

Splitting the party at 19,500 feet was a very dangerous thing to do. They were already a weak party and when they split it nearly became a fatal mistake for two members. (Source: Bob Gerhard, McKinley Park.)

*FALL INTO CREVASSE—Alaska, Mt. McKinley.* Ian Wade (30), Jen Jern (28), Mathew Wells (29), Ray Smutek (39), Robert Redmayne (32) and James Roscoe (25) were ascending the East Fork of the Kahiltna Glacier planning to climb the Cassin Ridge. Approximately 1/4 mile below the planned campsite (at 10,700 feet) the group stopped for a rest. Two members started on up ten minutes later; Jern led off following the tracks made by the previous two. Jern was on a rope with one other climber. He led out approximately 70 feet, then fell into a crevasse and took a 70-foot free fall to the bottom of the crevasse landing on his buttocks. He was partially buried by ice blocks. Ian Wade descended the crevasse and dug Jern out and then all members began to haul Jern out of the crevasse. Three hours after falling into the crevasse, Jern was finally pulled out very hypothermic and unconscious. (Source: Bob Gerhard, McKinley Park.)

*Analysis.* It is a very common practice for climbing parties to leave a rest stop and let the slack rope lie while the leader walks ahead. In the same manner, rope teams congregate at a rest stop by simply coiling the rope between them. To prevent the accident from being as serious as it was, Jern's second should have belayed the rope out to him while he left the rest area. Or else the party should not have congregated at one stop for a rest. Getting together for a rest while traveling on a glacier is done all the time. Jern did not get away with it. (Source: Bob Gerhard, McKinley Park.)

*FALL INTO CREVASSE—Alaska, Mt. McKinley.* The Muldrow-West Buttress Traverse party began their climb by flying into Kantishna. From there, their equipment was hauled to the Muldrow Glacier by dog team while they began their ski ascent. At McGonagall Pass, Ed Denbow (22) left the party and skied back to Park Headquarters alone. At 10,700 feet, one sleeping bag was lost while being dried on a windy day. The remaining three members decided that David Dausel (22) would continue on with another climbing group while Carl Stepniewski (22) and Carl Ellingsen (26) would descend. On their descent, Stepniewski fell 60 feet to the bottom of a crevasse. They were roped at the time but Stepniewski was passing Ellingsen so there was a great deal of slack in the rope. Ellingsen skied back up to inform a group from Colorado of the accident and they returned to help evacuate Stepniewski, who was unconscious for 15 minutes, then delirious. Stepniewski's condition improved somewhat and he was able to assist in the efforts to get himself out of the crevasse. After he was extricated, and his injuries were treated, Dausel skied back to Wonder Lake to report the accident. There he met a dog musher, Dennis Kogl, who was leaving for Park Headquarters. Kogl reported the accident

to Brown the evening of the 5th. Meanwhile, Stepniewski was able to walk to Wonder Lake with Ellingsen's assistance. On May 6, Park Ranger John Haller flew into Wonder Lake to investigate. They were able to land near Wonder Lake with a wheeled Supercub. Haller remained at Wonder Lake while Stepniewski was flown out. Due to bad weather, Haller was not able to be flown out until May 8, 1976. Dausel and Ellingsen skied back to Park Headquarters. (Source: Bob Gerhard, McKinley Park.)

*Analysis.* Splitting up an already small party was not good. If Stepniewski and Ellingsen had skied properly down the glacier (keeping the rope fairly taut between them), the crevasse fall probably would have been a only minor accident. (Source: Bob Gerhard, McKinley Park.)

*FALL, CLIMBING ALONE—Alaska, Mt. McKinley.* Gunther Schmidt (35) was a member of a five-person Australian expedition climbing the West Buttress route on Mount McKinley. All members of the party reached the summit on July 21, shortly after a Canadian party. When the party started their descent one of the Australian experienced trouble breathing so party leader Helmut Linzbichler told Schmidt to go ahead alone and try to catch up with the Canadians who had a doctor in their party. Before reaching Denali Pass (about 19,000 feet), Schmidt apparently slipped and fell down a steep slope leading directly down to the 17,200 feet basin on the West Buttress route. He slid and tumbled over 1000 feet and came to rest in a shallow crevasse. He was apparently killed instantly from a broken neck. His fall was witnessed by members of the Canadian party he was trying to catch up with. (Source: Bob Gerhard, McKinley Park.)

*Analysis.* No one saw the start of Schmidt's fall. Whether he fell off the ridge and down the steep slope or whether he was trying to descend the slope to save time is not known. Many climbers have negotiated this area unroped and/or alone. (Source: Bob Gerhard and Jed Williamson.)

*FALL, INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT, EXPOSURE.—Alaska, Mt. McKinley.* Joe Ebner (28), Richard Rose (41), Bill Joiner (25), and Larry Fanning (28) were members of a six-person expedition climbing Mount McKinley via the Pioneer Ridge Route. The party left Wonder Lake on June 17. By July 11, the party had reached a point above 18,000 feet on the ridge, above all the difficult climbing, and approximately one half mile from the summit of the North Peak. Two members, Swenson and Blume, who had done most of the route-finding and leading up to this point, were well ahead of the other four. They climbed over the North Peak and descended to Denali Pass. They did not rejoin members of their party for several days.

At almost 5 p.m. (on the 11th), Larry Fanning became ill. Party leader Joe Ebner put in a radio/phone patch call to a doctor at Providence Hospital