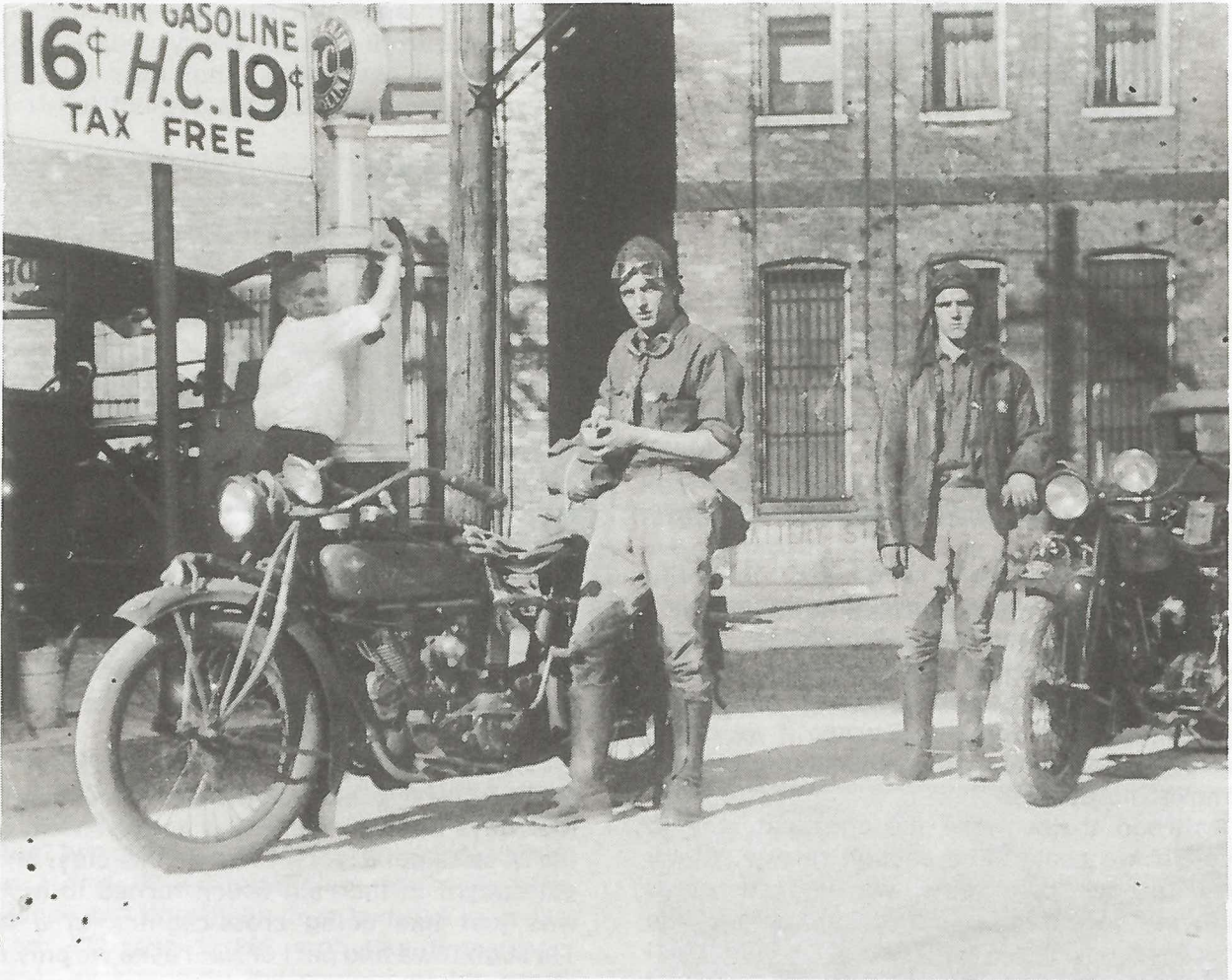


# “Anything I could get my hands on I could climb.”

by Jamie Lynch and Terry DelliQuadri

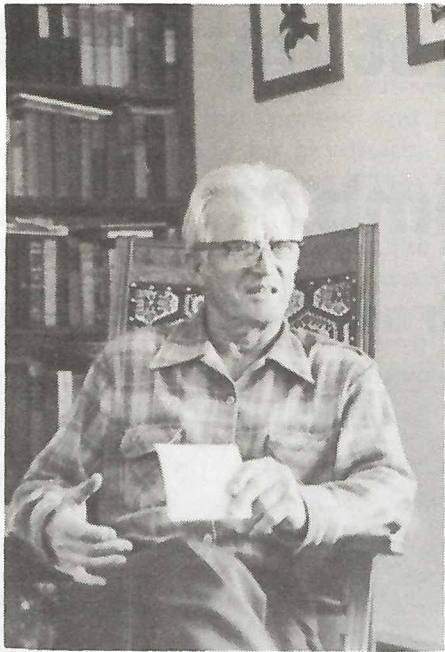


“The mountains were a long way from Chicago.”

Mountain climbing has been known to man since the beginning of time. The desire to reach the top has always intrigued man. “Climbing is a challenge, just like anything else. First man starts walking, then scrambling over rocks. The challenge always gets greater. On the mountain you are alone. The mountains are peaceful. A mistake can be dangerous.” Paul Stettner brought climbing to our attention through the book called *Climb*. This book is about climbing in Colorado. We contacted him and set up an interview.

Paul started our interview saying, “I grew up during the First World War in Munich, Ger-

many. It was different than the Second World War because not so many cities were destroyed. The airplanes in World War I were like butterflies; they dropped bombs without much damage. In the Second World War, Germany, France, and other countries were destroyed during. During and after World War I there was a serious food shortage, even bread was rationed, maybe two or three pounds of bread a week. In the beginning my mother tried to take care of the food supply, but after a while it got so rough she just said, ‘Use it the way you want it, if you slice it too thick the first day you won’t get any more.’ That was the only way she could do



**Paul Stettner Sr.**

it. The bread was not wheat or rye; it was made out of beets, potatoes, and other roughage. Meat was saved for my father. If we children got a little piece of meat during the week we were lucky.

Those times were pretty rough, and I think the youngsters today would appreciate things more if they had a similar experience. Most youngsters today come home and say, 'I want this; I want that.' It seems whatever they want they get. We were lucky in Europe if we had a piece of bread, some artificial honey, or a piece of smoked horse meat.

