

The enclosed story from the Rockford Register Star, July 23, 2002, tells his remarkable story:

**BELGIANS MAKE TRIP FOR SOLDIER'S  
HOMETOWN BURIAL**  
(By Gale Worland)

ROCHELLE.—Jean-Louis Seel had always thought of Stanley E. Larson, and the other American soldiers whose remains he had recovered, as a soldier.

But at Rochelle United Methodist Church, as a young boy rounded a corner, Seel made the connection: Stanley the young boy. Stanley the teenager.

Here was his hometown, his past. Stanley, the high school basketball star. The fresh-faced boy who had a kind word for everyone. The young gentleman in glasses whose keen personality and confident smarts had made him student council president his senior year.

Monday was a day of strange contrasts for the Larson family, who laid to rest one of its oldest members, who was also one of the youngest: Pfc. Stanley E. "Mike" Larson, struck down by enemy fire at the age of 19 in a war that most of the people at his funeral were much too young to have seen.

After being buried in a common grave for 57 years not far from where he fell on Dec. 16, 1944, during the Battle of the Bulge, Larson's remains were discovered last summer deep in the Monschau Forest by a group of Belgian "diggers"—four men, including Seel, who have taken on the recovery of American MIAs as a personal mission.

They had traveled from another hemisphere to see Stanley come back to his hometown, a Midwestern crossroads ringed by tasse-headed cornfields and shingled red barns.

And now they stood in the oppressive summer heat to say farewell to a young man killed on a historic, bitter winter's day. About 200 people gathered alongside them at Stanley's gravesite, including the great-grandnieces and great-grandnephews he never knew but who, today, tenderly walked to his silver casket and left a handful of red poppies.

Stanley's father, Elmer, had bought that plot for his youngest son nearly half a century ago. Now 16 members of VFW posts from throughout northern Illinois saluted their fallen comrade with a color guard. Seven white-gloved men and women sent by the U.S. Army from Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri raised their rifles and sounded the crack of three volleys for one of America's 58,000 World War II MIAs who had finally come home.

And as a bugler played taps, a train whistle in the distance blew in an uncanny, solemn harmony.

"These people are here today to give the family final closure," said Kenneth Seay of Loves Park VFW Post 9759. Seay, the POW/MIA director for the state, held the POW/MIA flag in the formal color guard at the gravesite. On his wrist he wears a thick band engraved with the names of the 98 Vietnam POW/MIAs from Illinois.

"With everything that's gone on in the past year, we really need to pay respect to those who've gone before," said Sen. Brad Burzynski, R-Clare, who attended the funeral.

"I believe God was with Stanley and his buddies when that barrage of hot steel came down upon them," said the Rev. Brian Channel, a military history buff who gave the sermon during the church funeral preceding Stanley's burial with military honors. "Stanley's journey ends today after half a century."

The casket lay in the church draped with a U.S. flag—just as it had at a similar cere-

mony months ago in a village church near where Stanley's body was found. Close to 2,000 people, many of them Belgians wanting to show gratitude to the American troops who helped secure their liberty, attended that day.

On Monday, the flag of Belgium, with its bold vertical stripes in black, gold and red, flanked the altar along with the Stars and Stripes. Belgian "digger" Jean Philippe Speder told the congregation how, when he was a teenager, he'd heard his grandparents talk about the war. But later he realized that those memories were dimming among his peers. "The picture of the GI was fading as a new generation, including mine, grew up," he said. Speder painted the woods where Stanley lay for 57 years as a place of "serene and magnificent deep forest, known for its high marshes and spring waters." More MIAs lie in unknown pockets of those woods. "Those boys will always be home," he said, "and live in our hearts forever."

The friends and family who spoke at the funeral unraveled the compelling tale of how Stanley was searched for and found. In few words, Battle of the Bulge veteran Roger Foehringer reminded all why they had come: "He's the real hero. He gave his life, his life for us."

"Home is where I belong," Foehringer said, speaking for Stanley, "Goodbye, friends."

**THE I.R.I. PROMOTES DEMOCRACY  
AND FREEDOM AROUND THE  
WORLD**

**HON. EDWARD R. ROYCE**

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, July 23, 2002*

Mr. ROYCE. Mr. Speaker, the importance of democracy and strong democratic institutions in today's world cannot be overstated; we have too many recent examples of the dangers posed by their absence. I would like to salute the International Republican Institute (IRI) and its dedicated work to promote and strengthen democracy around the world.

It is now impossible for us to ignore the potential that unstable states have as breeding grounds for terrorists and terrorist activities—particularly in Africa, where many weak and undemocratic states make fertile ground for terrorism. Africa has been the scene of past terrorist acts, as we saw in the tragic bombings of U.S. Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.

In my role as Chairman of the International Relations Africa Subcommittee, I have had the opportunity to witness IRI's work in a number of African countries in which political development has been seriously challenged by ethnic and religious conflict, mass violence, and corrupt leadership. In 1999 I led an IRI election observation delegation to observe the historic democratic elections in Nigeria.

