

THE CONQUEST OF MOUNT EVEREST BY THE CHINESE MOUNTAINEERING TEAM

BY SHIH CHAN-CHUN

1. On May 25, 1960, three young Chinese mountaineers reached the summit of Mt. Everest, accomplishing the task of conquering the world's highest peak from its difficult northern slopes for the first time in mankind's history.

2. It has been considered by many mountaineers of other countries that Mt. Everest is unscalable from its northern side.¹ But the three young mountaineers, Wang Fu-chou (25-year-old geologist from Peking, Master of Sports and member of the Chinese Communist Party), Kombu (27-year-old People's Liberation Army man of Tibetan nationality, First Grade Sportsman) and Chu Yin-hua (25-year-old lumberjack from Szechuan Province, Master of Sports and Communist Party Member) successfully accomplished this most difficult feat. The three victors had had at most two years of mountaineering experience behind them.

3. Besides these, twenty-five other Chinese mountaineers reached altitudes of 8,100 to 8,700 m., which is also a very important achievement.

4. The Chinese Mountaineering Expedition to Mt. Everest consisted of 214 men and women, one-third of them being of Tibetan nationality. Among these were workers, peasants, P.L.A. men, serfs who had just been freed from serfdom in Tibet, teachers, students, scientific researchers, medical workers and government functionaries from various parts of the country. In the expedition, there were seventeen Masters of Sports, eighteen First Grade Sportsmen and a greater number of Second Grade Sportsmen. The whole group averaged 24 years of age.

5. Before ascending Mt. Everest, we had carried out a long period of careful preparatory and organisational work. An overall plan of making reconnaissance in 1958, carrying out training in 1959, and ascending Mt. Everest in 1960, had been mapped out.

6. In November 1958 we sent a reconnaissance group to the foot of Mt. Everest for the first reconnaissance. Later, our meteorological

¹ This is, of course, absurd. As *La Montagne* pointed out with just acerbity, Everest is inaccessible to Western mountaineers because it is forbidden to them by political powers, and for no other reason.

group and other scientific researchers also entered the area. The meteorological workers set up a weather observatory in the mountain area and formed a meteorological information network, extending from Peking right up to the massif. They accurately forecasted the weather most suitable for the attempt on the summit. In the meantime, exhaustive investigations were conducted by the geologists, topographers, hydrologists, zoologists, botanists, surveyors and altitude physiologists. All this provided an important guarantee for the selection of a safe route and the mapping out of our plan of marches.

7. In 1959, we arranged a physical training programme for our members, giving them all-round training in technique, physique and adaptability of altitudes. In February 1959 we organised a climb of the North-east peak of the Nyenchen Tangla Range in Tibet (6,177 m.) In July the same year, a combined Chinese men's and women's mountaineering team successfully climbed Muztagh Ata (7,546 m.) during which our women mountaineers set up a new women's world record in mountaineering.²

8. After the ascent of Muztagh Ata, our members continued training in physique and technique in accordance with a unified plan after returning to their own jobs. As a result of this all-round training, many of them had improved physically and technically.

9. At the same time, we carried out enquiries into the data compiled by the expeditions of other countries in climbing peaks above 8,000 m., especially those concerning the ascent of Mt. Everest from the southern and northern sides. According to the information from various sources and our findings during on-the-spot reconnaissance, and weather conditions, we worked out a plan consisting of four operations, the first three operations being acclimatisation marches and the fourth the final assault on the summit. To be circumspect, we also prepared two alternative plans, one consisting of three operations and the other of five. In addition, thorough consideration and meticulous preparations were made against all possible difficulties which might crop up during the ascent, including even the smallest detail such as the use of matches at altitudes.

10. After the mountaineers assembled, special training was taken up with a view to tackling the Second Step, which had been described as an insurmountable barrier, besides making various preparations. According to experiences gained from all sides, we improved some of our equipment and successfully carried out training in climbing long stretches of precipices with an incline of 80 degrees.

² This was the highest summit reached by women, not the highest point. Mme. Claude Kogan reached a greater height on Cho Oyu. See *A.J.* 64. 78, 258.

AT THE BASE CAMP

11. On March 19 this year, the main party of our expedition arrived at the Base Camp (5,120 m.), at the foot of Everest, which was located in a valley off the snout of the Rongbuk glacier. The Base Camp had been established by the advanced party of the expedition, which, battling against hurricanes and snowstorms for half a month, had also set up Camp 1 (5,400 m.), and Camp 2 (5,900 m.) and Camp 3 (6,400 m.) and stored up sufficient equipment and provisions there. All this greatly facilitated the climbing party's advance to higher altitudes. We were also supplied with a steady flow of large quantities of high quality equipment and all sorts of concentrated food and fuel from various parts of our country.

12. At noon on March 25 the weather was exceptionally fine in the Everest area, as all members of the team gathered in the clearing of the Base Camp to watch our national flag hoisted to the strains of our National Anthem. Everyone of us had the same will: 'We will never give up until Mt. Everest is conquered.'

The march on the world's highest peak thus began.

