



Heil, Otto!

By David J. Bradley in "Dartmouth Out-o'-Doors"

THE Taft Trail lay below us. High up on the shoulder of Cannon Mountain a group of some seventy skiers were assembled waiting for the start of the race down over that winding highway of snow, with its fitful steep pitches, its ice and barked trees, to the bottom of the valley. Some of the skiers were nonchalantly joking and laughing, other were nervously swallowing, adjusting their bindings, and testing their waxes with a few trial turns. Strangely unconcerned seemed the starters as they checked the starting list and conversed by radio with the timers at the bottom. We could see only a short stretch of the Trail as it curved sharply to the right, but each of us was skiing in his mind over that vivid serpentine scar: the long straight run, curve, ice, the first steep pitch which was like suddenly falling off the end of the world and finding something underneath, curve, rough hillocks, trees, ice, curve—with a gasp—the second steep pitch, that rock-studded, stump-strewn, icy *schuss* down which we were to plunge and try to remain

healthy—then the final curves and the swoop to the finish. . . . It was one of those intense moments so familiar to skiers when life seemed to suddenly have only one all-inclusive dimension.

A dozen Dartmouth skiers were grouped around their coach, listening to the last suggestions which followed a careful examination of the trail on the way up:

"Vell, chentlemen, I'm going down now. Take it easy on the last *schuss*—it is not that ve vin the race; inschted dot ve ski it. Dann ve vin anyway. It is not dot ve break a ski, or a leg mebbe, or an eye—for vot? Ski no fall—dot's the most important dinks of the dinks.—und, Jack, there vill be pretty girls along the Trail, but don't shtop for dem now. Oh, Otto, die Madeln sind so schön—und das Leben ist ja so langweilig.

"Vot! Ein Ski-Fahrer der das Leben langweilig findet! Dot's a lousy dinks. Mann fahrt-ski aus Vergnügen, nicht für die Madeln for Chris' sake! Vell, all right, but don't vait

too long. Und so, chentlemen (to the rest of us), I see you at the bottom—so long—” and smiling, Otto turned, poled a couple of times and with a spray of snow that flashed silver in the sunshine, he was out of sight.

Otto Schniebs, Dartmouth's inimitable ski leader, would be waiting with mingled concern and confidence at the hazardous last *schuss*, and we would ski it—ski it well.

But let us ski back on the Trail of Time for a few short turns, a decade or two—when European nations were again engaged in their periodic pastime of comparing muscles. Otto, though still very young, was a recognized skier, leading his battalion of ski machine gunners against the Serbs, the Russians, and later against the French and Italians; and it must be admitted that skiing under war circumstances is hardly the recreative, social sport we are accustomed to think it. Few of his men are still alive, and Otto himself was four times wounded—however, these are only war's most superficial casualties; and at the conclusion of the peace, Otto finally got out of the hospital and sought the snows again. But somehow—American snows looked fresher, and with a remarkable record as a skier, particularly as a maestro of the 18 and 50 Kilometre langlauf, Otto came with his comely Frau and Fraulein to this new bewildering world.

His previous profession being that of an artist and a sculptor as well as a mechanic, Otto was particularly suited to his first job in America—turning out the nation's insidious dictators in a Connecticut watch factory. However, the fascination for regimenting time pales beside the passion for mountain snows and skiing, which is harder to remove than a vaccination, and through his excursions north and his exuberant fellowship with skiers, Otto soon developed quite a reputation as a skier and a teacher,—the only difficulty being the deplorable inability of New Englanders to understand perfectly good German. But here Otto's buddies in the watch plant stepped in and solved the problem, for which they deserve a college degree:

“Here, Schniebs, yer gotter know how ter speak d'King's Englitch, yer know dat, dontcher? Sure! Any mug knows dat. Well, all yer gotter do is jes listen in on us, see, and memorize a few useful things, an' yer all Jake, see?” Otto was quick to learn the workman's simple formulae, and his speech, though innocently devoid of sophistication, was undeniably colorful.

With this new fluency Otto gave his first ski talk in Boston before an audience of some forty people, and it was such a riotous annihilation of conventionalized speeches that he was more in demand than Fraulein Garbo. Three hundred came to his second talk and Otto must have thought American audiences remarkably ready to roar with delight and enthusiasm. It

was here that an incident occurred which is now historic:

“Otto,” asked a bright eyed young lady who had the look of one haunted by a deep problem, “What would you do if you were coming down a steep narrow trail a little too fast and there were stumps and trees and ice and things—and things all around?” “Vell, either take the damned skis off und walk—or schtem—schtem like Hell!”

Otto, the brilliant apostle of the religion of skiing and camaraderie, combined with his classic way of picturing his ideas in a vivid mosaic of English and German, seemed to ignite all New England; his popularity set a speed record up, which was only equalled by Wall Street's phenomenal achievement in the other direction, while Charlemagne would have blanched with envy at the number of converts made.

