



Jerry, on patrol, always managed to look both competent and stylish.

Jerry Nunn

The Lady and the Avalauncher

Story by Morten Lund

Photos courtesy Jerry Nunn collection

Somewhere in ski land

where the snow falls deep and steep there will be an occasion, during a given winter day, when a duo of ski patrollers walks up to an awkward-looking device resembling a 200-gallon propane tank with a 12 foot exhaust pipe sticking into the air from one end. One patroller drops a plastic projectile into the pipe, the other turns a valve, shuts it off, aims the pipe, pulls the lanyard, and—*whump!*—a blast of compressed gas hurls the projectile into the sky—*zing!* The projectile rapidly diminishes into the blue.

A mile or more away in the snowy distance—*boom!*—down comes an avalanche otherwise intended for the first unwary skier on the slope. This is the way an avalauncher looks and works, the mainstay of avalanche control in the U.S.

The existence of the avalauncher owes in great part to a National Ski Patrol avalanche specialist whose name is Jerry Nunn. She made the avalauncher possible, demonstrated it, and sold early models to high-profile ski areas around the U.S. and brought in the technical expertise that put the avalauncher profitable production.

How Jerry managed to accomplish all this is a remarkable story. Her lifetime devotion to the safety of the sport inspired her to take on the National Ski Patrol and the Forest Service avalanche leaders of her time. Her resuscitation of the avalauncher grew out of that. She made a difference. A big difference.

Jerry is 85 now

and lives with her husband Jimmie in a splendid home in Flagstaff, Arizona. She is still as full of fizz as ever and instinctively full of empathy and understanding, traits that made her hundreds of friends throughout the ski patrol world over the years. But this was only part of her life...Jerry was in turn an X-ray therapist, a mother with two kids of her own and four adopted, a major charity organizer in California's Bay area, one-time crocodile hunter, and other diverse accomplishments. Her news clippings fill several large, heavy scrapbooks.

Until she reached the age of 17, chances of her becoming a skier did not look good. Jerry was born Gertrude Schreiber in Oakland, California. Her mother and father divorced when she was seven. At 14, she was sent to Our Lady of Presentation, a Catholic convent school in Oakland. There she decided to become a nun. She changed her mind quickly when she entered public high school in Sacramento as a junior. There she decided there were other important things in life: one, skiing; two, the opposite sex. That ruled out the nunnery, but soon the third and most important thing of all became to help others in need, so she became a woman of faith after all.

Alpine skiing was very new in the U.S. in 1939—Jerry's junior year. A few hours by train west of Sacramento lay Donner Pass. The highest stretch, Donner Summit, was one of a half-dozen most substantial early concentrations of tows and trails in America. Donner's unique advantage was the Southern Pacific's weekly excursion train, the storied Snowball Express, which ran from the Bay area, stopped in Sacramento, all the way to Donner Summit every Friday in the winter. Jerry and her friends took advantage of her high school ski club's Snowball Express trips to get into the sport. Jerry's father had bought her Sears and Roebuck skis, beartrap bindings, and sensible ski boots. The rest of her expenses, including the \$20 round-trip fare from Sacramento (in today's money), she paid out of babysitting earnings. And that was how, somewhat improbably, Gertrude the would-be nun became Jerry the extraordinary skier.

Soda Springs was where Jerry learned to ski. She learned through the helpful hints from two Sacramento High girlfriends who were already into racing. Jerry's first and doubtlessly quite difficult lesson was how to ride the rope tow that reached halfway up Soda Springs' strapping 600 vertical feet. Once the rope was mastered, Jerry took to skiing as if born to the sport. She was naturally strong and adventurous. She could wrench herself right out of a fall. Even so, she recalls, she fell in every direction: frontward, backward, left, and right.

She soon became a sister of mercy—on skis—coming to a quick stop at the side of any fallen skier, ascertaining the extent of injury and making sure someone went for help. She made the victim comfortable until the man who became her first ski patrol mentor, Dr. Ralph Reynolds, the head of the Soda Springs patrol, arrived. After Dr. Reynolds gave first aid, Jerry would follow the victim, on the single battered Soda Springs toboggan, to the infirmary. She watched Dr. Reynolds paint abrasions with iodine, tape the sprains, and plaster the breaks. She found all of that fascinating and began to think that she might become a doctor.