"Railroad trains were the cheapest way to travel. If we could save enough money. Many times in the mountains we walked great distances because we could not afford the transportation. We would get close and start walking. Those were our vacations and short trips.

"Our first climb was in the Kaisers near Kufstein in Austria. The journeymen in the shop where I worked was a climber, so we borrowed the rope from him. We had primitive equipment for both climbing and skiing. We wore old clothes, and we didn't have parkas or sleeping bags.

"My brother and I had half a dozen intimate friends, and we pooled our resources. If somebody had a little money, well, the others went along. There was no luxury of any kind. We also belonged to a gymnastics group and a hiking club. I did track and field too. We did not go in for medals, just fun. Whatever we did was for fun, and we learned everything ourselves. We didn't have a guide or an instructor, because we didn't have any money.

"After I finished grammar school, at 14 I started my apprenticeship in engraving. The first year my wage was fifty pennies a week. Before this time apprentices had to generally pay the employer to learn a trade. Young people today are worried about how much they get paid and how much vacation they get. They're not interested in what they are supposed to learn. We learned the trade from a-z, the whole thing. After we finished our apprenticeship we became journeymen. A journeyman travels, so when we finished our apprenticeship we travelled to get experience in the trade. Today people are supposedly real craftsmen. That may mean they can hit a few nails, but they're not full-fledged craftsmen."

"When I was 18, I accepted an offer to work in Stockholm, Sweden, where I earned more than in Germany and could send home money to my mother, sister and brother. My mother thought I would forget about my family, but I wasn't running away, just looking for better working conditions. Also when I was in Sweden I get my first bicycle. As a youngster I couldn't afford a bike.

