

anchored; (3) the resiliency and strength of the 7/16-in. nylon rope minimized and absorbed the force exerted on a belay that failed to let the rope run; (4) a bowline-on-a-coil with four coils around his waist, in addition to the resiliency of the nylon, saved Baxter from injury by the rope.

*Sierra Nevada: (3) Twin Peaks (8924 ft.), above Lake Tahoe, California.* On 14 August 1947 Emmett Pettit, an easterner 23 years old, previously acquainted with a few climbs in the Canadian Rockies, was killed by a fall from a rock face. He was one of a party of six which had started from Tahoe with Hans Reiss as guide. The party had climbed the basin N. of Twin Peaks on easy slopes and was following a trail which led to the summit. Pettit insisted on breaking away from the party, against the objection of the guide, in order to take a shortcut. He stated that he would either return to the trail and catch up with the party, or else join it on the summit. Apparently he attempted to climb an almost vertical rock face alone. Members of the party thought they heard a rock fall on the face and, after waiting for some time on the summit, became alarmed. Having descended to the basin, Pettit's fiancée found his broken body at the base of the cliff. Presumably he had fallen several hundred feet.

*Sources of information:* newspaper accounts, statements by friends of the victim, and the official report of the U. S. Forest Service.

*Analysis.* Here is a tragic consequence of climbing alone. It is understood that this was not Pettit's first solo climb. Evidently he was unwilling to take the advice of the guide. Of course, the latter could have made a drastic move, such as calling off the climb. Whether the climber's failure to recognize his limitations, or loose rock on the face he was attempting to climb caused the fatality, cannot be known.

*Sierra Nevada: (4) Devil's Slide, San Mateo Sea Cliffs.* On 17 August 1947 a local practice group from the Sierra Club was climbing on cliffs of disintegrating granite south of San Francisco. John Hood, leading an unfamiliar route, had placed three pitons for safety. At a point 40 ft. above the belayer, the slope moderated somewhat on unsound rock. At that point, and with no further pitons for protection, he called out, "Falling!" He fell backwards,

turning over in the air. He was too high above the nearest piton to be checked by the rope; and he struck the belayer's ledge on one shoulder and the back of his head, sustaining a severe fracture of the skull from which he died about 16 hours later. The rope prevented a further fall. Telephone calls to experienced Sierra Club rock climbers, the County Hospital and the State Highway Patrol speeded the rescue. According to the attending physician, the injury was so severe that no amount of speed would have saved his life. The reason for the fall is not known.

*Source of information:* Sierra Club Mountaineering Committee.

*Analysis.* On careful study, a Sierra Club Committee could find no fault with the climbing and rescue technique employed. It can only be concluded that Hood was so far above his last piton that, even if the rope had come into play, a 40-ft. fall was bound to ensue. Hood was reasonably experienced and had a reputation as a conservative and careful climber; but, since most of his experience, according to reports, had been on the firm rock of Yosemite, he may not have had sufficient appreciation of the danger of unsound rock and of the need for additional care. Perhaps he relaxed his vigilance as the slope eased off, despite the poor quality of the rock, which should have kept him constantly on the alert. Whether the cause of his fall was a simple slip, loss of balance, a jerk from below, or the collapse of a hold, is impossible to determine. One may conclude, however, that his margin of safety was too slim and that more awareness of this might have saved his life.

*New Mexico Rocky Mountains:* In late October 1947, two girl secretaries from Los Alamos lost their lives on an icy slope of *Truchas Peak* (13,275 ft.), New Mexico's highest mountain. One was 34 years old, the other 35. Having climbed the peak, they were descending late in the afternoon to the point where horses had been left. With them was Sam Martin, whom they had employed as guide. Against his advice, one of the women took a shortcut across a wide expanse of ice (?). After going only a short distance, she fell and slid several hundred ft., cutting her leg and head. The party had no rope. Being unable to move the injured woman without one, the party made her as comfortable as possible; and her companion volunteered to remain with her while Martin went for help. The rescuers arrived shortly before noon the following day