Skiers at Soda Springs had one of the most advanced early ski patrols in the nation. Even so, an injured skier might spend considerable time on the snow before help arrived. Jerry was constantly on the lookout for bodies sprawled on the slope or sitting up dazed. She was often first on the scene and first to send for help. Dr. Reynolds was so taken with Jerry's effort that, in March 1940, he said, "Jerry, why don't you join the patrol? You're always here anyway. And you'd get your skiing free."

Dr. Reynolds didn't have to offer twice. Barely 18, the legal minimum age for patrolling, Jerry became what was very likely the youngest ski patroller in California. She was not expert enough to steer the toboggan, but she did learn a great deal about first aid. She even learned to fit the heavy plaster casts—work strictly relegated to hospitals today.

By 1939, Minot Dole of the Amateur Ski Club of New York was in his first year heading a National Ski Association committee to recruit a national patrol trained to national standards. At the same time, individual patrols across America were being urged to join the National Ski Patrol system by adopting minimum standards.

Jerry was one of the chosen few for whom history prepares the way. Not only was there a national ski patrol organization springing up, but avalanche work—Jerry's patrol specialty—was about to become a practical science. It was triggered when the brand-new resort of Alta at the bottom of Little Cottonwood Canyon in Utah's Wasatch Range received Forest Service approval to open. Little Cottonwood's topography had a heavy history of avalanches, so the Wasatch-region Forest Service felt an obligation to protect skiers in its licensed domain, and hired W. E. Tangren in 1938 as "a snow-avalanche observer" at Alta to maintain a log of snowfall measurements and avalanche occurrences.

In 1939 at Alta, nature gave a warning signal when a big slide hit Snow Pine Lodge. There were no injuries, but the slide did tear apart the lodge's unfinished upper story. Forest Service regional supervisor James Gurr beefed up the avalanche safety effort at Alta by hiring Sverre Engen, of the famous jumping Engen brothers, to work under Tangren, measuring snow accumulation and doing avalanche research. The next year Sverre took charge of the project and became in effect the first Forest Service Snow Ranger. The avalanche effort was underway.

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WRATH OF GOG

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through a narrow chute. It got even steeper as it opened up again into the middle face, which was divided down the center by a subtle sub-ridge (really more of a slight aspect change). The north side of the face (the direct line to the snowmobile) was steep and untracked. I could see down the dizzying drop to the start of another vertical-sided, funneling chute. Tim and Darren huddled below me, right in the fall-line on a thin spur, tucked behind the only existing tree in sight. I took a deep breath as I dropped through the bottleneck and onto the steep face.

As the third skier to descend the route, I didn't expect to trigger a slide, especially since it had already cracked. I was wrong. Mid-turn I noticed, in the very limits of my peripheral vision, the slab breaking apart across the slope above and to my left. Instinctively I skied off the moving mass while yelling, "AVALANCHE!" I watched, overcome by a helpless terror, as the slide ran within feet of my nervous partners waiting below on a tiny rib above a hundred-foot cliff, holding desperately to the flagged lower branches of a precariously perched alpine fir.



"I was starting to feel a prickling under my skin, and my palms were sweating inside my thin gloves. What were we getting into? I didn't much like the situation, but turning back was no longer an option, and the slab on the steep slope had already cracked without avalanching.

We should be alright, right?"

The avalanche ran past my two partners, barely dusting them, and continued harmlessly down the final pitch. In shaken silence, I made my way down the avalanched slope and rejoined my party. "Sorry guys. That was close," I said, but they had no idea what was going through my head. I was thinking I'd just come very close to killing them. I was overcome with fear and guilt. I was gripped, my downhill leg shaking like it did on my first exposed rock climb in Eldorado Canyon.

Tim looked at me and said, "Hey, you look kind of pale, like you've just seen a ghost."

"No, but I'm sure glad to see you guys intact. I thought you were done for."

"Well," said Darren, thinking of his spurned wife sitting at the corner table in the restaurant, "now what—where to?"

I took a few steps out to the right, breaking through a knee-deep drift, and I tried to peer down the gully to the left. The undisturbed northern half of the face hung ominously above. Luckily, the avalanche I'd triggered hadn't propagated onto it, but I feared that crossing the steep slope low might do the trick. The chimney-like gully led to gentler slopes below and to our snowmobile, but I was enveloped in nausea as I imagined the consequence of being swept down the drain. "We can't go this way, even though it goes." I was glad they couldn't see my frustration or hear the string of self-deprecating slurs I uttered under my breath as I gently re-crossed the drift and stepped back onto the relative safety of the small sub-ridge.

