

#212

Montgomery M. Atwater

Born: 1904 Died: 1976

Information taken from a nomination letter to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame submitted by Norman A. Wilson

Monty Atwater's primary mission in life was to find ways to protect people and their belongings from snow avalanches. He pioneered the art of avalanche control in this country. Certainly his efforts, methods, and techniques that evolved over the years have prevented many avalanche injuries and deaths.

Montgomery "Monty" Atwater was born in Baker City, Oregon, in 1904, and grew up in the West. He worked for the U.S. Forest Service as a Ranger, and his first exposure to skiing was when he was assigned to count elk in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. This trip was undertaken in part to assess the usefulness of skis as compared to snowshoes for such work.

During World War II, Atwater was a member of the 10th Mountain Division seeing action in the Kiska invasion, and the fighting in northern Europe.

After the war, he was assigned as a Snow Ranger in Alta, Utah. While the avalanche control program had been in operation for approximately 5 years, it was still in its infancy. Atwater continued the research operation, refining it and writing about it, working there from 1946 until 1956.

An English Literature major from Harvard, Atwater wrote many articles and books about his adventures in the mountains. His greatest contribution along this line was the *Avalanche Handbook* used by the Forest Service.

In 1959, Monty accepted a summer project as a snow problems consultant to copper mining development in Chile. The mine where he worked was located high in the Andes and had extreme avalanche problems. Remaining their consultant until 1972, he then chose to devote himself to other pursuits.

Atwater was the Avalanche Control Chief for the 1960 Olympics at Squaw Valley, California, and remained there as an Avalanche Control Specialist, developing innovations for controlled avalanches, such as projectile launches, exploding projectiles, and helicopter dropped "bombs" to start slides. He was also the Chief of Avalanche Control at the 1966 F.I.S. World Championships in Portillo, Chile.

In 1968, Atwater wrote *The Avalanche Hunters* in his easy-reading style, and it is in every avalanche worker's library, as well as technical and popular articles for national publication. During these years, Monty continued to write adventure books for young people.

His research papers are in the custody of the Forest Service, and those from after his retirement are housed at the University of Oregon where they can be studied by others interested in the control of avalanches.

Monty took over manufacturing and marketing of the Avalauncher and projectiles in the late 1960s. He continued to refine and improve the system until his death in 1976.

In 1973, he was honored as the "father of snow avalanche work in the United States" by more than 125 colleagues from the Forest Service, the National Park Service, Yosemite Institute, and the National Ski Patrol System at the Atwater Avalanche Honorarium in Yosemite National Park.

Montgomery Atwater was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1978.

