

Tom Wolf

From Ice Crusaders: A Memoir of Cold War and Cold Sport

Says he has been shook over hell. . . . Sometimes he is raving and excited, at others melancholy. . . . Very peculiar and excentric. flying from one Subject to another, and talking incoherently on all Subjects. . . . The subject of religion and his experiences in the army being paramount in his mind . . . [he] thinks all his enemies should be in hell.

—*Inquest record for an inmate, Jason Roberts, after the Civil War in the Indiana Hospital for the Insane*

Maybe all history is merely personal history. But I hope not. As the 2002 Winter Olympics in Utah approach, I hope that this memoir, my personal history as an Ice Crusader or Cold Warrior, will help others see the mountainous way that leads from winter war to winter sport. Like the memoir of the 10th Mountain Division's E.P. Motley, I hope my personal Ice Crusade will offer something in common to the reader. I hope that it will offer access to the 10th Mountain Division's real legacy to us: a useable past. We Americans have always seen winter's snows as liberating forces, as challenges against which we define ourselves. This is especially true insofar as our roots trace back to the mountains of New England or Europe. But it is also true for the members of the Black Skiers Association.

Like any walk or ski in the mountains, the way to a useable past is not easy or straightforward. It is fraught with risk. In our time, when it is popular to disparage war and warriors, heroes and heroines, I propose a return to a more traditional path. The shape of this path is peculiar, for it is no more linear than time and memory are linear. Again, and again, it circles back upon itself, like the snowtracks of a predator in a winterscape, quartering its territory, searching for its prey, pursuer and pursued. Yet always the path returns to its source, to the mountains and to the 10th Mountain Division.

My Ice Crusade, my personal pursuit of the Holy Land, began as the 10th Mountain Division engaged the German mountain soldiers in battle

in winter, 1945. At about that time, my mother bore me into a Colorado blizzard, en route to the hospital. And so I was not a post-war baby boomer but among the last of the war babies, among the first of the Cold Warriors. My father said that my first vision consisted not of my mother but of driving snow. Then my second vision involved skis, whose tips rested on the dashboard, separating Dad from my older sister, while a partially-open rear window suspended the tails above my laboring mother. If the car slid off the icy road, Dad reasoned, they would ski to the hospital. I obliterated that possibility by sliding out early, always eager for first powder.

That I exist at all I owe to the 10th Mountain Division. In 1942, the Army in general and the 10th in particular rejected my father. They left him at home to beget cold warriors and to power the war effort against the Axis. The 10th was like a fraternity. A candidate needed an IQ of at least 115 and three letters of reference to qualify. These my father had, including a letter from a medical doctor who was also a ski buddy. But he didn't have the heart to fool the Army doctors. An adolescent bout with rheumatic fever had irreparably damaged his German-American heart, but not his love for skiing, for shooting, and for mountains. When he recovered enough to face his doctors, they told him and his parents that he would die young of heart failure, but that his precarious time might lengthen if he were to lead a sedentary life at sea level. It was a family joke that he immediately headed back to the hills, such as Highway 40 over Moffat Pass, where he and his younger brother could take turns driving to the summit and skiing down the long avalanche chutes to their warm and waiting Model T.

I was born to lead, or at least to steer. As oldest son, I learned to drive by sitting behind my father in the family Ford on trips to the mountains. Sometimes, as we gained altitude, his heart would flutter to a stop. Wordlessly, he would pass out and slump over the steering wheel. My role was to reach over his shoulders, grab the wheel, and steer us to a stop, where we hoped we could revive him one more time. It was after one of these collapses that my father taught me to ski at a little family hill near Evergreen called Filius Park. As close as death always was, that was a good day.

As if we were bred to labor for Rockefeller and Kubla Khan, moving the dirt around, engineering ran in the family. Before going to fight his cousins in World War I, my Austrian uncle, Harry Sallen, worked on the railroad bore that became Moffat Tunnel, which linked Denver with the

Western Slope and the ski area that would become Winter Park. Similarly, my father pursued his own Ice Crusades as a civil engineer. Instead of dying in battle against his fellow Germans, he lived to serve Uncle Sam in another way. He lived to fill Colorado mountain valleys with dams and hydroelectric powerplants. Snow-swollen rivers like western Colorado's Fryingpan (which drains the snowy backcountry between Aspen and Vail) he stopped dead in their tracks behind graceful arcs of steel and concrete. Then, Lazarus-like, his rivers rose at his command from their slackwater deathbeds. Mighty rivers (even the Colorado River itself!) turned about, and, following transmountain tunnels (such as Moffat Tunnel), they flowed east under the Continental Divide to water the dry plains around ever-growing Denver.

There along the strip (today's Interstate-25) from Fort Warren (near Cheyenne, Wyoming) to Fort Collins to Fort Carson to Pueblo, the federal government needed water to support its many military bases. These bases began humbly at Camp Carson, near Colorado Springs. Or at the Denver Federal Center (near I-70, the highway to today's ski country). The Federal Center had been a munitions plant during World War II, before its conversion to the headquarters for my father's outfit, the proud and mighty United States Bureau of Reclamation.

From such modest beginnings, the federal presence in Colorado soared to the glory of the Air Force Academy, which opened its temporary doors in 1955 a few blocks from our home in East Denver, near Stapleton Airport, Buckley Naval Air Station, and Lowry Air Force Base. We who lived there were acutely aware that we lived at Ground Zero, primary targets in a nuclear exchange with the hated, feared Communists. While the first Air Force Cadets began to prepare themselves to fight the Cold War, architects with minds like engineers designed the Academy's permanent home at the foot of the Rampart Range near Colorado Springs, not far from the 10th Mountain Division's World War II training site further west into the mountains at Camp Hale.