The soft winter light was quickly fading. Would we find ourselves benighted on our little ledge? Darren suggested following the path of the avalanche as another option. In the growing darkness, though, we could not see the route as it turned sharply to the south and was obscured by the limestone outcropping. Darren went to check. My brother and I waited, fearing that we'd soon hear our partner's dismay at finding his route blocked by an airy ledge. A few minutes passed. We heard a distant whoop and a bit later a relieved shout, "It's OK...come on down."

Although we faced the wrath of our families for our late return, we'd escaped the avalanche unscathed. This lesson on the uncertainties of cracked slope stability had a positive outcome. Gradually, our wives forgave our tardiness. They've learned what to expect when we get together and the snow is nice. We've learned not to trust cracked steep slopes. Thankfully, the lesson did not have to be learned the hard way. I also learned a valuable lesson about responsible decision-making in the mountains when under the influence of powder fever—after all these years of surviving in avalanche terrain, I am still not immune to my own stupidity.

Toby Weed is the avalanche forecaster for the Utah Avalanche Center's Logan office. He is continually learning and re-learning the connections between theory and practice. ❄️

LADY & THE AVALAUNCHER

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That same year, former Yosemite ski school director Hannes Schroll opened the brand new resort of Sugar Bowl, a mile or so into the mountains from Norden, CA. Sugar Bowl had Donner Summit's first chairlift and the first big vertical drop. Jerry signed on to patrol Sugar Bowl often enough to ratchet her skiing up several notches.

Jerry graduated from Sacramento High in the class of 1940, and her next step was to see about a medical career. She moved to Oakland to live with her father and found an on-the-job training course as an x-ray technician and therapist at Oakland's Mills Memorial Hospital. She kept on patrolling of course. She joined the three year-old Oakland Ski Club in 1940 and helped build their clubhouse at Norden.

Then things really started changing. Jerry met Dr. Justin Colburn, a charming, debonair radiologist, divorced and 22 years older. No matter. Jerry was fascinated by the idea of sharing a doctor's life. "Marrying a doctor was a lot easier than to be one," as Jerry said. And she says, "I fell in love." In 1942, she became Mrs. Justin Colburn, at age 20. Within the year, she had a son—James. In 1946 she had a second—Richard. Jerry predictably loved being a

mother, but she didn't give up skiing. By hiring help, a reliable cook/maid/babysitter named Ruby, she was able to patrol one or two days mid-week, the days when she was most needed.

In 1949, her choices for skiing widened. Alex Cushing opened up the West's first world-class ski area at Squaw Valley, just east of Donner Summit. Skiing in northern California came up a whole level. Jerry skipped patrol at Soda Springs a few times to ski Squaw every so often and thought the terrain was terrific.

Then came an enormous change in Jerry's life. She had had difficulties in childbirth with her two sons, but still wanted more kids. In 1952 she and Dr. Colburn adopted a baby girl: Carol. That turned out to be a prelude to a deluge. That same year, Justin's ex-wife became emotionally incapacitated, and the Colburns took legal custody of Justin's two children: Mary Jean, 15, and Bob, 13. The same year, presto! two more kids landed on the Colburns. Justin's brother was suddenly institutionalized, his wife could not cope with the kids alone, so the Colburns took custody of Justin's nieces: Billy Ann, 11, and Kay, 13.

Just turned 30, Jerry had seven kids to take care of—ages 1, 8, 10, 11 (two), 13, and 15—the oldest four being from broken families. This was a situation that bad dreams are made of. Did Jerry go under? She did not. She learned how to organize and how to be a group leader

(skills which stood her in good stead later on when she became a seminar leader in avalanche work).

Skiing was a lifesaver. Her expertise at skiing gave her status in the kid's eyes as she taught every one of the six oldest to ski the first winter she had them all. She took them on weekends to Clair Tappaan—still a buck a bed and a buck for dinner. She had to manage the trip by herself because Dr. Colburn did not ski (he had promised to learn but never did). But other than occasional highjinks, like pouring cornflakes into a sibling's sleeping bag, the kids behaved because they were having a great time.

Two years later, in 1954, the kids (except the youngest) were ready for racing, and they all needed the challenge of better terrain. So Jerry decided she would apply to the Squaw Valley patrol. The kids would ski free and get into racing programs available at Squaw.

Jerry applied to take the training course for the Squaw patrol and at that point ran head-on into skiing's "macho wall." She had the shock of her life when she was refused. The patrol director was a hard-bitten mountaineer, Ernest Schickler—an Austrian-born, certified male chauvinist whose patrol was 100% male. Schickler knew who Jerry was, and did not want her, or any woman for that matter, on his patrol. Period.

