

In Memoriam

LEIGH N. ORTENBURGER

1929-1991

On October 19, 1991, Leigh N. Ortenburger, who had survived over 40 years of active mountaineering in the world's greatest mountain ranges, died in the firestorm that swept the Oakland, California hills and destroyed 3000 houses and apartments and killed 25 people. Leigh didn't even live there. He just happened to pick that day when disaster struck to make a rare visit to his friends and fellow mountaineers, Al and Gail Baxter. Gail also died in the fire and Al was severely burned. Leigh is survived by his daughters Carolyn and Teresa and his brothers Robert and Arthur Ortenburger.

Leigh was born in Norman, Oklahoma, on February 14, 1929. At an early age he demonstrated an instinctive interest in climbing by falling out of a tree and breaking his arm. In 1948, he first went to the Tetons and soon became a guide with the Exum Guide Service. He was in fast company with the likes of Glenn Exum, Bob Merriam, Dick Pownall, Willi Unsoeld, Art Gilkey and others at the guide shack and Dick Emerson at Park Headquarters. But even in that group, Leigh could hold his own. He might not have had the flair of an Unsoeld, the technique of an Emerson nor the strength of a Pownall, but he was a highly capable, competent and determined climber, always a reassuring presence on a rope. No matter how bad the situation became, Leigh was one person you never had to worry about. He was always part of the solution and not the problem.

Leigh was also interested in the history of mountaineering. Once in 1951, he was persuaded by friends into climbing the regular route on Cloudveil Dome in the Tetons. It turned out the real reason Leigh wanted to climb the mountain was that it still had the original register from the first ascent in 1931. It was a typical Ortenburger con job, skillfully performed and when it was over, the "victims" were glad to have done it. The culmination of this interest was his *Climber's Guide to the Teton Range*, which first appeared in 1956. Comprehensive, meticulously researched, it became a standard against which guidebooks were judged. Moreover, Leigh personally had done most of the climbs himself. He had just completed his most recent two-volume update of the guidebook and had published it in preliminary form when he died.

Besides being an historian, researcher and guidebook writer, Leigh was also an outstanding photographer. In an era of the teensy Kodak Flash Bantams, he didn't haul that big Speed Graphic camera around just as an excuse for his companions to carry the pack. He used it, as evidenced by the many superb pictures that grace his books. His friends always made sure to send him a Christmas card, because Leigh's card would have another one of his marvelous pictures.

He was also doing the hardest climbs in the Tetons, such as the North Face Direct on the Grand Teton and the Direct South Buttress on Mount Moran.

What was significant was not that his companions were the likes of Willi Unsoeld and Dick Emerson but that he belonged to that crowd. The man could climb!

Leigh graduated from the University of Oklahoma in 1952 with a degree in mathematics and got a master's degree from the University of California in Berkeley in 1953. While in the San Francisco Bay Area, he frequently climbed in Yosemite, often with members of the Stanford Alpine Club. It was there that he met and in 1956 married Irene Beardsley, a member of the club who shared his determination, dedication and love of the mountains. They proceeded to climb all over the Tetons and then the Andes, especially the Cordillera Blanca—like the Tetons, a good-weather area. He made ten expeditions to the region and accomplished such difficult climbs as Huantsán and in 1964 the second ascent of Chacaraju by the unclimbed north ridge.

Although one associates Leigh with the Tetons and the Andes, the ultimate test of his courage, skill and dedication to his fellow climber occurred on Makalu in 1961. Leigh was a member of Ed Hillary's 1961 expedition to that mountain. When Tom Nevison and New Zealander Peter Mulgrew were making their summit assault from Camp VII without artificial oxygen, Mulgrew collapsed at 27,400 feet with a pulmonary embolism. After two nights above 26,000 feet, Nevison as well as Mulgrew was severely dehydrated and could barely move. It was left to a few Sherpas and Leigh Ortenburger, who had climbed up in support, to get Peter Mulgrew down to Camp V. At one point, Leigh had to spend the night out alone with Mulgrew between Camps VII and VI. But Leigh not only survived; he persevered and eventually Peter Mulgrew was saved. It was one of those great selfless moments in the history of mountaineering.

