



(Photo courtesy of Florence and Jerome Kiefer)

Jerome Kiefer, 1934.



Camp Hale: A Civilian Perspective
by Barbara D. Kiefer*

World War II produced well known military heroes like Douglas MacArthur, George Patton, and Omar Bradley, to name just a few; but many unnamed civilian heroes also supported the war effort. The following is an account of one such man—Jerome A. Kiefer, a civilian who helped construct the most advanced ski trooper training center at that time: Camp Hale, Colorado. The Pando Valley, formerly an agricultural area, became the site of Camp Hale due, in part, to its accessibility by rail and highway. This project was an economic godsend to the civilians on the Western Slope who did not have the opportunity to secure jobs in war-time industries common in much of America. In February 1942, Jerome Kiefer and his friend and former business partner John Wilson found work building the Camp. Construction officially began in April 1942, and ended just seven months later; however, Jerome began work in February of 1942, and remained there until November of 1944.

Charles Minot Dole of the National Ski Patrol originated the idea of putting Allied infantry men on skis. Before the United States entered World War II, his "offer to mobilize skiers for military duties" was met with "polite derision."¹ Later, recognizing a need to fight in mountainous terrain on the European front, the then Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall liked the idea and "the 87th regiment was activated at Fort Lewis, Washington on the slopes of Mt. Rainier, then moved to Camp Hale in 1942."² Young men, some of whom had never seen snow

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in their lives, learned to ski with heavy packs and weapons, to fight in extreme weather conditions, and to survive in subzero temperatures. They trained along with Norwegians who had come to Camp Hale to develop efficient combat techniques in snow and harsh conditions. Their goal was to drive the Third Reich out of occupied Norway and regain control of their country. Working together for freedom, the Americans and Norwegians became the Tenth Mountain Division of the U.S. Army.

Nationally, the United States adapted itself to the restrictions of war and people did what they could to support the war effort. Patriotism flourished; most Americans firmly supported the United States' involvement in the war, and had a personal hatred for the enemy. Everyone knew at least one person who served in the military and was concerned for his welfare. According to historian John Patrick Diggins, "it was truly a people's war" and "the American work force mobilized for the war effort...throng[s] of men and women flocked to war plants."³ When the Leadville newspaper "'The Herald Democrat' announced on March 31, 1942, that an army camp would be constructed at Pando, people came from every part of the United States seeking work."⁴ The tiny mining town was completely unprepared for the onslaught of people looking for work. Temporary shacks and small trailers quickly filled the empty spaces. Sewage problems, an insufficient water supply, and fear of rampant venereal disease from the commingling of lonely men and local prostitutes forced town officials to declare Leadville out of bounds to the folks from Camp Hale.

In Grand Junction, Jerome Kiefer and John Wilson's budding plumbing and heating business was only two months old when the U.S. entered the war. They experienced great difficulty in getting materials due to the increased needs of the government for plumbing and heating supplies so they closed their business. Both men had growing families and were desperate for work. When they learned that an Army camp was going to be constructed in Pando they jumped at the chance despite the fact that the long distance would separate them from their families much of the time. Kiefer knew the sheetmetal trade, but the camp only needed plumbers; so he told the contractor he was a plumber to get the job. Although he knew almost nothing about professional plumbing, he learned the trade quickly by trial and error.

Kiefer visited Grand Junction once a month. Sometimes he drove his car; other times he caught a ride with someone or took the crowded train. Rationing of gas and tires made Kiefer reluctant to drive home. He

stated matter-of-factly, "of course we had to be careful not to drive any more than necessary."⁵ Kiefer's remark reflects the national attitude of doing everything possible to support the war effort. Kiefer's wife, Florence, recalled that everyone did what they could without question: rationing, giving up silk stockings, planting victory gardens, and doing without.

