

AMERICANS ON EVEREST, 1963<sup>1</sup>

BY NORMAN G. DYHRENFURTH

*(Eight illustrations: nos. 1-8)*

IN November of 1952, a few hundred feet above the South Col, the second Swiss attempt had to be abandoned. I remember our retreat clearly. Everest had been a terrible antagonist, but I knew then that I would have to return. Other expeditions followed: to Lhotse in 1955; an inconclusive Yeti search in 1958, and to Dhaulagiri with the Swiss in 1960. Permission for an American expedition to Everest in 1961 did not come through, and the next year had been reserved for an Indian team. I re-applied for 1963, and finally on May 10, 1961, permission was granted.

Contrary to the popular beliefs that ours was the biggest and wealthiest expedition ever to set sail for the Himalaya and that American mountaineers can get all the financial backing simply by making a few telephone calls, it took two and a half years of full-time, all-out effort on my part to secure the necessary support of more than three hundred sponsors. It was a foregone conclusion, based on the frustrating experiences of all previous American expeditions, that it would be utterly hopeless to achieve my original budgetary goal of \$180,000 for pure mountaineering. Deputy leader William E. Siri and I decided as far back as the fall of 1960 to develop a scientific programme which could be carried out by the men who were to go high on the mountain, rather than by a separate group of scientists. What eventually evolved were studies designed to investigate certain fundamental problems in glacio-physics, human behaviour, and biology. In formulating the research programme, care was taken to ensure compatibility of research procedures with expedition operations and the limitations imposed by time and field conditions.

The news media spoke of our final budget as being in excess of \$400,000, but the greater part of that decidedly frightening amount went for scientific equipment, salaries of the scientists for the duration of the research grants, production costs of a documentary film for television and motion picture theatres, organisational, administrative and fund-raising expenses, etc. etc. The figure also included more than \$70,000 worth of equipment and food presented by generous suppliers to the expedition.

In May of 1961 I received a letter from Lt.-Col. James O. M. Roberts in Kathmandu, offering his services as transport and administrative

<sup>1</sup> Certain portions of this article are also appearing in the *American Alpine Journal*, 1964. British mountaineers will wish to express their admiration of the expedition's extraordinary achievements.—EDITOR.



officer. Although we had met only briefly before, I was well aware of his outstanding record in Himalayan mountaineering and accepted his offer with alacrity. His contribution to the ultimate success of our venture was perhaps greater than anybody else's.

The final team was composed of nineteen Americans, one Britisher and one Nepalese liaison officer. As climbing expeditions go, it was a large one, but I firmly believed that a major objective called for a major effort.

The Advance Guard reached Kathmandu early in February, after having fought and won the traditional battle with Indian and Nepalese Customs to get some twenty-seven tons of food and equipment into the country. We were joined there by the main body on February 13. Headquarters in Kathmandu was the Hotel Royal where Boris made its northern compound available for the staggering array of our gear. Here we were joined by thirty-two of our Sherpas who had been carefully selected by Jimmy Roberts and myself.

Then came February 20—the date set more than two years before for the beginning of the trek to Everest. On the 19th, Jimmy Roberts had gone off by truck to Banepa with most of the Sherpas and all the loads, and the rest of us followed on the morning of the 20th. Our army of porters was there—Tamangs from the Kathmandu valley and Sherpas from Solu Khumbu—and for almost three hours they filed past in endless procession, while their loads and identification tags were assigned to them. Thanks to the organisational genius of Jimmy Roberts we left in good order and on time.

The final figure was 909 porter-loads, each weighing an average of 62 lb. In single file, bent under their loads and head-straps, A.M.E.E.'s army moved out of the field at Banepa onto the trail beyond. At last we were on our way.

The approach to Everest from Kathmandu is well-known and has been described in numerous accounts. After a march which was not without incident, we reached Namche Bazar on March 7. Here the scantily-clad Tamangs were paid off and replaced by Solu Khumbu porters. On the 9th we reached the lamasery of Thyangboche in the midst of a heavy snowstorm. While the porters were sent back to their villages with instructions to return on the evening of March 14, climbers and Sherpas spent their time sorting out equipment, as well as in hikes and climbs in the cause of acclimatisation. I was happy to renew my acquaintance with the reincarnate High Lama who graciously invited all of us to dinner. We reciprocated with donations to the lamasery, and, when His Holiness developed an unbearable toothache, Drs. Gil Roberts and Dave Dingman came to the rescue and pulled the worst of five badly infected teeth. They didn't dare pull all of them for fear of some lamaistic 'dorje', or thunderbolt.



The weather began to improve, and on March 15 we were ready to move on. The night of the 16th was spent at Pheriche, and Lobuje (16,175 ft.) was reached on the afternoon of the following day. All the porters—around 500—were sent back to Thyangboche, where Jimmy Roberts and our excellent liaison officer Capt. Prabakher Shumshere Jung Bahadur Rana (whose somewhat simpler nickname 'Noddy' dates back to Jimmy's 1960 Annapurna II expedition) had stayed behind with the remaining loads.

On March 18 some of us tried to break trail as far as Base Camp, but due to adverse snow conditions we called a halt at Gorak Shep, the old Swiss Lake Camp. Based on my previous post-monsoon experience I had planned to move from Lobuje to Base Camp in one day, but at this early date the amount of snow was prohibitive. An intermediate camp would have to be established at Gorak Shep.

Jimmy arrived on the 19th with some 300 porters and most of the remaining gear, but a number of porters did not cherish the thought of carrying through two feet of snow and refused to go beyond Thyangboche. Thirty-eight loads had to be left behind, and Tashi—our oldest Sherpa—was sent back to round up porters and bring up the rest. Of the 300 men and women who had come up with Jimmy, only 170 were willing to stay at Lobuje. There was nothing to do but to ferry loads from Lobuje to Base Camp, with an intermediate camp at Gorak Shep.

On the morning of the 20th a major portion of A.M.E.E.'s forces moved up to Gorak Shep, and on March 21 some of us established and occupied Base Camp at 17,800 ft., closer to the Khumbu Icefall than any expedition had ever camped before. It was also the earliest date ever, based on recommendations by Lionel Terray and Albert Eggler. It was then that I lost my bout with laryngitis, and my voice was reduced to a whisper throughout the build-up and assault phases on the mountain. Although transportation problems were greatly increased by the heavy winter snows, thanks to the talents of Jimmy Roberts and his way with the Sherpas no serious bottle-necks ever developed in ferrying all our loads to the base of the mountain. This did put us a few days ahead of our original schedule.