In that key country today, IRI is working with Nigerian political parties to prepare for upcoming elections and to encourage the increased participation of women in the political process. IRI also conducted, along with the National Democratic Institute and the International Foundation for Election Systems, a pre-election political assessment of Angola, a country that may be starting to make democratic progress from a savage civil conflict. A current program in Burundi is providing training and support to a legislature struggling to move for-

ward after a genocide of horrific proportions and ongoing violent unrest that threatens the stability of the entire Great Lakes region.

In these constantly changing political landscapes, IRI continues to work in innovative ways to address democratic priorities. For example, building on several years of successful training with local government in South Africa's young democracy, IRI is now constructing a program which will strengthen a local government and community-level response to the AIDS epidemic, a national crisis which threatens both development and democratic stability.

By working to foster strong democratic institutions, transparency and accountability in government, and political empowerment at the grassroots level, institutions such as IRI promote international political stability and further the ideals of democratic freedom throughout the world.

**TRIBUTE TO PETE SEIBERT,  
FOUNDER OF COLORADO'S VAIL  
SKI RESORT**

**HON. MARK UDALL**

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, July 23, 2002*

Mr. UDALL of Colorado. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to note the passing of Pete Seibert—a great man and a true pioneer. Mr. Seibert has often been described as a humble visionary guided by his passions more than his quest for material gains. His vision pioneered the Colorado ski industry and will no doubt continue to shape the industry for years to come.

Mr. Seibert started skiing on pair of his mother's wooden skis at the age of seven. He quickly fell in love with the sport and soon decided that he would one day create a ski resort of his own. As a young man, he joined the Army's storied 10th Mountain Division where he learned unparalleled mountaineering skills and served his country honorably during World War II. After being severely wounded in 1945, during some of the most difficult combat of the war, Pete Seibert was sent home from Italy with a Bronze Star and Purple Heart and was told that he would likely never walk again. He did not accept that verdict—in fact, he totally rejected it, and went on to overcome the odds against rehabilitation. So complete was his success that in 1950 he qualified for the U.S. Alpine Ski Team.

A few years later, Pete Seibert set out in earnest to create a ski resort. After considering many possible locations, he chose the site near Gore Creek that is now known as Vail Mountain. With the same tenacity with which he overcame his war injury, Mr. Seibert shrugged off suggestions that the area was too flat, too close to the interstate and too close to Aspen.

Chris Joufflas, a lifelong rancher in the area, tells about tending sheep high on the mountain before it was ever referred to as Vail. He remembers one day encountering two young men scanning the mountain, excitedly pointing out terrain features and taking copious notes. The two men were Pete Seibert and his friend Earl Eaton. Mr. Joufflas asked them what they were doing. They matter-of-factly replied that they were going to turn the mountainside into a world class ski resort. Mr. Joufflas likely had

his doubts, but Pete Seibert's dreams of that day evolved into one of the most successful ski resorts in North American history.

Vi Brown, a longtime local in Vail, recalls, "Pete was a real hero. If you saw him when you were walking down the street people would say to their kids, 'There goes Pete Seibert. He is the man that invented Vail.'" But despite his achievements and his fame he remained sincerely humble and was an imminently likable man. I believe that humility may well have come from his deep love and understanding of the mountains. Any real mountaineer will come to recognize that you must have perseverance, respect and humility in order to fully experience a mountain. One would be hard pressed to find a man who better embodied these qualities than did Pete Seibert.

It was not greed but passion that inspired him to create a place where millions of people have been able to experience the beauty of that mountain through the years. Our great state and skiers around the world owe a huge debt to Pete Seibert. He will be deeply missed but never forgotten. I ask my colleagues to join with me in expressing our gratitude for his contributions and our sorrow for his passing.

For the information of our colleagues, I attach a news story from the Denver Post about Mr. Seibert and his life and accomplishments.

SKI PIONEER SEIBERT DIES OF CANCER AT 77—  
10TH MOUNTAIN VETERAN FOUNDED VAIL RESORT

[From the Denver Post Mountain Bureau,  
July 17, 2002]

(By Steve Lipsher)

VAIL.—Pete Seibert, the visionary ski pioneer who turned Vail and Beaver Creek from dreams into two of the world's pre-eminent ski resorts, has died at age 77.

Seibert, who succumbed to cancer Monday evening, more than 50 years after Italian artillery shells nearly claimed his life during World War 11, was one of a small cadre of 10th Mountain Division veterans who developed Colorado skiing into an industry that generates billions of dollars annually.

"Peter is the one who really founded Vail and Beaver Creek, and ... those two areas are giants in the ski industry," said lifelong friend Bill Brown, one of the original nine men recruited by Seibert.

It was Seibert who, along with local rancher Earl Eaton, saw the potential in 1957 in what would become Vail Mountain, 100 miles west of Denver.

"Willy Schaeffler, God bless him, said Vail will never work as a resort; it's too flat," Seibert said in a December 2000 Denver Post interview, recalling the legendary former University of Denver ski coach. "I'd seen the places in Europe that worked. They were pretty easy, cruising. People liked that. They don't want to be holding an edge all the time. The skis should flow, and you should be able to go with them."