When Kiefer first reported for duty at Pando, he and Wilson lived in railroad bunk houses and ate in a temporary mess hall located in the ice house. Upon completion of the workers' bunk houses and mess halls, the old railroad buildings were torn down to make room for barracks that were to be built for incredible numbers of workers due to arrive in April, 1942. Before the main body of workers arrived, Kiefer and Wilson installed the plumbing in mess halls, latrines, and shower rooms. Author Rene L. Coquoz estimated that "five thousand men and women were employed at Camp Hale."⁶ Kiefer corroborated that figure: "By summer there were thousands of construction workers and quite a few separate contractors working on different phases of the camp."⁷ The quick erection of workers' facilities amazed him. In spite of the mass of people who moved in at once, "things went along like clockwork"⁸ and soon the permanent living quarters replaced the temporary shacks.

Installing two or three large coffee urns in each of the mess halls was one of Kiefer's first jobs. They were hooked up to propane gas and water, and made coffee continuously. Camp Hale had at least six mess halls which were large enough to handle several hundred people at once. Thousands of cold and hungry soldiers and civilians passed through Camp Hale's mess halls.

Camp Hale had several water wells, the largest having an outlet of twelve inches. Kiefer installed and connected large water pumps to the wells. He and his crew inserted long steel shafts into the bottoms of the wells and then hooked a pump to each shaft. "They were turbine type pumps with the turbine down in the well connected directly to a vertical motor by a long shaft."⁹ The largest pump motor was five hundred horse power and about eight feet tall. Leveling the pump motor to eliminate vibrations and connecting outlets to the water main were difficult aspects of this job. The excess water went into a water storage tank on a nearby hill. The Kiefers remember that the drinking water at Camp Hale was superb.

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the U.S. Army's military force increased tremendously, creating an immedi-

ate overcrowding problem at military bases nationwide. In order to meet the demand for more Army training camps, the military needed "reliable contractors with the managerial, technical, and financial strength to meet emergency demands."¹⁰ To get the work done as quickly as possible, each contractor was responsible for a certain portion of the camp and worked on "a cost-plus-a-fixed-fee basis."¹¹ This meant that the government would pay for the cost of materials and labor plus an added percentage. Consequently, the builders did not skimp on materials or labor and often worked their crews overtime to complete their portion of the camp quickly. This process, which Kiefer deemed inefficient, speeded the construction of badly needed military compounds. Contractors who built these compounds made a great deal of money because "the more money they spent, the more money they got."¹² Kiefer learned that the Army's more than generous method of payment attracted some very greedy people to Camp Hale.

When the temporary camp was complete, construction of the permanent camp began and Kiefer took a job laying water mains "with the water main gang."¹³ The contractor of the water main crew exploited the Army's liberal method of payment. Kiefer described a typical day on this job as "rather monotonous work and the contractor who was getting paid cost plus ten percent had us quit work and just lay in the trenches, which were from six to twelve inches deep, for hours at a time, then work [us] hard for a couple of hours to get a quota done."¹⁴ This strange work pattern allowed the contractor to get paid not only for the cost of regular labor, but also for unneeded overtime.

Kiefer did not agree with the poor ethics of this contractor and hated working for him, despite the fact that Kiefer was making a dollar and a half per hour, plus overtime at time and a half. Other contractors took advantage of the cost-plus-a-fixed-fee method—Kiefer heard about others who buried Jeeps, tools, and machinery in the holes for pipes and foundations and then ordered more supplies for the next job. Kiefer's boss was not quite that dishonest, but his lack of scruples rubbed Kiefer the wrong way. He was employed with the water main crew for two or three weeks before an event occurred that forever impacted his life and the lives of those he loved.

At Camp Hale, Kiefer met Carl Hixon and they became good friends. In August of 1942, Kiefer, Wilson, Hixon, and several other plumbers began living in boarding houses in Minturn "to get away from mess hall food and barracks life."¹⁵ Together these men commuted the



(Photo courtesy of Florence and Jerome Kiefer)

Bill and Jerry Kiefer.