13. Along the route opened up by the scout group, our climbing party reached Camp 3 on March 27 without any difficulty.

MARCH TOWARDS THE NORTH COL

14. On the following day, as the main climbing party was leaving Camp 3 to return to the Base Camp, a six-man scout group led by Hsu Ching set out to reconnoitre the route to the North Col.

15. The North Col (7,007 m.) is actually an undulating glassy ice slope with a height of 400 m. It stands like a wall athwart the only route leading to the summit. Our climbers rightly called it 'the Gateway of Everest.'

16. The steep, precipitous slopes of the North Col are covered by unfathomable névé. Numerous traces of ice and snow avalanches indicate that this is one of the most dangerous parts of the Everest area.

17. When the scout group set out, hurricane winds were raging round the Everest massif. The North Col was shrouded in dense fog. Tornadoes tore past the slopes and churned up huge columns of snow. Members of the scout group were forced to pitch a temporary camp at a spot 6,600 m. and wait for good weather. The weather improved somewhat the following day. With their accurate judgment and excellent mountaineering technique the scouts inched their way up, cutting each step forward with their ice-axes. Danger lurked at every step of their march. A slip might send them hurtling down to the bottom of the ice and snow slopes several hundred metres below. A moment's slackness could cause a fall into a deep crevasse. At

6,850 m. they camped upon an 'Ice Chimney' with an incline of over 70 degrees. They decided to climb up to the top of the North Col through this ice chimney.

18. Masters of Sports Hsu Ching, Liu Ta-yi and Peng Shu-li blazed the trail. They employed a complex combination of ice and rock climbing in scaling the ice crack. After a few minutes they were soaked to the skin with sweat.

19. When the reconnaissance group clambered to a spot 50 m. below the top of the North Col, it was getting dark. After grappling with severe cold, ice and snow for ten hours on end, they had at last found a safe route through the 'gateway of Everest'. Though it lay across four ice crevasses and four stretches of steep snow and ice slope, the route was free from possible ice and snow avalanches. Thus we victoriously concluded the first acclimatisation march which lasted from March 25 to 31.

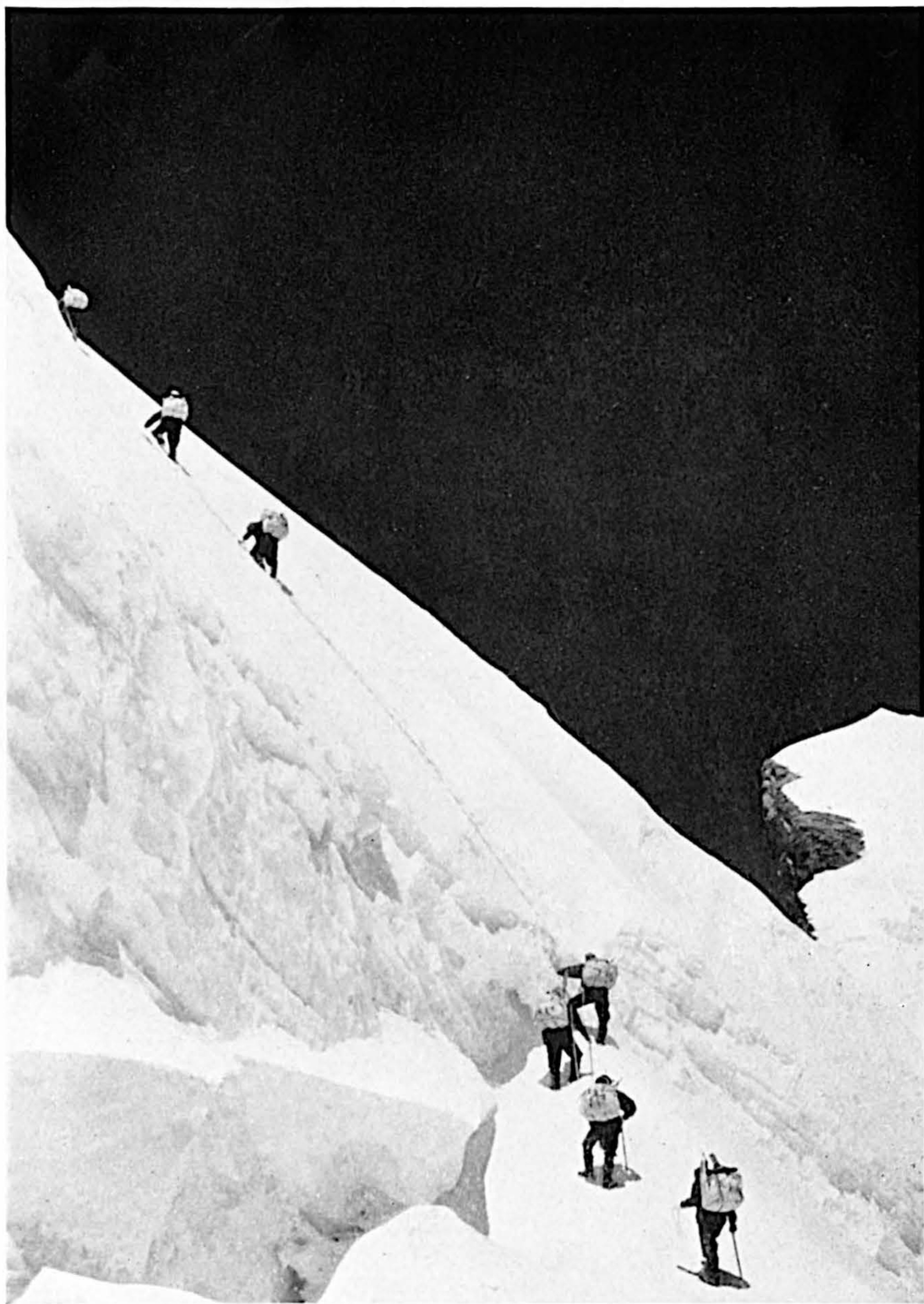
20. Between April 6 and 14, we carried out the second acclimatisation march, during which we intended to reach the top of the North Col and to reconnoitre the route above 8,000 m. Since the North Col is very precipitous, a group of mountaineers led by Hsu Ching was sent to build a safe road to the Col before the main climbing party set out. They cut steps on the steep icy slopes, rigged up light ladders on perpendicular ice walls, and spanned the crevasses with rope bridges. This passage later played a very important part in our fight to conquer Mt. Everest. It was along this passage that the main party reached the top of the North Col. During this march, though our reconnaissance group reached only 7,300 m., they nevertheless succeeded in reconnoitring the route leading to altitudes above 8,000 m.