Jerry was not deterred. She had friends in high places. One of them was John Thune, a National Ski Patrol leader with whom Jerry had spent many evenings in conversation at Clair Tappaan. Thune wrote a forceful letter to Schickler, attesting that Jerry could ski anything a man could ski, urging that she be given a chance. Jerry was in—if she made the grade. Schickler tried to make sure she didn't.

He took the group up to the top of the main chairlift, and then, without offering a chance to practice, told Jerry to take a toboggan down to the patrol shack—a two-mile run. The young patroller who brought her the toboggan offered to take the rear slot on the toboggan team. "Never mind, Jack," said Schickler evenly, "Mrs. Colburn feels she can handle it herself."

Jerry realized she was being set up, but she wasn't going to object. She had always specialized in first aid and had very little time on a toboggan. To take one down solo was a stunt for an experienced hand. "I was scared as hell," Jerry says, "but there are times when you just do whatever it takes." Jerry straddled the front of the toboggan, which weighed as much as she did, and took off straight down.

She flew off the steep top of the run, braking hard by pressing down on the toboggan, getting the drag chain to bite. As the trail flattened out, she eased up and had a good run down. Her thighs burned from holding a deep knee bend, but she brought the sled right to the patrol-shack door. Then the other trainees came in with their toboggans. Schickler had put two trainees on every one—Jerry had been the only one who had gone alone. And she'd done it.

After that, there wasn't much Schickler could do. He went on to avalanche training—simulated slides and searches for bodies—which Jerry easily passed. When it came to first aid, Jerry was a whiz. And in any terrain, under any snow conditions, she more than held her own on skis. In the end, she passed with flying colors. She was on—the first woman patroller at Squaw!

Even after that, whenever Jerry showed up for weekend patrol during the rest of the season, Schickler would come up with difficult duty. On several occasions, he ordered her to drag a half-dozen 100-pound tanks of gasoline from the top of the main lift to the Squaw jigback lift, pulling each along the snow for the distance of a city block—exhausting work for a burly male, let alone a slim female. But Jerry managed it.

Then one day Schickler outdid himself. "You and I are gong to fracture a cornice," he said. Unlike the Wasatch region of the Forest Service, the California region did not concern itself with avalanche protection. It was left to experienced mountainmen like Schickler to deal with an over-ripe cornice.

Breaking off a cornice is a job for an experienced avalanche control team, certainly not for someone new to avalanche work. Schickler marched Jerry to a position above the cornice curling over the Squaw Headwall. "We will rope up, and I will belay you. Take



Jerry (right), on patrol at Slide Mountain, Nevada in 1955, helps secure the toboggan after administering aid to a hapless accident victim.

Jerry Nunn Garners AAA's Special Service Award

Nominated by John Brennan, supported by Karen Sahn, Jill Fredston, Janet Kellam and Leslie Ross. To be presented to Jerry by Doug Abromeit at the U.S.F.S Snow Ranger's annual meeting in New Mexico during mid-February 2007.

Jerry Nunn began working as a ski patroller in 1940 at age 18. Despite having seven children in her family by age 30, Jerry continued to patrol. She began her career at the small Soda Springs ski area on Donner Pass, transferred to Sugar Bowl in the late '40s, and then went on to Squaw Valley in the mid-1950s.

Working at the larger resorts piqued her interest in avalanche control, so in 1957, Jerry applied for the Forest Service's Snow Ranger certification course in Alta, Utah. The course was run by Alta snow-safety specialists Monty Atwater and Ed LaChapelle. Nearly barred from the course because she was a woman, Jerry went on to become the first female Snow Ranger and also the first Snow Ranger in the far West. For approximately the next decade, Jerry presented snow-safety courses for ski areas, highway and railway departments, and mining operations. It was only in late '60s that these courses were taken over by Norm Wilson—a protégé of Atwater. Having impressed Atwater sufficiently during their 1957 meeting in Utah, Jerry worked with his avalanche crew when the Olympics came to Squaw in 1960.

Atwater retired from the Forest Service in the mid-'60s and focused on consulting work and on his pet project, the Avalauncher. Jerry assisted Atwater with manufacturing and sales, netting dozens of customers around the world. One of the launchers Jerry sold in the mid-'70s ended up in the hands of the French Atomic Energy Commission. An engineer there went on to develop the first breech-loading Avalauncher in the later '70s.