seventeen miles between Minturn and Camp Hale twice daily. They shared one truck; three men rode in the cab and the rest piled in the back. One evening, while returning to Minturn from Camp Hale, Kiefer and Wilson were riding in the back with a few other plumbers. Wilson was sitting along the side of the bed and asked to switch with Kiefer, who was leaning against the cab, protected from the cool mountain wind. Wilson's coat was not well suited for such extreme temperatures, so Kiefer kindly traded places to afford Wilson some protection from the chill. Soon after the two men traded places, a car pulled out of a side road onto the highway. The auto's driver took the turn too wide, and forced the plumbers' truck off the road. It plunged down an embankment, overturned, and came to rest directly on top of Kiefer. Wilson was decapitated, Kiefer was badly injured, and several others were hurt. One of Kiefer's eyes was gouged out and barely connected to his eye socket. His back was badly hurt, and he sustained numerous gashes and cuts. Carl Hixon's son was thrown out of the back of the truck. He helped get the overturned truck off Kiefer despite his broken back and punctured lung. At the hospital in Leadville, the doctor prepared to clip Kiefer's eye out but something stayed his hand and he decided to fill it with sulfa, put it back in and bandage it up. Mrs. Kiefer believes it was God's influence that saved Jerome's eye.

Mrs. Kiefer learned about his accident a day after it occurred because she was visiting relatives and the Camp personnel could not locate her. Beside herself with worry and having no details about her husband's condition, she left their two older boys with Jerome's parents in Mack and took the baby with her to Leadville. Friends there invited her to stay with them while Jerome was in the hospital. After about a week in the Leadville hospital, she brought Jerome home to Grand Junction to recover. With no insurance and no unemployment compensation, Florence struggled during Jerome's recovery. However, the Depression had taught her to be resilient, to do without, and to be creative with finances. In spite of the emotional and economic hardship, she successfully managed to take care of her three small boys and injured husband.

After the automobile accident, Kiefer had many obstacles to overcome. At first he could not walk due to the pain in his back and legs. Because of his eye injury, Kiefer could barely see, and when the bandages came off he felt seasick from the loss of equilibrium. However, he recovered swiftly considering the extent of his injuries. Kiefer remained home for about a month, regained his eyesight, and returned to work at Camp Hale.

While Kiefer convalesced, Hixon, who was not injured in the accident, had found an honorable contractor and became "plumbing superintendent" of the crew building the sewage disposal plant at Camp Hale.¹⁶ When Kiefer returned to the Camp, Hixon offered him a job as a plumber and Kiefer quickly accepted, thankful that he did not have to work for another conniving contractor. The sewage plant crew lived in their own barracks about one-half mile below the Camp. This separated them from the noise and bustle of the continuous construction work; however, they did eat at one of the Camp's mess halls. Quite a few men worked on the sewage plant and Kiefer remembers that "they were a terrific bunch of guys and got along well together."¹⁷ Kiefer found the work "really interesting" because it involved new methods of pipe fitting and new sewage disposal ideas.¹⁸ It was truly a state-of-the-art system, very much like today's small town systems.

The crew "worked hard and got a lot accomplished,"¹⁹ but Kiefer managed to take a few days off once a month to visit his family in Grand Junction. By the time they finished the sewage plant, connected it to the Camp's sewer lines, and made sure that it was operational, construction was nearing completion and the troops began to arrive. Kiefer was worried about finding work after the Camp was completed, but Hixon had already made big plans for the two of them.

A friendly, outgoing man, Hixon did not hesitate to go to the top when he wanted something. He talked his way into the Camp's permanent maintenance crew as a foreman and asked Kiefer to join him. Kiefer happily accepted the position. Next Hixon convinced the administration that they be allowed to live in the old temporary nurses' barracks located just inside gate number one. Since the barracks were large, the two men could bring their families to Camp Hale to live. The men's wives jumped at the chance to live with their husbands high in the beautiful Rocky Mountains. In January, Hixon's wife and two teenage daughters joined him. Kiefer made arrangements to go to Grand Junction by train to move his wife and three young sons, Jerry, Bill and baby Dennis. Arriving at the train depot one evening after work, Kiefer found that "about half the soldiers in camp had a weekend pass and a good part of them were headed for Glenwood Springs or Grand Junction. I did not know whether I'd get on the train or not, but happened to find myself close to one of the doors and was literally pushed on the by crush of bodies behind me. The seats were all taken and I spent the trip standing or sitting on the floor in the aisle along with a lot of others."²⁰ The young family packed dishes, bed-

ding and a few pieces of furniture into their car and headed for Camp Hale. They were very happy to be together again.