Did my father regret not serving in World War II? Did he wish he could be a member of the 10th Mountain Division? He could ski. He could shoot. He could climb. He had a college degree. When the National Ski Patrol and the Sierra Club and the American Alpine Club began recruiting members for the 10th after Pearl Harbor, any two of those qualifications would get you in—along with those letters of recommendation. At its birth, the 10th was intended as a guild of America's winter sports elite, a gung-ho, mountain version of Teddy Roosevelt's

Rough Riders from the Spanish-American War. Teddy Roosevelt's father had dodged the draft during the American Civil War. TR spent a good deal of his life making up for that. Camp Hale, where the 10th was finally based, was named after Major General Irving Hale, who fought for Roosevelt with the 1st Colorado Regiment of U.S. Volunteers. And who then went on to found the VFW—the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Before the turn of the century, about the time the Rough Riders were making Cuba safe for the generation of sportsmen led by Ernest Hemingway, my paternal grandfather left Germany to avoid the Kaiser's draft. Like empire builders everywhere, the Kaiser needed riflemen. My grandfather was not against rifles. He was a Prussian, after all! Nor did he frown on empires or empire builders. He just thought the Kaiser had entered the empire-building game too late to seize any land worthwhile—meaning any territory blessed with real mountains. (He hadn't heard of Kilimanjaro, which straddles the border between German-held Tanganyika and British Kenya.) Starting as a barrel maker in Chicago, my grandfather heard about the empire abuilding in Colorado, where a stroke of Teddy Roosevelt's presidential pen could create a Bureau of Reclamation to dam the rivers and a Forest Service to manage the mountains.

Always good with wood, Georg (later George) Wolf brought with him from Germany a pair of handmade bent-willow-and-rawhide snowshoes (which hang on my wall to this day), a pair of handmade hickory skis, a hunting rifle, and a shotgun with a blackcherry stock. When he had saved enough money, he rode the train from Chicago to Denver, where he saw the Colorado Rocky Mountains for the first time. He knew he was in the right place. He got a job as a policeman, married an Austrian woman, Catholic-to-Catholic—as people did in those times. And whenever he could, for the next half century, he took his sons with him to the play at war in the mountains.

Born in 1870, my grandfather was too old for service in World War I. But his new wife's brothers were not. They served, while my grandfather, now Captain George Wolf, kept order at home in east Denver out on the dry and (then) treeless plains that stretch from City Park east through the neighborhoods of Park Hill and Montclair to the little hill adorned even today by Richthofen Castle, which was Denver's easternmost border. My father was born in 1914, the first year of World War I—and named "William" for the German Kaiser Wilhelm himself—before anyone in our family dreamed that America would end up

fighting alongside Russia against Germany rather than alongside Germany against Russia.

Such ironies continued during World War II, when my father aided the war effort by designing military bases. One of these was Camp Hale. The Army started acquiring the land that would become Camp Hale in 1938, about the time it abandoned plans to send ski troopers south to Great Sand Dunes National Monument, on the west face of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains near the Colorado-New Mexico border. There, the Army had maintained, such mountain troopers as might be needed would get perfectly adequate, year-round ski training on the 700 foot high sand dunes, America's tallest.

Meanwhile, back at the future site for Camp Hale, it seems that the Army needed someone to take the Eagle River and straighten it out. The reborn Eagle would run through the camp in an orderly fashion, making room for 14,000 soldiers, 3,200 mules and horses, a sizeable canine corps, 21 streets, 1,022 buildings, a highway, and a railroad.

Later, on weekend leave from Camp Hale, some members of the 10th skied through the backcountry to Aspen, where they vowed to return if they survived the war. Others explored the remote, narrow valley where today's I-70 and Vail exist cheek-by-jowl. Similarly adventurous, some of the 10th's Pilgrims (Ivy Leaguers) would drive down from austere Camp Hale to Denver's swankiest hotel, the Brown Palace, where Colorado's empire builders have always congregated. There the Pilgrims would drink through the day to prepare themselves for their assault on the night. When the lights came on, they would wow the local belles, yodeling while belaying each other on climbing ropes and bedsheets from the upper floors that ring the venerable Brown Palace's spectacular atrium. Thus began another tradition associated with the 10th Mountain Division. While they swung from the chandeliers, there was a war on. Some earnest people did not approve. Then, as now, some people despise the 10th's fun-hog air, its insatiable appetite for self-advertisement, its strong emotional kinship with today's snowboarders.

In addition to me and Camp Hale, another of my father's war efforts was a naval base back in Virginia. When the 10th Mountain Division finally shipped out from Camp Patrick Henry, Virginia, for the war in Italy, my father was there to see them off. Then he returned home to Colorado, where his dying father lived long enough to see me arrive, long enough to know that the 10th had finally faced and fought the German mountain soldiers with distinction. My grandfather would have

liked what *Generalfeldmarschall* Albrecht Kesselring wrote in his memoirs about the end of the war in Italy: "To my surprise—in deep snow—the remarkably good American 10th Mountain Division launched an attack . . . which might imperil our whole operational plan for the spring."

So I grew up breathing Uncle Sam's power, playing at being a mountain soldier: skiing, snowshoeing, hiking, riding, fishing, and hunting the thoroughly dammed, railroaded, camped, tunneled, and highwayed Colorado mountains. To those same mountains, true to their oath, veterans of the 10th Mountain Division had returned from the war to found major ski resorts like Aspen and Vail with the eager assistance of Uncle Sam's Forest Service. So stories like the 10th's night assault on the crevasses and couloirs of the Brown Palace were food and drink to me. Like the engineers of my family, these soldier-skiers were heroes to me in a world where mountains were the holy land—the one thing worth defending. Like the Swiss Army, my boyhood sense of the defensible never even considered plains-bound, Kansas-like Denver. Only heavily-fortified mountains would ever count.