THE THIRD MARCH

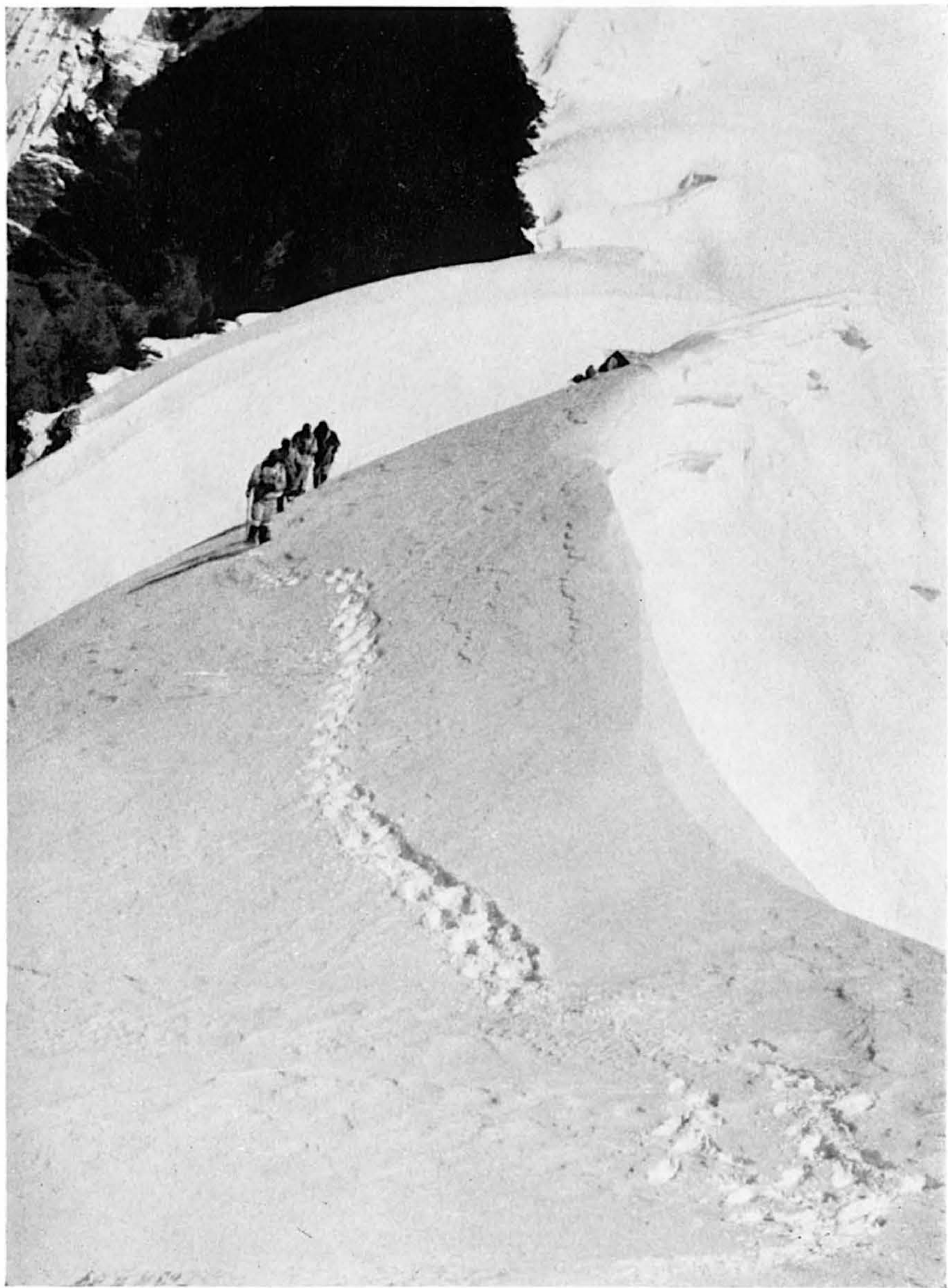
21. On April 25, the climbing party set out from Base Camp on their third acclimatisation march. Five days later, the party left the camp at the North Col for higher altitudes. Up to that time, the highest altitude reached by Chinese mountaineers was 7,590 m. It was attained by five other mountaineers and myself in the conquest of Minya Konka in Szechuan Province, 1957.³