The Hixons and the Kiefers lived together in the barracks until the completion of permanent housing for civilian employees on the south side of Highway 24. The two families got on amazingly well, cooking and eating together in the main rooms with each family sleeping in bedrooms on the far side of either end of the barracks. This extended family enjoyed itself. Carl absolutely adored baby Dennis, and the two teenage girls doted on the little boys, often baby-sitting for Florence whenever the adults needed a break or went to a dance or gathering.

Daily life at Camp Hale was a young boy's paradise. Jerry and Bill Kiefer — only six and five at the time — remember it fondly. Having to show a pass to the guard each time before entering the camp impressed five-year-old Bill. In addition, the barracks where the Hixons and Kiefers lived faced the main entrance, so family members could see all the excitement: soldiers drilling, Army vehicles roaring back and forth, and heavy machinery at work. According to Bill:

The most wonderful part of the Camp Hale experience was the soldiers. They were a part of the scene on a daily basis. Soldiers would march by during the summer wearing backpacks with rifles strapped to them and march by in the winter in white parkas and wearing their backpacks with rifles and skis strapped to them.²¹

Even Santa Claus wore white. When he came to the Kiefers' house to ask the boys what they wanted for Christmas, Bill "was taken aback by the white outfit."²² Bill learned that it was for Santa's safety, although he could not imagine even evil Hitler shooting Santa on Christmas. When asked what they wanted for Christmas, the boys said "soldiers", and they received soldiers—lots of them. "Not only did Santa give us soldiers, but every uncle and aunt sent us 'soldier sets' so that our living room was filled with them from one end to the other. There was one major disappointment—they were made of cardboard. We neglected to specify that we wanted metal soldiers."²³ The soldier sets and their accessories reflected the patriotic fervor of the country. The toy soldiers had projectiles that they could launch from tanks, cannons, or cardboard airplanes. The cardboard targets were "portrait caricatures of the three arch-enemies of the day — Hitler, Mussolini, and Tojo." The boys "spent

many contented hours playing [their] own war games, but naturally fighting only from the side of the allies."²⁴

The boys idolized the soldiers and watched their activities closely. Bill noted, "Soldiers were camped along Highway 24 between Camp Hale and Redcliff in neat rows of tents that filled up the summer meadows. In the morning we were awakened by cannon shots that echoed across the valley or by the sound of the bugle and its 'Reveille'."²⁵ The soldiers' transportation was a source of great interest for the Kiefer boys. In the summertime, soldiers drove by in Jeeps and "Peeps" (smaller Jeeps), and in the wintertime, they rode in "weasels", early versions of the snowmobile.

The Kiefer children enjoyed good health at Camp Hale in spite of exposure to scarlet fever and measles. However, the Kiefer's oldest son Jerry did have a Camp Hale hospital experience. After having his tonsils removed, he "had a problem being in a ward with the other kids, since they were all girls."²⁶ He must have complained bitterly, because soon he was moved to a ward filled with GIs. He spent a couple of happy days convalescing with the soldiers, who later took him to a movie.

At Camp Hale the children attended the small school inside the camp and Jerry began the first grade in a class of two children. Left at home, the younger brother Bill became very lonely. As a result, Florence asked the teacher if he could begin first grade along with his brother; she agreed, and Bill entered school at the tender age of five.

In the woods around Camp Hale, the little boys had many adventures—skiing, hiking and playing with animal bones. They had skis that "were made out of wood and had a leather strap which you pushed your feet under when you were ready to go down the hill."²⁷ In addition, the civilian housing area boasted a metal swing set on which the boys spent much of their time. One afternoon, they heard a loud explosion coming from the direction of the swing set. They ran toward the sound and found that a horrible accident had occurred. A boy was swinging and as he went back and forth, he hit the swing post with a metal object. The object, a live shell, detonated. The boy's hand was blown off and according to Bill, "I am sure that bloody thing left on the doorstep was what was left of his thumb."²⁸ Jerry remembers "the excitement and the blood."²⁹ All of the kids had an extensive collection of shell casings that they found in the woods around the Camp; however, after the accident the kids were more careful.