When application was made to the Nepalese Government, I had asked for permission to attempt not only Everest, but Lhotse and Nuptse as well. During my lonely crusade in search of finances, the thought of a three-way assault was not without merit. But then there was the West Ridge, one of the great remaining challenges of the mountain. Some of us had studied it with more than casual interest in 1952 and 1955, and more than one of the Swiss Everesters of '56 assured me that a reconnaissance of the West Shoulder had been considered as part of their programme. There was even some talk of a Swiss-German-Austrian group wanting to attempt the West Ridge in 1963. Jimmy Roberts

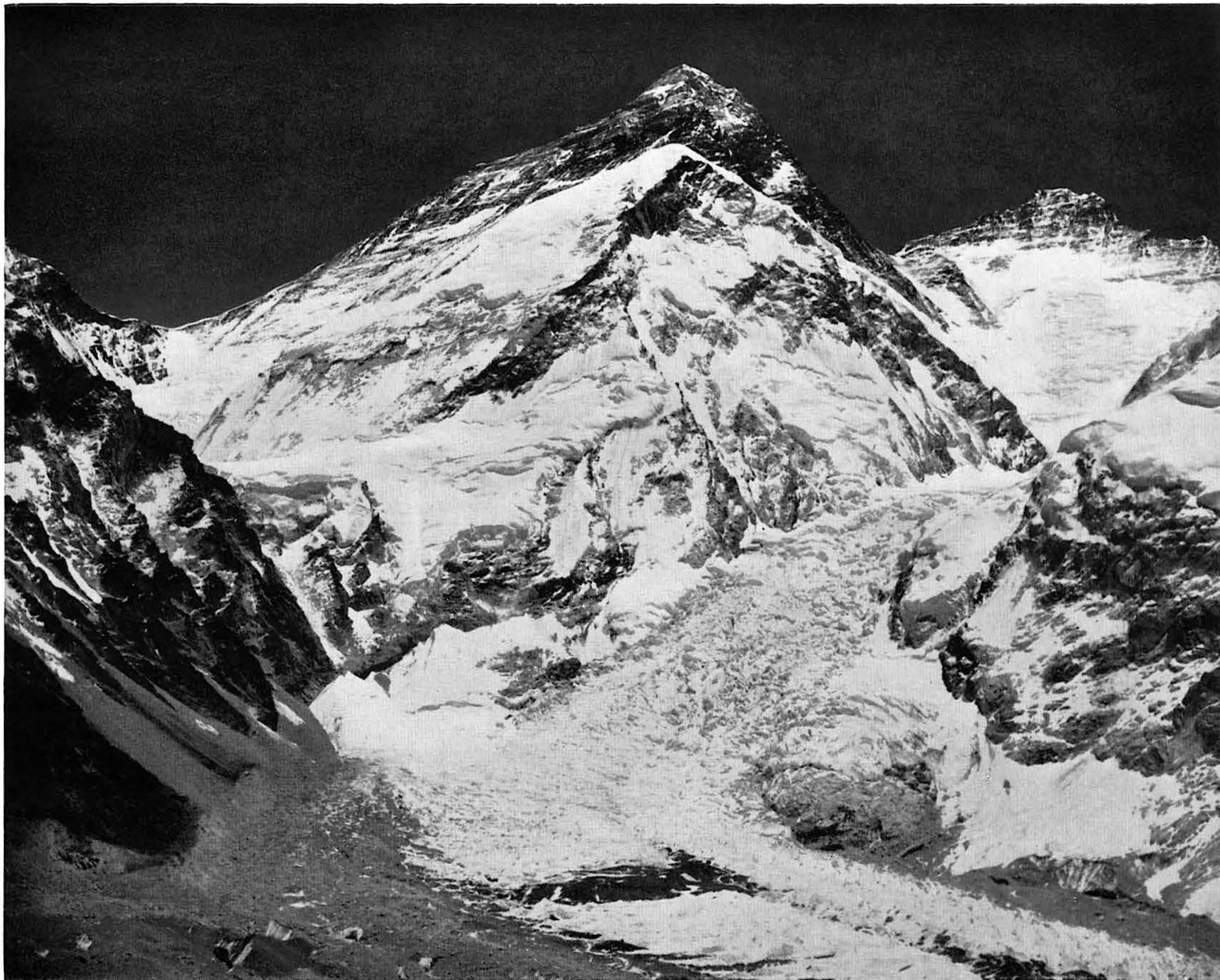


wrote me on August 1, 1962: '... By the way, the West Ridge gives rise to interesting thoughts—it would take one close to the old pre-war North face route....'

During our pre-expedition training session on Mount Rainier, I brought up the subject of the West Ridge and discovered that there were others who had given the matter some thought. We agreed on a reconnaissance of the West Shoulder but decided not to discuss our plans with anybody, at least not for the time being. The final decision was made during the approach march, while we were camped at Chaubas. It came as a result of a group discussion which I recorded in my diary in some detail: '... Now that we have no more 'camp followers', we talked very frankly about the thing that had been on the minds of all the climbers: the West Ridge, which, if we can pull it off, would be one of the biggest things in Himalayan mountaineering. It was interesting to see how highly motivated the whole group was. There was comparatively little interest in Lhotse and Nuptse although I had explained to them that initially, when we were trying to raise funds, the idea of an American 'Grand Slam' of three peaks had its appeal. But to most of the men that meant very little. In fact, Tom Hornbein, who is such an idealist and so enthusiastic about the idea, declared himself in favour of throwing everything into the West Ridge attempt, even if it meant jeopardising success altogether. At this point I had to speak up strongly. I told them that I was in favour of making a serious stab at the West Ridge, or at least a thorough reconnaissance. If it proved feasible, we would push up a line of camps, but at the same time we would build up the South Col route. We might possibly make the main attempt over the West Ridge, but as a back-up we would have a four-man assault with support team from the South Col, so that we can be sure—or as sure as one can be—of success on a mountain such as Everest. If the West Ridge proves impossible, we will at least have taken some good pictures of the Tibetan side of Everest from an entirely new point of view. But if the ridge is possible, we could attempt a traverse by having some men go up from the West and come down toward the South Col, and two—or perhaps four—do the same in reverse. That of course would be almost too much to hope for. In any case it was agreed that we should certainly make a stab at Lhotse as well, oxygen and other logistics permitting....'

