

## UNITED STATES

### **FROSTBITE, DEHYDRATION, DAMP MITTENS**

#### **Alaska, Iliamna Volcano**

On February 9, 1985, Ken Zafron, George Rooney, Willie Hersman (34), and Rudi Bertschi (38) flew to the Tuxedni Glacier. They hoped to make the first winter ascent of Iliamna Volcano, and to establish a new route on the mountain's north ridge.

Throughout the trip the temperature remained steady around  $-20^{\circ}\text{C}$ . Skies were sunny, but after two days the party was climbing in the shadow of Iliamna. Winds were generally light at low altitude. By February 12, the climbers ascended to 2350 meters where they made their high camp in a snow cave.

During the ascent, Bertschi had experienced nausea and heartburn which forced him to restrict his intake of food and fluids. On February 13, he rested in camp, eating and drinking as much as possible, while the remainder of the party explored the north ridge. The north ridge presented unanticipated difficulties, so the party turned its attention to the nearby northwest ridge.

At 0900 on February 14, the entire party left camp and traversed the north face. A relentless 30 knot wind with gale force gusts blew from the west. Just prior to gaining the northwest ridge, Hersman called a halt to warm his hands which had become very cold. Then, while Zafron, Bertschi, and Rooney continued to wait on the exposed ledge, Hersman led a steep pitch to gain the northwest ridge. During the 30 minute wait, Bertschi's feet became very cold, but rewarmed somewhat after he added extra clothing and resumed climbing. The climbers reached the summit (3080 meters) by 1530; and, in fading light, promptly retraced their steps to their high camp.

By the morning of February 15, Bertschi detected some discoloration of his right heel. The party descended to the airstrip on the Tuxedni Glacier by 1900. Then, inspection revealed the formation of a bleb on Bertschi's foot. Blebs were also developing on the fingertips of Hersman's left hand.

On February 16, Bertschi and Hersman were flown to Kenai and then drove to Providence Hospital in Anchorage where they were treated for superficial frostbite. Deteriorating weather delayed the exodus of Rooney and Zafron until the following day. (Source: Rudolph Bertschi)

#### **Analysis**

Winter climbing in Alaska is always risky. Prolonged periods of low temperatures, high winds, massive snow accumulation, and poor visibility should be anticipated. While extreme conditions were the proximate cause of the climbers' frostbite, dehydration and poor diet can be listed as contributing factors to Bertschi's injury. Hersman began climbing on the 14th with mittens still damp from the previous day's climbing, a condition which contributed to the rapid heat loss and injury to his hand. (Source: Rudolph Bertschi)

### **HAPE, FAILURE TO DESCEND**

#### **Alaska, Mount McKinley**

On April 25, 1985, a five member Japanese party, Tokyo Hakuryo Alaska Expedition, flew to the 2130 Kahiltna landing strip for their climb of the West Buttress of Mt. McKinley. On