The Hixons and the Kiefers enjoyed what the mountains of-

ferred—fishing and hiking in the summer, skating and skiing in the winter. The civilians and the military personnel enjoyed pot-lucks, picnics, dances and get-togethers. Mrs. Kiefer wrote to her sisters often and in one particular letter described preparations for a dance at the Camp and expressed her attitude about fun during the war.

We are supposed to attend a dance tonight here at the Rec. Hall...but as it is, Jerome just doesn't care whether we go or not. I washed my hair and did it up this morning just in case he actually wants to go, but we and the children attended the Pot Luck supper last Wednesday night, so we feel we have spent enough on pleasure this week.³⁰

Mrs. Kiefer loved the activities at the Camp, in part, because she could show off her children. "Really girls, there's nothing like showing off your kids,"³¹ she wrote to her sisters. She enjoyed snapping photographs of the camp, taking long walks on summer mornings (until she was informed that the area in which she was walking was an artillery practice area and that she was in extreme danger), and spending time in the large mess hall kitchen which had a giant coal cook stove. Coal cost almost nothing at Camp Hale, and the range could hold at least twenty loaves of bread at a time. The women were grateful for the large oven because with two families and occasional visitors, there were many hungry people to feed. In addition, the range was attached to a one hundred gallon water tank, so there was always plenty of hot water.

The Kiefers had many relatives visit them during their stay at Camp Hale, despite the fact that it was a high security area. Aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, mothers, and fathers all visited at least once to satisfy their curiosity about life in the only mountain military camp in America. On one particular visit, Mrs. Kiefer impressed her visiting aunt by getting arrested by the military guard. She had taken her "flatlander" uncle from Indiana for a drive over Tennessee Pass. On their return trip he asked her to stop so that he could enjoy the panoramic view of Camp Hale from the highway which stood several hundred feet above the Pando Valley. Despite Mrs. Kiefer's strong warnings, the uncle popped out of the car and snapped a picture of the camp. Upon arrival at the guardhouse, they were arrested and taken to the Provost Marshall's office. Mrs. Kiefer was mortified and very angry at her uncle. They were held by the military police and forced to wait for hours to see what the Provost Marshall would de-



Civilian housing.

(Photo courtesy of Florence and Jerome Kiefer)

cide to do with them. They were questioned extensively and released only after her uncle "accidentally" exposed the film.

While living in the old nurses' barracks, Kiefer came down with the measles and was put in the Camp Hale hospital. He had contracted the measles from working on a plugged floor drain in the measles infirmary. After a few days there, he became friendly with the GI in the bed next to him. During polite conversation, Kiefer learned that the soldier thought he had scarlet fever. Later, while signing his discharge papers to check out of the hospital, Kiefer began to feel strange. By the time he got home, he felt deathly ill and had an extremely high fever. Mrs. Kiefer was "frightened to death and got a nurse who lived nearby to come and take a look at him."³² The nurse called an ambulance which returned him to the hospital. He had contracted scarlet fever from the G.I. who was not in quarantine because the doctors had misdiagnosed his illness and placed him in the measles ward. Kiefer was very ill and in quarantine at the hospital for two or three weeks. Each day, Mrs. Kiefer braved temperatures as low as thirty five degrees below zero to shovel their car out of the deep snow to visit her husband.

Unable to work, Kiefer could provide no income during his illnesses. Mrs. Kiefer, frustrated and concerned about their lack of income, went to the administration building and talked to a lieutenant where she demanded compensation since Mr. Kiefer was exposed to measles while repairing drains at the infirmary and to scarlet fever while recuperating from the measles at the hospital. The officer told her she "didn't have a leg to stand on."³³ However, at her insistence, he gave her an address in Washington to which she wrote a letter describing the situation. Eventually, she received an apology, and, more importantly, a compensation check.