On March 22, Willi Unsoeld, Jim Whittaker, Lute Jerstad, Nawang Gombu and two Solu Khumbu men entered the Icefall and in a tough but rewarding day's work forced a passage better than half way to the top before returning to Base for the night. They hacked steps, placed fixed ropes and marked the route with willow wands. The next day a second team went up to improve and continue the route. This consisted of Jake Breitenbach, Dick Pownall, Dr. Gil Roberts and the Sherpas Ang Pema and Ila Tsering. At about 2 p.m. they found themselves at a





*Photo: N. Dyhrenfurth, A.M.E.E.]*

EVEREST FROM 20,000 FT. ON PUMORI. THE PHOTOGRAPH SHOWS THE ROUTE FROM THE NORTH COL, THE WEST RIDGE ROUTE AND THE KHUMBU GLACIER ROUTE AS FAR AS THE SOUTH COL.

(No. 1)





*Photo: R. Pownall, A.M.E.E.]*

SHERPAS IN THE KHUMBU ICE-FALL

(No.2)



steep wall of ice, some thirty feet high, to which the first party had attached a rope. This was near the future site of a supply dump, in the general area of the former Swiss and British Camp II. Pownall, Ang Pema and Breitenbach were on one rope, with Roberts and Ila Tsering on another. 'I climbed an ice rib,' Dick Pownall reported, 'which parallels the ice cliff and is separated from it by some eight feet. I called down to Jake to ask Gil—who was in a better position to see—if there was a way around this spot; it looked spooky. There was no other way, so we proceeded, and I asked Jake to untie the end of the fixed line so I could use some slack and ice-screws to secure it better to the cliff. Just then there was a noise, and everything under, around and above started moving. Since we had been climbing over similar terrain all day without the slightest movement, my first impression was shocked disbelief. My next was movement and the thought "so this is death".'

A huge section of the wall collapsed, burying Jake Breitenbach under tons of ice. Death was instantaneous. Recovery of the body was attempted, but proved impossible. Neither Gil Roberts nor Ila Tsering were hurt. Dick Pownall suffered minor injuries, while Ang Pema, with deep facial lacerations and a mild concussion, had to be carried down to Base Camp by a hurriedly dispatched rescue team. Thanks to the competence of our physicians he was soon patched together and well on his way to recovery.

Sudden and violent tragedy had struck. During the next two days, while we were trying to find our way back to life and purpose, there was no movement of men in the Icefall. The 25th was spent passing out clothing and equipment, and by the end of the day we were again a team instead of a group of lonely and severely shaken individuals. We had lost a close friend and an outstanding mountaineer but, as deaths go, Jake Breitenbach's was a clean-cut, kindly one.

Based on experiences gained in 1952 and 1955, I had been determined not to have a regular camp in the Icefall, and now I was more so than ever. But as in 1955, it became necessary to place a supply dump at about 19,200 ft., better than half way to the top. This was done on the 26th by Corbet, Dingman, Bishop, Auten and twelve Sherpas. They improved the route, placed fixed ropes, built wooden bridges across the largest crevasses and put up a small tent at the Dump for emergency use only.

The breakthrough to the top of the Icefall and Camp I (20,200 ft.) was accomplished on March 28 by Willi Unsoeld, Big Jim Whittaker, Lute Jerstad and Nawang Gombu. The final obstacle was a 70-ft. vertical ice-wall which ran clear across the glacier. Three hours of hard work with ice-screws, rope-pulleys and Jumar ascenders put them on top where they had their first look into the Western Cwm. Gombu confessed to me later that he had never seen such climbing before. By comparison



his work as instructor at the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute in Darjeeling seemed like child's play. He didn't know this kind of climbing existed.

Once the 70-ft. wall had been tamed and made easy for heavy load-carrying by the use of several sections of aluminum ladder, fixed ropes, bucket steps and the tunnelling of the uppermost portion, we were ready to establish Advance Base (Camp II) at 21,350 ft. On March 31 Big Jim, upon arrival at the camp site, reported via radio, 'If there should be a good moon tonight, I may decide to take a stroll up to the South Col!' In more serious vein he thought that the approaches to the West Ridge were subject to some avalanche danger, but that the difficulties were by no means insurmountable. That evening I wrote in my diary: 'If our health continues to improve, and if the weather stays good, we may climb Everest by *May 1st*!'

The time had come to hold a 'summit meeting' at Advance Base. Leaving Base Camp with my old friend Ang Dawa IV on April 1 and filming some exciting scenes along the way, we spent one night at the Dump and the next at Camp I. When I reached Advance Base on April 3, the warm welcome given to me by our reconnaissance group was most gratifying. They had begun to feel cut off from the expedition's main body. Eight men were up here, and the rest at Base Camp. Eighteen Sherpas were stationed at Camp I and comprised the 'upper ferry', while the balance of the Sherpa team—reinforced by twelve 'special' Icefall porters, who for the time being slept at Base Camp—worked at lower altitudes.

Long before we reached Base Camp each man was assigned according to his personal preference: on the West Ridge Willi Unsoeld would be in charge of operations, with Tom Hornbein, Barry Corbet, Jake Breitenbach, Dick Emerson, Dave Dingman and Barry Bishop in his team. Now with Jake gone they were in need of someone to take his place. I planned to be in charge of the South Col operation, with Will Siri, Jim Whittaker, Lute Jerstad, Dick Pownall and Gil Roberts in the team. The remainder of the group would act in support on either route.

A first reconnaissance of the approaches to the West Ridge had carried the men about halfway between Advance Base (21,350 ft.) and the shoulder (24,000 ft.). As yet no one had seen the ridge head on, and there was general agreement that another reconnaissance in force was needed to determine whether (a) there was a feasible route, and (b) there were possible sites for at least three, and preferably four, camps between 23,800 and 28,000 ft. Only then would we be in a position to determine our ultimate course of action.