22. When we left the North Col in the early morning of April 29, the sun was shining brilliantly. But when we were approaching 7,400 m. a hurricane suddenly came out of the blue. The mercury plummeted to 37° C below zero. Braving the piercing icy winds, the climbers advanced inch by inch, sometimes in soft powdery snow and sometimes on hard granular snow. It was so exhausting to advance in such con-

³ *A.J.* 64. 194. In case the use of the term 'conquest' should mislead the reader, we remind him that this was the second ascent of Minya Konka.



CLIMBING THE ICE-SLOPES OF THE NORTH COL.



ASCENDING SNOW-SLOPES ABOVE THE NORTH COL, AFTER LEAVING CAMP 4.

ditions that every few steps we would sprawl flat to take shelter from the freezing winds.

23. At dusk the weather worsened, and the temperature continued to drop. Despite our high-quality mountaineering clothing, we shivered with cold. Our breath froze and formed white frost round our mouths. Some climbers' noses turned blue with cold. Under such unfavourable conditions, we pressed on steadily. That night we camped at 7,400 m. The next day we were still detained there, due to the tearing wind. On the third day we reached the foot of a rock wall 7,600 m.—a new altitude in China's mountaineering history.

24. On May 2, Hsu Ching, Lhakpa Tsering and Migmar (both of Tibetan nationality) and I started off to chart a route to the summit. At midnight we reached 8,100 m. and pitched our tents. Shortly after this, several other members arrived. Early next morning, Wang Feng-tung, Shih Ching, Lhakpa Tsering, Konbu and I left the camp at 8,100 m. and reached 8,500 m. on the same day.

25. After leaving three persons to set up a camp at 8,500 m., Wang Feng-tung and I continued to climb. Before long, we came upon the last technical hitch on the route to the summit, that is the Second Step (8,570–8,600 m.) which had been regarded by Western mountaineers as unscalable. It is a sheer and slippery rock wall. After searching around at the bottom of the rock wall, we decided to ascend along a razor-edge ridge hardly a metre wide and then turn to the right to continue the climb up the step. We pressed on with great determination and care, boldly using the necessary mountaineering techniques. At 21.00 hours Peking time we reached the foot of the three-metres-high vertical slab at the top of the Second Step, 8,600 m.

26. It was already dark, so we decided to stay there for the night with a view to reconnoitring a route to the summit from this favourable position next morning. We dug a small hole in a snow-filled crevice on the rock wall, huddling together and waiting for dawn in a searing cold of over 30° C. below zero.

27. Our physical condition at that time was perfectly all right except for sheer exhaustion. In order to save oxygen, we did not use our breathing apparatus throughout the night. The successes achieved by us on this occasion and later by other members in withstanding the lack of oxygen indicated that the serious training for adaptability to high altitudes we had undertaken and our early start during the present expedition were very fruitful.

28. Early next morning, there was not a single flake of cloud in the sky and the peak of Everest appeared clearly before our eyes. Having found a practicable route to the summit, we began to descend. Together with all other members, we returned safely to the Base Camp.

29. In mid-May, a marked change was discernible in the weather of

the Everest area. Thick white clouds often floated above the snow-capped peaks, the Rongbuk river began to thaw, the frozen earth softened and Himalayan vultures hovering around the peaks increased in number. All this was a sign that the monsoon would soon arrive.

30. After carefully studying the weather forecasts, we calculated that the period between May 19 and 25 would be the last phase of good weather before the monsoon, and decided to assault the summit during this stretch of time.

31. From May 14 on, braving bad weather, the supply groups set out from Base Camp to carry equipment and provisions to the altitude camps right up to 8,500 m.

THE ASSAULT ON THE SUMMIT

32. At 09.30 hours Peking time, May 24, Wang Fu-chou, Chu Yin-hua, Konbu and Liu Lien-man left the Assault Camp at 8,500 m. and embarked on the last 340 m. of their march to the summit. They carried with them rucksacks, sleeping bags, ice-axes and breathing apparatus. Before long, they reached the foot of the Second Step at 8,570 m. The four courageous Chinese mountaineers pressed doggedly ahead in a cold of 30° C. below zero.

33. When they reached the three-metres-high vertical slab of the Second Step, Liu Lien-man moved ahead to blaze the trail. He made use of every available finger- and toe-hold to inch his way up this wall of rotten rock by sheer strength. But four times he fell back. Finally he decided to use the method of 'courte échelle' (short ladder).

34. He crouched down slowly on a piece of rock, big enough for one person only, and offered Chu Yin-hua a leg up on his shoulders. At this altitude, even the slightest movement would consume a great deal of strength and energy. He trembled all over, short of breath, but he clenched his teeth and steadily stood up, with much heroic effort. Liu helped Chu Yin-hua to the top of the slab. Finally with the help of a rope paid out by Chu from above, the three others climbed up the cliff one after another. Only when they had all reached the top of the Second Step did they find that it had taken them three hours to climb this three-metre slab.

