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Dr. Merritt Stiles

Born: 1899 Died: ?



Dr. Merritt Stiles was just as well known nationally in his profession (an internist specializing in disease of the heart) as he in his principal avocation – skiing. He got into skiing late in life at age 55, but his enthusiasm and hard work made up for his late beginning.

Dr. Merritt Henry Stiles (born September 10, 1899, in Stiles, North Dakota), was heavily involved in organized skiing locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally. Probably his greatest accomplishment was his backing and inspiration in moving the U.S. ski competition program from more or less of a part-time activity toward its present full-time status. He provided the backing for Dr. Bud Little and Bob Beattie to get things moving.

Early in life, Dr. Stiles moved to Tacoma, Washington, where he entered the University of Washington. He served in Italy in the U.S. Army Ambulance Service during World War I. Following the war, he graduated in medicine from the University of Pennsylvania and he practiced in Philadelphia until 1942. In 1937, he married Tana, a registered nurse.

Dr. Stiles enlisted as a major in the U.S. Army Medical Corps in 1942 and served in a number of army hospitals all over the country. He was introduced to Spokane as Chief of Medicine at Baxter General Hospital. Later he took over as commanding officer of the 188th General Hospital at Leyte, Philippines. He was discharged as a lieutenant colonel in 1946. He could have returned to his Philadelphia practice, but Spokane

offered too many advantages. He thought he would relax, hunt, fish and play golf, but it didn't work out that way. He entered the real organizational phase of his life, first local professional societies, then the American Heart Association, and then skiing.

He collaborated with Dr. Robert D. O'Malley of Holyoke, Massachusetts, in writing *Ski at any Age*, published in 1972, dedicated to proving that people over 50 years of age can grow healthier by taking up skiing. In fact, since starting skiing, Dr. Stiles was a nonstop prophet for the sport's health benefits, particularly those affecting heart health.

An example of his enthusiasm, culled from the book, "It is an unfortunate fact that the average American of mature years, male and female alike, has allowed himself or herself to deteriorate into a state of physical unfitness. The young adult male often works under too much stress, with prolonged hours, with too little recreation and with no exercise, frequently associated with heavy cigarette smoking, too much alcohol, overeating and resultant overweight. Can such a person turn the clock back? We believe he can, providing he has sufficient desire and providing he is willing to bestir himself and devote as little as one percent of his time to regular healthful exercise." -- *Ski at Any Age*, Award House, 1971

He started skiing in 1955 when he strapped on a pair of old wooden skis to watch his son race on Mt. Spokane. He then took some lessons with his wife, Tana, at Squaw Valley. Tana enjoyed a good deal of all the activities. She accompanied her husband on many of his trips and acquired membership in airline 100,000 mile clubs along the way. (During the height of his skiing activities, Dr. Stiles was logging nearly 100,000 miles himself, every year.)

When not skiing, Stiles ran about six miles a day (in about 20 minutes), a minimum of three days a week.

Dr. Merritt Stiles was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1975.