

June 20. Landolt wrote that she had a complete tear of her anterior cruciate ligament.

### **Analysis**

Landolt's expedition was doing a traverse from Wonder Lake on the Muldrow Glacier up and over Denali Pass. After waiting out weather near Denali Pass in hopes of a summit bid, they descended the fixed lines with heavy packs and two sleds. Landolt might have chosen to cache some weight at some point in order to decrease the risk of injury. The expedition had decided to descend to the 14,200-foot ranger camp in order to rest and wait for another summit day.

## **AMS, HAPE**

### **Alaska, Mount McKinley, West Buttress**

On May 26, Mark Hall (42), a client of Mountain Trip, was brought to the Ranger Camp at 14,200 feet complaining of a severe headache and persistent cough. He was treated for Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS) and High Altitude Pulmonary Edema (HAPE) and a possible respiratory infection. After being reevaluated on the morning of May 27th he was evacuated from the mountain via Lama helicopter to basecamp where he was transferred to Life Guard and taken to Providence Hospital.

### **Analysis**

The rate of ascent over the course of the expedition remained within reasonable limits for proper acclimatization at 1000 feet per day. However, on Denali's West Buttress the large jumps in elevation that are generally undertaken within a single day to reach the established camps result in some individuals reacting adversely. The fact that Hall was already experiencing symptoms at 11,200 feet and yet he continued to ascend, and further, that his symptoms continued to worsen on that ascent to the point where he was no longer self-sufficient and still continued up to the 14,200-foot camp rather than descend, are cause for concern. The well-established prescription to descend at the onset of AMS symptoms or at least cease ascent until such symptoms resolve was not followed. And while the needs of the individual must be weighed against those of the group and it is often difficult to make a decision that adequately accommodates both, the decision to continue to 14,200 feet may have hampered this expedition's ability to remain self-sufficient and execute a self-evacuation.

## **FOOTHOLD GAVE WAY—FALL ON SNOW, PLACED NO PROTECTION**

### **Alaska, Mount Hunter, Southwest Ridge**

On May 26 at 1700, James Raitt (27), James Bonnie (27), Mark Paterson, Darren Swift, Richard Cantrill, and Peter Pollard flew to the Southeast Fork of the Kahiltna Glacier to attempt Mount Hunter's Southwest Ridge and the Sultana Ridge on Mount Foraker. Taking into consideration the current snow conditions and recent weather patterns the team decided to attempt Mount Hunter first. At 1900 the team departed Basecamp for the Southwest Ridge of Mount Hunter and camped at the base of the West Ridge.

On May 27 the team moved their camp to the Thunder Glacier at the base of the Southwest Ridge, arriving at 1400. On May 28 the team took a rest day

and wanded the route to the base of the Southwest Ridge. On the morning of May 29 at 0400 the team departed camp arriving at the base of the couloir at 0500. The group was traveling in rope teams of two, with Raitt and Bonney being the lead team. Around 0600 Raitt and Bonney had reached a bend in the couloir. They were moving well and saw no need for running protection up to that point. Bonney later stated, that since the terrain was starting to get steeper, he had considered putting in some protection at this point, but continued without it. Moments later a piece of ice on which Bonney was standing gave way. Bonney fell pulling Raitt off with him. Neither was able to self-arrest and the two fell to the bottom of the couloir, coming to rest on the debris cone just above the Thunder Glacier, a distance of approximately 700 feet. The other four members of the team witnessed the fall and descended to render assistance. The two injured climbers were within three meters of each other when the other members arrived.

Raitt sustained injuries to his pelvis and lower left leg. Bonney sustained injuries to his right ankle and ribs and abrasions and contusions to his left hand and forehead. Both patients remained conscious throughout the fall. After Raitt and Bonney were stabilized, Pollard and Cantrill left for Basecamp at the Southeast Fork of the Kahiltna, while Swift and Paterson remained with the injured climbers. While en-route to basecamp, Pollard and Cantrill contacted Talkeetna Air Taxi Pilot Rico Olmstead by CB radio and informed him of the accident. The party was unable to hear Olmstead's response, so Olmstead used air to ground signals to acknowledge receipt of their transmission. Olmstead landed at basecamp and reported the transmission to Ranger Mik Shain. On his own initiative, Olmstead, with climber Mark Westman aboard, flew to the scene to try and gather more information about the accident. Olmstead and Westman were unable to communicate with the two climbers who were en-route to basecamp, nor the climbers at the scene of the accident, but were able to confirm the location and number of climbers involved.

