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Flying through the air...on skis



Torger Tokle is often referred to as the “Babe Ruth of Ski Jumping”. Born in Lokken Verk, Norway in 1919, he was one of six brothers in a poor family that learned to ski on barrel staves. Torger came to the United States on January 29, 1939. Within eighteen hours after stepping off the boat from Norway, he set a record at the Bear Mountain Park Tournament in New York, the first in a sensational series of achievements he would accomplish in his abbreviated ski jumping career. He settled in Brooklyn and quickly rose through the ski jumping ranks in the US, culminating in winning the national title in 1941. Tokle entered the US Army in October of 1942 and served as a Technical Sergeant in the 10th Mountain Division (1st Platoon, Company A, 86th Mountain Infantry Regiment). He was proud to serve his adopted country and paid the ultimate price when he was killed in action during the famous Battle of Riva Ridge in Italy on March 3, 1945. Like many recent immigrants, his family elected to repatriate his remains to his home town in Norway where we track him today as an isolated burial. Torger Tokle was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1959.

And without a parachute!

We have two monuments in our database that honor incidents where US airmen survived getting shot down *without a parachute!* Sergeant Alan Eugene Magee of Plainfield, NJ joined the Army Air Corps in 1941 after Pearl Harbor, and, because he was a small man and could fit into cramped spaces, became the ball turret gunner on a B-17 Flying Fortress. B-17 41-24620 "Snap! Crackle! Pop!", took off from Molesworth, Cambridgeshire, UK on a daylight bombing mission over the “Flak City” of St Nazaire. The target was a torpedo storage area near the submarine pens. Once over the target area, heavy flak and fighter attacks damaged the plane and started a fire on board. Only three crew members managed to bail out, one without a parachute. That was Magee, who fell over four miles, crashed through the glass and fell onto the steel girders of the St Nazaire train station. The Germans treated his injuries and sent him to Stalag 17B in Braunau, Gneikendorf until the end of the war. Two crew members parachuted to safety, seven were killed. After the war, Magee worked in the airline industry in New Mexico until 1979 and died in 2003. He returned to St Nazaire for the dedication of the plaque honoring him and his crew. An equally lucky man was Sergeant Robert J. Sorenson, the waist gunner on

B-17G #44-8422 “Duffy’s Tavern” of the 360th Bomb Squadron, 303rd Bomb Group, Heavy. The aircraft was on a mission to bomb the Buer Synthetic Oil Plant at Gelsenkirchen, Germany when it got caught in the slipstream of another B-17 which flipped it over and sent it into a spin with a flaming engine. Sorenson was blown out of the plane without a parachute and while in freefall a parachute pack fell towards him. He was able to clip it on and claw it open. The partially inflated chute saved his life. Though badly injured when he landed in a tree, he was the lone survivor of the crash. Today the rest of his crew is honored on a plaque in the Much Wenlock Parish Church in England (right), while Magee’s crew is honored on a monument in La Baule, in the Brittany region of France (left). Both sites are where the respective aircraft went down.