Seibert also rallied skeptical investors into paying \$10,000 apiece for shares in the company—along with homesites in the village and lifetime ski passes—that now are worth millions. And it was Seibert who

oversaw the cutting of the original ski trails, and ultimately it was Seibert who first lured the World Alpine Ski Championships to Vail.

"He had an idea a minute, almost, in the early days, and he saw the potential of Vail," said Bob Parker, another 10th Mountain Division veteran who left his job as editor of Skiing magazine to join Seibert as Vail's first marketing manager. "We all believed in Vail because we believed in Peter. It was his real leadership and enthusiasm."

Pat O'Donnell, head of Aspen Skiing and chairman of industry trade group Colorado Ski Country USA, credited Seibert with setting the industry standard in resort development.

#### HE'S AN ICON, A VISIONARY

"He's an icon, a role model, a visionary and is largely responsible for the success, through his dreaming and implementation, of what the ski industry is today for the state of Colorado and the nation," O'Donnell said.

Fired as CEO by incoming Vail owner Harry Bass in the 1970s, Seibert later returned to the company under George Gillett as a full-time adviser, a position he held until his death.

"He was always one to share his experience, to brainstorm ideas of how to improve our business," said Beaver Creek chief operating officer John Garnsey. "He was such an innovator and just a great thinker. He was always coming up with ideas, and he never stopped challenging us to come up with better ways of running our resort."

Two years ago, when Vail opened Blue Sky Basin—finally realizing the full scope of the ski area envisioned by Seibert in the 1950s—the company named one of the expanses "Pete's Bowl."

"That is the signature homage to Pete Seibert," said Vail Resorts CEO Adam Aron. "There were a number of people who were involved in the founding and funding of Vail. But clearly, Pete Seibert was the conductor of that orchestra and deserves the great credit."

In recent years, Vail attracted the ire of environmentalists, who complain that it is too big and caters to the wealthy at the expense of nature. Seibert once told a Denver Post reporter: "We weren't trying to save the world. We were just trying to build a ski area."

Born in Sharon, Mass., on Aug. 7, 1924, Seibert started skiing at age 7 on a pair of his mother's wooden skis, winning races by age 15.

After graduating from high school, he joined the U.S. Army's famed 10th Mountain Division, which trained at Camp Hale and then fought in the 1945 siege of Fiva Ridge—the name of one of the seminal runs at Vail—and Mount Belvedere.

Wounded so badly in the battle for Mount Terminal a few days later that doctors warned him he probably wouldn't walk again, much less ski, Seibert was sent home with a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart.

Seibert, however, endured a painful rehabilitation and quickly took up skiing again, teaching himself to get down the hill practically on his one good leg with such speed that he made the U.S. Ski Team in 1950, wrapping his damaged right leg heavily before each run.

"One way or another, skiing was going to be my life," he wrote in his book on the history of the resort, "Vail: Triumph of a Dream."

After working for Aspen and Loveland ski areas, training as a gourmet chef and attending L'Ecole Hoteliere de Lausanne, an international school for hotel management in Switzerland, Seibert began in earnest pursuing his dream of creating a world-class ski resort of his own.

#### THE GREATEST PERSONALITY

"He could sell an icebox to an Eskimo," Brown said. "Pete has the greatest personality."

Despite repeated run-ins with Paul Hawk, the U.S. Forest Service supervisor for ski-area development, as well as a mad scramble for money from investors, Seibert and Vail Associates finally opened for business in 1962.

Little snow had fallen that autumn, but after a stunt in which Seibert hired Indians to perform a snow dance, a blizzard struck, and Vail was off and running.

Still, it was hand-to-mouth for a while, as all profits had to be dumped back into improvements on the mountain.

"As Vail was being built, we were always balancing on the brink of failure," Seibert recounted in his book.

Soon, however, the resort achieved success, accompanied by the development of an upscale town modeled after a Bavarian village.

But, truth be told, Seibert never achieved the wild wealth of many of the later arrivals to Vail, although after he was hired again by Gillett, he certainly lived comfortably and was as accustomed to wearing a tuxedo as a ski parka.

"He always seemed driven by his dreams and vision rather than by material considerations," said Vail Mayor Ludwig Kurz, the longtime former director of the Beaver Creek ski school who helped Seibert sketch out the treacherous Birds of Prey downhill course at that mountain that challenges top World Cup skiers today.

Seibert was diagnosed with stomach cancer last year, and although he underwent aggressive treatment, it spread into his lungs and esophagus.

"We all knew that he was fighting a tough battle," Garnsey said. "But Pete had overcome a lot of tough battles and adversity in his life, and he always came through."

He died in his sleep at his Edwards home, surrounded by his former wife, Betty, with whom he remained very close, two of his three sons and family friends. He also is survived by three grandchildren.

"He was really a patriot of skiing and tried to make the town something," said prominent Vail hotel and restaurant owner Sheika Gramshammer, who came to Vail in the early days with her husband, Pepi, at Seibert's insistence. "Vail was really a small family, and Pete was like our patron, our father. I think he was born to do this kind of thing. He was a dreamer."

The family has asked that, instead of flowers, donations be sent to the Shaw Regional Cancer Center at the Vail Valley Medical Center. No services have been announced.