

with only an ice axe would not have revealed a crevasse. This builds a strong case for using longer probe poles when traveling on Alaska glaciers, particularly in heavily crevassed areas.

**Additional Note:** Seo attempted suicide while in the crevasse by biting his tongue. It was later learned through an interpreter that Seo was in a great deal of pain, and without being able to move attempted to commit suicide by the only means possible. His tongue had numerous deep lacerations, some full thickness, which were described by attending physicians as his most serious wounds. The tongue injuries had compromised his airway. (Source: Ron Johnson, Mountaineering Ranger, Denali National Park)

*(Editor's Note: This narrative is included primarily to indicate the level of complexity involved in some rescue efforts. Furthermore, without the good will and skills of the other climbers—quite noteworthy ones in this case—and VIPs, the victim might not have survived.)*

## **FALL ON SNOW, DESCENDING UNROPED, EXCEEDING ABILITIES**

### **Alaska, Mount McKinley**

At approximately mid day on May 20, 1992, Soo Yang Yung (29), Sung Tak Hong (26) and Seong Jong Jin (25) from Korea were killed while attempting to descend the Orient Express route on Mount McKinley. The three fell several thousand feet to the 15,800 foot level. On May 23, the three victims were extricated from the 15,800 foot location by the NPS contract LAMA helicopter and transported to the Kahiltna basecamp. From here they were flown to Talkeetna.

### **Analysis**

A Fantasy Ridge guided party led by Chip Faurot was camped near the three at several of these locations. Faurot commented that he noticed the Koreans “were not comfortable on the terrain, especially exposed off camber ice.” Faurot observed Hong fall several times while ascending Fantasy Ridge’s fixed line at 12,800 feet. After several days of stormy weather, the three moved to 15,200 feet. The Koreans had plans to traverse down to the 14,200 foot camp on the West Buttress from their camp at 14,800 feet, but unfortunately found they were in the wrong place. On this same day, the three other members that were ascending the West Buttress made an attempt to meet up with the three on the Rib in order to give a hand assisting the Rib team down to the West Buttress route. It appears the three Rib climbers were not certain where they were on the route as discrepancies were discovered. Their reported locations were often 1000 feet off of what they told their West Buttress party compared to what was observed by Faurot. The three on the Rib indicated they were at 17,200 feet when actually they were at 15,200 feet. From May 14 through May 16, they encountered strong winds which kept them tent bound. By May 16, they reported two to three days of food left. The weather improved on the 27th where the three ascended to 16,200 feet. They took a rest day on the 18th where their West Buttress team suffered a serious crevasse collapse forcing the evacuation of one of their members. At an 0800 radio call on May 19, the Rib team indicated they would be making an attempt for the summit this day. Due to the circumstances with the accident the night before, the West Buttress team requested that the Rib team descend back to the 14,200 foot camp on the West Buttress. The Rib team declined and indicated they would try for the summit and hoped to be on top by 1600.

A group of NOLS instructors left for the summit on the same day as the Koreans. Willie Peabody of the NOLS group passed the Koreans at 16,500 feet on the 19th. The Koreans, like the NOLS group, had full packs and were planning on carrying everything to the plateau (19,500 feet), then descending the West Buttress. The NOLS group reached the plateau and encountered extremely cold and windy conditions with poor visibility. They descended the West Buttress after seeing the Koreans for the last time at 17,900 feet on the West Rib.

The West Buttress Koreans received no communication from the Rib team until 1000 on the 20th. On this call they reported that they had not reached the summit and were in a snow cave because of very strong winds. Their tent was damaged, they were out of food and indicated that they would be descending down to the 14,200 foot camp this day. This was the last communication with the Rib team. Since they were last seen at 17,900 feet, their camp was most likely high on the West Rib in a very exposed area.

This descent route is no easy escape route even in good weather without heavy packs. The trio succumbed as a result of making the same fatal mistake that has taken a dozen other climbers in the last 20 years. (Source: Roger Robinson, Mountaineering Ranger, Denali National Park)

## **SNOW LIP/BRIDGE COLLAPSE—FALL INTO CREVASSE, INADEQUATE BELAY, WEATHER**

### **Alaska, Mount McKinley**

On May 4, 1992, Mugs Stump (41)—a guide for Mountain Trip—and his clients Nelson Max (40) and Robert Hoffman (45) began climbing the 1965 Japanese Ramp Route on the South Buttress of Mount McKinley. The team established a base camp on the upper part of the East Fork of the Kahiltna Glacier and made at least one carry of food and equipment up the Ramp before moving their camp onto the South Buttress. The Ramp, a steep and crevassed glacier that descends the South Buttress from 15,600 feet and feeds into the East Fork about 11,600 feet, is known for its objective hazards from crevasses, ice fall, and avalanches. On May 20, Stump and Max reached the summit of Mount McKinley via the Southeast Spur Finish in extremely adverse weather conditions.

On May 21, about 1130, Stump and his clients began their descent from high camp at 16,000 feet on the Southeast Spur in generally good weather. At 1300 they began descending the Ramp. First on the rope team was Hoffman, followed by Max, who was tied in a short distance behind, and Stump at the end of the rope with a greater length of rope between him and Max than between Max and Hoffman. There were no tracks left from their ascent, and Hoffman followed Stump's directions for route finding. They crossed a large slope beneath and slightly south of some seracs and an ice cliff as they approached a large crevasse. Hoffman stated he felt they were at a point further left of where they crossed this crevasse on their ascent. He stated that Stump had a sense of urgency to get off the slope and away from the avalanche path overhead. The air temperature had warmed and snow conditions were soft. Hoffman stopped near the edge of this crevasse, unsure of how to proceed. Stump approached the crevasse from uphill, passing by Max and Hoffman, to inspect the route. He was standing on the uphill lip of the crevasse and appeared to be inspecting a flimsy looking snowbridge. Hoffman said that he heard a "crack," and then Stump suddenly disappeared into the crevasse. He pulled in approximately 15 feet of slack rope between him and Max before Max was pulled off his feet. Max attempted to self-arrest, but was pulled toward the crevasse for approximately 20