

ACCIDENTS IN 1934.

YET another disastrous season attended with appalling loss of life. Of the countless accidents recorded—and never have we known such numbers that could so easily have been avoided—all must pale before the catastrophe in the Himalaya costing in all no fewer than ten lives, and the total or partial disablement of many others. At this date and with possibly many facts still unpublished, it would be presumptuous and unfair to the survivors to offer any comments on the handling of the expedition by the Europeans, whose courage has been manifest to all. Willy Merkl,¹ as leader of the Nanga Parbat 1934 attempt, displayed all the desperate gallantry we expected from him. His death and that of his loyal porter—both apparently from starvation—is a tragedy for German mountaineering. Survivors and victims were alike worthy of his leadership and—we have no hesitation in saying so—of their humble, native companions.

For us it remains to express to their nation, and to the relatives and friends of the deceased, the sorrow and sympathy felt by the Alpine Club and all British mountaineers.

Of the other accidents occurring outside Europe a few words must suffice. The aviator, Maurice Wilson, having forced his way surreptitiously into Tibet, disappeared on the upper East Rongbuk Glacier of Mt. Everest. He was alone, had little food, and was entirely ignorant of mountaineering. His three Sherpa porters, starving, made their way back to the Rongbuk Monastery after three weeks' wait. They eventually reached Darjeeling. Wilson's death, like those of the solitary Farmer on Kangchenjunga or Marden towards Aconcagua, can be ascribed to nothing else than a form of mental insanity. The deaths of Matteoda and Durando, both capable Italian mountaineers, on the Andean Tronador, were due to one of the fearful storms so prevalent on that mountain.² No trace could be discovered by their party led by our member, Aldo Bonacossa.

Of Alpine accidents, the disaster on the S. face of Mont Blanc explains itself, while that on the Aiguille d'Argentière to a British party was not only one of the saddest, but also worst cases of bad mountaineering so far known in the Alps. The leader aged about sixty, whose climbing career had commenced some ten years earlier, took an inexperienced party including a girl (whose *united* ages amounted to under fifty years) up a difficult mountain and by a wrong route. He fell while still very low down and dragged his

¹ We publish a portrait of Herr Merkl with this number; an obituary by his friend and second in command, Herr Bechtold, will appear in May 1935.

² See p. 371.

party with him. Two of his companions survived. The accident in the Eastern Alps—on the traverse of the Schüsselkar-Leutascher Dreitorspitzen—was very similar, except that in this case there were no survivors. Three ropes, including three women, and with *one* capable climber among the seven members, perished on this occasion.

Besides those to be related, accidents took place on the Pic d'Olan; Flambeau des Ecrins; Dents Blanches (Franco-Swiss frontier); Mont Blanc; Aiguille du Goûter; Dôme de Miage; Lyskamm; Weisshorn; Gletschhorn; Galenstock (an unaccountable slip of five, apparently sound, Swiss mountaineers of whom four were killed); Grosshorn, in which a Swiss amateur, accompanied by *two guides*, fell through the cornice; Finsteraarhorn; above the Goeschener Alp; Silvrettas, etc., besides the normal holocaust in the Eastern Alps.

The Accident on the S. face of Mont Blanc.

ON August 21, 1934, a party, consisting of J. D. Hoyland and P. Wand, aged 19 and 23 years respectively, arrived at the Torino hut on the Col du Géant, from a camp near the Montenvers, which they are presumed to have left either on that or the previous day. On the following day they descended to Courmayeur, and were seen leaving that village at 2 P.M. They arrived at the Gamba hut at 10 P.M., the guardian stating that they were very tired and carrying extremely heavy loads. They had thus taken 8 hrs. for an ascent that can be accomplished comfortably in 5 hrs.

They left the Gamba hut at 9 A.M. next day, August 23, having informed the guardian that they intended bivouacking on the *Col Eccles* (known locally as the Col du Mont Blanc), and ascending Mont Blanc de Courmayeur by the Innominata arête and face: they also left a note in the hut-book to this effect. Again, according to the guardian, they appeared tired and when last seen were going very slowly. The weather, unsettled at that time, the wind being in the south, broke next day, snow falling on the hills in the immediate vicinity of Courmayeur, whilst the general conditions were also bad, there being a considerable amount of snow resting on the face of Mont Blanc de Courmayeur and the Innominata arête.