"My brother and I skied and climbed together in both the Bavarian Alps and Austria. My brother had applied for a visa and had to wait 2 years to come to the United States. He told me that if I wanted to come I had better put in my application. It took six months for me to get my visa. I came from Sweden by boat. There were no airplanes then. It took ten days to get to Chicago. That's where my brother lived. It was a good place to do engraving work.

"In 1927 we came to the Rockies on motorcycles. The trip was rough; and it took us about four days because there was no pavement after the Mississippi River. It was all like clay, and we got caught in the rain which turned to mud. It was just like going cross-country in a field. Through Iowa and part of Nebraska we only rode about sixty miles a day because we spent more time off the motorcycles than on them. The motor bikes were Indian Chiefs, I don't think they make them any more. If there is one today,



it is surely a museum piece. It was the biggest motorcycle they made, a two cylinder, and made for touring. The mountains were a long way from Chicago."

"The first climb we did here was the Long's Peak's East Face. At that time there was hardly any rock climbing, and the only East Face climb was called the Alexander's Chimney. We went there to look for some mountains, something to climb, so we climbed it. It's now named after my Brother and I, 'The Stettner Ledges.' It's still one of the best known climbs on the East Face.



## Returning from the East Face of Long's Peak

"We had pitons and carabiners and an ice axe, but we didn't have a rope! We thought we could buy a rope in Denver but couldn't. We even tried to borrow a rope at the Long's Peak Inn. There was a guide there, but he wouldn't lend it to us or sell it. We had to go to Estes Park to get a rope, one made out of rough hemp. It wasn't a climbing rope, but it was the best we had. We never had any stirrups like the equipment today. It was all more or less free climbing without direct aid. We had special climbing shoes that we brought from Europe. That had manila soles, not rubber, and they were made of cloth for technical rock climbing. We carried them along and changed into them when we need to.

"We often would look at a mountain and if we liked it, we would climb. We enjoyed climbing, and that was the most important thing. Once in the Selkirks of B.C. Canada a climber happened to come into our camp. At that time the road wasn't finished, so all of us had to come in by trail. From our base camp we climbed Mt. Sir Donald. We started early in the morning, and completed the climb in one day. Then the fellow who came into camp earlier climbed the south face and found some evidence, a can or wrapper, that somebody had been there before. He didn't even complete the climb, but came back because he wanted to have a first."

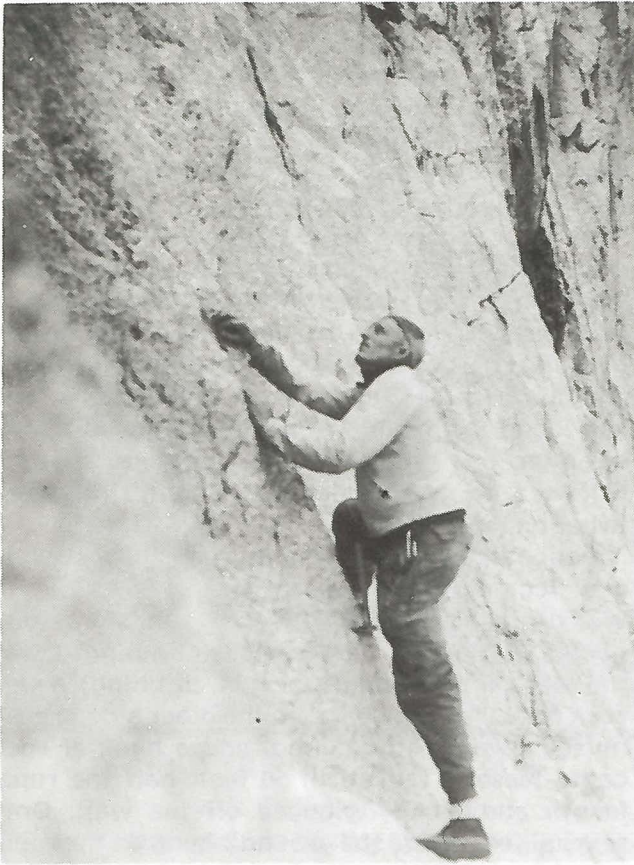
"One can get hurt on boulders, rocks are hard, and a persons doesn't have to fall very far to fracture a skull. During serious climbing it's best to know who you're climbing with and what they can do, so you don't get into any trouble. A person without endurance can spoil the fun. It's best to know if they have the endurance and if they can handle themselves when it gets steeper. Also if there's bad weather anybody can laugh and smile when the sun is out, but it is a different story when the weather gets bad. Then everyone finds out what they're made of. This reminds me of the first time my wife ever saw the mountains. She climbed the East Face of Long's Peak. She had done gymnastics and was a good sportswoman, but even before the climb she was a little scared. She trusted me though. I proposed to her on top."

