despite doctors predictions.

With love for the mountains, Seibert joined other 10<sup>th</sup> veterans at Aspen, racing and working. He spent three years in Europe learning hotel management and European ski resort expectations, determined to develop a similar resort. Upon returning to Colorado, Seibert became general manager of Loveland in 1955 and explored the state, looking at potential ski areas, including Telluride. Finally, in 1957, fellow patroller Earl Eaton showed Seibert a mountain west of Vail Pass, home to sheep herds.

Eaton and Seibert trekked up old logging roads until they reached the top of Vail Mountain and looked at the future Sun Up and Sun Down bowls. Vail was perfect: 100 miles from Denver, skiing terrain for all abilities on the front, treeless bowls in the back. Dick Hauserman, who dedicated his life to establishing Vail as a town and resort, was an original investor and resident. With Hauserman and others, Seibert purchased 500 acres on Vail Mountain at \$125/acre.



An attorney for Vail Associates, Ltd., Jack Tweedy was also part of the 10<sup>th</sup>, and trained at Camp Hale before he moved to the CIA. Tweedy "helped greatly develop Vail Associates, Ltd." and set up everything for a limited partnership.

With investments, Forest Service permits and equipment, Vail opened in December of 1962 with the most ski terrain nationwide, serviced by a gondola and three chairlifts. Lift tickets were just \$5.

Like Aspen, Vail attracted many 10<sup>th</sup> veterans. Bob Parker, editor of *Skiing* magazine from 1955 to 1962, knew Seibert from the war, but quickly became involved with Vail. "[Seibert] came into my office, sat on the corner of my desk and said, 'I've found the perfect resort.' I said, 'Oh? Where did you find that?'" So with Eaton and Seibert, Parker hiked up Vail and was "convinced that this would be the next great ski resort."

Bill "Sarge" Brown also joined Vail's ranks. After serving in the 10<sup>th</sup>, Brown was at Dartmouth, organizing winter warfare ROTC programs, but came west. Hired as trail crew manager in 1967, Brown supervised the trail crew, and "half the time I couldn't find them." Brown earned his nickname as "Sarge" by setting new rules and firing lazy workers, quickly became mountain manager and "introduced all kinds of improvements to make Vail the perfect ski mountain."

Benjamin Duke also served in the 10<sup>th</sup> and moved to Colorado following the war. Serving for nearly 20 years on the Board of Directors of Vail Associates, Duke encouraged

Vail to host the 1989 World Championships. He ensured that Vail was family-oriented, emphasized the importance of ski school, children's programs and grooming.

To continue reading about Vail's incredible growth, look for the second part of this article next week. To be continued...

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."
- Colorado Ski & Snowboard Museum archives & interviews with Pete Seibert, Jr. and Robert Parker.

## **Vail Visionaries II**

### **Seibert, other men of 10<sup>th</sup> develop world-class resort**

This article series focuses on history of the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division, the famous "soldiers on skis" who fought in Italy's mountains during World War II. Throughout the winter, the series will be exploring the forces behind the creation of the 10<sup>th</sup> 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.

With Pete Seibert in charge, early Vail attracted many 10<sup>th</sup> veterans, including longtime board member Ben Duke, mountain manager Bill "Sarge" Brown, attorney Jack Tweedy and marketing manager Bob Parker.

After being editor of *Skiing* magazine, which was founded by 10<sup>th</sup> veteran Dick Wilson, Parker joined Vail Associates, Ltd. on March 2, 1962 as assistant general manager and later as marketing manager. Parker came up with trail names (some were inspired by the 10<sup>th</sup>, like Riva Ridge), helped Vail overcome logistical obstacles, and focused on attracting upper and middle class skiers. When there were no gas companies available to install a village system, Parker ensured there would be one by designing the system himself and recruiting experienced company directors to install it. Upon discovering that gondola parts would not arrive until March of 1963, Parker recreated the delivery system to ensure arrivals on time for Vail's 1962 opening.

During Vail's first year, there were 55,000 skier visits, most of whom had seen Seibert's movie shown nationwide. Parker recruited skiers by "attending ski shows and creating posters and brochures." Pete Seibert Jr. recalls his dad wondering if he made the right decision, one January day with 6 tickets sold.

The second season was much better. Parker recalls that Willy Schaeffler printed an article in *Sports Illustrated* magazine, saying Vail would always be a mountain for normal people because it didn't have steep slopes. While the directors were upset, Seibert said he couldn't have written a better thing. Many existing ski areas contained mostly steep, tough terrain – but "every skier begins as a non-skier" and resorts need varied terrain. People began calling in, wanting to know if it was true: could the whole family ski at Vail? As Parker says, "Vail took off because it attracted many families."

At the same time, the Head ski company was producing easier skis than wooden ones; Bogner stretch pants were fashionable; buckle boots were invented and "the Lange

boot with buckles was *the* boot to have.” Additionally, Parker “began to work with airlines immediately after Vail was created and we began to put together packages” to promote winter business.

This group of men who worked to create and establish Vail were all in it together: “We were working at something we enjoyed,” remembers Parker. These were “guys who had never worked on a ski resort, but had in common a belief in the project” Pete Seibert, Jr. echoes a similar sentiment: There was a “sense of community. They needed to make things work, everyone needed each other.”

Seibert’s dreams continued in 2000, when Blue Sky Basin opened, with Earl’s Bowl and Pete’s Bowl completing the expansion of Vail Mountain. Pete Seibert, Jr. said his dad would have believed that “it’s not about what you accumulate, it’s about what you accomplish,” and Seibert certainly achieved his dream of creating one of the top ski resorts in the country.

These men of the 10<sup>th</sup> were driven by their passion for skiing – not for development – and a desire to share that passion, born in mountains all over the country and intensified at Camp Hale. One of many incredible results of this passion was Vail. Their mark will be forever left on the industry as developers, managers, innovators, and, above all, skiers.

#### 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 & interviews with Pete Seibert, Jr. and Robert Parker.