Owing to the fact that letters were not expected, no anxiety was experienced in England until it was learnt that their camp near the Montenvers had not been reoccupied, and it was not until the middle of September that Dr. C. A. Wiggins, the guardian of Wand, arrived at Chamonix. There he ascertained that the party had left for the Col du Géant. Engaging guides, he went up to the Torino hut, where he found a record in the passport register to the effect that they had descended to Courmayeur. On arrival at Courmayeur he learnt that the party had left the Gamba hut as already stated. He therefore engaged the guides Guillaume Rey and Baroux and, on September 20, sent them up to the Gamba hut with instructions to commence a search.

Meanwhile Mr. J. S. Hoyland, the father of J. D. Hoyland, asked me on September 18 to travel out with him from England and institute a search. At that time he was unaware of the movements of Dr. Wiggins. We arrived at Geneva on the afternoon of the 19th, where we were met by M. Charles Gos, to whom Mr. G. Winthrop Young had previously sent a telegram. M. Gos accompanied us to Chamonix the same evening and was most helpful. At Chamonix we found that the guide Armand Charlet was ready to begin the search, having been engaged by M. de Ségogne, who had kindly wired on behalf of the C.A.F. His services, however, proved unnecessary, as at Chamonix we discovered that Dr. Wiggins was in Courmayeur and had traced them to that village, though, owing to the inefficiency of the telephone between Chamonix and Courmayeur, intelligible conversation with him was impossible.³ M. Gos accordingly returned to Geneva, and Mr. Hoyland and I motored next day, September 20, to Courmayeur.

At Courmayeur I engaged Adolphe Rey and Camille Grivel (porter), and on the 21st ascended to the Gamba hut, Mr. Hoyland accompanying us for part of the way. In the afternoon Guillaume Rey and Baroux returned from *Col Eccles* after an unsuccessful search. They reported 2 metres of avalanche snow choking the bergschrund at the foot of the Innominata face and the slopes of *Col Eccles*, and considered a further search useless. I decided, however, to search next day and, if it proved unavailing, to abandon it as there seemed small likelihood of finding traces, as a month had elapsed since the accident. A search high up on the Innominata face, supposing they had bivouacked and died in the storm that would most likely have overtaken them during their ascent, was, owing to recently fallen snow, out of the question. Guillaume Rey was sent down to Courmayeur and Baroux retained.

Next morning, September 22, we left the Gamba hut at 3.15 A.M., and climbing on two ropes, Rey and I, Baroux and Grivel, reached the Col du Fresnay at 6.15, although a good deal of step-cutting was necessary in the icefall of the Brouillard Glacier, while some time was spent in searching crevasses.

Some 100 to 150 ft. above the col on the ridge, which at this point consists of rocks and snow inclined at a moderate angle, Rey discovered an ice axe, the point of the pick being just visible above the snow covering the rocks. Descending from the ridge to the E., we found an old bivouac site which, as it proved, had no connection with the accident. Looking down the rock couloir leading to the Fresnay Glacier we could see an object on the surface of the latter which did not possess the appearance of a stone.

³ The line connecting Courmayeur with Aosta is extremely bad. One volunteered explanation was that as it does not pay it is not worth while making it efficient.

Unfortunately, I had neglected to provide myself with a telescope.⁴ Some time was spent in probing the snow which lay 2 or 3 ft. deep on the ledges and on the ridge. Rey wished to push on a little, but before we did this I sent Baroux and Grivel down to a ledge from which a better view was obtainable of the couloir. Arriving on this they saw a balaclava helmet lying on the rocks, some 100 ft. lower. Rey and I descended to this spot down steep but not difficult rocks, and then perceived other articles and clothing on the rocks below. There being now no further doubt that they had fallen from the ridge, it was decided to follow the line of their fall to the Fresnay Glacier. We accordingly descended the loose rocks of the couloir, climbing at our utmost speed, owing to the possibility of falling stones being detached by the sun, which was rapidly gaining in power. During the descent various items of equipment were found, and it was obvious from these, which included full-size table forks and spoons, heavy ski-ing gloves, heavy woollen sweaters, guide-book and underclothing, a condensed milk tin, a bivouac tent weighing at least 6 lbs., etc. etc., that the party had been grossly overloaded.⁵

Owing to falling stones, the descent of the ice slope at the foot of the rocks as well as the crossing of the bergschrund by an ice groove was dangerous. It was only an exceptionally speedy piece of step-cutting by Rey that prevented an accident, since shelter had but just been gained under the lip of the bergschrund when a fall of rocks occurred which swept the steps and the ice shoot. The bodies were lying some 50 yards beyond the bergschrund, and it was obvious from the nature of their injuries that they had been killed instantly: they had fallen about 1800 ft. Stones were falling, so we placed the bodies in a less exposed position. They were wearing crampons, which would have been more dangerous than useful on the ridge where the slip occurred, particularly in conditions of soft snow which, according to Rey, prevailed at that time.