35. At this time, the pressure gauges of their oxygen apparatus indicated that their reserves were running low. Liu Lien-man was very weak owing to his utter exhaustion and was stumbling every one or two steps. At 8,700 m. above sea level, he could scarcely proceed.

36. The three Communist Party members, Wang Fu-chou, Chu Yin-hua and Liu Lien-man, and Konbu, then held a brief Party group meeting. It was decided that the assault group should advance to the

summit as quickly as possible and Liu Lien-man should remain where he was.

37. After the three others left, Liu Lien-man, at the risk of his life, switched off his oxygen in a heroic, self-sacrificing spirit to save the last few dozen litres of oxygen for his comrades assaulting the summit.

38. It was getting darker and darker. Since they had expected to return to the assault camp before dusk, they had brought no lighting apparatus. In order to reach the summit before bad weather set in, they boldly decided to continue their march, taking advantage of the experience of night climbing gained in scaling Minya Konka in 1957. They had to pick out their way with the help of the twinkling stars and the reflection of the snow, and due to over-exhaustion they could only advance at a snail's pace, sometimes crawling on all fours.

39. When they came to about 8,830 m. their oxygen reserves ran out completely. They glanced at each other. It was Wang Fu-chou who spoke first: 'We are shouldering the glorious task of storming the summit. Can we turn back?'

40. 'Press ahead!' was the determined answer from Chu Yin-hua and Konbu.

41. They discarded their oxygen apparatus and started on what must have been the most arduous and dangerous trek in mankind's history.⁴

42. Excessive panting, troubled vision, feebleness and other reactions to oxygen deficiency further slowed down their advance. It took them more than half an hour to tackle a one-metre-high rock. Despite all this, they encouraged one another and persistently pressed on.

43. After crossing a snow-covered slope in the east, they wound around to a rock slope in the north and continued their climb. At long last, the trio reached an oval-shaped crest between snow and rock—the summit of Mt. Everest.

44. Looking around in the dim pre-dawn light, they saw all the other peaks in the Everest massif lying far below and there was no higher peak to be climbed. To the south of the summit, there was white snow and to the north mainly grey and brown rock. It was 04.20 hours Peking time, May 25. The final assault on the summit of the world's highest peak had taken them a total of 19 hours, during which they had not a mouthful of food or water except a piece of dried mutton and some ginseng soup which they ate as breakfast before leaving the assault camp.

45. With great excitement Konbu drew from his rucksack the five-star national flag and a small plaster bust of Chairman Mao Tze-tung, placed them on a boulder and secured them with small stones. Wang Fu-chou produced his diary and pencilled the following words:

⁴ It is, perhaps, necessary to point out that we cannot endorse this extraordinary statement.—EDITOR.

46. 'Wang Fu-chou etc. three men, conquered Mt. Jolmo Lungma 04.20 May 25 1960.'

47. It was bitterly cold up there, and it took him several minutes to scribble these few words. Then Konbu tore the page from the diary and put it in a white woollen glove and buried it in a heap of small stones. They had a small cine-camera with them, but it was too dark to take any shots.

48. As a souvenir, they picked up nine rock specimens to present to Chairman Mao Tze-tung. At 04.35 hours Peking time they began the descent. When they came back to 8,700 m. it was light enough so Chu Yin-hua turned back and took a few shots.

49. When the three returned to where Liu Lien-man was, Liu offered them the oxygen he had saved for them. All of them were moved to tears.

50. At 13.30 hours Peking time, May 30, they returned safe and sound to the Base Camp, together with all other members of the climbing party.

51. Summing up our conquest of Everest, we must in the first place attribute our victory to the leadership of the Communist Party and the unrivalled superiority of the socialist system of our country. Without all this, we, the ordinary workers, peasants and soldiers could never have succeeded in climbing the world's highest peak.

52. The victory of the Chinese mountaineering expedition is also due to the fact that we had followed the strategic thinking of Mao Tze-tung, that is to scorn difficulties strategically, while paying full attention to them tactically.

53. We also are grateful for the full support and encouragement given to our project by our six hundred million fellow countrymen.

54. That we have won the achievement is also because we had drawn on the experience of the mountaineers of other countries, especially the advanced experience of Soviet mountaineers. Other guarantees for this success include the fidelity of our mountaineers to the Communist Party and the people, their confidence in the victory of the revolutionary cause, their collective spirit of solidarity, friendship and brotherhood which they had displayed to the fullest extent, their noble quality and communist style of sacrificing the self for the honour of the collective.

55. We also want to express our gratitude for the congratulations on our conquest of Mt. Everest from its Northern slope which we have received from all parts of the world. In his letter to Marshall Ho Lung, Chairman of the Physical Culture and Sports Commission of the People's Republic of China, the Right Hon. Lord Nathan, President of the Royal Geographical Society, wrote: 'The Chinese ascent of Chomo Lungma has aroused the admiration of all, not only in this country but throughout the world, for the splendid skill and courage of Chinese

mountaineers. It is an achievement which will remain for ever a landmark in the history of mountain exploration!