Concurrently with the West Ridge probes the South Col route was reconnoitred and advanced: Camp III on the first terrace of the Lhotse Face, at 22,900 ft., and Camp IV was to be as close to 25,000 ft. as possible.



During the next few days some time was lost in trying to follow the route taken by the Indian expedition of 1960, with Nawang Gombu, a member of that group, pointing out the way. The changes which had taken place since then were such that our men found the old Indian route impractical and eventually chose a line of ascent which closely followed our route in 1955.

Satisfied with progress made thus far, I returned to Base Camp on April 5. A number of changes had occurred in the Icefall, but Annullu and his 'road gang'—he had volunteered for the dangerous and important job of keeping the Icefall open—were busily hacking away threatening séracs and rebuilding collapsed bridges.

A major problem was to keep up with the advance parties, and to speed up the carries through the Icefall. According to Tom Hornbein's figures, four oxygen bottles weighed 52 lb. and should thus constitute a reasonable load, while some of the Sherpas maintained that this was too much. An accurate check disclosed that four cylinders actually weighed 56 lb., but after some initial grumbling most of the men carried that much and more. It is true that some of the Americans carried up to 75 lb. at times, but this was not done on a constant, day-by-day basis as in the case of the Sherpas.

Al Auten, our communications officer, was relieved of his duties by Barry Prather and moved up on April 6. I asked Jimmy Roberts to occupy Camp I on the 7th to expedite matters there. Will Siri—who by now had completed his physiology programme at Base Camp—went up on the 8th, and Dick Emerson, Jim Lester, Ang Dawa and I followed on the 9th.

In the afternoon of April 13 Willi Unsoeld, Tom Hornbein, Dave Dingman and Barry Bishop returned to Advance Base from their second reconnaissance of the West Ridge. They were tired, but Dave appeared to be utterly exhausted. They had reached the rocky summit pyramid of Everest at 25,100 ft. Although convinced that there was a route, even the most optimistic amongst them spoke of serious logistical problems and an apparent lack of suitable camp sites. Dave didn't like the route and asked to be reassigned to the South Col team. Barry Bishop had certain misgivings about the chances for success on the West Ridge. As professional photographer and staff member of the National Geographic Society, A.M.E.E.'s largest single sponsor, he knew he was expected to reach the top. With Willi Unsoeld and Tom Hornbein as the number one assault team, his own opportunities for a crack at the top were rather slim. When he too asked to be reassigned to the South Col route, it became obvious that the West Ridge attempt would have to be postponed, at least for the time being.

On April 14, Lute Jerstad, Dick Pownall and seven Sherpas moved up to Camp III, while Jim Whittaker, Gombu and two Sherpas succeeded



in establishing Camp IV at 24,900 ft. They came all the way down to Advance Base, tired, but very happy. Now all that remained to be done was to string fixed ropes across the Lhotse Couloir and the Yellow Band, and the route to the South Col would be open.

As a result of a series of planning sessions, we decided to continue the West Ridge build-up on a limited scale, while the bulk of man-power and supplies was directed at the Col. There was much gloom in the West Ridge camp, and my chances of winning any popularity contest were rather slim. They were dedicated mountaineers, not glory seekers, and they stuck to their guns, even when given the chance to switch over to the 'conventional' route. 'Surely mountaineering is more than a matter of summits,' wrote Willi Unsoeld in his diary, 'even when the summit is that of Everest.' For me, who had spent all these years in mounting the expedition, the situation was somewhat different. Mine was the overall responsibility for the success of the venture, and much as I would have liked to gamble on the more challenging West Ridge route I considered it safer to give preference to the South Col effort at this time and made the final decision accordingly.

There were to be two teams of four men each: the first assault group would consist of Big Jim Whittaker, Nawang Gombu (from Darjeeling), Barry Bishop and his Sherpa, Girmi Dorje (from Solu Khumbu). The second team of Lute Jerstad, Dick Pownall, Ang Dawa and myself would move up one day behind the others in support and make its summit bid after the first team's attempt. It had been my hope to go as far as the South Col, but now, in view of the sad fact that Dan Deedy, the only other professional film-maker, was unable to acclimatise even to the altitude of Advance Base, Willi Unsoeld and others convinced me that I should at least *try* to carry a movie camera to the top. Our four-man team was in turn to be supported by Will Siri, Dave Dingman and two Sherpas. Those were our plans on April 14.

The next day Lute Jerstad, Dick Pownall, Chotari and Nima Tenzing (Thami) occupied Camp IV, while Barry Bishop, Dave Dingman and Dick Emerson (who had much difficulty with the altitude) went down to Base Camp for some much-needed R and R (Rest and Recreation).

On the morning of the 16th the men at Camp IV moved across the Lhotse Couloir toward the Yellow Band. There they encountered some difficulties due to icy conditions, but then they had passed the rocks and continued up through the steep bowl toward the crest of the Geneva Spur. Although their assigned task was to prepare the route across the Yellow Band with fixed ropes and return, ambition got the best of them, and they continued. All of us at Advance Base watched with mounting excitement until the Geneva Spur hid them from view. Quite late in the afternoon they reappeared on their way down, and the following message was transmitted via Base Camp radio: 'At 3.30 p.m. on April 16



Luther Jerstad, Richard Pownall, and the Sherpas Nima Tenzing and Chotari reached the South Col at 26,200 ft. This is the earliest time of year that the Col has been attained. The next ten to twelve days will be spent in carrying food, oxygen, tents and gear to Camp V on the Col before Camp VI is established at 27,800 ft., preliminary to the first summit attempt. At the same time preparations are under way for the assault on the West Ridge.'

During the build-up phase on the South Col route, the West Ridge team was by no means idle. While Barry Corbet and Al Auten occupied Camp 3-W (W = West), placed at 23,800 ft. just below the crest of the ridge, they installed a light but powerful motor-driven winch, capable of lifting a load of 500 lb. To install and anchor it was one thing, but to make it run was quite another, and it took many days of herculean and frustrating effort before the first ski-toboggan load of oxygen cylinders moved up from a supply dump below to Camp 3-W in a series of agonisingly slow, spasmodic jerks. It had been our hope that this winch might save many man-days of carrying, but in the long run our 'secret weapon', as some newspapers chose to call it, was a very limited success.