Jerry's multi-decade dedication to both practicing and educating on a variety of topics related to avalanches garners her the well-deserved Special Service Award of the American Avalanche Association. ❄️



right: Jerry takes a moment to smile during duty at the 1960 Squaw Valley Olympics. She was one of only five women selected to the Olympic games patrol.

top left: Jerry carries the Bulgarian banner during the opening ceremonies.

bottom left: Jerry and Squaw Valley founder Alex Cushing inspect the area's Olympic runs in 1960.

Imagine the flap when a pig-tailed redhead arrived at the Forest Service Snow Ranger program in 1957. "I am sorry," Koziol said, "we don't accept women."

"Well you've already accepted this one."



this shovel, and dig in to start fracture. Understand?" Jerry nodded, not too happily.

"Well, this is just one of the tough demands placed on the ski patrol," said Schickler. "Nobody asked you to join us. Feel free to leave now if you like." He roped Jerry to himself and then to a carbine stuck into rock on top. Jerry hesitated. "It's getting late, Mrs. Colburn," he said. "Either you do or you don't." She went down, kicking steps until she was out on the cornice.

Schickler braced himself above. Jerry began to dig away at the strategic spot. With a huge whoomp the cornice fell into space and Jerry with it. Schickler heaved on the line and cut her fall short, then hauled on the dangling Jerry until she got her footing and kicked her way back to where Schickler was standing. "Well, I guess that makes you a ski patroller," was all he said, but after that he began to come around and went on to become her mentor.

In 1956, her husband's practice was thriving and they bought a 20-acre ranch in Warm Springs, 25 miles south of Oakland. It had seven kids' bedrooms, one for each. And now Jerry entered another transformation to her life as a patroller and her life as a mother of seven: she became a Bay-area charity phenomenon.

Then in 1957 as she patrolled Squaw, Jerry became concerned at the avalanche danger. Essentially Squaw had no avalanche control other than Ernie Schickler closing slopes and taking down cornices. Jerry was having pangs of fear for her kids, now skiing all over the mountain. But she wasn't really sure, so she decided to learn what she could about avalanches and make her kids aware of signs and conditions for avalanche.

Jerry applied to the pioneer Forest Service Snow

Ranger program, which was held every year at Alta, Utah, under Monty Atwater (who had replaced Sverre Engen as Alta's Snow Ranger in 1945) and Monty's assistant, Ed LaChapelle, plus Wasatch Forest Service district supervisor Felix Koziol. Jerry was delighted that her application was accepted, unaware that Koziol, who handled applications, was unfamiliar with the California ski patrol scene and assumed Jerry Colburn was a man, just like the other candidates.

"Imagine the flap when a pig-tailed redhead arrived at the Forest Service school in February 1957," wrote the patrol historian, Gretchen Beset, in an article for the Ski Patrol newsletter. Understandably, Felix Koziol did a double-take when Jerry came up to say there must be a mistake, that she had been assigned to a men's dorm. "I am sorry," Koziol finally said, "we don't accept women."

Jerry crisply replied, "Well you've already accepted this one. I have it in writing." Koziol shook his head. "Well, then," said Jerry, whose sunny disposition could turn dark quickly, "I have a lawyer who will be calling you." She was bluffing but, as she said, "After some argument and my tears, they decided that I could stay, provided that I could keep up with the men."

Some of my instructors tried to make it difficult for her but, says Jerry, "I made it through by stubborn determination, perhaps a bit of my German heritage." Koziol picked Jerry over 20 men in the group to dynamite a cornice. She dug the hole, dropped the charge, and backed off while it blew—duck soup compared to breaking off a cornice while standing on it. At the end of the 11 days, Jerry graduated with the honor of being the first-ever certified female Forest Service Snow Ranger.

Jerry was now a West Coast phenomenon. No other patroller in the Bay Area held a Snow Ranger certificate. Jerry was named by the regional patrol office to head the East Bay patrol (the first-ever female section leader). She excelled at keeping up with cutting-edge avalanche literature. Over the next eight years, Jerry gave an annual course for ski patrols, highway departments, mining companies, and railroad personnel.

Some found it disconcerting to have Jerry—barely five foot five and a 120 pounds—face the group and lay out the program for what were mostly male patrollers. But she exhibited such astonishing elan and easy generosity of spirit that today, many years later, she is utterly welcome whenever and wherever she appears, as she often does, in the company of veteran national patrollers around the country.