Paul talked about getting hurt. "Once while practice climbing up at Camp McCoy in Wisconsin, we climbed some sandstone pinnacles. It was not very serious climbing. I was the last one walking down (not climbing) a wee rock face. I put my hand on the other side to ease myself over, then I pulled, and a hunk of rock came loose. I fell about 50 feet, half the rope, length and luckily glanced off the wall. Only several feet above the ground I hung on the rope. I just had a little red mark on my waist. The other fellow got most of the damage, when I fell he was not belaying me because it was such an easy place. Whatever rope he had gathered ran over his upper arm.

"Another time I fell on the Rock of Ages in the Tetons. It was an overhang and pretty close to the summit. I wanted to go back to my last piton because I was getting tired. I was above it and wanted to drop and catch myself on the rope, more or less. The piton came loose and I went backwards. I was lucky, my brother held me.



## Early Climbing Equipment



## Paul in action.

Today the techniques are much different. Someone may spend a couple of seasons preparing for a climb, like in Yosemite, El Capitan. A climber might go up and leave either the fixed ropes or the bolts, so the next time they can advance to where they were much faster. I think the first successful climb of the Diamond on the East Face of Long's Peak took three days to complete. A supply party was at the bottom, so they could haul up food. They also had a rescue party at the top with cables in case they got stuck. When we did our climb on Long's Peak we were on our own. If someone broke a leg it was up to them to get out. It required skis, a sled, or a toboggan. If someone got hurt and couldn't walk, then we had to carry him out. There was no rescue party."

We were interested in rescue, so we asked him if he had ever rescued anyone. He replied: "Yes, I've helped get people out. In fact in two outings of the Chicago Mountaineering Group. We went to the southern Wind Rivers, Wyoming. On Warbonnet a fellow was killed. He was with two other climbers who were stuck on the mountain for the night. The next day we got them down and later found the body. He had fallen 800 feet. Another fellow got killed on the Middle Teton. He was in my party on some snowfields. It was nothing difficult, and we didn't use the rope.