I also grew up into a world where the scale of warfare changed overnight, in 1945, from mountain combat I could personally reenact to thermonuclear holocaust no one could even imagine. Every boy has to hate someone. It happens. During those post-World War II years, the features of my enemy gradually clarified into implacable Josef Stalin, erecting the Iron Curtain, ordering the blockade of Berlin, grinding and crushing occupied Prussia and Austria under his steel heel, infuriated to find a re-vitalized German army blocking his way to the Rhine, crazed by the news that West German, Italian, French, Austrian, and Swiss mountain troopers were honeycombing the Alps with nuke-proof defenses.

One of my first memories is of Stalin deepening the chill of the Cold War when the Communists exploded their own version of our Fat Boy, in August, 1949. They called their atomic bomb "Joe 1." That stuck with me. (The "Joseph" of my middle name honors Austrian Kaiser Franz Josef, not Stalin.) Who would save us from this terrible Uncle Joe? General and now President Eisenhower had won World War II. But how could he win the Cold War? How could he deal with Stalin? How could he deal with the Cold War confusion and uncertainty of Korea?

Meanwhile, after my initiation at Filius Park, where we climbed for our runs, my father continued to teach me to ski on groomed slopes under the supervision of 10th Mountain veterans who were serving as

ski instructors. We started on wooden skis, snowplowing and stem christying at a little area called Cooper Hill (now Ski Cooper), located above Camp Hale, on the way up Tennessee Pass, where the 10th Mountain Memorial stands. Then we graduated to Aspen, Winter Park, Loveland Basin, Arapaho Basin, and finally to the open, ungroomed powder slopes leading from high altitude highways like U.S. 6 over Loveland Pass, or U.S. 40 over Berthoud Pass.

On the ski slopes, on the lifts, in the warming huts, I acquired a special set of uncles: talkative 10th Mountain veterans, clad in snow-white, still hewing powerful, arcing turns through the powder atop their massive, white wooden skis, much as one might bring about a battleship beset by heavy, foaming seas. Forever locked in tournament-like combat with German ski soldiers, they told and retold their story of the private duel of the snowgods. From a Colorado boy's point of view, the plot then considerably thickened. Here is the way I half-perceived, half-created the endless history of the 10th Mountain division.

High in the Colorado Rockies, a not-so secret weapon readied itself to end the war. Not through a nuclear holocaust, but through the Germans' own blitzing tactics: swift, ski-borne iron fists. After training at home from 1942-44 (and fighting briefly against Japanese phantoms at Kiska in the Aleutian Islands west of Alaska), the barely-bloodied 10th Mountain Division strained for the chance to engage German mountain troops in the picturesque, tournament-like setting overlooking Florence, where a watching world would appreciate the frieze-like pomp and majesty, the pageantry and the chivalry of sporting men engaged in mountain warfare: the private duel of the snowgods.

Once through the obstacle of the Apennines, once across the Po Valley, America's fleet mountain troops longed to penetrate the Alps via the Brenner Pass, following in reverse the route Hannibal's war elephants had trod in their winter assault on the Romans millennia ago. Once over the Brenner Pass, their way would be open to capturing or killing Hitler himself. Only specially trained mountain troops could even consider such a task. Everyone knew that Hitler had vowed a fight to the death in the Eagle's Nest, his impregnable mountain redoubt in the Bavarian Alps.

With the 10th far away in America, General Kesselring had already earned Allied respect for his stubborn defense of his famous and mountainous “Winter Position” in 1943–44. Kesselring had been a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford. His Allied counterpart was General Mark Clark. Known as “the American Eagle,” Clark struck warlike presidential poses and peered far ahead to post-war political battles with Eisenhower and perhaps with Patton.

Acting on a tip from General Marshall, Clark had a new commandant, General Hays, assigned to the demoralized 10th, then roasting in a new kind of hell at hot, humid Camp Swift, Texas, where it was rumored that the Army would turn its bastard child, the expensive, experimental 10th, into an ordinary, mechanized, flatlander infantry division.

General George Hays had served in Italy during the battle for Monte Cassino. He had commanded an artillery division on D-Day at Omaha Beach. He was fresh from fighting his way across France. Like a savvy athletic coach, he gathered the disheartened, overtrained 10th together into a huddle. As a veteran of the 10th later remembered, “It was most inspiring for all of us because he gave a picture of war which most people hadn’t heard—that war was an exciting thing. He said we would look back on it as one of the greatest things that ever happened to us.”

Late in 1944, Mark Clark plucked the 10th out of their endless hell of training and shipped them to Italy. He ordered General Hays to smash the Gothic Line by taking 3,800 foot Mount Belvedere and its outlying sub peaks. One of these, out to the west, is Riva Ridge. Part of the 10th’s purely technical challenge was to find a way up the stratified cliffs and ice-glazed slopes of this snowbound spine. Steep on one side only, like so much of the Apennines, three-and-a-half-mile-long Riva Ridge gentles out to its north. There the Germans had dug-in artillery positions. There German mountain troops from the 51st Mountain Corps, including the Bavarians of the Fourth (Edelweiss) Mountain Battalion, had stymied all attacks by conventional Allied troops. To everyone’s intense frustration, the Germans, commanded by *General der Gebirgstruppen* Valentin Feuerstein, stubbornly controlled the overhang, where they could direct artillery fire on anyone approaching from the valley below or attempting to flank the ridge and assault Monte Belvedere itself.

Absolute American control of the air was no more effective here against hardened mountain troops than it would be later that spring in the Alps. True, American airpower kept the Germans pinned down in their fortified positions during daylight hours. But planes and long-range artillery cannot dislodge experienced, dug-in mountain troops. For mountain soldiers, rough terrain shoulders forward as a powerful ally. Mountain soldiers learned about morale from the trench warfare of World War I, such as my Uncle Harry, who told of men scurrying like rats through muddy mazes dug into open plains. Only the swiftness and skill of mountain troopers can root out the snarling, badger-like, hunkered-down defenses of their comrades-in-arms. Only pure-bred mountain troopers remember what the dachshund breed did before it became a yapping lapdog. Burned-out Allied tank hulks on the slopes of Belvedere showed what German mountain artillery could do to the ordinary, mechanized infantry tacticians of earlier assaults. German forward artillery observers sat on Riva Ridge, where they also directed fire at the supply lines and reserves of Allied attackers.