The descent of the Fresnay Glacier was rendered difficult and dangerous on account of the broken nature of the ice this year and the number of unstable séracs. Furthermore, the hanging glacier between the 'Gruber' rocks and *Pic Eccles* was discharging some immense avalanches, which were sweeping far down the glacier. Rey led with great skill and speed, but even so it took 3 hrs. to reach the slopes below the Col de L'Innominata. The Gamba hut was regained at 2.15 p.m. Later Rey and I descended to Courmayeur, leaving Mr. Hoyland, who had come up, at the hut.

On September 24 twelve Courmayeur guides accomplished the difficult and dangerous task of recovering the bodies. By means of

⁴ A pair of field-glasses or a telescope should always be taken on a search party.

⁵ Everyone who saw them at or near Courmayeur remarked on their heavy rucksacks.

fixed ropes a route was forced up the side of the Fresnay Glacier, thus avoiding the greater risks of falling ice. Two men were, however, slightly injured by falling stones in the couloir below the Col de L'Innominata. Thanks to the courtesy of the Italian military authorities, motor vehicles were provided to bring the bodies and the guides down the Val Veni. Nothing could have exceeded the kindness and sympathy experienced at Courmayeur. It will remain an enduring memory. The funeral was attended by many of the local inhabitants, nearly all of whom brought flowers. The coffins were borne by guides. The Prefect of Aosta was represented, as were also the military and civil authorities. Signor Bertolini was the representative of the C.A.I.

Comment on this sad disaster would seem scarcely necessary; the facts speak for themselves. It is only because of Mr. Hoyland's earnest desire that his son's death may prove a warning and a deterrent to others that I should like to mention a few facts.

The original party which left England had announced that they intended to attempt routes among which were the Grépon, the traverse of the Drus, the E. arête of the Aiguille du Plan (Ryan's route, and stated by Franz Lochmatter to be the hardest climb he ever did in the Chamonix Aiguilles), the Péteret arête and the Brenva face of Mont Blanc *via* 'La Sentinelle Rouge.' That such expeditions, particularly the last two, should be planned for a *first* season in the Alps is almost beyond criticism. The Grépon was climbed, but owing to the inclusion of an almost *complete* novice in the party, they were all benighted on the Nantillons Glacier and had to sleep in the little shelter placed on the rocks there. They had also planned to attempt the Mer de Glace face of the Grépon, but whether this climb was carried out or not is uncertain. A number of experienced mountaineers had warned them against attempting such routes as the Péteret arête, but it is very doubtful whether a British-trained rock-climber is justified in attempting such a climb as the traverse of the Drus in his first season, because the longer Aiguille climbs call for reasonable speed and a different technique to British rocks. The E. arête of the Plan is certainly not a climb for any but a mountaineer, whilst it seems scarcely necessary to state that routes such as the Péteret arête and Brenva face call for long experience in all the branches of mountaineering.

A broken watch that had stopped at 3.52 was found on one of the bodies. This taken in conjunction with the fact that their bivouac sack had obviously not been used, that their stock of candles was also unused, as was apparently their lantern, suggests that the accident occurred during the ascent. If this was so, they took 6 hrs. and 52 mins. to climb from the Gamba hut to the Col du Fresnay, as against the 3 hrs. taken by the search party. This time also speaks for itself. Had the accident not occurred it is very doubtful whether they could have traversed Mont Blanc in one day from *Col Eccles*, APART FROM THE FACT THAT THE CONDITIONS WERE

BAD AT THAT TIME. They would almost certainly have been caught by the bad weather that broke in the afternoon or evening of August 24, in which case disaster *must* have overtaken them.

There is one last point on which comment should be made. The discovery of the ice axe reminded me immediately of the similar find on Everest last year. What most probably happened was that the leader slipped, and the second man having no firm snow into which to drive his axe put it down in order to seize the rope in both hands and, failing to stop the leader, was himself dragged down, leaving his axe behind him.⁶

F. S. SMYTHE.

[All mountaineers will concur with Mr. Smythe's comments. A few words of praise and thanks are due to him and that great guide, Adolphe Rey, for the skill and success of the admirably conducted search party.—*Editor.*]

The Accident on the Col de la Brenva.

