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Birger Torrissen

Born: 1901 Died: 1991



Birger Torrissen had an outstanding career as a jumper, cross-country, nordic combined and biathlon competitor. He developed a junior jumping program at Lake Placid, New York, and was an instructor of the Ski Troops at Camp Hale, Colorado.

Birger Torrissen was an “unsung hero” of the ski world, a pioneer, who helped develop the healthy growth of the sport, both competitively and recreationally. He was born in Bardu, Norway, north of the Arctic circle, in 1901. After a highly successful jumping, cross-country and combined nordic career in his native Norway, he received his jumping judges card. In 1929, this powerhouse launched his American career and few can equal Birger’s achievements.

Always a quiet, modest, hard-working individual, who preferred to remain in the background while his accomplishments bore fruit, Birger earned his niche in the ski world. He was named by National Historian Harold Grinden to the All-American Cross-Country Ski Team in 1931. Birger excelled in the 18, 30, and 50 KM cross-country competitions, and was also among the top performers in ski jumping and combined, during the 1930s and early 1940; was a member

of Uncle Sam’s Olympic team in 1936 at Garmisch-Partenkirchen; developed the junior program at Lake Placid at the request of another Ski Hall of Famer, the late Harry Wade Hicks, and assisted in the development of such “boys as Art Devlin, Perry Crosby-Smith, Jay Rand and others,” who ranked among the best jumpers this country has ever had.

Birger was a ski instructor for the ski troops at Fort Lewis, Washington, designed and tested cold weather equipment and vehicles while with the Mountain and Winter Warfare Board at Camp Hale, Colorado, organized the first military ski race in the USA, a 30-K championship for the 10th Mountain Division; became a civilian instructor with the Mountain and Cold Weather Training Command at Fort Carson, Colorado, simplifying methods of teaching for thousands of troops each season, coached the U.S. cross-country team for the F.I.S. at Lake Placid (1950), trained an American team to compete in the International military races in Switzerland in 1953, and had four members of his Armed Forces make the 1956 Olympic team that competed in Cortina, Italy.

During the big snowstorm of Christmas 1951, he was one of two men called by the Air Force to come to the rescue of the 26-man crew of a freight-train stuck in the Southern Rocky Mountains. Birger laid out the safe trail for the weasels and said, “We were able to rescue all the men who had been trapped there for three weeks.” He was then with the Strategic Air Command Survival School.

In preparation for the Winter Olympics at Squaw Valley, California, Torrissen served as a 1958 delegate to the Swedish National Biathlon races and the World Biathlon championships, was in charge of the Olympic jumping hills in 1959-60, designed and helped construct the Biathlon course and served as director of the Olympic biathlon competition.

Following his Olympic role in Squaw Valley, he returned to Salisbury. Torrissen inaugurated a junior program in cross-country and combined for both boys and girls. While directing this highly popular junior program and serving as tournament director for the Salisbury Outing Club jumping and combined classic competitions, Birger suffered a heart attack. He also taught skiing at Hotchkiss and Millbrook Schools, was Technical delegate to the National Biathlon championships at Rosendale, NY, in 1965, and Lake Placid in 1966.

Yes, this was a quiet man, a real American of Norwegian descent, whose record in skiing is monumental and diversified. Birger will always be remembered as a real asset to the world of skiing.

Birger Torrissen was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1972.