The 10th's General Hays sent out a few flanking patrols on skis and snowshoes, to get a feel for the Germans' grip on the mountain. Later, Bud Lovett, a medic in the 10th, would write, "We encountered a German on skis, and he was standing on kind of a natural snow dam between two ridges. We ordered him to put his hands on his head and come on in. He stood and looked at us, and then he did a jump turn and skied right down that thing as if it were a headwall. Nobody shot at him; I think most of us were impressed by his skiing."

A patrol of 10th mountaineers scaled the northern part of the ridge, where they encountered a barking German Shepherd sentry dog and three German soldiers at the top. The Americans descended quickly under machine gun fire. But they had succeeded in mapping the first of their routes up the rock face. In the weeks that followed, more patrols mapped more routes, attaching ropes as they went for later use as handholds.

Invisible to the Germans directly above them on the overhang, daring 10th Mountain daylight patrols inched their way up the naked rock, looking for all the world (to their friends hidden below) like circus performers. They laid out four climbing routes with nylon camouflage rope. Pounding with muffled

hammers, they set these routes into stone, adding snaplinks and pitons.

Appreciating the specialized abilities of his mountaineers perhaps for the first time, General Hays saw that he must accept what the mountain offered him: a direct, frontal assault, mountain-soldier-style, but under cover of darkness. On the night of February 17th, 1945, and throughout the morning of the 18th, the Americans moved to the base of Riva Ridge and Belvedere, where they remained hidden from the Germans' view. On the night of February 18th, elements of the 10th started to climb Riva Ridge in preparation for a dawn attack. Given their choice of bedrolls and blankets or additional guns and ammunition, they chose the latter. "They told us if we could take Riva Ridge, they'd relieve us in twenty-four hours," Jim Hoff remembered. "After we got up there and took the ridge, I think we got relieved eight days later."

When the cold February night fell, the 10th floated up through the air with the greatest of ease. As if in a dream, like daring young men on a flying trapeze, they ascended the exposed routes in total silence and near-total darkness, pierced only by powerful searchlights bouncing off low clouds mixed with fog. When the climbers speared on up and through the reflective blanket of fog, they had to continue in absolute darkness. Even German mountain soldiers, the world's best, had never attempted such a feat. Guessing, a few nervous Germans raked the invisible climbers with rifle and machine gun fire, rolling hand grenades down on their heads. The imperturbable American mountain soldiers carried everything from 90 lb. rucksacks to rifles to disassembled 80 mm. mortars. Every rock above the climbers looked like a German helmet, but they had orders not to fire until absolutely necessary.

When one advance patrol topped the ridge, its three members took a few steps and hit ice. The 10th's Bart Wolffis remembered, "All three of us landed on our butts and started sliding down the German side of the hill. All I could think of was, 'We're going to slide right into the Germans.' We were using our rifle butts to try and stop us from sliding. As it turned out, there was a fairly shallow bowl and we slid to a stop." Isolated on top of the ridge, out in front of the other Americans, Wolffis

said he felt like a spectator, above even the advancing and retreating morning fog.

As day broke, an even heavier fog rolled in. The fog helped to hide the remaining climbing Americans, while most of the Germans slept in their dugouts, wondering while dreaming (they would tell me much later) about the firing during the night.

Later that morning, the wind picked up. As if for all the world to see, the 10th had its dream come true: a firefight broke out. Mountain soldiers locked together at long last in combat. Meanwhile, down below, the 10th's engineers assembled an aerial tram, much like a ski lift. Supplies ascended, the dead and the wounded descended. Some of the fighting was fierce, but many of the Germans were so surprised that they simply surrendered. One of them told his interrogators, "We did not realize that you had really big mountains and that you knew how to climb." Another said to his captors, "You look at war as if it were sport. You are never tired."

If you scavenge bits of lore and legend, lying about, here and there, you will never tire of confabulating the legend of the 10th. No one ever said it was history. Later, at Colorado College, I would learn more about the difference between story and history from philosopher Glenn Gray, who had served as a frontline interpreter in World War II, interrogating German POW's. Truth is the first casualty of war, Gray said, long before the Vietnam War made him a bitter prophet.

At Easter, 1963, another prophet, Pope John XXIII, had issued an encyclical, "*Pacem in Terris*," which raised questions for earnest young men like me. A few months before, I had registered for the draft on my eighteenth birthday. As a Roman Catholic, I was learning what was missing for my generation of wanna-be soldiers: that modern-day will-o-the-wisp, a just war.

Just a few years before, in 1958, Pope Pius XII had finally succumbed, opening the way for a new pope and a new, questioning attitude to accompany most Catholics' monolithic hatred of the Communists. Now we could finally ask out loud: Had Pius XII collaborated with the Nazis? If he had, did their shared anti-Communism justify his actions? The bluntness of his successor, Pope John XXIII, raised many such troubling questions. If you wanted to serve as a soldier of Christ, you could not serve Hitler. You could not say, "I am just following orders." And if you

wanted to serve as a soldier of Christ, you had better think twice about whether Vietnam presented you with a just war. In 1954, hadn't French Catholics already learned their own hard moral and military lesson in Vietnam? But then, didn't President Kennedy himself see Vietnam as an opportunity for continuing the Cold War's Ice Crusades against the Communists? And wasn't Kennedy a Catholic and a war hero?