Ranger Mik Shain contacted the Talkeetna Ranger Station at 1050 to inform them of the accident. Initial reports speculated that the accident was caused by avalanche and that there were up to four patients. The Incident Commander, Ranger Joe Reichert, with the Air Operations Chief, Dave Kreutzer, decided to send the NPS contract helicopter to the scene.

At 1221, the Lama, piloted by Jim Hood, was launched with Rangers Gordy Kito and Kevin Moore aboard. At 1223 Jay Hudson launched in a Cessna 206 to provide communication and visual support. At 1254, the Lama arrived on scene. Through hand signals the rangers determined that there were two patients to be evacuated from the scene. Because of the exposure to objective dangers at the accident site, it was decided that Ranger Moore would be short-hauled to the scene. The Lama landed, and a staging area was established at the team's camp on the Thunder glacier. Ranger Moore was short-hauled to the scene at 1313 with a "screamer suit," "Bauman bag," and a backboard. Bonney was loaded into the "screamer suit" and transported to the staging area at 1321 hours, while Moore, Swift, and Paterson put Raitt onto the backboard and into the "Bauman bag."

Raitt and Moore were lifted from the scene at 1334 hours and transported to the staging area. Both patients were assessed at the staging area by Kito and transferred to Air National Guard Pararescue personnel for transport to Anchorage.

### **Analysis**

Raitt and Bonney were both skilled mountaineers having collectively climbed in the French and Swiss Alps, Peru, and Nepal. The objective the team had chosen seemed well within their abilities, and they paid close attention to previous weather patterns, snowfall and route conditions. The team had planned plenty of time for the expedition and was climbing on an appropriate schedule.

As they started climbing the couloir at the base of the route, they made a decision to continue climbing without running protection while being roped together. Bonney stated that at the time of the accident he was starting to consider placing running protection. Unfortunately Bonney's stance gave way before he placed any protection. The injuries that resulted from the fall may have been worse had both climbers not been wearing their helmets.

The severity of many accidents in the Alaska Range may have been reduced by the use of running protection while climbing simultaneously and roped together. Climbing roped on steep terrain, without protection either natural or through the use of pickets and ice screws, always carries the risk of increasing the number of injuries or fatalities while offering little in the way of safety.

There have been numerous accidents on this route despite John Waterman's claim in his book *High Alaska* that this is the "safest... route up Mount Hunter." Two of the four members in the first ascent party were caught in a wet-snow slide while descending this couloir and carried 500 feet to the bottom. Though the first ascent party suffered minor injuries, a team of four experienced climbers, despite placing running protection, fell 1,700 feet down the couloir, which resulted in the death of two of the members.

## **FALLING ICE, POOR POSITION**

### **Alaska, Mount McKinley, Cassin Ridge**

At 2105 on June 16, Jason Kraus (30), a member of the Cold and Stinky Expedition, requested evacuation from the base of the Cassin Ridge on Denali. Kraus had sustained an injury to his left leg from falling ice while belaying his partner, Michael Morris, in the Japanese Couloir. Both members rappelled approximately 500 feet down the couloir where they established a landing zone at the 11,300-foot level for the NPS Lama helicopter. Kraus was unable to walk, yet remained in stable condition until Denali Park Ranger Dave Kreutzer arrived on scene with Lama pilot Jim Hood. At 2247, Kraus was transported to 7200-foot camp where he received primary medical assistance by climbing ranger Karen Hilton and NPS volunteer Sara Ennega. Kraus' chief complaint was point tenderness in his upper left thigh resulting in an inability to bear weight. Lifeguard helicopter arrived at 7200-foot camp at approximately 2300 and transported Kraus to Providence Medical Center where he was treated for a bruised thigh.