During Kiefer's illnesses, Hixon, the shop foreman, saved his position on the maintenance crew. Kiefer was glad he had become a plumber because sheetmetal workers (his profession before World War II) "seemed to spend a good deal of their time cleaning soot and ashes out of flues and stoves."³⁴ About twelve men worked in the plumbing shop; half with the Water Main and Sewer Department which was responsible for taking care of sewers and broken or frozen water mains, and the other half, Kiefer's crew, handled smaller jobs such as leaky faucets, stopped up drains, frozen pipes, and installation and remodeling projects. The Army had a few other facilities in remote areas around Camp Hale, such as on Cooper Mountain and in Leadville. Kiefer's crew remodeled the

Vendome Hotel in Leadville and the Leadville Airport. They built Cooper Hill, located near the summit of Tennessee Pass and the ski training area for Camp Hale. The crew built a mess hall and installed the plumbing for the latrines there. Sometime after the war, Cooper Hill was rebuilt and renamed Ski Cooper; it is now an exclusive ski resort. Its entrance is near the Tenth Mountain Division Memorial.

After a few months of living in the old nurses' barracks inside the Camp, the Hixon and Kiefer families moved into civilian housing across Highway 24 from Camp Hale. Each family had their own apartment in the two or three bedroom duplexes provided for civilians. "They were very nice but nothing fancy" and all were exactly the same inside and out. They had a living room and kitchen, and the rent was only seventeen dollars per month. A great deal of confusion resulted from the similarity of the apartments; people often burst in someone else's home, bewildered and apologetic. Jerry remembers: "One day as Bill and I were walking home, we saw someone hanging up clothes. Bill said, 'Hi, Mom,' and when the woman looked around her laundry to see who was talking to her, we were surprised; she wasn't our mother and that wasn't our house." The boys learned to look at the garbage to determine which house was theirs.³⁵

In addition to training troops for mountain fighting, Camp Hale functioned as a prisoner of war camp for captured German military men. The captives shoveled snow, washed windows and kept the Camp and the civilian housing area clean and neat. The Germans fascinated the little boys and the civilians at Camp Hale. The POWs sometimes peeked in the windows at Mrs. Kiefer while she did her exercises. This not only frightened her, it also embarrassed her. Consequently, she made sure she had a kerchief on her head so that they would not recognize her when she went outside her home. Kiefer remembers that some Germans repaired their own barracks. They would come into the plumbing shop and ask, in broken English, for pipe or pipe fittings. Most were nice, and many were quite young, and glad to be away from the fighting.

While living in the civilian housing, Kiefer became ill again, this time with what the Camp Hale doctors thought was a hernia. They wanted to operate, but something told Mrs. Kiefer to get a second opinion. She took him to Gilman, Colorado where he was diagnosed as having severe orchitis, an infection of the testicles. According to the doctor at Gilman, if he had the hernia operation, the infection would have spread throughout his body and killed him within hours. Once again, Kiefer's



The Hixon Family.

(Photo courtesy of Florence and Jerome Kiefer)

life had been spared.

When he was not ill, injured or working, Kiefer found the time to fish, which became his passion. After Hixon introduced him to fly fishing, they would hike three or four miles to the Four Sisters Lakes or fish on Homestake Creek. Often their wives would accompany them. The fishing was so good that the men would catch their limit within a few hours. Fish fries and picnics with the other civilians often resulted from these successful fishing expeditions. That summer, Hixon and Kiefer "went up to the lakes [and] took along a saw, axes, rope and some wire and made a raft out of three or four long logs lashed together and used it the rest of the season to paddle around one of the lakes to get out farther than [they] could cast from shore."³⁶

The Kiefers often went fishing alone while the Hixon girls babysat the boys. In the spring of 1944, early one morning, Florence and Jerome crossed Homestake Creek on a large log which was two or three feet above the water. That evening, when they were headed back to the Camp, they discovered that the creek had risen until it was a raging torrent and the water completely covered the log. There was no other crossing point for miles, so they had to use the log. Jerome made it across safely even though the log sagged and the water came up to his knees. When he got across, he saw that Florence, who was very small and light, was having extreme difficulty making it over the log. The force of the current was terrific, but fortunately she persevered and made it across safely with the assistance of Jerome and a cable that had been strung across for a hand-hold. Fishing was an inexpensive activity and because money was tight for the Kiefers, they did it often.

Economically, the Kiefers were in the same shape as the rest of the country, depending on ration books to get some of the items that were scarce, such as sugar, gas, and soap. Payroll deductions for war bonds were automatic; while they were at the Camp, they invested about twelve hundred dollars in war bonds which helped them put a down payment on a home in Grand Junction after the war. This was a significant amount of money for the time period. Like many Americans, the Kiefers were much better off after the war than before.

