



#309

Merrill "Mezzy" Barber

Born: 1918 Died: 1989

Merrill "Mezzy" Barber was highly respected as both a ski jumper and a person.

Merrill "Mezzy" Barber was born on July 14, 1918 in Brattleboro, Vermont. He was a world class ski jumper, one of the best American born ski jumpers according to his friend Art Togle. But Merrill was a talented four-way skier as well, winning among others, a U.S. National four-way championship to go with several class A ski jumping championships, the 1952 U.S. National Ski Jumping Championship and the Toger Togle Memorial Award.

Merril's heart was so much into becoming a great ski jumper, that in 1938, he diverted college funds his father had given him and instead chose to go to Norway to train. He was quick to gain Norway's respect and friendship. The Norwegians were so taken with Mezzy as a person and a ski jumper that the King of Norway personally made him an honorary citizen.

The 300 foot distance was always an elusive barrier for the North American jumpers.

Everyone knew that the mark was sure to fall in the not too distant future. That day, in the early 1950s, it happened at the Rocky Mountain Ski Association's Championships at Steamboat Springs, Colorado. However, none of the spectators dreamed that they would witness the skiing spectacle that would occur that day, February 25, 1950. The day before, the United States distance record of 297 feet had been matched in practice; so the crowd felt sure a new distance record was possible. On the first round, the crowd saw Gordon Wren jump 301 feet, but they had not seen it all. Mezzy Barber, on the same round, stretched into the air for a second United States distance record of 305 feet. The next round Art Devlin squeezed out another distance record of 307 feet. Art Togle hoped he would put it away for the day and flew 311 feet, but he was unable to hold himself upright on his landing. Three United States distance records were broken, all exceeding 300 feet for the first time, all on the same day by three of the best ski jumpers in North America. It was probably the most exciting day for ski jumping that the United States has ever seen.

In 1952, Mezzy was first at the U.S. National Ski Jumping Championships. He was also the recipient of the Toger Togle Memorial award, given by Norway to the U.S. National Ski Jumping Champion.

Devlin and Togle remember their close friend as always being an "up" individual. According to Devlin, "Mezzy just made it fun wherever we went."

Merrill "Mezzy" Barber died on May 7, 1989. he was truly an American skiing hero.

Merrill "Mezzy" Barber was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1999.

