



Paul Leimkuehler at Boyne Mt., 1959. He had started skiing in March 1956.

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## Paul Leimkuehler

Born: 1918 Died: 1993

Information taken from a nomination letter submitted by William E. Stieler, Chairman – Handicapped Skiers Committee, USSA – Cental Division

*The many programs of instruction and the long trail of handicapped people seeking out the sport of skiing today owe a great deal to this man who got it together, Paul Leimkuehler.*

Paul Leimkuehler, a native of Cleveland, Ohio, was born August 22, 1918. In 1936, as an active youth of seventeen, he competed in the U.S. Olympic Bicycle Road Race Finals in Patterson, New Jersey. He lost his left leg above the knee in 1944, while serving as an infantry lieutenant in World War II. For awhile, he thought his days of lively activity were behind him.

The direction of Leimkuehler's life as an amputee was to be dictated by an experience in the hospital where he was assigned for recovery. Paul involved himself on a voluntary basis in the artificial limb

and brace shop while his leg was being made. In a matter of months, he was up and around on his own new leg and was making and fitting artificial limbs to other veterans.

On his release from the hospital, Paul entered the prosthetic field, quickly established himself as a certified fitter with a business of his own; and in recognition of his skill by his peers, has risen to the presidency of two national prosthetic and orthotic associations. He is listed in "Who's Who in America."

In January 1956, at the age of 38, Paul and his wife Kay, accompanied some friends to a ski area called Seven Springs, east of Pittsburgh. Paul did not plan to ski – just take pictures of the others. However, while engaged in a conversation with a European instructor and the area manager's son, Phil Dupre, he learned that amputees in Europe were experimenting on the ski slopes, balancing on one ski, with various adaptations of crutches for balance.

He later found, in the Cleveland library, a short Austrian film on the subject called "Miracle on Skis." From what he observed in the film, he began to dream up some equipment of his own. Paul called on a war buddy, Stan Zakas, who had lost a leg on the opposite side. When they found they had the same size feet, they shared a pair of army boots and filed a groove in the heel. Paul wore the left one, and Stan wore the right.

Paul got hold of an old Flexible Flyer ski and fitted it with a cable binding. He saved the tips off a pair of cheap kids' skis and fitted them onto the ends of crutches with a hinging action and adjustable front and back stops which he devised. Now they were ready to hit the slopes (of a small hill on a local golf course). Very shortly, however, Paul was back at Seven Springs and before the day was out, he had learned to steer to the left which was necessary if he was to wind up at the rope tow. On that day, Paul and his wife Kay were hooked on the sport of skiing.

Later, in the summer of that first year, Paul contacted Howard Head of the Head Ski Company. Head showed enthusiasm and graciously supplied the boys with two pairs of metal ski tips and a pair of outrigger ski crutches and during the following season, 1957, they skied every weekend at areas in Pennsylvania, Michigan, and New York.

The media began to follow them around. Soon people reading the news releases began writing to Paul, asking questions. The Head Ski Company also started getting inquiries which they referred to Paul.

In 1957, the publicity reached a British army officer, Christopher Boulton, who contacted Paul. Boulton became an amputee and had discovered three track skiing in Europe. Through him in 1960, Paul managed to import six pairs of outrigger ski crutches from a Herr Bruno Winterstaller of Austria. These outriggers were distributed around the country upon request, and Paul was learning that amputees were not alone in their attraction to this adaptive mode. People with post Polio weakness and other forms of physical affliction were being attracted.

Willy Schaeffler, for example, acquired a pair of outriggers from Paul, when he tore an Achilles tendon and wanted to remain on the job. Schaeffler was then coach of the Denver University Ski Team.

In 1958, Dick Martin, an amputee in Portland, Oregon heard about Paul and contacted him. The result was a rendezvous of skiing at Sun Valley. Martin went to organize the Flying Outrigger Ski Club in Oregon. Lee Perry, a certified ski instructor and Hal Schroeder joined Martin in spreading the word to California in the early 1960s.

Paul Leimkuehler was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1981.