Though I had left home and a Catholic high school for secular Colorado College, I did not go far, for I knew better than to leave the Colorado mountains. Colorado College's mountaineering and skiing traditions appealed to me. 10th Mountain Division veteran Bill Boddington was a CC coach, an old hand from the Berlin Olympics of 1936, whose American passport Hitler himself had signed. Boddington had returned home to tell Americans that they could not hide from Hitler. Most ignored him. Now he was mentoring my German language professor, a German-American named Horst Richardson, as a CC coach. Horst's own father had been an enthusiastic Nazi who died with his convictions intact, fighting bravely as a tank commander against the Communists on the Eastern Front. Meanwhile, Kennedy died. It was hard to know where to turn. Twenty years or so after Riva Ridge, in the summer of 1965, as the War in Vietnam heated up, I was still dying to die for my country. As Glenn Gray's student, I read and re-read his book, *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle*.

Though I went away to school, I also knew better than to try to hide anything important from my confessor from high school days. Father Albrecht (not his real name) was a ruddy, round Swiss Benedictine, a good skier, a worldly, holy mountain man. He was happy that I was learning German. During World War II, when he himself was eighteen, he had interrupted his studies for the priesthood to serve as a mountain trooper in the Swiss Army. "We built our defenses on the western side of our country," he told me, speaking *Schwyzerdeutsch* and then translating into English. "We weren't worried about the Nazis. We planned for the next war, the one against the Red Army." Like most German Swiss, Father Albrecht was well-versed in the language of war, just or not. His was the uniquely Swiss wisdom of a well-armed non-combatant who carefully selects and defends to the death mountainous terrain. When I proudly registered for the draft with the Selective Service System on my 18th birthday, January 27, 1963, I was fresh from my sessions with Father Albrecht, who strongly believed in universal military service in war and in peace: "*Jeder Bürger ein Soldat*," he would say: "Every citizen is a soldier. Napoleon taught us that."

Father Albrecht understood young men. As our reward for tolerating his religion lessons about just and unjust wars, he would read to us from Hemingway's "Nick Adams" stories. "Emingvay!" he would exclaim to us in his thick-tongued, German-studded English, which dropped the "h" and "v'd" the "w". "An American who understands *den Krieg*—war!"

When even Nick Adams failed to grasp our attention, Father Albrecht would suddenly snap to attention, click his heels, and call us to order. Then he would silently troll the depths of his long black cassock's hidden pockets. Out would come one of his many red Swiss Army knives. As the knives with their numerous, shimmering blades made the rounds through our hands, Father Albrecht would recount war stories from his boyhood and mountain soldiering experiences in and around Andermatt, on the eastern side of Switzerland, where the Swiss Army has always trained.

"Why does the Swiss Army train in the eastern part of our country?" he would ask. Andermatt, we learned, is the site of the *Schöllenen Teufelsbrücke*, the Red Devil's Bridge, which controls access to Furka, Oberalp, and Sankt Gotthard, the three railroad passes that command the heart of the Swiss Alps. Here, also, the great rivers of Europe, the Rhine and the Rhone, rise in their glaciers and drive Swiss hydro-electric turbines.

"You Colorado boys should understand this. It's all about keeping your power at home," he said. The Napoleonic Wars, he told us, marked the last time the Swiss served as mercenaries in other countries. Since Swiss soldiers had joined in the French assault on Moscow, the resurgent Russians itched to return the favor, pursuing Napoleon (and the Swiss) all the way home, penetrating even unto to the Red Devil's Bridge.

"They drove as far into Switzerland as anyone has ever managed. Though heavily outnumbered, our mountain soldiers stopped them there, where the canyon narrows at the *Teufelsbrücke*. They were Russians, after all. And so they did not know how to fight in such mountainous terrain. But we Swiss learned our lesson: the threat to Christendom always comes from the East. That's as true today as when I was a boy your age. That's as true today as it was in St. Benedict's time. Why do you think we call it the Red Devil's Bridge?"

There remain, he said, only two exceptions to the general rule about Swiss soldiers remaining homebound. "One we inherited from the Romans," he said. "They learned early. Like the trustworthy Germans who guarded the Roman emperors, we Swiss guard the Holy Father in Rome."

And the other exception? “That’s me, a Swiss mercenary and a Soldier for Christ. Guarding you like St. Michael the Archangel against the day when the Communists will try to cross your personal *Teufelsbrücke!*”

There was lots of time for wargames, whether spiritual or physical or both. There were also lots of crisp Catholic girls as ski-crazy as I was. “Life is long,” Father Albrecht told our parents. “The war of good against evil will not end anytime soon. There’s always time for fun, for sin, for skiing—and finally for confession.”

That was 1959, before the Eisenhower Tunnel opened the easy way via Interstate-70 to Summit County and to Vail and Aspen. And it was long before the St. Gotthard Auto Tunnel did the same for the Swiss ski areas, opening them to armies of *Alpini* invaders from Italy. Every Saturday morning, a special ski train left downtown Denver’s Union Station at 7:00 am, bound for the Winter Park ski area on the west side of the Continental Divide via the Moffat Tunnel. While we skiers flowed west, water from my father’s west slope dams flowed east to Denver. Now, as then, the huge pipes that compose this system line the lower slopes at Winter Park and disappear into the mouth of the tunnel just beyond the ski area.

Those train rides were deliciously long. That tunnel was delightfully dark. Lots and lots of high school kids rode that train in the days when the Eskimo Ski Club promoted the new mass sport of skiing. Father Albrecht pointed out to our parents that the tunnel was indeed both long and dark. And that the Eskimo Ski Club was open to kids from the public schools. Surely, Catholic kids needed their own ski club. Call it the Saint Gotthard Club. Surely, Catholic kids in the Saint Gotthard Club needed a chaperone. Surely, the ideal chaperone could use his tunnel time well by hearing our confessions. If there wasn’t an American patron saint for skiing, we young Americans would surely, in due time, breed one of our own. In the meantime, the Swiss would loan us Saint Gotthard, a good man for tunnel work, an ally for any sort of mountain fray.

Father Albrecht had done his homework. Sure enough, there was in our school a girl named Antonia (not her real name) whose wealthy father owned huge mountain ranches in Wyoming. During the 1930’s, Antonia’s father had fought in the mountains with the Nazis against the Communists in the Spanish Civil War. He liked Germans. He understood the advantages of an early match between ski-mad kids and mountains.