In 1930 the Dartmouth Outing Club realized its opportunity, set the machinery going, and that Fall put Otto officially at the helm of Dartmouth skiing. Perhaps this is the most important chapter—to us certainly, and probably to all New England—for in the brief period of six years that he has been with us an explosive change has shaken her very granite foundation. There is only one failure that is worthy of mention: Otto hoped that breathing such cultured college atmosphere would have a beneficial effect on his English. But what disillusion has resulted! Through long association with his skiers, many of whom have majored in our great language, Otto has been forced sadly to watch his speech gaining only in facility, not in gentility. Thus he is still one of New England's most popular lecturers, particularly in girls' colleges where, more than anywhere else, more even than at murder trials, “color” is pre-requisite in a speaker.

When Otto accepted his position here, winter sports had already had twenty years of development and tradition; it had become the primary function of the Outing Club and an essential part of Dartmouth life. Skiing was almost unique at Dartmouth, and exponents of the sport had not been lacking since the days of Fred Harris. John Carleton, by virtue of his wild downhill running (“If such,” questions the conservative sage, “can be reasonably considered a virtue . . .”) is remembered in Europe as, “Herr Gott! für ein crrazie Amerikanor!”

To be sure, there was a holdover of skating and snowshoeing, which to the advent of Otto reigned supreme in the winter sports world; skiing was having a dry spell, and felt like the Bott in Baislethrup, Baislethrup, Baislethrup and Bott—Lawyers. But skiing was like a great nervous chemical mixture, needing only a cataclyst to set it effervescing.

Came the cataclyst Otto and in two short seasons, through the spark of his dynamic energy and magic personality, the

nebulous vapors of ski dreams caught fire and burst upon the Dartmouth planet like a new comet.

Look east to Balch Hill. What has become of the ski track or two and the few weary snowshoe marks cutting obliquely across the sleepy white face? Instead, the patient flakes barely have time to settle comfortably over the rocks before hissing blades of wood are scattering them in terror or crushing them to ice. Wild-eye novices are careening down the slope, intermittently gyrating through the air like drunken helicopters and excavating gaping shell holes where the snow lies smoothest.

Look south to the Ledyard Trail; the trees that line the two difficult curves have their knees badly skinned and wear a weary air of resignation. Here are able skiers sweeping gracefully down; here, too, are not-so-able skiers. There is one now, just crawling out of the spruce grove; his face glows with an apologetic grin, his head is tangled with the splintered remains of his latest spruce victim.

Perhaps Otto is climbing up with a group of gay fellows and pauses: "Dots de schtoff, dots ho-kay! Ve needed a new trail anyway. But keep the knees more togedder pressed und lead vit the shoulder in like this — —. Vell, v'ere going to the top—you come vit-up?" Gratefully the boy grins again and murmurs, "Sure, Otto," that has more reverence than Gabriel's, "Yas, Lawd."

This must be the border of Otto's Promised Land, for ski-ing has claimed more enthusiasts than football or Smith; there are more skis in Hanover than dogs, an unprecedented situation; and Dartmouth's ski consciousness has threatened to replace the old life blood—the "Beat Yale" complex. This, this is Otto's tragic effect on a well-regulated life, on deep established conventions, on warm rooms and Bridge, Bull and Baker sessions.

Perhaps less important, though more spectacular, has been the success of Dartmouth ski teams under Otto's leadership. Instead of one team, three have been organized to provide representation at most of the meets and to give more of Dartmouth's skiers an opportunity to compete.

A very abridged enumeration of his team's victories during the past six seasons will serve as an antidote for any scoffs:

- 6 times Intercollegiate Champions
 - 5 times winner of the Lake Placid College Week
 - Twice winner of the Marshall Foch jumping trophy at Lake Placid
 - Twice winner of the President Harding combined event trophy
 - 5 times winner of Dartmouth Winter Carnival
 - Twice National Downhill Champions
 - Eastern Combined jumping and langlauf Champions and numerous minor titles.
- There may be beer, there may be girls, who,

fired by Otto's ski talks, have abandoned silks and fragile shoes for ski clothes and battleship boots, and have fled north to the snow country. Yes, there undoubtedly will be beer and girls after the race is over, but we ski to a deeper inspiration. Otto has never been a coach, he is a leader and a companion, having that subtle streak of genius that makes all the difference, that creates a Knute Rockne, a Pancho Villa, a Napoleon.

His teams have never known the baleful pressure of training rules, rigidly enforced by threat and self-consciousness—never has there been the need.

Through the long Fall afternoons, strings of fellows are jogging over hill and field and fence, each man swinging his two ski poles as he runs—it is Fall langlauf training.

And when, after the squad has for many weeks devoutly prayed Otto's ringing ski prayer (which more than makes up in spirit for doubtful rhymes), and good Saint Peter has smiled down indulgently upon his apostle and has emptied the skies of snow, then across these magically changed fields and hills come the skiers. Some are running with that tireless rhythmical technique of a langlaufer, others are plunging down sweeping turns through the flashing crystals. The new season has felt the snow under its skis again, and there are more than three months of fierce competition ahead for Otto's teams.

