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## Ralph Townsend

Born: 1921 Died: 1988

*Ralph J. Townsend was in the spotlight in the eastern, national and international competitive skiing circles during the 1940s, and his caliber of performance was outstanding.*

Ralph J. Townsend, born in Lebanon, New Hampshire, December 28, 1921, and was a resident of Williamstown, Massachusetts, for over three decades. He was known as both a ski athlete and a skisport builder.

Townsend was the product of two Hall of Famers: the late Erling Heistad, who coached Townsend at Lebanon High School, and Edward Blood, who was Townsend's mentor at the University of New Hampshire.

Ralph starred for the Wildcats ski team during the University of New Hampshire's glory days of the early 1940s. Hall of Famer Al Merrill was a Townsend teammate in 1941; Curt Chase, Steve Knowlton and Merrill were teammates in 1942.

Although Townsend matriculated at the Durham institution in the fall of 1939, World War II intervened to delay his graduation until 1949.

As his brothers Richard, Harold and Paul, Ralph was a stellar interscholastic performer for Heistad's all-conquering Lebanon High ski teams. Moving on to college, Townsend became Eastern Cross-Country Champion in 1941, Nordic Combined Champion in 1941 and 1946, Eastern Slalom and Alpine Combined titlist in 1947, National Nordic Combined Champion in both 1947 and 1949, represented the United States in its 1946 Nordic Ski Team duel with Canada, was a member of the 1948 U.S. Olympic Ski Team and the 1951 U.S. F.I.S. Ski Team. Along the way, Townsend gathered numerous other lesser interscholastic, intercollegiate, state, eastern and regional titles.

During World War II, S/Sgt. Townsend fought with the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division, serving in the Asiatic Pacific and European African Middle East theatres. He was the recipient of a Purple Heart.

Moving into the organizational and promotional phases of skiing in 1950, Townsend's participation staggers the imagination in intensity and scope.

He became head coach of the William's College ski team in 1950, guiding its destinies until his retirement in 1972. It is among the longest ski coaching tenures on record, ranking with that of Walter Pragers at Dartmouth, slightly more than Willy Schaeffler's at Denver, and a half-dozen years less than Ed Blood's record 28 years at the University of New Hampshire. During that period he not only developed some notable performers, but he instilled a love of skiing to untold hundreds.

Serving on the Rules Committee for the formation of the Eastern Intercollegiate Ski Association in 1950, Townsend was its president in 1958, 1959, and 1960. Along with service at various times on many of its committees, he was on EISA's Executive Committee in 1956-72.

Townsend was secretary of the National Collegiate Athletic Association in 1962-64 and 1969-73. He was on the NCAA Skiing Rules Committee in 1960-64 and 1969-73. A director of the U.S. Eastern Amateur Ski Association (now Eastern Ski Association) in 1951-52, Townsend was a member of its cross-country committee for many years and its chairman in 1959-60. He was both an alpine and nordic official. In 1960, he was coach of the ESA's National Nordic Team.

For the United States Ski Association, Townsend has given countless hours of service to its committees: Olympic Ski Games, 1960-64; International Competitions, 1960-64; Intercollegiate, 1961-65; Coaches System, 1965-68; Nordic Competitions, 1959-60; and Cross-country, many years.

Townsend's career was demonstrated in his ability, versatility, and dedication. He was also a member of the National Ski Patrol system, a ski patrol leader, and a certified professional ski instructor.

Ralph Townsend was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1975.