And so it came to pass that Father Albrecht held court in the dining car. At designated times, he retreated to his confessional, a compartment in one of the coach cars. As Catholics from big families, we were accustomed to following orders. So we lined up in the aisles outside Father Albrecht's compartment for confession. As for Father Albrecht, beyond the dining car and his own coach, he did not venture. Beyond that was indefensible terrain, no place for a mountain soldier. We were free to lurch our way through the other coach cars, where the compartments left opportunity aplenty to explore unprotected, even mountainous terrain with good Catholic kids like ourselves. Since we all knew some Latin, we had useful physiological terminology in place, such as *mons Veneris*, or "mountain of Venus." Following the customs of high school boys, that Latin term became our code word for Antonia. She earned it.

Safe in the arms of the Church, our system was both open and closed. "If you want to be Soldiers for Christ," Father Albrecht would tell us, "fight with St. Michael the Archangel against the Red Devil. Renounce Satan and all his allies. But be prepared to lose a few. Never pick a fight on low ground. Always fight with mountains at your back. Never defend the indefensible. Be like the Swiss Army! Cut your losses. Renounce lowlands if you have to. Defend the moral high ground. Defend mountains!"

"Be like the Swiss Army." What seemed simple in 1960 had become less so by 1965, when the lowland war in Vietnam turned its bloody face to me and demanded that I serve Caesar (in the form of President Lyndon B. Johnson), as a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Army. I did my level best to flunk out of Colorado College's Army Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) program. This was not easy. After World War II, a retired Army general had saved Colorado College by recruiting veterans to be educated under the GI Bill, along with young professors who had served in the war—and who taught us to think long and hard about war. Glenn Gray was the most prominent of these. When the Army demobilized the 10th Mountain Division immediately after the war, nearby Fort Carson nurtured what formal mountain soldier traditions remained. Meanwhile, much of the Army surplus equipment of the 10th went to the growing cadre of skiers and climbers who knelt at Colorado College before Professor of English Robert Ormes, dean of Colorado's mountaineers.

It was no wonder, then, that Army ROTC found a firm place at Colorado College. To be a freshman was to be a grunt. When a young man

enrolled at Colorado College, it was assumed that he was potentially an officer and a gentleman. Our neighbor and competitor (for the attention of local women) was the all-male U.S. Air Force Academy. When John Kennedy was elected President in 1960, it seemed like Catholics could do anything. By then, the 10th Mountain Division no longer existed, except in the tales of its veterans and in the imaginations of boys and young men. If I couldn't be a mountain soldier, my goal in life was to fly heavy bombers for the Strategic Air Command against the Communists. But in those days, when it could afford to be picky, the Air Force required 20-20 vision (without corrective lenses) for its future pilots. My appointment to the Academy disappeared in my cloudy vision, dooming me to Army ROTC.

In the fall of 1963, as an entering freshman, I joined the college ski club and the Colorado Mountain Club just as naturally as I signed up for Robert Ormes' writing classes, where Hemingway was God. To satisfy my natural need for violence, I played varsity football—and skied, skied, skied.

I signed a contract committing myself to at least two years of ROTC training, with the option of another two years that would lead to a commission as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army. It took Kennedy's assassination in the fall of 1963 to begin to shake my faith in this American version of "Every citizen a soldier." Lee Harvey Oswald's connections with Moscow and Havana made it seem obvious that we should blame the Communists for the assassination of America's first Catholic President. Up till then, I had thought that Vietnam was simple: northern Communists vs. southern Catholics. Such simplemindedness did not last long under Lyndon Johnson's leadership. Johnson and his Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, began to commit significant numbers of American ground troops in Vietnam.

Back at home in Denver, where I went to visit my family and confess my sins to Father Albrecht, I learned that some of my high school classmates were returning from Vietnam in bodybags and wheelchairs. Those bodybagged included an old ski buddy who had recklessly chosen ski bumming at the new resort in Vail over college. He and I shared the same hungry draft board. If you didn't go to college, your draft board saw to it that you joined the Armed Forces.

In 1965, on Washington's Birthday, my Dad and I went skiing at Winter Park. In the afternoon, we took a long run on "Mary Jane," now a black diamond slope but then a leisurely backwoods powdertrap of a trail, with

plenty of turnouts where you could sit and visit in the sun. It was a chance to talk things over. My father was rising fast through the ranks in the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, at that time a strongly conservative, patriotic, and largely Mormon organization. My father was successfully locking horns with the 10th's (and the Sierra Club's) David Brower over Glen Canyon Dam. Some of our local draft board members were my father's friends and colleagues. "I may be a federal employee, but I render unto Caesar only what is Caesar's," he told me. "You listen to your conscience, and I'll back you. I have discussed this with your Uncle Harry. He and I agree. You listen to Father Albrecht." Skiing was good that day.

Back on campus, ROTC became so real that it was almost fun again. Working with topographic maps, we learned to compute firing angles for howitzers and light artillery operating in mountainous terrain. In spite of what the contours on the maps said, the Sergeant Major tried to convince us that there were mountains worth fighting for along the Laos-Vietnam border. But inevitably the rising casualty rates among junior officers in Vietnam became a hot subject. We learned that the Army no longer trusted us. After a break-in at our armory, the Sergeant Major permanently removed the firing pins from our World War II-vintage M-1 rifles. From there, things went downhill fast. I began to wonder, what did I have to do to flunk ROTC?

The Dean of the College called me onto the carpet. We sat in big leather chairs in his office. He smoked a pipe, silently. I thought about our previous interview, when he proudly told me that the College was grooming me as a soldier-scholar-athlete for a Rhodes Scholarship. We looked at the carpet. We looked at my feet. As an aspiring young gentleman, soldier, scholar, and athlete, I was wearing freshly shined brown wing-tips. It was the spring of 1965. The Dean said, "Mr. Wolf, you remember our conversation about Rhodes Scholars. We recognize your potential. Now, up until this semester you had compiled a perfect academic record here. Can you explain how one flunks ROTC?"

