

device. If I can't see whether the rope reaches, I always tie the ends on the rope together.

But not this time. I was tired, weighed down with gear and preoccupation. I failed to look down this familiar rappel and didn't notice that one end of the rope was 40 feet shorter than the other. But when I felt the rope slip through my rappel device and felt the rush of acceleration, I knew what had happened—and that the next few moments could dramatically affect my life.

Falling happens quickly, but the release of those fear-triggered chemicals—adrenalin, endorphins, etc.—slows the experience so that you have time to think, though seldom to react. Primarily, I thought about the bony crunch I knew was fast approaching. I anticipated it as an ugly, jarring sensation that would explode through the top of my skull like a starburst. I was right. My ankle buckled on a ledge and my knees folded into my face, splitting my upper lip. Then I catapulted backwards into the air and began ripping through trees, over boulders and down a steep gully. The karma of rappel bolting had caught up with me.

(Editor's Note: Child figured out that he has done about 410,000 feet of rappelling in the last decade, and has therefore set up 3,733 rappels. He estimates his casualty rate at .036%. He calls this "food for thought.")

ICE FALL

Washington, Mount Shuksan, Hanging Glacier

On August 21, 1991, two experienced climbers—Curt Veldhuisen (29) and Gary Gray (33)—signed out at the USFS Ranger Station and proceeded to their base camp in the White Salmon drainage below Mount Shuksan. The next morning they were climbing the NW arret and stopped where the rock route meets the hanging glacier. While they were stopped to put on crampons at 1330, they noticed some small avalanche activity. Without warning, a large section of iced up glacier broke off and swept down upon the two climbers, trapped in the moat between the wall and the glacier. Curt was knocked unconscious and Gary was immediately buried in an ice fall under chunks the size of wood stoves. When Curt regained consciousness, he determined his injuries and searched for Gary. He set up some bright gear to try to attract help. He attempted to descend by himself, but returned due to crevasse problems and the extent of his injuries.

As the victims were overdue, a search was initiated. A North Cascade National Park helicopter flew the route and located Curt. A radio was lowered to him and the extent of the situation determined. Curt was later that day flown off in a basket by the NCNP helicopter. Rescue teams returned at first light the following day to the scene to attempt to recover Gary's body. An anchor station above the avalanche area was established and two rescuers were lowered to the scene. It was determined to be a very hazardous area to continue search activities. No trace of Gary was evident within the jumble of ice blocks. The search was suspended.

Analysis

Possible judgment error in route selection due to warm temperatures and lateness in day (1330). An approach between an icefall could more safely be made in colder conditions. (Source: Harte Bressler, Base Operations Leader, Bellingham Mountain Rescue)

FALL ON SNOW/ICE, CLIMBING ALONE AND UNROPED, FAULTY USE OF CRAMPONS

Washington, Mount Rainier

At 0840 on September 1, Ken Seifert (49) arrived at the JVC Ranger Office to check out for a summit climb. After indicating he was planning to go alone, Seifert was advised by Climbing Ranger Dan Ostrowski of the solo climb regulations and also of the poor weather and climbing conditions on the upper mountain. He was also told the Park Service was discouraging climbing on the upper mountain because of these poor conditions.

During the entire conversation with Ostrowski, Seifert was very evasive about giving information concerning his climbing experience and his address. His attitude about climbing seemed reckless to Ostrowski. Seifert also seemed very excited for so early in the morning and Ostrowski suspected he might be using drugs. Seifert was told by Climbing Ranger Garry Olson that he would have to apply for a solo climbing permit in writing and that it normally takes about two weeks to go through the process. Mr. Seifert stated he was familiar with the solo climbing regulations as he had talked with a Ranger before, but stated he moved around a lot and it was not convenient for him to apply. Ranger Olson advised Seifert he did not have permission to climb solo, but that he could possibly hook up with another climbing party and make a climb in that way. Seifert indicated he would try to find someone at Muir with whom to hook up. Seifert left Paradise, arriving at Muir that afternoon.

Camp Muir Ranger Ann Lowery had been advised to watch out for Seifert by Paradise and that he might attempt a solo climb. Lowery talked to all the climbers at the public shelter around 1545, advising them that the weather had improved somewhat, but it was still not good. Lowery said she felt Seifert's reaction to her cautions seemed casual and as if he was amused by her questions. When they were discussing his climbing boots he indicated they weren't very comfortable and might prevent him from climbing. He explained he had hiked up most of the way from Paradise in flip flops.

Around 1645, Lowery noticed Seifert leaving Camp Muir alone headed toward Cathedral Rocks. He was contacted by two RMI guides and they advised him of the conditions. He was traveling without a pack, had an ice ax but no crampons, and was dressed in light clothing, even though the weather was changing, temperature dropping and snow beginning to freeze.

Seifert returned to Muir and Lowery contacted him immediately. He stated he had just gone up toward the Flats to "check things out." Once again he was advised climbing solo beyond Muir was illegal unless permission had been given by the Superintendent. His attitude during the conversation continued to be very casual and he did not want to provide Lowery with his name or any other information. She contacted Paradise for the information.

On September 2, Seifert left Muir alone climbing to the top of Disappointment Cleaver. At the top of the cleaver, he talked with the Guide Service who advised him of the poor conditions and the fact that a fatality had occurred. Seifert indicated he was going to go help, but the guides advised him they didn't need him. Seifert turned around at this point and began descending. The guided party observed that he caught a crampon on his gaiter, fell and began to slide. They yelled at him to self-arrest, but he made no attempt to stop himself, and fell approximately 800 feet, coming to rest in a small crevasse.

Two RMI guides worked their way down to Seifert. Finding no signs of life, they reported him dead at approximately 0815. Since another rescue was going on simulta-