The weather, which had hitherto been unusually good, now began to slow down the South Col operation to such an extent that there was serious danger of physical and mental deterioration of all climbers. April 21 brought near-tragedy: Dan Deedy complained of severe pain in one leg which was quickly diagnosed by Gil Roberts as thrombophlebitis. Anti-coagulants, some blood-letting, and ten days flat on his back saved Dan's life and enabled him to descend to Base Camp under his own power; but it was now out of the question that he might be able to accompany one of the assault teams to the summit.

It snowed hard during April 25 and 26, and all activity on the Lhotse Face and beyond came to a halt. Much new snow presented considerable avalanche danger. We discussed the problems of deterioration and the general feeling of low morale. Eventually I decided to hang on for another day. If the weather showed no signs of improvement, we would all go down.

But the morning of the 27th was clear. High on the Lhotse Face the carrying teams were on the move again. Camp V on the South Col would soon be stocked. The first summit team left Advance Base for Camp III. The second group followed the next day. At the last minute Barry Bishop and I changed places, since it was Willi Unsoeld's well-known persuasiveness that had convinced me of the importance to the future American Mount Everest Foundation—in terms of income from the motion picture—that the first summit assault be recorded on film.

We spent that night at Camp III, with Big Jim, Gombu, Ang Dawa and myself sharing a four-man tent. For the first time we used oxygen



for sleeping, one bottle for two men at a flow-rate of one litre per minute. This involved the use of T-joints and special plastic sleeping masks, but they turned out to be very uncomfortable and rapidly filled up with saliva. I had to empty mine at least five times during the night, and the others fared little better. Although this system had the advantage of using only half a litre of oxygen per minute per man, we decided to use Tom Hornbein's specially developed breathing mask from here on. This made for better sleeping, but was far less economical of oxygen.

On April 28 we moved up to Camp IV, accompanied by twelve heavily-laden Sherpas. The four of us went on oxygen, and the 2,000 ft. climb—frequently interrupted by movie-making—was strenuous but not too exhausting. That evening my regulator developed a leak, with most of the precious gas escaping before it reached the storage bladder. Ang Dawa immediately offered to exchange regulators with me, after I had tried unsuccessfully—in view of my continuing laryngitis and total absence of voice I used Gombu as intermediary—to persuade one of the eight Sherpas who would make the final carry to Camp VI to give up his.

As a result of my filming the departure from Camp IV, Ang Dawa, Pasang Temba and I were unable to catch up with the others. The weather deteriorated rapidly, and the long grind up the steep snow-slopes and the traverse toward the Geneva Spur seemed endless and thoroughly exhausting. The route did not lead over the top, but cut across the ridge and from there almost horizontally onto the South Col. It was snowing and blowing hard, and every few minutes we had to stop to clean our goggles. Then three Sherpas appeared through the storm, on their way down after having dumped their loads on the Col. Since Pasang Temba was meant to descend with them, Ang Dawa and I distributed his load between us and continued with dogged determination. But with more than 70 lb. on my back I soon realised that I would never make it. Fortunately Big Jim and Gombu were aware of our situation, and they dispatched two men to take some of the weight off our backs. By the time we reached 'the world's most desolate spot', I was staggering from fatigue in spite of the oxygen. The three four-man tents were buffeted by strong winds, and the South Col looked just as inhospitable as I had always imagined it to be. Gombu was the only one with enough energy and drive left to come out of the tent and help me take off my crampons and unrope.

The night was cold and windy, but thanks to sleeping pills and oxygen we rested fairly comfortably. The oxygen consumption was a cause of grave concern to me. Because of our inability to tolerate the so-called 'sleeping-mask', twice the allotted amount was used. Then there was the leaky regulator which more than doubled Ang Dawa's needs, and upon arrival on the Col we all remained on oxygen



at a one-litre flow while resting, in order to conserve our strength for the struggle ahead.

The morning of April 30 was extremely windy, but we were able to see the South Summit of Everest with a huge plume of snow. The Sherpas were eager to get started. Big Jim and Gombu were next to leave, while Ang Dawa and I stayed behind to film their departure. Again I wrestled with the faulty regulator, replaced some parts, tightened every screw, but to no avail. By the time we were roped up and ready to leave, the eight Sherpas were out of sight, and Big Jim and Gombu were nothing but tiny dots.

We started off, and I felt good. For the first time since leaving Advance Base did I feel reasonably certain that I would be able to reach the highest camp. In the past I had always entertained doubts whether I could get to the South Col, and here I was at the head of a rope, making fairly good time and actually gaining some on the others. As we approached the steep couloir, I felt a tug on the rope and discovered that Ang Dawa's breathing bag was deflated. This meant that half of his oxygen supply was gone. I cramponed down to him, changed bottles and threw away the empty. This reduced his load by 14 lb., but we were greatly concerned about the continued infernal hiss of escaping oxygen.

The Sherpas waited among the rocks to the left of the couloir until Big Jim took over the lead. By the time we reached that point I began to tire, but on we went, belaying carefully across the couloir, and up over rotten rock covered with loose snow to the crest of the South-east ridge. Above, we could see the men putting up two small tents, but at our slow pace it took us hours to get there. We passed the ruins of the highest Indian camps, and some fifty feet below our camp we came upon the skeletal remains of the tent where Lambert and Tenzing spent that memorable night in May of 1952.

The eight Sherpas passed us on their way down, but to my horror seven of them were still going on oxygen. Plans called for the eight partially consumed bottles to be left at Camp VI, but all of Big Jim's and Gombu's pleading was in vain. At last Dawa Tenzing relented and turned over his set, so that Ang Dawa would at last have a good one.

It had taken ten men nearly two hours of hard work to carve a semi-level platform out of the mountain-side and pitch two connecting two-man tents. I estimated our altitude to be no more than 27,450 ft., about 400 ft. lower than I had hoped for. But with the Sherpas half-way down to the Col, and the camp well-established, there was nothing to be done about it. Gombu assured us that ours was higher than the Indian camps, and the other Sherpas told Big Jim that this was the highest Sherpa carry ever made on Everest. Jim had no way of knowing at the time, but we were several hundred feet lower than Hillary and Tenzing's final camp.