And a new phase was about to begin. Monty Atwater had moved to California to institute an avalanche program for Squaw Valley in time for the 1960 Olympics that would be held there, and he was impressed by Jerry's knowledgeable, sharp mind. Monty, a somewhat crusty ex-captain from the 10th Mountain Division, knew more about avalanches than any man on the continent, and was not easily impressed. Of the honors that came Jerry's way, one was particularly welcome. At Monty's recommendation, Jerry was named as one of five women on the 90-person patrol that was to handle the 1960 Olympics. She spent a month in the winter of 1959 in Atwater's training session for the Olympic Patrol.

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One part of the training was very realistic. Monty and another patroller had gone across the steep face of KT-22 and Jerry was crossing third when an avalanche broke loose above, foaming down and raking Jerry off her feet. "I started swimming because that is what Monty had told us," she says. After being carried for a city block, her body—minus skis and poles—was deposited at the edge of the slide. Her skin was massively abraded right through her clothing. Otherwise, except for a case of the shakes, Jerry was okay. That was the risk of the job. Jerry was back training with Monty the next day.

In truth, the five women who had been chosen to join the crew of over 90 patrollers owed a good deal to the waves Jerry had made during the 1950s. She would occasionally try to provoke a lingering male chauvinist by laughing and saying, "Anything a man can do, a woman can do better."

She did her bit to live up to that. During the winter of 1960, she travelled abroad to study avalanche science at the famous Davos Avalanche Institute, returning to Squaw just in time for duty at the Olympics.

Monty brought a new idea into the field of avalanche control after the Squaw Games were over. He called it the avalauncher and was responsible for the early

development. It was Jerry who provided the means to secure the avalauncher's success.

When Monty arrived at Squaw in 1957 to take over the matter of avalanche control during the 1960 Olympics, he brought in four 75mm and two 105mm recoilless rifles. They were light and had enormous range, up to two miles—an almost-perfect tool. But the outlook for recoilless rifles was limited. "The Army had been warning us that time was running out on these rifles," Atwater wrote in his biography. "No more spare parts and no more ammunition were being manufactured."

In 1961, W.S. Davis of the Forest Service regional office sent Monty a leaflet advertising a baseball-throwing machine that operated on compressed air; it was used by most major and minor league teams for batting practice. Monty wrote to the manufacturer asking if the baseball-throwing machine could be modified to throw a four-pound projectile a quarter of a mile, rather than throw a half-pound baseball 30 yards.

During the early 1960s, the inventor of the baseball-thrower, Frank Parsonault, improved the avalauncher under Monty's supervision. In 1963, Parsonault came up with an avalauncher that lofted a four-pound projectile 1200 yards, about 500 yards short of a mile. That was getting up there to a useful distance.

The next year, Monty retired from the Forest Service and moved to Sausalito to set up a company he dubbed Avalanche Control Systems. He wanted to focus on

developing the avalauncher, a device that he hoped would be his legacy. But in 1966, he had a big setback. While testing at Tuckerman Ravine in New Hampshire, an avalauncher blew up and injured two Forest Service Rangers. Without Forest Service support, the avalauncher project was now dead in the water.

In the meantime, Jerry continued to patrol at Squaw and present the annual California avalanche course for NSPS. In 1967, California's Forest Service district decided to get into avalanche work and picked Norm Wilson, who had worked under Monty at Alta and the Olympics, to give California's annual avalanche course.

During this period, Jerry's marriage to Dr. Colburn came to an end and she was feeling a bit at loose ends. She began visiting Monty in Sausalito, a half hour's drive from her home in San Leandro. Monty was also struggling. He had a heavy alimony obligation and had to pay off a settlement for the avalauncher accident. The flaw in the device's design had been corrected, but he still had not been able to sell any avalaunchers outright. Jerry agreed to help out. She went out to a test range with Monty to learn how to fire the avalauncher—she'd never fired a piece of artillery in her life.

Once she got the hang of it, she took the demo model on summer road trips. Jerry was carting the

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Jerry carted around the equivalent of several pounds of dynamite in her Chevy Impala, pitching the avalauncher to potential customers through a live demo.



top: Jerry and Pete Peters (left) inspect the new MK-18 Avalauncher in 1974 with Jim Cox (right), builder of the gun and base.

left: Jerry's on-the-road avalauncher sales pitch included setting up the device and firing off a few rounds.

right: Jerry and Monty Atwater look over his book, *The Avalanche Hunters*, in 1973.