[IN 1881 the late Herr G. Gruber with Johann von Bergen and Emile Rey attained the Col de la Brenva⁷ from the Italian side by ascending the great precipitous icefall situated to the right, N., of Moore's buttress, the ordinary route ('A.J.' 26, 172). There is no record whatever of the details of Herr Gruber's line, which is exceedingly dangerous and rightly has never been repeated.]

A party, consisting of Signori S. and P. Ceresa, C. Alberico and L. Borgna, all about 25 years of age, having reconnoitred the route on July 26, 1934, from the Fourche de la Brenva, arranged to start for an attempt on the col by the above ('Gruber') route. The weather was fine, but the state of the immense icefall determined the party to execute the ascent in the night. Leaving the Torino hut at 21.00 in two parties, the Col de la Fourche de la Brenva was crossed about 24.00. Having attained the avalanche cone at the base of the Col de la Brenva, they started to ascend the 'ice couloir' rising towards the pass, the brothers Ceresa in the lead. At about 02.00 a puff of wind extinguished the leaders' lantern, the other rope, Alberico and Borgna, then taking the head. The parties had reached a point close to the rocky islet⁸ situated in the lower third of the couloir, when a snow avalanche carried away the two leaders, as well as the first man of the second rope, smashing the lantern in his hand.⁹ Ceresa was held by his brother's rope and soon stopped. In complete darkness the brothers, quite unable to tell what had

⁶ See pp. 447-49.

⁷ This appears to have been the third ascent of the Brenva route.

⁸ See illustration *A.J.* 26, facing 203.

⁹ It is not stated whether the avalanche came from above or was trodden loose by the parties.

happened to the first party, remained in the same place. Two hours passed and at 04.00, by the first light, they descended the icefall abreast, roped 30 ft. apart. Passing over the snowy masses of the avalanche, they ascertained that the flow of this had been interrupted by the bergschrund, some 20 ft. wide in parts. Not the slightest trace of Alberico and Borgna could be found. The brothers shouted to another party on the 'Moore' route, but unable to make themselves heard and in great danger from avalanches, determined after an hour's hunt to return to the Torino, there to organize a search party. This was duly found and a prolonged hunt was made on the following day, one of the brothers Ceresa having himself lowered some 80 ft. into the bergschrund. Nothing except a glove some 50 ft. above the schrund could be found. The large search party was soon in the gravest peril, an enormous avalanche, pouring down, nearly choked the schrund; this was followed by a second, which swept down an axe belonging to Alberico. This is the only other trace of the victims so far discovered, despite every possible effort.

From *La Stampa*.

[The survivors and search party are entitled to the highest praise for their devotion and courage, but an accident appears inevitable if such routes be taken. The conditions of the 'Gruber' line are now far worse than in 1881.

The brothers Ceresa were members of the recent (Italian) Andes expedition.]

The Accident on the Grandes Jorasses.

On *July* 28, 1934, Herren R. Peters and R. Haringer¹⁰ of Munich left Chamonix and bivouacked in the Leschaux Glacier icefall under the N. face of the Grandes Jorasses. On the following morning they started up the precipitous 1000-ft. ice slope leading towards the 4000-ft. wall. Owing to the execrable condition of the said slope, they bore away to the right, W., towards the obvious rocky rib leading straight up towards *Pointe Whymper*, where conditions appeared somewhat more favourable. The party bivouacked that night in a notch in the rib. On *July* 30, after overcoming extraordinary difficulties, they bivouacked again in a crevice, stated to be half-way up the wall. On this day Italian, French and Austrian parties were also on the face, but were forced to turn back much lower down on account of the unusual difficulties [*sic*].¹¹ On *July* 31

¹⁰ Fellow-members of Brehm and Rittler killed on the same face in 1931.—*A.J.* 44, 336.

¹¹ In reality, of these parties, two were forced to fly on account of stonefall provoked by the Munichers.

