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## In Memoriam

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# In Memoriam

## William Lowell Putnam III 1924–2014

Bill Putnam, media master, author, and mountain climber, died December 20, 2014, at the age of 90. Over his long career, he made enormous contributions to the world of American and especially Canadian mountaineering. His guidebooks to various ranges in western Canada set a high standard. He wrote many other books; among the most

relevant to readers of this journal is *The Worst Weather on Earth* (American Alpine Club, 1991), a history of the Mount Washington Observatory. It is a fascinating tale, and a cautionary one, as it chronicles the astonishing low temperatures and high winds on the summit—and not only in winter. No student of high-altitude climbing can neglect *K2: The 1939 Tragedy*, which Bill coauthored with Andrew Kauffman (Mountaineers, 1992). It is a controversial account of a controversial expedition, which almost reached the top of the world's second-highest mountain, but ended in disaster.

Bill was a formidable climber and expedition leader. During World War II, while very young, he served in the famed 10th Mountain Division and was twice wounded. His many ascents in western Canada are part of history.

In a rich professional life, Putnam, known for his colorful personality, founded WWLP, the first television station in Springfield, Massachusetts, (the letters are his initials), in 1953. He expanded the station considerably, which led to his induction into the American Broadcasting Hall of Fame. He served as the sole trustee of the world's largest private astronomical research observatory, his family's Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff, Arizona, from 1987 to 2013.

Putnam held many positions and received many honors in the world of mountaineering. He became involved with the American Alpine Club in 1957, when he edited its Canadian guidebooks. Later he was AAC president and, in later years, named honorary president. He also belonged to the Alpine



*Bill Putnam in his later years, as a television station owner.* DALE GESLIEN

Club of Canada, the International Mountaineering and Climbing Federation, and the Appalachian Mountain Club, to which he was elected an honorary member in 1976. His most active years in the AMC were in the 1940s through 1960s, but the editor of *Appalachia* received an essay submission in 2013 (on the question of whether Hannibal had been able to go over the Alps with elephants). Among his many volunteer posts in the AMC, Putnam chaired the Mountain Leadership Committee from 1958–1962. Putnam probably wrote the poem, “How to Die in the Mountains” for an early MLS poster. Its last stanza was, “We beg of you/Before you die/Just pick a place/That’s not too high.” Putnam detailed his wisdom in his 1959 article about mountain safety (*Appalachia* vol. XXXII no. 3), saying this: “Conservation of energy is not just a scientist’s expression; it is also a mountaineering law.” He attended MLS’s 50th anniversary in 2008. He appears in a chapter of the AMC’s new book, by Peter W. Kick, *Desperate Steps*, when he was called in for help in the 1962 attempt to rescue Margaret Ivusic below the Knife Edge on Katahdin.

Putnam’s mountaineering achievements included the first ascent in 1943 of Damnation Gully in Huntington Ravine on Mount Washington, with Andrew Kauffman; the second front-point ascent, with four others including Rick Wilcox, of Pinnacle Gulley; and numerous first ascents in the Adamant Range.

He wrote several guidebooks, and had succeeded, according to legend, in influencing the Geographic Board of Canada to name one peak Mount Sir William.

Putnam’s first wife, Joan Fitzgerald Putnam, died in 1993. His second wife, Kathryn “Kitty” Broman Putnam, with whom he worked at his television station, died in January 2014. His many surviving family members include two brothers, two sisters, two daughters, a son, a stepson, a stepdaughter, and many grandchildren. A memorial service for Bill took place December 27, 2014, in Springfield.

—Steven Jervis and Christine Woodside

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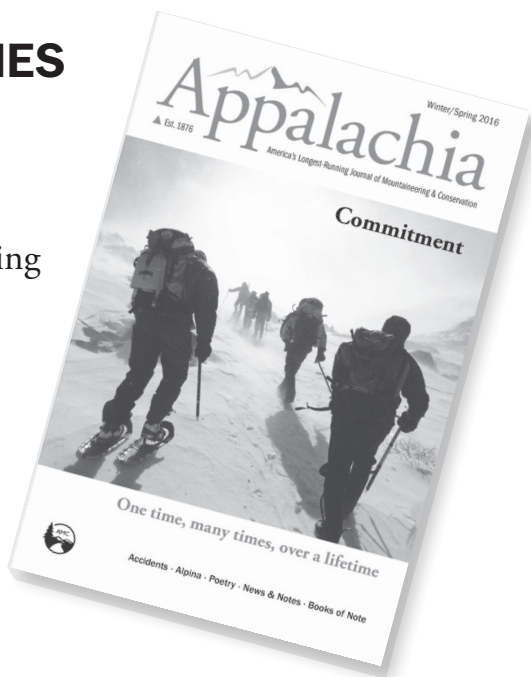
*"I started reading Appalachia for the accident reports, but I kept reading for the great features."—Mohamed Ellozy, subscriber*

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