The night was quite comfortable, but on the morning of May 1 there was a gigantic plume of snow directly above us, with Lhotse and Nuptse barely visible. Makalu was completely blotted out. After a quick breakfast—a cup of hot Jello per man—Big Jim and Gombu were on their way by 6.30. I told them: ‘Don’t wait for us, we’ll come along and see how high we can get. If the weather improves, we hope to reach the South Summit and film you guys on the final ridge.’ I had no illusion about making the summit. My forty-fifth birthday was only six days off, my pack with two oxygen bottles, two still cameras, a professional movie camera, extra clothing and film weighed around 55 lb., while Ang Dawa carried at least that much. We roped up and began to follow the fast-fading tracks of Big Jim and Gombu. The wind blew so hard that they were soon filled with snow, and I had to break trail all over again. We moved very slowly, with the regulators set at the maximum rate of four litres per minute. The packs seemed terribly heavy, and the goggles filled up every few minutes with drifting snow. There was rotten rock under a foot of loose snow, with little or no chance for adequate belaying. After a traverse toward the left around steep rock ledges and a snow couloir we gained the ridge where the summit team’s tracks were again visible. As we followed the ridge we saw no more than a few feet ahead of us, and I was uncomfortably aware of the fact that my right hand with the ice-axe was inside Tibet, with a near-vertical drop of more than 10,000 ft. to the Kangshung glacier. From time to time we looked over our shoulders at Lhotse, barely visible through the driving snow. We were just about even with its summit, then we were above it. On we went, following the faint tracks into nothingness. It was tough going, with three to four breaths for every step. I started counting steps, with a prolonged rest after every twenty, then after every ten. Suddenly there was a tug on the rope. Ang Dawa’s breathing bag was empty, and he seemed to be in trouble. I cramponed down to him to discover that his first cylinder was used up. After changing bottles and discarding the empty one, we continued to climb. At a point where the ridge levels off before rising sharply toward the South Summit, half of my oxygen supply was gone, and Ang Dawa helped me change cylinders. I explained to him that this was the end of the line for us, but when I got ready to go down, he looked at me uncomprehendingly: ‘Up go, Bara Sah’b?’ said Ang Dawa, pointing. But I shook my head: ‘This is the point of no return. If we go on, we will have oxygen until we’re about half way between the South Summit and the Main Summit. Then we will run out of air, and we will never get down alive.’ I explained that the heavy movie equipment which we had carried to this point (28,200 ft.) was absolutely useless, since we couldn’t see anything. At last Ang Dawa saw my point of view, and after a very slow and careful descent we reached Camp VI around 1.30, completely done in. All the way down, while hanging on for dear



life in that terrifying storm, I kept worrying about our summit team. It seemed utterly impossible that the summit could be reached.

And yet, at the very time when Ang Dawa and I decided to turn back, Big Jim and Gombu kicked steps up the steepest portion of the ridge. They each had deposited one partially-used oxygen bottle at about 28,400 ft. to lighten their loads, confident that one full bottle per man would get them to the summit and back again. With Big Jim doing the leading, they reached the South Summit at 11.30. At this point they were hit by the full force of the storm, and there was some doubt in the big man's mind as to whether to go on. Although he had studied the previous photographs of that final ridge, now that he came face to face with it, it looked much steeper and more difficult than anticipated.

After a few minutes' hesitation and soul-searching, Big Jim and Gombu dropped down some thirty feet to the saddle between the two summits and began climbing up the final ridge. They worked their way up carefully between the immense snow cornices which overhang the Kangshung face on the right, and the rocks on the left. Struggling on through the gale, they reached 'Hillary's chimney' and encountered no difficulties. Soon they were above it, and what followed was a series of humps in the snowy ridge. And then, as Big Jim approached what appeared to be the final dome, he stopped and waited for Gombu to come up to him: 'You first, Gombu,' 'No, you go first,' was the small man's reply. Then Jim said 'Let's go together,' and side by side they walked the last five feet. Beyond, everything fell away. They hugged each other, fighting to maintain their balance on the storm-swept summit of the world. It was 1 p.m., almost seven hours after they had left Camp VI.

At the very top Big Jim drove in a four-foot aluminum stake to which he had secured an American flag. And then they took pictures of each other holding various smaller flags. Toward the west and the plains of Tibet in the north the view was clear, but to the south and east everything was obscured by the mountain's vast snow plume. After Gombu tied a *kata*, the traditional Buddhist friendship scarf, to the stake, the men began their descent. They were shocked to discover that their oxygen tanks were empty! At a maximum flow of four litres per minute, a full bottle is supposed to last almost four hours. But due to the cold and the reduced pressure at this great altitude, their estimate had been faulty. Only two hours after they had dumped the other cylinders below the South Summit, they had run out of oxygen! During their grim battle to the top, they failed to keep an eye on the pressure gauges. The problems of the mountain and the basic fight for survival demanded their fullest attention without having to think about flow-rates and reduced oxygen rations. The realisation of their predicament hit them with full force.

Gasping for breath, they discarded the empty tanks and continued



their slow and cautious descent, with Gombu in the lead. All of a sudden a big chunk of cornice dissolved between the two men and dropped toward the Kangshung glacier some 12,000 ft. below. Some of their crampon tracks had disappeared, and Big Jim found himself staring at Tibet between his feet! He gave a tug on the rope to point out the gaping hole to Gombu, and both men looked at the corniced ridge with renewed respect and moved closer to the rocks on their right.

When they reached the lowest point in the ridge, Jim found it necessary to heed what would appear to be the highest call of nature in mountaineering history. While the big man fought his private battle with pack and layers of clothing, the small man clawed his way to the top of the South Summit. It took Jim fifteen minutes to get back into harness, and by the time he reached the steepest portion of the 30-ft. climb, the steps had all but disappeared. Greatly weakened by his recent effort, he suddenly lost his footing and found himself hanging from the rope upside down, with the pack pulling him backwards. He shouted, but in the howling wind Gombu could not hear him. Instead he kept pulling on the rope with all his might, making it that much harder for Jim to get back on his feet. After a tremendous, desperate effort he was once again right side up and proceeded to kick steps up the steep incline at the rate of five minutes per step. This was perhaps the worst part of the climb, and for the first time that day Jim began to doubt that they would get down alive.