The facts are as follows: on *July* 30, three parties, including the Chamonix guides Armand Charlet and F. Belin, Signori R. Chabod

the party cheerfully resumed the climb, and by 14.00 hrs. are stated to have been some 500 ft. [?] below the summit of *Pointe Whymper*, when a raging snowstorm, inaugurated by a general break in the weather, smothered the party. Further progress could not be thought of, as in a few minutes everything was covered with fresh snow avalanching in enormous masses into the abyss. By 16.00 retreat had become obligatory. They were compelled to rope down on their two ropes, each of 150 ft., without reliable hitches, since frequently for stretches of 150 ft. not the slightest hold could be found in the enormous slabs. Finally, on a snow-covered ice slope of 70° , as darkness crept on, came disaster: Haringer slipping and falling 1800 ft. Peters bivouacked there and then on the spot, shelterless, in the raging blizzard. He continued the descent on the following day, the weather being similar, and was once again compelled to bivouac before attaining the base of the wall. Finally at 17.00 hrs. on *August 2*, he completed the descent to the glacier, where friends, led by the well-known Franz Schmid, were waiting to succour him.

From D. & C.A.V. *Mitt.*

[The escape of the survivor, together with that of the solitary French climber who spent 8 *days* at the bottom of a crevasse in the Nantillons Glacier, is perhaps the most extraordinary chronicled in these pages.]

The Accident on the Matterhorn.

ON August 13, 1934, two parties of young climbers, Signori Giuseppe and Innocenzo Longo, Mario Finazzi and Giuseppe Tacchini of Bergamo; Ario Lisa, Walter Fogagnolo and Giuseppe Ghetta of Turin, left the Luigi di Savoia hut in the above-named order for the ascent of the mountain by the usual route.¹² Owing to menacing

and G. Gervasutti, and three Austrian climbers, crossed the bergschrund between 03.00 and 04.00, and clambered up the central spur. The professional party, finding the conditions unfavourable, turned back at 08.00, after having caught up and *passed* the Munich party: the Chamoniards attained the surface of the Leschaux Glacier before 11.00. The Italian party joined the Munichers about 11.00 at a height of about 3650 m., but the latter moving with extreme slowness, the Italians also descended towards 11.30. They met the Austrian party who had halted low down near some pinnacles ever since 08.00. The Austrians now descended with the Italians, both parties crossing the bergschrund at 21.00. The Germans were seen from the Leschaux hut for the last time at 17.00 on July 30 practically in the same spot as at 11.00. It was their first visit to the Western Alps.—From *Alpinisme* and ‘communicated.’

¹² Needless to say, the accident was reported in the British Press as having occurred on the S. face, ‘which has only once been climbed.’

weather, the start was much delayed. Below *Pic Tyndall*, Lisa, suffering from mountain sickness, fell out, his companions proposing to pick him up on their return from the summit.¹³ Meanwhile the reduced Turin party was gradually overhauling the Bergamasques. The Turin party, passing the others about *l'Enjambée*, duly reached the Italian summit. Fogagnolo and Ghetta were seen to be returning, but on the glazed slabs above the *échelle Giordano* a slip occurred, and both plunged headlong down the S. slope of the *Col Félicité*, in full view of the others.

The Bergamasque party, who had overcome the greater part of the mountain's last step and 'were within half an hour of the top,' considered it quicker to continue over the summit and descend to the Solvay hut. A furious storm had long been raging and, on the following morning, August 14, Giuseppe Longo expired from exhaustion on the top. The three others pushed on through the blizzard and, attaining the neighbourhood of the Solvay hut, wandered helplessly about for the remainder of the day. Innocenzo Longo (brother of Giuseppe) died here. Of the two survivors, Finazzi reached the Hörnli hut late on the 15th, while Tacchini did not arrive there till the morning of August 16. Both were at the last gasp but recovered eventually.

All the bodies were recovered finally, thanks to the truly heroic efforts of the Valtournanche guides, prominent among whom was Louis Carrel. These actually traversed the mountain from Breuil to the Hörnli in the height of the tempest. It is unlikely that, despite all the risks run, the remains of Fogagnolo and Ghetta would ever have been found, had not a great rock and snow avalanche swept the corpses off the rocks above, within actual view of search parties working near *l'Enjambée* and on the Forca (Cervino) Glacier who had up to then found no traces.

From *La Stampa*.