"It is very difficult, sir," I answered. "But I am doing my best."

He said, "Mr. Wolf, when you enrolled here, you agreed to honor our ROTC requirement. As one gentleman to another, I now ask you whether you are acting in good faith."

I thought I had learned the art of disputation, so I said, "Generations of men in my family have graduated from Colorado College. I could simply have quit the course and/or the College, but I did not. I am honoring my gentleman's agreement by accepting, in protest against the unjust war in Vietnam, my failing grade."

"Mr. Wolf," the Dean replied, sternly, blowing smoke, "this is a grave matter. War is always here. We don't choose our wars. I have spoken with your father. I have found your father both a reasonable man and a gentleman. In light of your potential, the College believes you would do well to reconsider. We have arranged for you to go abroad for a year as an exchange student to Germany. When you return next year, we will revisit this question. *Auf Wiedersehen!*"

And so I left America in the summer of 1965. To those of us born and bred to serve mountains and combat Communism, it now seemed like Vietnam was strictly a civil war: all swamp, plain, and lowlands. In my last confession before going abroad, Father Albrecht surprised me. He agreed with me that to kill against my conscience in the Vietnam War would be to murder. He also agreed with me that reasonable men might come to a different conclusion. "You Americans don't want another civil war, do you? You fought your last one so brutally. No finesse. All organized butchery. And then there is your own personal civil war. You are angry and you want to kill someone. Beware!" In 1960, Hemingway had killed himself with his own gun. The best war for a writer, Hemingway had said, the most complete, is a civil war. What could he mean? I would follow Nick Adams to find out. I shoved off for a year of skiing and whatnot in Europe.

Because of the 10th Mountain Division, and because my old skiing girlfriend Antonia was already there, Italy seemed like the place to start. The cheapest flight to Europe was Icelandic Air. My prop plane, a DC-6 flying out of New York, stopped to refuel in Iceland, where I saw my first large glacier. Then we ground on to Luxembourg. As we approached the airport, I could see big mountains out to the south. Somewhere down there was Hitler's Eagle's Nest, now broken to service as a resort for the American army of occupation. On the long train ride down under the Alps through the St. Gotthard Tunnel, I longed for the simplicity of Moffat Tunnel ski days. We passed by night through the Apennine Mountains, so I lost my chance to see Mount Belvedere. As my train slowed into the main station in Rome, images of Hemingway's Italian women gradually appeared through the windows. Either nurses or whores, it seemed. But what was a skier like Antonia? As our high school's head cheerleader, how many times had I heard her intone the chant:

Action! Action! Action, boys!

You make the action! We'll make the noise!

I remembered chairlift and après-ski stories of Red Cross girls and Italian women told by veterans of the 10th Mountain Division. Either

nurses or whores. Or cheerleaders. Or were the mountaineers just remembering their Hemingway? How often had I heard 10th Mountain vets recite Hemingway on the chairlifts? It was Hemingway's works the Pilgrims read during the endless years of training; Hemingway they carried with them to Italy; Hemingway they found on dead or captured Germans. While the 10th fought in Italy, Hemingway himself was serving as a highly-paid citizen journalist, covering the real war in France. At one point, he seized a Browning Automatic Rifle and led a furious assault on a German position. He was too famous to punish.

Except through Hemingway's eyes, I had never seen a whore before. Now they lined the platform as the other passengers from my train began to disembark. I shouldered my vintage 10th Mountain rucksack and descended, one of the last, onto the platform. Antonia was supposed to meet my train. Where was she? What would the Swiss Army do? A heavily made-up woman approached me, walking with palm on outthrust hip, looking considerably more formidable in life than in literature, looking little like the cheerleader-style women I had known. "*Sprechen Sie Deutsch?*" she asked. "*Nein!*" I whispered. "*Nein!*" Then, as if I were skiing the most demanding moguls, I stutter-stepped through the shoals of whores and out toward the street, where I ran into Antonia's open arms. She did a little cheer, right then and there, complete with the sliding splits, to the amusement of passing Italians:

Two, four, six, eight!

Who do we appreciate?

There was always war. There was always sin. Right there in Rome, practically under the eyes of the Pope himself, Antonia and I practiced our form of Russian roulette, a high-risk form of birth control called the Rhythm Method. But what the hell? Fathers got draft deferments. The American colleges in Rome were beginning to fill up with draft-age young men like me, suddenly facing early fatherhood. At the Spanish Steps, where Americans our age gathered, the air was thick with a mix new to my nostrils: doubt, defiance, and dope. The only dissenter was Antonia. Her father was sure that Catholics had to take a stand against Communism wherever we could. Her older sister was married to an Air Force B-52 pilot who was already flying bombing runs over Vietnam. As I prepared to leave her to complete her studies in Rome, we uneasily agreed to disagree about Vietnam.

"When we get home, we'll let Father Albrecht arbitrate," I offered.

"When we get home, we'll let Father Albrecht marry us," she countered. She didn't look pregnant, but she had the last word.

I sought comfort and escape on the road, hitch-hiking, my 10th Mountain rucksack on my back, heavy with Hemingway. That pack was a beauty. Thinking reluctant fatherhood over, I worked my way through Rome, through the suburbs, and out toward the truck stops. What would Nick Adams do? What if Antonia were pregnant? In those days, as now, the Pope forbade the use of birth control but approved the Rhythm Method. So we sinned in synchrony. Married, college-enrolled fathers could kiss the draft goodbye.

Panicky, I thought of the pregnant and unmarried young waitress at the inn in "Cross Country Snow," the greatest of the Nick Adams ski stories. And then I thought again of a 10th Mountain skiing and drinking song I had heard many times.