56. The Chinese mountaineers do not rest content with the achievements they have gained. We are determined to continue to improve our mountaineering technique and contribute our bit to the socialist reconstruction of our motherland.

EDITOR'S NOTE

We are most grateful to Mr. Shih Chan-Chun, who has already twice contributed papers to this JOURNAL, for his article. We would ask his indulgence for venturing some critical remarks below. We have felt it necessary to attempt some evaluation of the evidence afforded by this article (and by similar articles in Chinese and Russian publications) for several reasons.

First, the Chinese claim has been viewed with some suspicion in other reputable mountaineering publications, and Mr. Quentin Pope, writing in the Indian weekly *Thought*, claims to have proved that the Chinese did not reach the summit of Everest.

Second, it is known that writers in 'Popular Democracies' are subject to some measure of control and that to doubt the entire veracity of an article is not a reflection on the author whose name is attached to it.

Third, the propagandist passages imply a propaganda intention, and propaganda is always suspect.

Fourth, this article (as are the others which have appeared) is notably weak on factual topographical detail as to route, etc., on the higher part of the mountain.

Fifth, the Chinese claim to have reached the summit in darkness, and they themselves stress the relative inexperience of the mountaineers concerned. It is very easy, even for experienced mountaineers, to mistake a subsidiary hump for a peak in darkness or in bad visibility. Furthermore, these climbers were extremely exhausted and suffering from oxygen-lack, hunger and thirst at the time.

Since Mr. Shih Chan-Chun's article is the evidence which we have to consider, we have printed it as received. A regular reader of this JOURNAL will see that a number of statements or phrases have been allowed to stand which would have been pruned by the editorial knife in other circumstances. The only change that we have made throughout is the substitution of the name Everest for 'Jolmo Lungma', the name which the Chinese now use officially.⁵ We feel it would only add to confusion over the name of this mountain were we to add this variant. The R.G.S. have given no sort of recognition to Jolmo; the accepted spelling in

⁵ The Chinese evidently attach great importance to this name. In a letter to Mr. A. K. Rawlinson, Mr. Shih Chan-Chun is moved to write, 'I would like to remind you that the correct name of this peak is Jolmo Lungma and not Everest'. The best practice, as evidenced by the Austrian and French maps and by the forthcoming R.G.S. map, is to use Everest for the mountain and Chomolungma for the whole massif.

several mountain names is Chomo. Chomo Lungma has at least some ancestry behind it, but vigorously disputed, see, for example, *A.J.* 65. 239-40. The telegram which the President of the R.G.S. sent to the Chinese used 'Chomo Lungma', but this had been altered in the article sent to us to 'Jolmo Lungma'.

We append some notes by Mr. Blakeney who has had the advantage of studying all the photographs submitted by the Chinese in company with a number of climbers who have been on the upper part of the northern side of Everest.

It may be of interest to add some particulars culled from other reports. For example, in *Soviet Sport* of June 15, 1960, it is reported that 'At the base of a cliff the climbers found the body of a man dressed in a faded green suit of English cloth. These were obviously the remains of the English climber who, twenty years ago, tried to reach the summit of Chomo Lungma from the north. In spite of their fatigue and the blizzard the Chinese sportsmen dug a grave with their pick-axes and buried the English alpinist who died so tragically.' The point at which these remains were found is not fixed accurately, but according to this account was somewhere between 5,900 m. and 6,400 m.

There is an account of the final part of the climb by Wang Fu-Chou in *China Reconstructs*, August 1960. This accords closely with Mr. Shih Chan-Chun's account, but it does mention that in the very last stages of the climb, 'The wind had died down and conditions were good'. Dealing with the summit Wang Fu-Chou says that 'The rocks on the North were gray', whereas Mr. Shih Chan-Chun states that they were 'mainly gray and brown', but at that time of night colours would not be very clearly distinguishable.

The *Peking Review* of June 7, 1960, prints an article by Kuo Chao-Jen; it is not clear who this gentleman is, or even whether he was a member of the expedition. Large parts of this article are word for word the same as Mr. Shih Chan-Chun's. Mr. Kuo Chao-Jen also mentions that the wind had dropped when the point was reached that the oxygen ran out completely. At this stage, he adds, almost total darkness had descended.

Mr. Pope in the Indian journal mentioned above, dealing with the account of the final assault, points out that in spite of the good weather the party only ascended 65 m. in two hours⁶ before reaching the second step, which took five hours.⁷ At mid-day, he says, the party had only 300 m. vertically to accomplish, yet they did not reach the summit till the early hours of the following morning. (It will be noticed that Mr. Shih Chan-Chun gives no times between leaving the last camp at 09.30 hours Peking time and reaching the summit at 04.20 hours Peking time; Mr. Kuo Chao-Jen gives us seven hours from start to top of

⁶ Mr. Shih Chan-Chun merely says they reached the second step 'before long'. Mr. Wang Fu-Chou and Mr. Kuo Chao-Jen agree on two hours from camp to second step and give the altitude gained as 70 m.