Another account—attributed to one of the survivors—says the parties left the Italian hut in 'safe' weather at 04.00. At 12.00 the Bergamasques were passed by the Turin men, the weather having suddenly become appalling. At 16.30 the Bergamasques met the Turin party *descending* from the summit; immediately after, the latter fell on the 'Giordano' ladder. The Bergamasques attained the summit at 17.00, the storm compelling a bivouac on the top, the morale of the party being very good. The descent was begun at 05.00 on August 14, I. Longo dying quietly one hour later. Night overtook the three others before attaining the Solvay hut, compelling a second bivouac. At 10.00 on August 15 the hut was attained; the storm was fearful, but the condition of the party was 'satisfactory.' After a short rest, G. Longo and Tacchini, their provisions

¹³ Lisa made his way back to the hut, was rescued eventually, and brought back to Breuil by the search party.

being nearly exhausted, continued towards the Hörnli, leaving Finazzi with a little food in the Solvay,¹⁴ but 'promising to send him a guide.' On the descent Longo grew weaker, and the party was overtaken by the guides Louis Carrel and Maquignaz [who had come *over* the summit from Breuil]. This was about 18.00; later they were overtaken by two more Italian guides, and about 22.00, at a short distance from the Hörnli, Longo expired. Finazzi rejoined the survivor in the Hörnli on the 16th at midday, having been assisted down from the Solvay by the guide Maquignaz.

[Of all the many and *avoidable* disasters that have occurred on the mountain, this accident is perhaps the most pathetic.]

The Accident on Nanga Parbat.

(Translated.)

[OWING to the late date on which Herr Schneider's sad narrative reached us (October 22), it has been found necessary to postpone *complete* publication until the following number of the 'A.J.' The full account of the tragedy commencing with the death of Herr Drexel, will be found below.

The 1934 Expedition was composed as follows: Herren W. Merkl, leader; Peter Aschenbrenner, F. Bechtold, A. Drexel, P. Müllritter, W. Welzenbach, U. Wieland, W. Bernard, doctor; H. Hieronimus, E. Schneider. These made up the climbing party together with 35 of the best Sherpas and Bhutias, many of whom had served on the Everest Expedition of 1933. Captain Sangster and Captain Frier of the Indian Army were in charge of transport arrangements. In addition there were present on the scientific side, Herren Finsterwalder, Raechl and Misch. A Swiss, Dr. Kuhn, and the German Consul, Herr Kapp, joined the Base camp somewhat later.]

The party attained the Base camp, 17 days after leaving Srinagar, on May 15, 1934. . . .

. . . Drexel was usually in charge of the wireless. In Camp III a violent storm was raging that day and Drexel's usually clear voice was difficult to understand in the Base camp. He seemed to have caught a chill. We called to him [by wireless] to descend to the base to recover his health there. Drexel went down with his porter Angtensin to Camp II. We three others went up higher to Camp IV. On the following morning a porter arrived with a letter from Bechtold in Camp II, saying that Drexel had arrived there in a collapsed condition and that Müllritter had left at once for the Base to fetch the doctor and help. During the day and night the condition of Drexel had grown so rapidly worse that he was incapable of descending further. Dr. Bernard arrived

¹⁴ See p. 408.

in the afternoon with Müllritter, but Drexel died at 9 P.M. from pneumonia. During the night Wieland arrived through the savage icefall with two porters and oxygen, but it was now too late. We all returned to the Base camp and buried our comrade on a moraine pinnacle with his head facing the north wall of Nanga Parbat. This was our first great blow and the fourth victim that the mountain has claimed since Mummery and his two companions.

During the following days Camp IV was fitted out with equipment and food, Captain Frier making the arrangements. On *June 22* Merkl, Bechtold, Müllritter, Welzenbach, Aschenbrenner and I went as the advance party to Camp IV. Captain Sangster, Wieland and Bernard followed three days later. From Camp IV nearly everyone climbed the Western Chongra peak. This camp, at a height of 5950 m., served us as a kind of advanced base and from it we went up and down twice with porters to Camp V conveying stores. The route is steep but can be accomplished with good snow and tracks in 3 hrs.; a long climb still separated us from the summit. Our intention was, from Camp V at the foot of the Rakhiot peak, to make our way to the great upper névé plateau by passing *over* this peak and the connecting ridge to the *Silbersattel* lying between the two eastern peaks: this rises gently from a height of 7600 m. over a distance of nearly 3 kilometres to the little lower top, whence the route continues, *via* a descent into the last depression and a steep shoulder in the ridge, upwards towards the summit. The route is mostly difficult and especially very long as it lies at an average height of 7000 m. [= 23,000 ft.]. This constitutes the main difficulty and the solution to the attainment of the top. We considered our best plan was to overcome these troubles by a rapid assault and short pauses, thus not meeting with hindrances from lack of [atmospheric] oxygen. We wished to preserve our strength and powers for the final assault on the summit.

