

A military rescue helicopter met the party at their high camp (12,000 feet) and whisked Montecucco to Talkeetna. He was diagnosed with a broken and a sprained ankle, and bruised ribs. He allowed the ankle a week to reduce in swelling, and was successfully cast in Palmer, Alaska, near his home on Lazy Mountain. He has recovered completely as of this writing, but he is taking time off from big peak ski-mountaineering. (Source: Letter from Tyson Bradley)

**EXPOSURE, DEHYDRATION, INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT (Rope, Altimeter, Compass, Clothing), PARTY SEPARATED, EXCEEDING ABILITIES  
Alaska, Mount McKinley, West Buttress**

A group of thirteen Taiwanese were training for an Everest expedition. Twelve of the group flew into 7,200 foot base camp on May 31, with the final team member arriving on June 8. Four team members, Chang Yang-Du, Kuang Ming Wang, Chang Shun Ming, and Tyi-Hone Cheng, climbed to 17,200 feet on June 8. Chang Shun Ming and Tyi-Hone Cheng left from 17,000 feet on June 9, went to the summit, then returned to 17,000 feet, picked up the two remaining team members and left. These four team members were not involved in the rescue in any way, except in that they were part of the original group that came to climb and train on Denali.

Eight more of the party climbed to 17,000 feet, and prepared for summit bids. By June 13 they felt ready to make their summit attempt. Seven of them left 17,000 feet at 1000 on June 13. They were Makalu Gau, team leader, Chen Jung Chung, Lin Tao Ming, Chiu Jui-Lin, Wu Min Chung, Kaotien Tzu, and Shieh Tzu Sheng. One team member, Ming Chun Cheng, was sick and stayed behind at 17,000 feet. Each team member carried his own food and stove. No sleeping bags were carried. None of the team members climbing to the summit had experienced any sickness at 17,000 feet. They had good weather on the way to the summit, and all seven made the summit around 1800, where they spent less than five minutes. The temperature was approximately 1° C, the winds were calm, and bad weather began coming in just after they left the summit. A storm had moved in from near the Football Field. They couldn't see any of their wands in the poor visibility, which had dropped to fifteen feet, and the winds picked up out of the northeast, blowing 20-30 mph. The group was last seen with all seven members alive at the summit by the Royal Hong Kong Police group, who noted that the Taiwanese lacked cohesiveness, and would sit down alone without telling anyone.

They descended to 19,400 feet, where they bivouacked. They huddled together, and attempted to dig in using ice axes and their feet. They ate most of their emergency food, drank their remaining water, and attempted to make more water.

In the morning the weather had not improved. Their limbs were numb but they were not sure if they had frostbite. The group again had difficulty finding their way down. They had no map, no compass, no altimeter, and no rope. They walked in circles for a time. At some point in time that was not able to be determined, they split into two distinct groups. The first group consisted of team leader Makalu Gau, Kaotien Tzu, Chen Jung Chung, and Shieh Tzu Sheng. The second group consisted of Chiu Jui-Lin, Doin Min Lin, and Wu Min Ching. The group of four found the trail and began descending. They waved back to the other three to follow. Two of the remaining three started to follow. (These are the two who were later rescued by NPS patrol members Alex Lowe and Conrad Anker.)

The group of four got to camp at 17,000 feet on the evening of June 14. They joined up with their one team member who had waited. At this point, five of the original group

were at 17,000 feet. Three were at 19,000; of these three, two were injured and one was dead in the rocks near Archdeacon's Tower. The five at the 17,000 camp tried to radio back to the remaining three, but received no answer. Several groups at 17,000 feet helped the Taiwanese with their frostbite.

Chen Jung Chung and Shieh Tgu Ching were rescued from 17,000 feet by NPS Lama on June 15 at 1235, flown to the 7,200 foot base camp, where they were stabilized. A full medical survey was done, their frostbite was evaluated, and they were questioned about the accident. They were then transported to Alaska Regional Hospital via National Guard Pavehawk.

On the morning of June 15, an aircraft from Hudson Aviation and NPS ranger Joe Reichert searched the upper mountain. They spotted two of the three climbers near the 19,400 foot level. Doin Min Lin and Wu Min Chung were assisted by NPS patrol members Alex Lowe and Conrad Anker from 19,400 feet to 17,200 feet, where they were airlifted on June 15 at 1932 to Talkeetna by an Army Chinook, then transported to Alaska Regional Hospital by National Guard Pavehawk.

Doin Min Lin and Wu Min Chung were found to be suffering from hypothermia, frostbite, and dehydration. They had not been able to take in any liquids for two days, due to their prolonged bivouac. The more critical of the two patients was Wu Ming Chung, due to severely frostbitten fingers and toes.

Chiu Jui-Lin was found dead near Archdeacon's Tower by NPS patrol member Alex Lowe. Chiu was not wearing gloves or mittens, and had on only a light outer jacket and pants. After checking for pulses and determining that Chiu's body was rigid, frozen and pulseless, Lowe secured the body for later recovery (on June 17).

All remaining members were assisted down to the 14,000 foot camp by NPS and NPS patrol members, and climbing groups.

### **Analysis**

This accident was caused by a number of factors. A lack of skill in accurately understanding weather patterns on Denali meant that the Taiwanese missed vital clues about when the weather would change. A lack of critical route finding tools such as a map, compass, and altimeter prevented the team from navigating accurately down from the summit. Splitting the group weakened an already struggling team. A lack of sleeping bags and other bivouac gear left the team vulnerable to sudden weather changes. It is clear that this team tragically underestimated the severity of conditions on Denali. (Source: Eric Martin, Mountaineering Ranger, Denali National Park)

## **AVALANCHE**

### **Alaska, Mount McKinley, South Buttress**

The "South Buttress 95" expedition members included leader Tom Fitzsimmons (45), Jim Fitzsimmons (38), Richard Rodgers (40), and David Hoffman (49). Their intended route was the 1954 ascent of the South Buttress from the Ruth Glacier.

On June 16, the group was flown to the Ruth Glacier to begin their approach. They had established a base camp at the 9,200 foot level of the West Fork near the head of the cirque. Two days were spent fixing 900 feet of line and advancing supplies to approximately the 10,800 foot level, positioned in the middle of a face. This face is the start of the difficulties, comprised of 2,000 feet of snow slopes and ice bulges, with angles from 30 to 60 degrees, and having a southeast aspect. While working this lower face section, they encountered two crevasses whose uphill lips were higher than the downhill lips, forming cliffs of 40 and 100 feet. The expedition weaved around an end of the first crevasse. They climbed 600 feet higher and located a cache under the awning of the 100 foot cliff.