After what seemed like hours Big Jim reached the top of the rise and flopped down in the snow, gasping for air and trying to gather his strength. Gombu too was close to the end by then. It had taken them almost three hours from the summit to get this far, and the lack of oxygen had taken its toll. But somehow the instinct for survival saw them through the ordeal of getting down the steep ridge, climbing one at a time and belaying each other carefully. Every fifteen feet they had to stop and gasp for more air. At last they reached their oxygen bottles, and soon they were sucking in the breath of life at its fullest flow. They had been without liquids the whole day, for their canteens had frozen solidly half an hour out of camp. Their bodies were drained by dehydration and oxygen-starvation. Clouds were building up over the South-east Ridge, and the wind was still blowing hard. They continued to belay each other down the ridge, got off the steep section and kept on going. It was only then that Big Jim began to believe that they might make it back to Camp VI.

In the meantime Ang Dawa and I had recovered somewhat and prepared food and drink for the summit team. We tried to keep warm, breathed oxygen at a one-litre flow, and waited. It was terribly windy, and the ridge above us was barely visible. Then it was five o'clock, and still no sign of our friends. At last, at about 5.30, small snow-slides and rocks began to hit the tents. We could see the two men coming down,



very slowly and carefully. When they were within shouting distance, Ang Dawa called out to Gombu who gave the victory signal with his ice-axe. Ang Dawa turned to me with a big grin, and we slapped and hugged each other. By the time the men reached the tents, they were staggering from fatigue. Big Jim looked haggard and completely done in, at least ten years older than when he left that morning. It took them almost half an hour to get rid of crampons, rope and packs and crawl inside their tent. I wanted desperately to rush out to embrace and congratulate them, but I simply didn't have the strength. All I could do was to croak my congratulations and admiration for the superhuman effort they had put in. And then we plied them with tea, bouillon, dried beef, canned peaches and more tea.

We were unable to establish radio contact with the second assault group on the Col, but fortunately they had considered the weather too bad for a summit attempt and decided to stay put for at least another night. As to ourselves, we were far too exhausted to descend to Camp V that evening and settled down for a second night at 27,450 ft. (Later we learned that Sir Edmund Hillary, who was camped at the foot of Taweche, had looked up toward Everest on May 1 and declared the weather 'impossible'. Down at Advance Base Dan Doody wrote in his diary: 'Expect all above are staying put for the day.') During the night we ran out of oxygen, and in the morning we made the descent to the Col and points below without it. Before leaving Camp VI Ang Dawa helped me to set up the movie camera, and with my last strength I made the highest panorama ever taken from a professional tripod. The climb down over treacherous, snow-covered rocks was a nightmare, and by the time we reached the Col we were as close to death from oxygen-starvation as I ever hope to get. Lute Jerstad, Barry Bishop and Dick Pownall made me lie down on the snow and placed an oxygen mask over my face. After gulping oxygen at the maximum rate of flow for a few minutes, I was strong enough to make it to one of the tents under my own power. I thought of my good friend, Sir John Hunt, who underwent a very similar experience in 1953!

A hurried meeting of all concerned resulted in the sad realisation that in view of the acute oxygen shortage the second summit assault would have to be postponed, and all of us would have to go down to Base Camp to recuperate and reorganise. We still had the better part of May for further attempts, and then there was the West Ridge!

By May 4 most of the team were down at Base. It was good to be alive, to rest, to catch up on correspondence and to receive by radio the many congratulatory messages from around the world. Everybody wanted to know the names of the summit climbers, but we had voted as a group not to give out *any* details until everybody was off the mountain. We wished to prevent the glorification of two men at the expense of the rest of the team.



There were long discussions on oxygen and the apparent excessive use of it during the first assault. Our logistical planning had to be revised, with Willi Unsoeld and Tom Hornbein doing most of the work. Another serious problem was that of persuading the Sherpas, who had made more high carries for us than on any previous Everest expedition, to move up again. Once again it was Jimmy Roberts who saved the day, and in spite of fatigue, sickness and considerable grumbling, a number of our Sherpas rose to the occasion and declared themselves ready and willing. Some had already carried to the South Col three times, and others had gone to Camp 4-W on several occasions. I am convinced that their amazing performance was due primarily to the leadership and popularity of Jimmy Roberts.

On May 7 Willi Unsoeld and Tom Hornbein moved up to Advance Base in one day. We had worked out the following plan: two two-man assault teams on the West Ridge, and one two-man team on the South Col route, all with the necessary support groups. A traverse of the mountain from the west was to be attempted only if it could be coordinated with the men on the Col route. Target date for the double-assault was May 18, and arrangements were made to evacuate Base Camp on the 22nd.

The weather deteriorated into a series of storms. Each snowfall increased the avalanche danger of the route to the West Ridge. At one time four Sherpas and two tents at the Dump were swept down by a snow-slide, but nobody was hurt. The tents and everything inside were a total loss. Now May 21 was the earliest summit date. This was hard on the nerves for Lute Jerstad and Barry Bishop, who were impatiently waiting at Advance Base for word to move up the Col route.

By May 9 the pressure from the outside world to release the names of the first summit team became unbearable. By porter grape-vine, Kathmandu already had the news. Very reluctantly I gave in, and announced the names over the radio. This was very much against our beliefs and convictions, and I felt like a traitor to the men above, but in the world of present-day communications ours was a stand that could not be held.

And then there were four days of perfect weather, with Barry and Lute sitting at Advance Base and champing at the bit. But everybody understood that a traverse was possible only if the South Col team could act as support for the West Ridge party. There were further delays due to difficulties with the power winch, and by now most of our best Sherpas were listless and bone-tired from many weeks of high carries.

Camp 4-W had been established at 25,100 ft., near the steep rocks of the West Ridge. On the night of May 16 the camp was all but swept off the mountain during the worst storm we had yet experienced. Barry Corbet, Al Auten and four Sherpas were in two four-man tents, joined





*Photo: W. Unsoeld, A.M.E.E.]*

NORTH FACE AND SUMMIT PYRAMID OF EVEREST FROM THE WEST RIDGE. CAMP 4-W (25,200 FT.) WAS SITUATED AT THE END OF THE RIDGE, NEAR THE START OF THE ROCKS.