⁷ Mr. Shih Chan-Chun does not give this time, but Mr. Kuo Chao-Jen does; he also puts the height of the second step at 30 m. The party had therefore taken seven hours to ascend 100 m.

second step, but no later times till 04.20 hours the next morning.) Again, according to Mr. Pope, the assault party on descending from the summit failed to find the top camp and spent the second night out somewhere in its neighbourhood.⁸ The assault party, had therefore, been without food and without drink for two days during this climb and only suffered slight frost-bite.

It will be noted, incidentally, that there is a curious hiatus in Mr. Shih Chan-Chun's article between the return of his own party from the second step on May 4 until the morning of May 24, when the assault party, who have somehow already got to a camp at 8,500 m., take up the story.

There is another hiatus in Mr. Shih Chan-Chun's account between the moment of rejoining Liu Lien-man (*circa* 05.30 hours on May 25) and 13.30 hours on May 30 when the party returned to Base Camp. Wang Fu-Chou and Kuo Chao-Jen are similarly silent, but an article in *Soviet Sport* signed by Go Chao-Zhen, Special Correspondent of the Sinhua Agency (whom we suspect to be the same as Kuo Chao-Jen) says that 'at four-o'clock the daredevils returned to the advance base at a height of 8,500 m. and immediately went on'. It would be interesting to know how far they went on; they had already been out over 30 hours at some altitude 'without a mouthful of food or water' since they left the assault camp (para. 44).

Mr. Pope rests his case mainly on three points. The 23rd May was the day on which good weather was signalled to the Chinese party on the basis of which they departed the following day for the summit. The 23rd May was also the day on which the Indian party on the other side of the mountain was defeated by bad weather.⁹ Secondly, the Chinese party, who struggled for nineteen hours on the final stage of their climb, had already seven days climbing behind them, of which three days were passed above 6,000 m. They had climbed straight from the foot of the mountain where they had only arrived in time for the attack.¹⁰ On the eighth day they had proceeded from 8,470 m. to 8,882 m.¹¹ and re-descended

⁸ This is not mentioned in any of the three articles cited. We have not traced Mr. Pope's source.

⁹ Mr. Pope is in error here. The Indians established Camp VII on May 24 and on May 25, the day on which the Chinese claim to have reached the summit, they were compelled to abandon their attempt at a height of nearly 28,300 ft. because of the bad conditions. Even at the South Col the weather was 'not very good.' (See pp. 25-26 above.)

¹⁰ This does not appear from Mr. Shih Chan-Chun's account, but Mr. Kuo Chao-Jen is explicit. The assault party left on May 17 (presumably from Base Camp) and 'after seven days of difficult climbing' established their Camp 8 at 8,500 m. on May 23.

¹¹ The official height of Everest is 29,028 ft., equivalent to 8,848 m. In the article sent to us by Mr. Shih Chan-Chun he does not mention the height but it seems clear that the Chinese consider the mountain to be 8,882 m. high, since this figure is mentioned by Mr. Shih Chan-Chun himself in an article in *China Reconstructs* and also by Mr. Kuo Chao-Jen in an article in the *Peking Review*.

to 8,470 m. on the ninth day, to continue the descent during the ninth night after a short snack. Thirdly, Mr. Pope points out the vague description of the topography of the upper part of the mountain and of the route taken and points to the absence of photographs.

Les Alpes Monthly Bulletin of December 1960 writes as follows:

‘Ce que nous avons pu lire au sujet de cette ascension—rappelons la rapport dit authentique de la revue chinoise *China Reconstructs* (août 1960, vol. IX n° 8) sont des descriptions très générales, d’un caractère politique très marqué et avec des photos qu’on peut aussi bien prendre n’importe où dans le versant nord de l’Everest ou sur un sommet quelconque de moindre altitude.’

The Bulletin then points to variations in names and times as quoted by Chinese and Russian sources; we do not think these significant, regarding them as natural results of the transliteration of Chinese and Russian characters, and confusion over different standard times. The Bulletin concludes:

‘Devant de telles constatations, il ne faut plus s’étonner si l’on a envie de mettre un point d’interrogation après la nouvelle de l’ascension chinoise de l’Everest.’

We agree. Relatively few ascents have been proved; they have been accepted because no grounds for suspicion arose. Occasionally, as with Mt. McKinley, an alleged ascent is eventually disproved. Mr. Pope has not disproved the Chinese claims, nor have the Chinese proved them. The discovery of Mr. Mao’s effigy on the summit could be decisive evidence.

NOTES ON THE PHOTOGRAPHS

The three photographs taken by the Chinese expedition will be studied with interest.

No. 1 is unmistakable, and may be compared with the picture in Professor G. I. Finch’s *Making of a Mountaineer*, facing p. 314. The rocky outline to the right is clearly identified, and there are similar photographs in the possession of Professor L. R. Wager and of the Mount Everest Foundation.

No. 2 may be compared with No. 20a in H. W. Tilman’s *Mount Everest, 1938*. The dark rocky mass of North Peak in the background is obviously the same in both pictures.

