

Slack rope between Stump and Max caused Stump to fall an excessive distance. A belay in this case would have provided a more secure rope system for stopping the fall. The size of crevasses on Alaska Range glaciers can be deceiving because of large overhanging lips. (Source: Jim Phillips, Mountaineering Ranger, Denali National Park)

FALL ON SNOW, INADEQUATE BELAY, WEATHER

Alaska, Mount McKinley

On May 17, 1992, the Canadian "GT-92" expedition departed from the Southeast Fork of the Kahiltna Glacier at 7,200 feet. They spent the next five days reaching the 14,000 foot camp. After spending five days there, they proceeded to 16,200 feet for one day. On May 29, they moved to 17,200 feet. On the 30th they attempted to summit, leaving camp at 1200. The weather at the time was very windy with winds coming from the northeast at 20-25 mph. The ambient temperature at the time of the departure was 0o F. The group proceeded to Denali Pass and apparently attempted the West Buttress route. They were observed below Arch Deacon's Tower at 18,700 feet by several groups at 1645. They appeared to have on all of their high altitude equipment, including face masks. The route was well wanded (100 feet between markers on the Football Field). The weather remained windy, estimated between 20 and 30 mph, with the ambient temperature still at 0o F. The group wasn't observed again until 2200, when they were seen by Gerald Guidroz, a member of the expedition "New World Order," descending the Summit Ridge at 20,000 feet. The weather at 17,200 feet had started to deteriorate, with the winds gusting up to 50 mph. Throughout the rest of the night, the weather continued to deteriorate, with winds at 17,200 feet in excess of 60 mph.

On the morning of May 31, Annie Duquette (Kahiltna basecamp manager) was notified by an expedition at 17,200 feet that the group "GT 92" had not yet returned from their summit attempt. Duquette informed the NPS Mountaineering Rangers in Talkeetna of the overdue expedition. The weather prevented an overflight of the summit area. At 1200, the weather cleared and an aerial search was launched at 1230. Ranger Roger Robinson and Pilot Cheri Fleming flew over the search area and spotted a group of four climbers roped together traversing around 19,200 feet on the Messner Coulior. This group was believed to be the Canadian Team "GT 92." The NPS patrol at 14,000 feet led by Ranger Daryl Miller was alerted by Robinson as to the whereabouts of the expedition, and Miller was able to locate the group with the use of binoculars. At 1437, Miller saw the rear climber in the group fall, dragging the other three members of the rope team down. They continued falling through the first rock band. The rope appeared to be severed. The expedition was still falling, even after a member had been separated from the rest of the group and was tumbling down the slope by himself after the rope was cut on the rocks. The group fell approximately 3,000 feet to 16,000 feet in the Messner Coulior.

About 1500, Billy Shott, Mike Abbott, Colin Grissom, and Ranger Daryl Miller, members of the NPS patrol at 14,000 feet, departed for the accident site. At 1735, they reached a backpack at 15,500 feet. Visibility was less than 25 feet with no visible sighting of the victims. Snow conditions on the slope were extremely unstable, and the patrol unanimously concurred that it was too unsafe to continue the search at the time. At 1822 they turned around.

On June 1 at 0700, Miller talked to South District Ranger J. D. Swed in Talkeetna and decided to make another rescue attempt. At 1025, Shott, Abbott, Grissom, and Miller left the 14,000 foot camp and progressed to the Messner Couloir. At 1305, the patrol arrived at the accident site where they discovered three bodies at 16,000 feet and one body at

16,200 feet separated from the rest of the group. The patrol concluded that the body at 16,200 feet would be too dangerous to reach due to unstable snow conditions. The bodies at 16,000 feet were laying on a slope of roughly 45 degrees in three feet of deep snow. Miller and his group spent 15 minutes at the accident site and then retreated. They found no personal identification but were able to confirm the identity of the four men through clothing descriptions given by other climbers. The patrol returned to camp by 1500, and Miller and Swed decided to attempt to retrieve the bodies using a helicopter with a long line and hook to eliminate the danger of exposing rescuers to potential avalanche conditions. On June 2, at 1100, the Lama successfully retrieved all four bodies and took them to 7,200 feet where pilot Cheri Fleming flew the bodies off the mountain to Talkeetna.

Analysis

The Canadian team chose to go to the summit in deteriorating weather, while other teams turned back. The conditions forced the Canadians to be exposed at the upper elevations to strong winds and cold temperatures for an extended period of time. Since the group had very little gear, this more than likely predisposed them to frostbite, hypothermia, dehydration, and acute mountain sickness. They most likely were traversing the upper part of the Messner Couloir to get out of the strong north winds. Due to the fact that they were all roped together with no intermediate protection, a single fall by one of the members caused the entire rope team to perish. (Source: Daryl Miller, *Mountaineering Ranger*, Denali National Park)

AVALANCHE, WEATHER

Alaska, Mount Foraker

On June 14, 1992, Tom Walter (34), Ritt Kellogg (28), and Colby Coombs (25) skied from the Southeast Fork of the Kahiltna Glacier to the base of the "Pink Panther" on the East Face of Mount Foraker. Approximately three inches of new snow fell on the evening and night of the 14th.

On the morning of the 15th, the weather cleared. Walter, Kellogg, and Coombs began climbing the lower one third of the route called the "S Couloir," a steep snow and ice couloir interspersed with rock bands. They camped at a level area at the base of a cornice ridge line on the top of this couloir. It snowed again that night.

On the morning of the 16th, they were unable to climb due to poor weather. Late in the day the weather cleared and they began climbing the cornice ridge which marks the middle third of the route. They climbed through the night, and completed this portion early on June 17. They arrived at the base of the final rock buttress, which marks the last third of the route, as the weather deteriorated. They dug a snow cave and bivouacked, waiting out the poor weather.

On June 18, the weather remained poor with additional snow accumulation. Early in the evening of the 18th the weather cleared. They began climbing the final rock buttress. The weather remained good until the final 300 feet, when it deteriorated with wind and poor visibility. They completed climbing the rock buttress and intended to stop and bivouac at the first opportunity. They continued to climb up the final 50 to 60 degree snow and ice slope above the rock buttress, anticipating a bivouac site at the crest of the Southeast Ridge about 13,500 feet.

At this time Walter was leading the rope team with Coombs in the middle and Kellogg at the end. There was 150 feet of rope between each, and they were ascending simulta-