Besides rearing a family and climbing mountains, Leigh worked for over thirty years at Sylvania in Sunnydale, California, as a statistician specializing in the propagation of radio waves. He obviously was a valuable man because Sylvania always allowed him to take several months off each summer to go climbing.

Leigh joined the American Alpine Club in 1952 and was active in the affairs of the Club, especially on the Expeditions Committee. He was Western Vice President of the Club from 1965 until 1967.

Like many mountaineers of his era, Leigh was a man of firm convictions, some of which might even be considered eccentric by his eccentric friends. For instance, he had distinct tastes in food, which once led him to turn down most of the offerings of his friends when he had left his entire food supply, five jelly sandwiches, at the base of a climb and was in danger of starvation. But this interest in food also led to such immortal comments as his remark about one companion, "He is the kind of man who will pick all the cashews out of a can of mixed nuts."

Leigh was an original. It was only after his death that his friends realized that they probably had more Ortenburger stories than stories about even more famous climbers. For many years, when asked about what is the most important quality in a mountaineer, I always liked to quote what I call Ortenburger's law.

"A strong man who won't get out of the sack in the morning is useless." Leigh always got out of the sack in the morning.

My favorite story, one that illustrates his love of climbing, his enthusiasm, his ability to con others and his imperturbability in the face of circumstance and human disdain, occurred in the Tetons in the early 1950s. At six in the morning at Jenny Lake Campground, Leigh was shaking the tent, trying to get his companions to do a new route on the south face of Symmetry Spire. Ugly black streamers were scudding off the summits. When this was called to his attention, he pointed to a small hole in the clouds that was rapidly disappearing east over the Gros Ventre Range and shouted, "Look, Blue Sky! Blue Sky!" We went for a picnic on the Snake River instead. But Leigh did not give up. He finally got some innocents to join him. They were about 500 feet up the face when the inevitable happened. The skies opened and they were deluged in rain and hail. It was so heavy that they couldn't even rappel. His three companions huddled miserably on one end of the ledge and Ortenburger sat on the other. As his victims glowered at him under their leaking parkas, Leigh glanced up and said, "Who talked me into this?"

We shall miss him!

NICHOLAS B. CLINCH

DANIEL A. REID

1941-1991

On September 10, 1991, Dan Reid, M.D., an AAC member since 1971, and his wife Barbara were killed in a climbing accident on Mount Kenya. Their death left a void in many lives which can never be filled.

Dan was an extraordinary mountaineer. His climbing accomplishments include the first ascent of the Kangshung Face of Mount Everest and one of the earliest ascents of the North America Wall on El Capitan. He made the first ascent of South Taku Tower in Alaska's Coast Range and the first solo ascent of the University Wall on Squamish Chief. He was the leader of the Juneau Icefield Expedition and the British-American Torre Egger Expedition. His determination and belief in himself was infectious, and his attitude often gave others the inspiration they needed to carry on in adverse circumstances.

More than an extraordinary mountaineer, however, Dan was truly an extraordinary man. He was a highly regarded cardiothoracic surgeon, practicing at the Mount Diablo Medical Center in Concord, California. After growing up in Birmingham, Michigan, Dan attended Michigan State University and then Medical School at the University of Michigan. He received his surgery training in Seattle and thoracic training at the Albany Medical Center in New York.

In Dan's many avocations, he was an athlete, a fisherman, a bagpiper, a soldier and a charitable and public-minded citizen. He was a member of the U.S. Polo Association, the Diablo Valley Fly Fisherman's Society, the Saint Andrew's Society of San Francisco, the Clan Donnachaidh Society and the