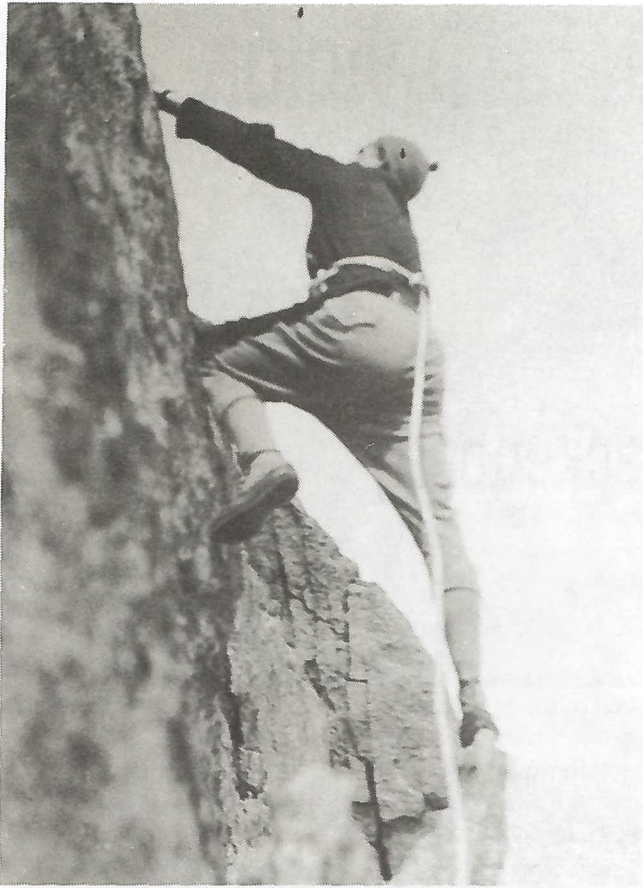
Four of us just joined hands in case someone slipped. One fellow above us lost his footing, slid into us and knocked two people off their feet. I had a gal on one side and a fellow on the other. When they broke the handhold, the fellow on the other side of the girl just kept sliding. It got steeper, and he ended up in the boulders at the bottom."

Some classmates were working on a story for **Three Wire Winter** about the Tenth Mountain Division and they talked to several in this area that were members, so we were surprised when Paul said: "During the war I was in the Tenth Mountain Division. Well, actually, I did not volunteer, but I had my application in. In case I was drafted then I would be with the Tenth Mountain Division. My brother was in the Tenth before I was. He was an instructor at Camp Hale for a time, but didn't go to Europe because he was over age. The funny thing about it that I had to take my basic infantry training in Texas because the Tenth Mountain Division didn't have basic training. I was in Camp Hale just over a week. I helped them to clean it up and nail it shut before I went back to Camp Swift in Texas.

"The Tenth Mountain Division had very little equipment when it got to Italy because they had been taken away in the shakedown. We were just regular infantry division without mountaineering equipment. In fact, there were so many shakedowns that if they found a carabiner of gators that someone had kept for sentimental reasons they were demoted. In the last shakedown at Camp Swift I found a few carabiners lying around, and I couldn't just leave them. I was just a Private First Class anyway, so I just took them. Of course, when we got to Italy I had a couple of carabiners. Most of our stuff was made by Smithys in Italy, like pitons or carabiners. Skis we didn't have, so we just punched holes in the snow. The only skis we had were captured from the Germans.



## Paul and his brother Joe.



## Climbing!



"The combat in Italy was short. The 87th Regiment of the 10th Mountain Division left the states on New Year's Day on the U.S.S. West Point and it was too fast for the convoy, so we went alone with no protection. We disembarked at Naples and broke through at Mount Belvedere which was held by the Allies, for a while at least. The Allies lost a number of tanks there. The Tenth Mountain Division was supposed to stop at the Po Valley, and let the 88th Division go

through us, but they didn't catch up with us so we just kept on going, and only stopped at the Brenner Pass because we didn't want to run into our own Allies who were coming from the opposite direction.

"The war in Italy ended on May 2nd, when Kesselring surrendered. We were one of the most decorated divisions, and also had a high rate of casualties. I received the Silver Star." The combat. There is only one medal above the Silver Star, and that is the Congressional Medal of Honor."

After the armistice Paul was on detached service in Italy and Salsburg, Austria, as interpreter and liaison. Being so close to Munich, he visited his family on several occasions. He saw firsthand the terrible destruction and results caused by the fanaticism of Hitler and his cohorts.

He returned to the states on October 7th, 1945 and after his discharge took employment in his former trade (engraving).

He retired in 1973 and with his wife moved to Routt County from Chicago. He had continued his active climbing nearly 50 years. From his start as a youngster in Germany, to his many successful climbs in the United States, as late as 1969, he was doing hard pitches with deceptive ease. The Chicago Mountaineer once reported him as saying, "It used to be that if I could get my hands on it I could climb it!"



**Paul Stettner Sr. and  
Jamie Lynch after an  
interview.**