

hypothermia. However, the altitude and conditions precluded this kind of attempt. Also, resuscitation is considered futile if core temperature drops below 18 degrees C, which would have taken only a few hours to reach in that environment. The somewhat unusual nature of this case raises the unanswerable question of whether her preexisting medical condition may have contributed to her collapse and demise, in other than the psychological aspect mentioned above. (Source: Dr. Peter Hackett, Director, Denali Medical Research Project)

FALL ON SNOW, UNABLE TO SELF-ARREST

Alaska, Mount McKinley

On May 18, 1988, a nine member Genet Expeditions guided climbing team departed the 5200 meter high camp on the West Buttress of Mount McKinley and began their ascent toward the summit. Chief guide was Vern Tejas (35), and the assistant guide was John Schweider (29). At the 5900 meter level, the group split up. Schweider took two team members who would not continue on toward the summit and began to descend back to the high camp. During a portion of the descent, the party clipped into a short piece of fixed line that descended a steep step just above Denali Pass. Schweider was last on the rope. As Schweider unclipped from the fixed line and prepared to descend, he either caught his crampon points and/or was pulled off balance by one of the clients and fell forward. Schweider unsuccessfully tried to self-arrest on the icy slope and slid approximately 25 meters. His fall was stopped when he slid head first into rocks. He sustained head and forehead lacerations and possible neck injuries. Schweider was able to descend, with assistance, back to high camp. He was helicopter evacuated from the location the following day along with Mike Moss, another Genet party member, who was frostbitten during the summit bid. Hospital reports indicated Schweider had sustained a stable compression fracture of one of his cervical vertebrae and multiple lacerations to his head. Moss underwent treatment and surgery for frostbite. He eventually lost the first digit of his left thumb and a small portion of his left big toe. (Source: Bob Seibert, Mountaineering Ranger, Denali National Park)

Analysis

This group was descending roped; however, the last person on the rope fell and slid into rocks before the slack in the rope tightened to provide an effective belay. The guide had just unclipped from a fixed line and he was preparing to resume his descent. His temporary inattention to his footing or the movement of his rope team partners probably contributed to the accident. (Source: Bob Seibert, Mountaineering Ranger, Denali National Park)

ACUTE MOUNTAIN SICKNESS, ASCENDING TOO FAST, CLIMBING ALONE

Alaska, Mount McKinley

Sung Hyun Baek (29) flew in on May 5, 1988, to join the Korean Alpine Club expedition on a climb of the Cassin Ridge of Denali. The Korean Alpine Club expedition had flown in on April 28 and Baek was unable to catch up with them. He soloed the route to 5500 meters where he met members of the New York Alpine Club expe-

dition (another Korean group).

At 2135 on May 26, the Talkeetna Ranger Station received a call for help. The reporting party spoke only Korean which complicated communication; the only English transmitted was, "Mayday, Mayday." A Korean interpreter/climber was located in Talkeetna who said the climber had "high altitude sickness, frostbite on one leg and frostbite on the hands." The victim was reportedly unable to use his hands and could not walk. The reporting party were two members of the New York Alpine Club expedition who had no rope and only one day of food left. Apparently Baek had reached the camp of the two highest members of the New York Alpine Club expedition but was unable to continue up or down.

Deteriorating weather hampered a reconnaissance flight that night by Jay Hudson in a Cessna 206. Though the western part of the mountain was clear, descending clouds on the Cassin prevented the plane from getting close to the route. Hudson flew at 0815 the next morning when the weather improved. A Korean interpreter, Seung Hwan Lee, and NPS Ranger Ralph Moore were on board. They determined the party's location and told the group to move Baek to the southern end of the ridge just below their camp when the helicopter approached.

Elmendorf Air Force Base's Rescue Coordination Center provided logistical support and coordinated the availability of the Chinook helicopters for this mission. Fortunately, the Chinooks from the 242nd Aviation Company, Fort Wainwright, were in Talkeetna at the time to fly out a portion of the medical/rescue camp. Ranger Bob Seibert organized the rescue effort with Dr. Peter Hackett providing valuable medical assistance. A hook was lowered from the hovering Chinook with a sling and carabiner for Baek to clip into. He was raised 25 meters into the ship from the steep, exposed ridge at 1255 on May 27. Extra food and CB batteries were dropped on the hoist cable to the remaining two people. The helicopters returned to Talkeetna by 1345.

A neurosurgeon who had recently been working at the medical/rescue camp examined Baek and found only the tips of two fingers to be grayish with no frostbite on the feet. There were minor indications that cerebral edema had been present, as residual effects are often still present immediately following such a rapid descent to sea level.

Through working together, this interagency effort accomplished the highest hoist rescue ever done by the U.S. military. The rescue was a smooth operation despite its decidedly dangerous location only because of perfect weather conditions and the fact that the group happened to be near one of only a few flat areas along the ridge where such a rescue could be performed. (Source: Ralph Moore, Mountaineering Ranger, Denali National Park)

Analysis

A solo attempt leaves little room for error. The urgency of this evacuation was questionable due to the minimal medical problems and the substantial risk and expense involved. Self-rescue is imperative unless it is truly a life-and-death situation. (Source: Ralph Moore, Mountaineering Ranger, Denali National Park)

HAPE, ASCENDING TOO FAST, INEXPERIENCE

Alaska, Mount McKinley

On May 28, 1988, High Altitude Medical Project personnel received a report from