Camp V was situated at 6700 m., just in front of the abrupt final step leading to the Rakhiot peak. This step we rendered secure by fixed ropes and the hewing of big footholds for the porters—a two days' job. On *July 4* Merkl, Bechtold, Welzenbach, Wieland, Aschenbrenner and I, with 18 porters, arrived at Camp VI. Camp V was the true take-off for the real assault on the summit of Nanga Parbat, for in this place it was possible to construct a 'strong point' fitted with sleeping-sacks, food and fuel. Müllritter returned from this point to Camp IV with a sick porter. His orders were to return later to Camps VI and VII and equip these in case of need with fuel and food, thus covering our retreat [from the top] to these camps.

From the jutting ridge-shoulder of the Rakhiot peak we turned on to the W. slope and avoided the summit. Afterwards, once more on the crest, we attained our Camp VI at a height of 6900 m. It stood in the same place where Camp VII of the 1932 Expedition had been erected. In that year the party had attained the locality by the great hollow followed by a steep and fatiguing snow and ice gully. On this occasion, however, that route was blocked by an ice

wall at the base of the gully, consequently we took the ridge route.

During this period, below at Camp IV, the weather was mostly bad. Higher up progress was *above* the clouds; these latter rising only towards nightfall and smothering the ridge. The wind, although violent, was not disagreeable. Progress along the snowy ridge was marvellous since everything below us was concealed by a sea of cloud from which Nanga Parbat—like an island—alone emerged. Below us fell the immense wall towards the Rupal Nulla; often the wind scooped a clearing in the clouds and we saw, 14,000 ft. below us, the level, débris-strewn glacier with its neighbouring green meadows. For us who had lived for so many weeks in snow and ice, it was like a vision of another world.

We dug out a camp site for our tents in a notch in the ridge just below the steep rise to the *Silbersattel*—Camp VII, 7100 m. The clouds had met on the ridge, causing a snowstorm and making our labour severe. In the evening, however, it cleared, and once more on the following day we became inhabitants of a lonely isle far above the clouds. In this place we could still eat, but it consisted mostly of soup, in which we dumped a great mass of butter for increased nourishment. We slept in two tents with two in each sleeping-bag. Bechtold left us here in Camp VII with two sick porters; he had been taking films up to this spot. His instructions also were to follow up with Müllritter later and keep Camps VI and VII open. At Camp VI four porters had had to fall out sick, so on *July* 6 we set out with 11 porters¹⁵ to Camp VIII—the last before the summit. We got away early, all were in good form, and progress was at the rate of 200 m. [= 650 ft.] per hour. On the steep slopes leading to the *Silbersattel* we cut a series of steps for the porters. Above, sitting on the rocks of the E. peak, Aschenbrenner and I waited for the others following up with the porters, smoking cigarettes we had borrowed from the latter. The doctor had forbidden smoking for the party, consequently tobacco in Camp IV was very scarce. On the head of the column attaining the *Silbersattel* we proceeded, skirting the upper névés, as far as the first top [*Vorgipfel*]. We then turned back, since we saw that the porters could not go farther, and Camp VIII, 7600 m., was pitched close to the *Silbersattel*. It was still early when we turned back, the height was about 7900 m., 50 m. below the measured first top [= 25,800 ft.]. A ridge some 900 m. long and 240 m. in height [*ca.* 800 ft.] still lay between us and the summit [26,620 ft.]. We were full of confidence and never doubted about attaining the top next day.

That evening we were able to eat some soup and were quite care-free concerning the following day which was to consummate our victory. Fate, however, was against us. The night was still clear, but the wind raged—probably always the case. In the morning a tremendous snowstorm burst over the tents. The blizzard was so violent that it was almost impossible to breathe in the open; the

¹⁵ Viz. 16 persons, of whom 9 were destined to perish.—*Editor*.

driving snow was blown horizontally in broad sheets, while perpetual darkness seemed to gather about us. During the preceding night a pole of the larger tent was smashed, while a second went the same way on the following. It was impossible to dig out a cave in the level névé; the surface of the latter was wind-blown into an iron substance which even on the first night had but barely allowed us to scrape out a hollow for the tents. The small tent occupied by Aschenbrenner and myself was no longer sufficiently wind-proof against the elements; during the first night we lay in our sack amidst driving snow, but had managed to become almost accustomed to it. In spite of everything we decided to wait one more day, since according to the observations of 1932, a storm of this nature on Nanga Parbat hardly ever lasted more than a day. On this day we took nothing at all beyond half a cup of tea apiece. Food and fuel we possessed in sufficiency, but in the howling storm it proved impossible to melt snow or prepare any warm nourishment.

