

A top rope (sent up via a fire escape) would have made the accident trivial, but Cary believed that all ascents should be made as leads even if no protection was possible. He had already made several severe building and rock climbs with inadequate protection and had ignored warnings as to the outcome if he continued the practice.

It is possible that a spot could have broken his fall sufficiently to save his life, though at a risk to the spotter. However, Cary had not requested a spot and Marshall was in no position to give him one when the fall occurred. Had he fallen two feet farther left, Cary would have landed in shrubbery and probably lived, but falling climbers are unable to choose their landing spots.

Other than not climbing buildings it is hard to prevent such accidents, unless the climbers are willing to take certain precautions, even if such precautions may reduce the "purity" of the climb. Only when certain climbers have the sense to take basic precautions will such accidents be eliminated.

*Colorado, South Maroon Peak.* On 27 August, Peter Isto (51) and George Slahorek were descending South Maroon Peak. According to Dr. Slahorek, Isto slipped on wet rock and fell about 100 feet suffering a possible brain concussion. Leaving the victim on a rocky outcrop, Slahorek descended down the snowfield to Crater Lake reporting the accident to some campers who called the Sheriff, Lorraine Herwick, in Aspen. The call was received about 5:30 p.m. When Slahorek left Isto he was alive and rational. When rescue party reached Isto the following morning he had fallen approximately another 50 feet into a crevasse below the outcrop to his death. The crevasse was formed by the receding snow from the rock. The drop-off was vertical.

*Source:* Alfred Braun.

*Analysis:* Due to the slippery conditions of rock and snow, climbers should have been under belay. Neither one of them had an ice ax or crampons. They did have a rope.

*Colorado, South Maroon Peak.* On 15 August, Frank Pretzel (44), Herbert Ungnade (54), Robert Day (42), and William Martin (22), set out from camp to climb South Maroon Peak (14,158) near Aspen, Colorado, by the west ridge. A fifth man, Donald McEachern (29), accompanied the party from camp to the base of the ridge, but did not climb because he was recovering from a dislocated shoulder. The previous day the five had backpacked approximately 13 miles from Snowmass Falls Ranch to their campsite; all were from Los Alamos, New Mexico. Plans were to climb the peak, pack out, and drive at least part way back to Los Alamos that day. Ungnade had climbed since his youth in Germany and was quite experienced; Pretzel had climbed for at least 10 years and was an excellent rock climber; Day took up mountaineering seriously about four years previously, but had years of outdoor experience prior to that; Martin was a relative newcomer to mountaineering. The party carried three ice axes, one stout stick (for Martin) and two ropes.

The party left camp at 6:00 a.m. and climbed to the base of the ridge

where McEachern turned back. Ascent was first up a snowfield (angle 35°-40°) for several hundred feet; the snow was hard enough so that occasional step-cutting was necessary. Several small patches of ice were encountered. The rope was not used. Exit from the snowfield was to the left. From there the party traversed back and forth on a series of ledges until the ridge was reached. The ridge was followed to the summit which was reached about 10:00 a.m.

The party left the summit about 10:30. There had been a light snow-storm earlier which had passed over by this time, but the rock was now wet. During descent two rappells were made to avoid climbing down steep wet sections of the ridge. It was decided to descend the entire snowfield which reached to a notch in the ridge, rather than go down the ledges, because it was believed faster. The angle of the snowfield here was about 45°. The party roped up, four on one rope. Before starting, the snow was tested to see if an ice ax arrest would work, since the snow was somewhat soft. The test arrest did work. The axes were carried by #1 (the low man), #2, and #4 (the high man); #3 carried the stick. #1 descended facing inward, making steps; the others faced outward. All moved simultaneously.