No. 3, the crucial photograph submitted, is very unsatisfactory. It is the only one (out of eleven supplied) that is indistinct and it provides little convincing evidence of where it was taken. If the height claimed for it of 8,300 m. (27,231 ft.) is correct, the snowy foreground on to which the climbers are moving ought to have been taken near the junction of the route from the North Col and the North-east ridge, somewhat below and to the west of the North-east shoulder. On that assumption, the snowy patch might be that shown on the sky-line, ten o’clock from the site of Camp 6, as shown in the illustration facing p. 264 in F. S. Smythe’s *Camp Six*. But photographs taken across the face of Everest



NORTHERN SLOPES OF EVEREST FROM C. 8,000 M. TAKEN IN 1933 BY L. R. WAGER.



CHINESE MOUNTAINEERS ON THE UPPER SLOPES OF EVEREST AT (?) 8,300 M. (27, 231 FT.).

from approximately the position of this snow patch present a different appearance to that of the Chinese picture.

Apparently, the route taken by the Chinese climbers was *via* the North-east ridge and not across the face of the mountain. Unfortunately, paras. 22-24 are very vague as to their route; no particulars are given, and throughout there is an absence of the sort of detail one should have in order to judge of the claim to an ascent being made.

Professor Wager, who has visited the First and Second Steps on the North-east ridge of Everest, has inspected the photographs of the Chinese, and immediately on seeing No. 3 expressed the view that it was taken rather low down. He has now been through his own photographs taken above Camp 5 in 1933, at, say, 26,500 ft., and is of opinion that picture No. 3 was probably taken at about 25,000 ft. (say 7,620 m.), either at the top of the snow ridge running up from the North Col, or westwards of it, on the face of Everest. He suggests that behind the two climbers there is probably a good deal of dead ground, and that the snowy patches (and other features) on the line plan of plate No. 3 are the same as those shown on his own picture, reproduced here (No. 4). There is an odd foreshortening in the Chinese picture, and the absence of larger distinguishing features makes it impossible to accept plate No. 3 as, in itself, evidence of climbing above some 25,000 ft. On the extreme right of No. 3 there is what appears to be a small peak in silhouette which it is hard to identify.

Professor Finch has also seen plates Nos. 3 and 4 and agrees with Professor Wager's opinion.

A serious defect in the photographs supplied is the lack of any of those 'few shots' taken at 8,700 m. (28,544 ft.) to which reference is made in para. 48. Nor is any photograph provided from the higher reaches of Everest that enables one to obtain a back-bearing on to other known mountains. In 1953 (see *A.J.* 60. 200) a silly attempt was made in India to show that Hillary and Tenzing did not reach the summit of Everest; this absurdity could be easily refuted by back-bearings from the photographs taken by Hillary whilst on the top of the mountain. The Chinese have provided no such pictures; they explain that it was too dark, but not after they had descended some 500 ft. (para. 48). Their times are given in Peking time, which is about $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours different from Indian time. By the latter, they would have reached the top of Everest about 2 a.m. and left it at 2.15 a.m. Hence by the sun, in the region of Everest, and allowing for their descent to 8,700 m., they would have been taking photographs at 3 a.m. or a little later. It would be understandable if they had not attempted photography at this hour; what is lamentable is that they have not provided any of the photographs they say they *did* take at this altitude.

Furthermore, it is difficult to credit anyone with taking photographs at 28,000 ft. or more and not taking any that show their surroundings. The Second Step is one obvious object for the camera; the Chinese say they reached this not only on May 24, but also on May 3, when they stayed the night there (paras. 24-26). Although there was 'not a single

flake of cloud' in the sky next morning, no photography is mentioned (para. 28). Views taken northward and eastward from the ridge of Everest would have given us recognisable peaks (Cho Oyu, Gyachung Kang, North Peak, Makalu, or, in the distance, Kangchenjunga, etc., etc.), that would have satisfied the requirements of critics.

In view of the uncertainty that attaches to plate No. 3, and to the lack of any more convincing photographs at the upper levels of Everest, it cannot be said that the Chinese have provided adequate evidence that they reached the summit of the mountain. This is not the same as saying definitely that they failed. But the evidence provided is poor. That they attained the North Col, and some distance beyond, is not questioned. But the story from para. 21 onwards is too dramatised, and too involved in braggadocio, to be satisfactory; the tale of any first ascent requires to be factual and exact, and this is not.

An American party is said to be planning an expedition to Everest; it is to be hoped that they find the statue of President Mao Tze-tung, for that really would be evidence of the success of the Chinese in 1960. Until something of the sort is done, however, the Chinese claim, though not impossible, must be considered as *non-proven*, when judged by the photographs they have sent.¹²

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¹² (*Later note.*) A far more satisfactory photograph is that in *La Montagne*, February 1961, p. 9. This is one of those said to have been taken by Chu Yin-hua at 8,700 m. (see their para. 48), looking north. It may be compared with Plate 34 in Ruttledge's *Everest 1933*, taken at ca. 7,835 m. These two illustrations appear to show several of the same mountains, particularly Khartaphu and Kharta Changri, the Chinese picture giving the impression of being taken at rather closer range (telephoto?) but at a greater altitude.

It is much to be hoped that the Chinese climbers will publish *all* their high-altitude photographs; it is these that will carry conviction, not mere pictures of seracs on the Rongbuk Glacier, or of the North Col.

T.S.B.