The Kiefers were devout Catholics and when they moved to Camp Hale they were relieved to find that non-denominational chapels were being erected. They attended services every Sunday and participated in religious activities whenever possible. A deep abiding faith carried many Americans through the trials of wartime. The Kiefers attended church

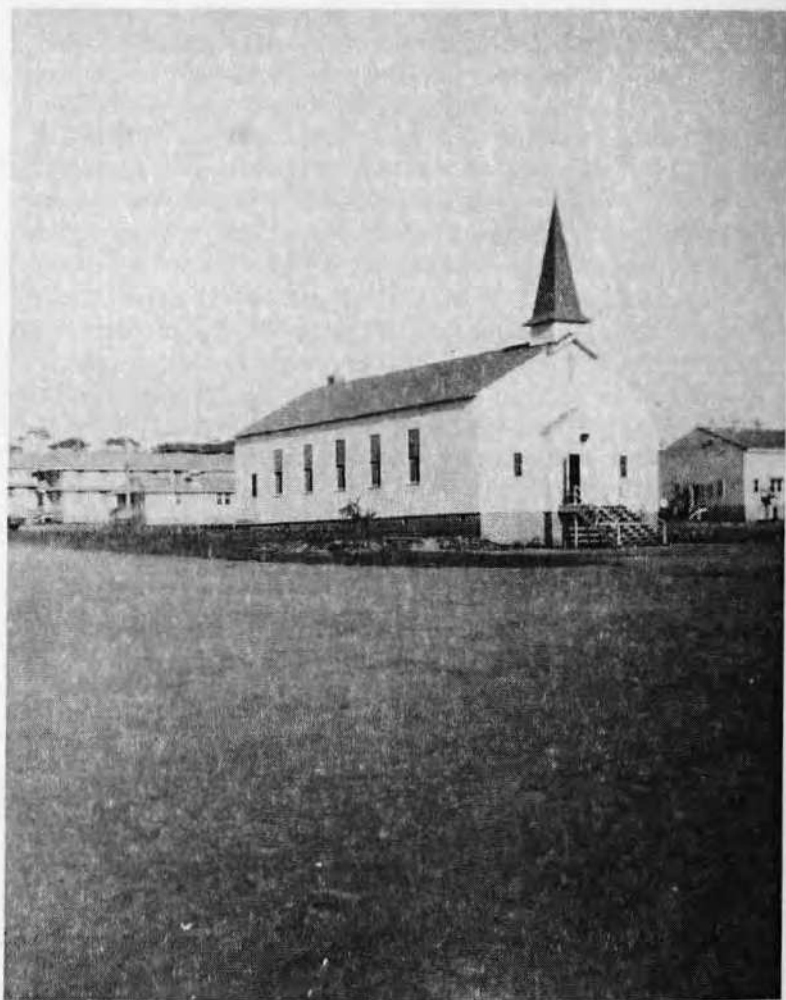
with Rupert and Werner Von Trapp, two members of the famous Von Trapp Family Singers. The Von Trapp boys, who sang at Christmas and served Mass, were soldiers in the Tenth Mountain Division. The famed Rodgers and Hammerstein musical "The Sound Of Music" is loosely based on the life of the boys' mother, Maria Augusta Trapp.

After months of intense training, the soldiers left Camp Hale in July 1944 to go to "Camp Swift, Texas for further pre-combat training."³⁷ A band played while a large crowd of well-wishers waved goodbye. It was a "stirring moment for each of us, soldiers being sent off to the far corners of the world, some never to return."³⁸ Some traveled to Italy, while others went to the Aleutian Islands off the coast of Alaska where Japanese troops had set up a post and were thought to be preparing for an attack on America. The Tenth Mountain Division, well prepared for the harsh elements of the Arctic Circle, were successful in driving the Japanese off United States soil.