The second night was almost worse than the first. Yet another tent-pole broke during a squall, while at daybreak there was still no improvement. It was useless to wait yet another day and night; accordingly we decided to descend.¹⁶ Aschenbrenner and I led with three porters to break the trail, our companions intending to follow at once with the remaining natives. None of us was in bad condition and there were no complaints as to ailments. Our only sorrow was the thought of the long grind upwards again from Camp IV to VIII and of the valuable time lost. We thought ourselves certain to return in a few days when the weather had cleared.

On the *Silbersattel* an india-rubber mattress was torn off the back of a porter; this was immediately followed by a heavy sleeping-bag. The storm blew these horizontally and bodily into space—they vanished round a corner. The sleeping-bag was ours, the porters still possessed their own. On the steep traverse below the ridge we cut steps, while on the crest itself we forced our way through the snow masses. The storm drove countless snow particles into our eyes, so that we could see nothing; in fact, Aschenbrenner, 10 or 15 ft. away from me, became nothing but a greyish shadow.

We lost sight of our three porters near the tent of Camp VII. On the Rakhiot peak we followed the ridge over the top, turning down at the ropes towards Camp V. We dug the tents out of the snow and ate something. In the late afternoon we reached Camp IV, where Bechtold, Müllritter and Bernard were waiting. They had attempted vainly to mount on the preceding day, but were held up by masses of snow before reaching Camp V. We were of the opinion that the porters and our companions would soon follow us; when no one appeared we thought they had spent the night in Camp V. On the following day the storm continued, as it had in fact done in this spot for nearly a week. During the evening of the following day it cleared with a raging gale that swept the billowing clouds off the

¹⁶ July 8.

ridge. We perceived figures descending the Rakhiot peak and made towards them. They were four porters, Pasang, Kitar, Kikuli and Da Thondu ; all were frost-bitten and completely exhausted. We rubbed them with snow and sent them down to the Base camp with Bernard on the following day. We attempted to go up and give help, but it proved impossible. Once we attained Camp V, three climbers and six porters, literally buried in bottomless snow up to our shoulders. Here another storm caught us ; not a porter could move. We ourselves were too weak to go higher alone. On another occasion we even failed to reach Camp V ; no porter then accompanied us—even they were exhausted utterly by the long high-altitude sojourn. On *July* 15 came the porter Angtsering from somewhere above Camp VI. From him we learnt the end of the tragedy above. Wieland had died near Camp VII ; he appears to have sat down for a short rest and went to sleep without waking. Welzenbach died in Camp VII, while two porters, Nima Nurbu and Dakshi, perished higher up still. Merkl proceeded with Gay Lay and Angtsering some way towards Camp VI. About this place he sent on Angtsering to bring help ; had it not been for this [*? i.e.* the previous presence of Merkl and his porter], the latter could hardly have possessed the strength to force his way down alone through the storm [*sic*]. Three porters, Nima Tashi, Pintzo Nurbu, and Nima Dorji, died shortly before Camp V. Gay Lay stayed with his Sahib—to die with him. May his memory be honoured for ever.

Meanwhile we sat almost within shouting distance and could do nothing. Always we tried to force our way up and ever we failed. Raechl and Misch came up to Camp IV to help ; they failed equally to reach Camp V. It was dreadful, this continued effort, worse still to know that it was always vain and useless.

On *July* 18 we evacuated Camp IV and descended. The way was difficult, harder than on the way up, as we sorrowfully tracked through deep snow and the torn icefalls. Half-way down, between Camp II and III, we met Bechtold and Müllritter who had once more come up to help. It was far too late : our last hopes of being able to bury our dead friends and porters were extinguished in the drifts of new snow and continuous storms. Weary and worn out, we descended over the moraine pinnacles to the tents of the Base camp. Hieronimus and Kuhn came to meet us. Everything had been arranged at the Base, the sick porters looked after and much labour accomplished. The frost-bites of the porters healed well under the doctor's care. . . .

Shall we be lucky enough to fight another round with Nanga Parbat ? And shall we once more return there ?

ERWIN SCHNEIDER.

Illustrations.

Photo No. 1 (P. Müllritter). Nanga Parbat ; Base and following camps.

Photo No. 2 (E. Schneider). Camp VI with summit of Nanga Parbat ; dotted line indicates highest point reached, summit on extreme left.







WILLY MERKL.
1900-1934.

[To face p. 382]