



Ernest L. "Tap" Tapley

Ernest L. "Tap" Tapley, age 91, was born on January 2, 1924 in Amesbury, Massachusetts and passed away peacefully in his Santa Fe, New Mexico home on March 2, 2015. He was one-fourth Passamaquoddy and was proud of his Native American ancestry. At a young age he grew to love the outdoors. Around fourteen years old, he had learned to ski and was soon skiing the famous Tuckerman Ravine, which is a steep face on Mt. Washington in New Hampshire. One day when he was eighteen years old, the well-known radio broadcaster and world traveler, Lowell Thomas, noticed Tap schussing the ravine and told him he was good enough to be on the ski patrol at the prestigious Sun Valley ski area in Idaho. Mr. Thomas wrote a note to a friend, who was the head of patrol, explaining that Tap would be an excellent addition to his team. He gave the note to Tap and told him if he ever made it to Sun Valley, to give it to his friend and that he would most likely have a job. Shortly thereafter, Tap left home and hitchhiked, with his skis, to Sun Valley where he handed the note to the ski patrol director and was promptly hired. He had arrived in the West, where he would make his home for most of his long and spectacular life.

After World War II had broken out, he learned of a special army regiment had been formed for mountain warfare, and would include ski troopers. He knew that was how he wanted to serve his country and soon enlisted. The program grew into the legendary 10th Mountain Division with its headquarters at Camp Hale, high in the Rocky Mountains near Leadville, Colorado. It was here he became a ski and mountaineering instructor to the troops. After basic training he was chosen as a member of an elite team of ten that spent the war on the Aleutian Islands of Alaska monitoring Japanese troop movements. He always cherished the camaraderie with his fellow soldiers of the 10th Mountain Division.

A key person in Tap's life was Chuck Froelicher, who was both the founding board member of Colorado Outward Bound School (COBS), and the headmaster of Colorado Academy (CA), a boy's school southwest of Denver. In 1961 Tap lived near Carbondale, Colorado and was handpicked by Chuck Froelicher to construct the first Outward Bound (OB) base camp in the United States at Marble, Colorado. During the summer of 1961 Tap bulldozed roads, cleared timber, laid waterlines, and with the help of CA students made ready the wilderness campus. Tap then traveled during the winter of 1961-62 to England to study the original Outward Bound program. Returning to Marble with the course concepts, he opened the school that summer as the chief instructor. Santa Fean John Braman, an early OB instructor said with devotion, "Tap quickly became Outward Bound's most beloved instructor."

In the fall of 1962 Tap joined the staff at CA and instituted a mountain rescue program, which drew upon the skills of juniors and seniors. In his summer's off from CA he continued instructing for COBS. However, in the summer of 1965, Tap went to Lander, Wyoming to help his old friend Paul Petzoldt create the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS). Tap became the chief instructor for the initial courses that ran during that summer. So, he taught mountaineering at CA during the school year and in the summers would return to NOLS. After teaching and mentoring hundreds of CA students, Tap's dynamic eight-year career at CA came to a close in the spring of 1970.

His life changed dramatically when he left the Rocky Mountains and moved to Baja, Mexico where in 1970-71 he started a sailing and kayaking school for NOLS. Soon he was teaching courses for both NOLS and OB.

Santa Fe, New Mexico became his home in 1976 where he began an outdoor education program for young students within the Episcopal Diocese of the Rio Grande at Camp Stoney. His summers were spent in Santa Fe and winters in Baja.

Tap was a pioneer and one of the founding fathers of outdoor education in the United States. He lived a Big, Big life and his legacy is vast. Over his lifetime he inspired thousands of young people. Gently he taught his students to respect the wilderness and to "work with" Mother Nature. But, more importantly he guided them on a journey of self-exploration where they learned confidence comes from within and that they were capable of more than they had ever dreamed. Former CA student, Dan Newman (1966) expressed it this way, "You would have exhaustively placed one foot in front of the other, towards a place you could never imagine existed, and glory in it's discovery, pointed by Tap, for you to find."

The COBS tribute stated, "Tap was so many things to each of us – teacher, mentor, husband, father, grandfather, and friend. And he was as skilled an outdoorsman as there ever was."

In 2002 the City of Santa Fe honored Tap and his wife, Anita, by naming them 'Santa Fe Living Treasures.'

However, Tap's story is not finished because within OB and NOLS his teachings, philosophy, and magic will live on and on, guiding ever-new generations of students.

Tap's biography is in progress and will be released later this year.

Tap is survived by his wife of thirty-one years, Anita M. Stalter. And from a previous marriage, two daughters, Marjorie Joy Smith of Colorado Springs, Colorado and Pamala J. Tapley of Big Fork, Montana. There are also three granddaughters and three great-granddaughters.

Friday, April 10, 2015 at 2:15 p.m.

Santa Fe National Cemetery

501 North Guadalupe Street

Santa Fe, NM 87501

Please meet at the south side of the cemetery and signify your car by showing a red bandana.

A Celebration of Tap's Life

Saturday, April 11, 2015

2:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

Bishop's Ridge Stoney Camp and Recreation Center

7855 Old Santa Fe Trail

Santa Fe, NM 87505

Please RSVP at 505-820-3166 or Ktelehany@dioceserg.org

Bring stories and photos to share.

In lieu of flowers, please make donations to the Tap Tapley Scholarship Fund at Colorado Outward Bound School www.cobs.org

Condolences may be sent to:

Anita M. Stalter

7800 Old Santa Fe Trail

Santa Fe, NM 87505

taptapley2000@yahoo.com

Written by: Jeffrey A. Lowdermilk, CA 1970

Anita M. Stalter (Anita also took the Great photo!)

John C. Braman, OB and NOLS 1964 to 1990

Daniel C. Newman, CA 1966