*I was a barmaid in a mountain inn;
There I learned the wages, the miseries of sin.
Along came a skier, fresh from off the slopes;
He's the one that ruined all my hopes.
[chorus]
Singing ninety pounds of rucksack,
A pound of grub or two,
He'll schuss the mountains
Like his daddy used to do.
[Sung to the tune of "Bell-Bottomed Trousers"]*

I stuck my thumb up into the thick Italian air, meaning to hitch-hike the 100 miles or so to the 10th Mountain's battle sites in the Apennine Mountains north of Florence. But especially at the highway interchanges and truckstops, the whores thickened again.

My road led along the Tiber River, through the hills of Umbria and Tuscany toward Florence. At the next truck stop, I waited for a long time while the whores took turns casting hex signs and shouting insults at me in a sing-song way that suggested cheers I had heard. They reminded me of a bizarre 10th Mountain battle scene I had heard about. It occurred near the ruined town of Castel d'Aiano, as the 10th fought its way through the mountainous ruins of the Gothic Line and down toward the Po Valley. Years later, a 10th vet remembered it this way, pretty much as I had heard it back home on the ski lifts from others:

The area was strewn with wrecked tanks and dead bodies. As we moved along, much to my surprise, I saw an American Red Cross

girl in her little starched and ironed pin-striped dress, standing by the side of the road, jumping up and down, and cheering us on like a cheerleader. My first reaction was, 'How in the hell did she ever get here?' My God, people were getting killed within a hundred yards of her. There was still sniper fire and shell fire going on in the area. I remember thinking that she and whoever let her come up here is crazy as hell. She was all by herself, standing by the side of the road, cheering us on. She was a very spunky woman. I now wonder who this girl was and where she came from. At this late date, we'll probably never know.

At the *Mercato Nuovo* in Florence, on a square near the cathedral, I bargained my way to a U.S. Army down mummy bag, aluminum canteen, and messkit. They went well with my 10th Mountain anorak and rucksack. Waiting in line for mail at the Florence American Express office, I traded another American for his iceaxe. He wouldn't be needing it, he said. He was heading home. He had just received his draft notice.

When my turn at the window came, my first mail, forwarded from home, was from my Uncle Sam, informing me that my withdrawal from Colorado College had cost me my student draft deferment. I was officially classified I-A: cannon fodder, even lower than a Second Lieutenant. The Dean played rough. It had been only three weeks since I left college.

Iceaxe in hand, my first reaction was to climb something—anything—to escape my pursuers. An accompanying letter from Dad said, "You aren't treed yet. I'll help you fight the Army. Take this summer and make your pilgrimages like a good crusader. Enjoy your time with Antonia. Live with your 'I-A' till the fall. Then you should enroll as planned at the German university. I'll stall your draft board, and you'll get your II-S student classification back."

The extremely wet winter of 1965-66 would be a great one for skiers in northern Europe. I noted this in letters home, and my father sent me sketches of the sites in the Apennines where Italian engineers could build dams to avert catastrophic floods. He wrote me about an angry confrontation with the Sierra Club's David Brower, "the most obnoxious of all the 10th Mountain Division!" My father had just finished his masterpiece (and Brower's nemesis), Glen Canyon Dam on the Colorado River. By then, he stood close to the throne, next in line to become Chief Engineer of the Federal Bureau of Reclamation. Like any beaver,

Dad was eager to build yet more dams, but a new kind of environmentalist was trying to stop him. With a 10th Mountaineer's genius for manipulating the media, Brower had attacked the Bureau's plans for damming sites near the Grand Canyon in a full page newspaper ad in the New York Times, asking: "Would you flood the Sistine Chapel to get a closer look at the ceiling?" "Now," Dad had asked Brower, "would the Sierra Club dam the Arno to save the artworks of Florence?"

Similar rifts and crevasses were yawning in front of me, as Brower and others failed to see mountains the way men in my family saw mountains. But my heroes were still engineers, mountaineers, ski soldiers: men to match the mountains, men at play, but with a purpose. I did not see the divisions coming between men at work in mountains and men and women at play in mountains. I did not see how the recreation-based environmental movement would grow out of the anti-Vietnam war movement. I did not see how some would come to pity mountains. I did not see how this pity would become a weapon in a strange civil war that threatened to undermine every authority, until we would all be declared victims, until everyone would be diagnosed as suffering from the insidious modern version of shellshock, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). I did not see how Father Albrecht himself would become a casualty in the developing cold war.

Notes & References

When Churchill realized what Stalin was doing, he delivered his famous Iron Curtain speech in 1946, calling the Free World back to arms against the Communist menace. Fittingly, he saw that the northern edge of the Iron Curtain fell in Germany at Stettin, the port city for Berlin. My German grandfather came from Stettin, now known as the Polish city of Gdansk.

A fine book on the cultural history of snow is Bernard Mergen's *Snow in America* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1997).

The Jason Roberts inquest quote is from Eric Dean. *Shook Over Hell: Post-Traumatic Stress, Vietnam, and the Civil War* (Harvard University Press, 1998). Readers should also see Frederick Crews, ed., *The Memory Wars* (New York: New York Review Books, 1995).

David Brower's autobiography *For Earth's Sake* (New York: Knopf, 1990) and personal website are cases in point for the 10th's skill at self-glorification. Brower was already 30 when he joined the Army in 1942, fresh from editing *The Manual of Ski Mountaineering* for the University of California Press. Though unusual in his singleminded devotion to conservation, Brower is typical of the men of the 10th in terms of his genius for bringing the war back home with him.

Sand dunes: it wasn't until 1999 that the X-Generation discovered the right ski surface for sand. That turned out to be formica, a product of the 1930's.

Unless otherwise noted, the quotes of 10th Mountain veterans I use come from Flint Whitlock and Bob Bishop's authoritative account of the history of the 10th, *Soldiers on Skis* (Boulder: Paladin, 1992).

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