When word came that the camp would be closed, the Kiefer family was disappointed. They and many others hoped that the camp would be permanent. In November 1944, the Kiefers and the Hixons parted ways. Each family packed up their belongings and their memories and moved—the Kiefers to Grand Junction and the Hixons to Caldwell, Idaho, where Carl and his son opened a plumbing business. The two families eventually lost contact with each other. Soon after the last person had moved away, the government began tearing down the buildings that had been built so quickly only two years earlier. The Pando Valley saw only sporadic bursts of activity after the demolition; in 1953, it was reactivated as an occasional high mountain training center for the United States Army but never reached the efficiency of its 1940s heyday. It officially closed again on June 30, 1966.

Back in Grand Junction, Kiefer found work in W.B. Johnson's sheetmetal shop and began a long career in the sheetmetal trade installing and repairing furnaces. Kiefer learned something on nearly every job. Tenacity and courage drove Kiefer to attempt a multitude of complicated projects. "In order to make a little money back then, you had to do things that you were scared of and you learned by doing."³⁹ This was not new for Kiefer— at Camp Hale he was determined to become a plumber despite not having any training and by the time he left the camp, he was a skilled plumber.

The memories of the camp will stay in the Kiefers' minds forever. It was an interesting time for all of them. Certainly, there were bad



(Photo courtesy of Florence and Jerome Kiefer)

Non-denominational church.

aspects; living far from home and family and a dry racking cough called the "Pando Hack" caused by the dust and pollution in the air. But the Kiefers experienced good things too: good fishing in nearby lakes and the stream right inside the camp, and the hiking, climbing and skiing. People at Camp Hale learned to live with the harsh conditions of the Rocky Mountains. Although temperatures could get as low as forty degrees below zero, no one seemed to mind. Working in the cold did not bother Jerome either; he had a job to do and did not mind the discomfort.

Today, the only evidence of Camp Hale's existence are the foundations of the barracks and a concrete skeleton of the Service Club. Paved roads criss-cross the valley floor, delineating the boundaries of the Camp. Nature has begun to reassess itself; pine and aspen trees grow through the holes in the foundations along with oak brush and windflowers. There are occasional well covers and some pipe laying around, the only legacy of Jerome Kiefer's hard work at the Camp. The Pando Valley is a National Forest Area and is well cared for with pull-outs for visitors to stop, enjoy the scenery, and read the signs which are located where Gate Number One stood. Although Camp Hale has been gone for almost sixty years, its contribution to America has not been lost. The heroic acts of soldiers that trained there and recreational equipment such as snowmobiles and the modern ski bindings which were developed and tested there will forever be a part of our heritage.

There is a tall granite monument at the top of Tennessee Pass in memory of the soldiers of the Tenth Mountain Division who lost their lives in service. Although the soldiers trained for war and fought against the enemy, they were not the only people to make a significant contribution to the war effort. Civilians were important too—men like Jerome Kiefer gave their all to make the Pando Valley habitable for the servicemen who trained there. Perhaps the non-military people at Camp Hale deserve their own monument.

NOTES

¹Winston Pote, *Mountain Troops: Tenth Mountain Division* (Camden: Down East Books, 1982), 1.

²*Ibid.*

³John Patrick Diggins, *The Proud Decades: America in War and Peace, 1941-1960* (New York: Norton, 1988), 15.

⁴Rene L. Coquoz, *The Invisible Men on Skis: The Story of the Construction of Camp Hale and The Occupation by the Tenth Mountain Division 1942-1945* (Boulder: Johnson Publishing Co., 1970), 10.

⁵Jerome Kiefer, Letter to Anne Kiefer-Schmalz, 11 March 1987. Personal Collection of Jerome Kiefer, Grand Junction, Colorado.

⁶Coquoz, *The Invisible Men on Skis*, 15.

⁷J. Kiefer, Letter to Anne Kiefer-Schmalz.

⁸Jerome Kiefer, Interview with Author, Grand Junction, Colorado, 28 October 1996.

⁹*Ibid.*

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¹²J. Kiefer, Interview.

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¹⁴J. Kiefer, Letter to Anne Kiefer-Schmalz.

¹⁵J. Kiefer, Interview.

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³⁷Coquoz, *The Invisible Men on Skis*, 27.

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THE COVER: The drawing is by Jason Frank. Jason is a native of the Western Slope and has served in the 82nd Airborn Division of the U.S. Army. He now makes his home in Palisade.