This is Dartmouth ski-ing—now, an incarnation of Otto, of the rare synthesis of personality, knowledge and devotion; devotion that sees him experimenting late into the night with various conglomerations of waxes, that sees him out before breakfast the morning of a race, ski-ing over the langlauf course to test waxes and observe conditions; that sees him stationed half-way along the course to shout a cheery, "Dot's de schtoff—but Bem has ten seconds on you!" as his fellows come steaming and cursing by; knowledge that is confident of its subtle mixtures of waxes, that supplements technique by recognizing the best way to run a difficult stretch. But the greatest of all is personality. For when there are misty, tortuous miles of hills and brush ahead, when legs and arms are numb and heavy, when wax is gone and herring-boning is the only way to climb and falling is the only way to stop or turn,—then there is but one thing which will carry a fellow to the finish of a langlauf race with good time—inspiration.

But Otto's religion is no local fanaticism, unique to Dartmouth. His gospel is the vital creed of much of New England now. In proper puritanical homes grace is said by people with ski boots on their feet and tar wax on their hands.

Look South; barefoot school boys are playing on Florida's tennis courts; through the weeds of abandoned greens loiter the lazy local bovines; Florida's race horses now run in

pairs—in harness; and Florida's once-aristocratic sharks have had to apply to Washington for a sea C.C.C.

Look North; the wild enthusiasm for ski trail building, together with the tremendous destruction to vegetation due to over-ardent novices that hurtle like crazed projectiles down the mountain sides, have greatly imperiled our mountain forests. Snow trains are snatching victims from the noisy metropoli. And the crooner or the authority on the Townsend Plan moan alike through the mike into empty air.

This is New England—now, and there can be no doubt that Otto's hand has moulded much of it. Yet perhaps even more important than the material manifestations of the ski religion is the presence of a new element in the atmosphere—the intoxicating spirit of fellowship which is as easy to breathe and still as inescapable as the air itself. Wherever skiers collect,—on the trail, in the magnificent bowl of Tuckerman's Ravine, or around a cabin stove to repair a steel edge or thaw out a toe, or just to drink beer, talk ski-ing and try to speak German—wherever skiers are, there will be found that "*gemutliche stimmung*" which still seems foreign to our self-concerned, business-bound America. Perhaps such a spirit is the inseparable partner of ski-ing, but the reflection is so like Otto himself that no one would deny the affinity.

The number of Otto's friends is as boundless as his warmhearted *kameradschaft*. It includes everyone from the ablest tempo demon to the

beginner whose repertoire of turns consists only of a spectacular "*sitztmark*", and many of his best friends are found among the ranks of teams competing against his own. He doesn't hesitate to give advice to them, and after the race is over, laughs and says, "Vell, you schood hev Sohms vex und other dinks, you know, inscht of dis glue."

It seems almost as if a section of the fancied Happy Hunting Ground had broken off of some celestial cliff and avalanched down upon us. This is ours, oh bored and smoke-sick city dwellers—companionship, the snow-steeped forests, the shaggy mountains, and the cold armoured winds.

At the zenith of his success in leading Dartmouth skiers, having, in addition to capturing his usual string of ski meet scalps, placed four of his protegés on the Olympic Team, Otto has decided to resign his position and transfer his talents to his ski business and ski school. His contacts have become too large and his home too important. It is merely the end of another brilliant chapter, and we are all more than happy for having been able to help in its writing—for the world, but more, for ourselves.

So it's, "Well, Otto, I hear there are two feet of snow on Hell's Highway. I'm going up this week-end; will you be up there? Great! I'll probably see you there—but remember, schtem like Hell on the Rock Garden—Ski Heil!"

Ski-ing in the Tropics

AT LAST the ski-ing craze has reached the tropical shores of Hawaii.

Parties climb the snow-covered slopes of Mauna Kea (13,825 feet high) to indulge in a sport that was entirely foreign to the Islands until last year. They reported excellent ski-ing at the 12,000-foot level, although the bright Hawaiian sun on the tropical snow caused a few cases of temporary snow blindness.

Several globe trotters who have been on the expeditions claimed that the ski-ing was as good as that experienced in any part of the world. Islanders among the group reported that their experience in sliding down the crests of Waikiki waves on surfboards was of little help to them in handling the skis, and they were pretty certain that ski-ing, while a grand novelty, is not likely to supplant surfing as a sport in Hawaii.

The pioneer winter sportsmen reached the ski runs by horseback, as the snow belt is far off

the beaten track on this, the largest island in the archipelago.

Mauna Kea means "white mountain" and is snow-capped the year around. Its sister peak Mauna Loa, is the scene of occasional outpouring of volcanic fire—the last flow having been a little over a year ago.

Ski-ing has finally come to Jamaica, too, but, in lieu of snow, they take to the waters of beautiful Montego Bay, which makes a happy substitute for the snow of northern winters.

Major Colin Cooper, British sportsman, was the adventurous soul who started it all. "Water ski-ing," they call it. All you have to do is to put on the long boards, seize the ropes and stay on while a speed-boat whizzes around the bay with you in tow, if you're lucky.

Outside of swallowing a gallon or so of good Montego Bay sea water, there's not much that can happen to you, but swimming with the skis on is not recommended.