After descending a short distance near a point where the snowfield narrowed and passed between two walls, #2 slipped. By the time the slack in the rope went out #3 could do nothing and was pulled off. #4 momentarily held the rope, but also was pulled out. As the three passed #1, he too was pulled out. The party fell approximately 600 feet, passing over two sets of rock ledges and coming to rest when the rope caught. Martin had been wearing a hard hat which was lost during the fall and was momentarily knocked out by falling rock. When he came to, he found that he seemed to be only bruised and cut; he also seemed very weak and blacked out occasionally. Pretzel and Day were dead from head injuries. Ungnade was calling from above. Martin thought that his cries came from a considerable distance upslope and knew he could not climb up very far so he descended to camp to get help. McEachern packed ponchos and sleeping bags and left for the scene of the accident. Martin walked to Snowmass Lake where he was given a horse, and then rode out to Snowmass Falls Ranch. During the trip he sang and shouted to keep from blacking out. He reached the ranch at 6:00 p.m.; the accident was at about 1:10 p.m.

McEachern reached Ungnade in very short time and found him wedged in a crevasse between rock and snow. He cut the rope, eased him partly out and wrapped him in two sleeping bags and two ponchos. He then descended to Snowmass Lake to see if Martin had got out, and arranged for someone to go down the trail to check. Several men went back up toward the ridge with McEachern.

A helicopter was sent from Aspen about 8:30 p.m. with Fred Braun, Mountain Rescue Director, and a doctor. Braun, the doctor, and McEachern went to Ungnade, arriving about 9:15 p.m. The helicopter delivered a litter and a Forest Service man to the site. The four men lowered Ungnade to the bottom of the snowfield using rope and axes. From there, the helicopter took Ungnade and the doctor to Aspen, arriv-

ing at 5:00 a.m. Ungnade died en route. The remaining bodies were flown out later that morning.

All three deaths were due to head injuries, with exposure contributing in the case of Ungnade. Martin felt that his hard hat, the only one in the party, saved his life. He was released from the Aspen Hospital late the morning of the 16th.

*Source:* Alfred Braun.

*Analysis:* From the preceding account, it is seen that the immediate cause of the accident was a slip by one member of the roped party of four, which slip could not be arrested by the party. However, from the fact that the climbers roped up before entering the snow gully where the accident occurred, it appears that they recognized the possibility of a slip and felt that the rope would enable them to control its consequences. Therefore, more fundamentally, the accident can be attributed to a failure to appreciate the difficulty of stopping a slip. Limited experience on steep snow and haste were likely contributing factors.

The first of the climbers to enter the snow gully tried a self-arrest, while belayed, and it worked. When the accident occurred the four climbers were descending simultaneously and, according to Martin, felt at ease and had allowed quite a bit of slack to accumulate between them. When the #2 man slipped, only he had any reasonable chance of using a self-arrest. The shock of the rope first came on the beginner without the ice ax who was violently pulled from his steps. Then, due to the accumulated slack, the pull of two falling men on the top man was more than he could hold. Perhaps simply a little less slack would have provided the margin.

With regard to the factor of haste, it will be recalled that the party was in a hurry to get down so as to be able to pack out the 13 miles and start the long (seven hour) drive home. The snow gully was chosen, according to Martin, over the other routes of descent since it would be faster. Haste may have influenced their decision not to belay down the gully.

Even after the climbers were tumbling down the snow, they might have escaped serious injury if there had been a reasonable run-out below. Instead their route was intercepted by several rocky areas where the fatal injuries were sustained. The survivor was the only member of the party with a hard hat. He remembers hearing it bang against rocks during the fall. The hat did not have a chin strap and came off near the end of the fall. Morals: Eternal vigilance — hard hats.

*New Mexico, Shiprock.* On 16 April Robert Schroeder (20), Robert Schlichting, William Heatley, and Gray Dixon were descending Shiprock after a successful ascent. William Heatley submits the following report: The weather was excellent and climbing conditions were good. The judgment of the party was weak in that we decided to continue our descent after dark even though a stay overnight on the rock was feasible. The strength of the party was good considering the lengthy route followed. The clothing of the party was suitable for the conditions present. The equipment carried by the party was excellent in all respects but one (i.e. only one head lamp was taken on the climb).

The descent was being made at night along the line of ascent, which