(No. 5)



together at their entrances. It was here that the wind struck its most violent blows. Toward midnight the men suddenly realised that the guy lines had torn loose, and that they were sliding at an ever-increasing rate toward the Rongbuk glacier 6,000 ft. below. Just before going over the edge, they were saved by what appeared to be a miracle. In a chaos of torn canvas, twisted tent poles and scattered gear, the dazed and struggling men found their downward slide arrested by a narrow snow-shelf, some 100 ft. below the crest of the ridge. Through darkness and storm, Al Auten battled his way up to Willi and Tom whose tent was still standing. The three of them went down and helped secure what was left of the two tents by anchoring them to the slope. A semblance of order restored, the stunned and battered men hung on for their lives, awaiting the dawn of another stormy day.

Toward nine o'clock Willi established radio contact with Base. At the very moment when he informed us that they were evacuating Camp 4-W, his tent started moving sideways across the surface of the snow. He shouted into the microphone that they were on their way, and that the tent was about to go over the brink. For a moment there was considerable confusion and excitement. In the next instant Tom Hornbein made a wild dive through the entrance, grabbed a tent stake and did a self-arrest. By spreading his legs wide in the vestibule and thus tangling the tent he was able to stop its movement temporarily. At this point Barry Corbet looked around and saw Willi still talking into the microphone. Feeling guilty at the thought of leaving Willi alone in the tent, he made a motion to come back in. Willi, with the microphone switch still depressed—and it made horrifyingly dramatic listening for us at Base—shouted: 'No, Barry! Out, out man, out!' Needing no further urging, he shot out of the door, and Willi followed him with such violence that he broke the antenna on the radio. And yet Willi continued giving a running commentary on what was happening until he had to sign off in order to load oxygen bottles on the collapsed tent to keep it from blowing away. But with this, the last of 4-W was reduced to ruins.

It took the eight men more than an hour to find their ice-axes, ready their packs and start the long descent to 3-W. It was a miserable trip. The wind kept knocking them off their feet. Their goggles became impacted with snow which made it almost impossible to see the route, but once they got down below the crest of the ridge, the wind abated somewhat. They were close to total exhaustion. They kept losing their balance, stumbling around like drunks. Although they had ropes amongst them, it seemed impossible to try to tie knots in that nightmarish storm. At last they reached the shelter of Camp 3-W where they thawed out and recuperated during the next two days. The men of the West Ridge were battered and shaken, but they weren't ready to throw in the towel yet.



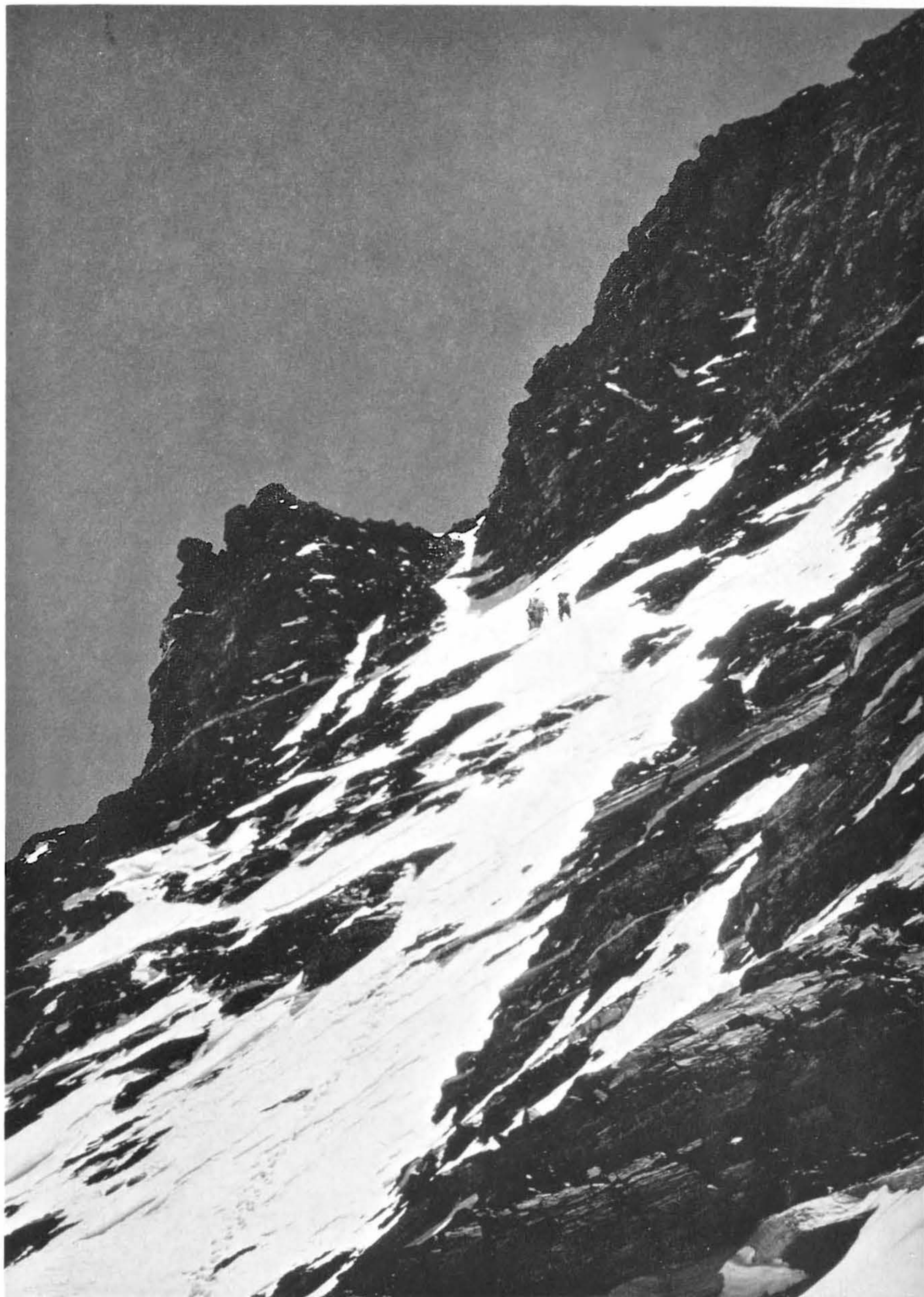
But in terms of overall strategy and time-table, the target date had slipped again, and the chance of a 'summit-meeting' appeared all but gone. Even Willi and Tom, our eternal optimists, began to have serious doubts. Originally, plans called for two further camps on the West Ridge, but now, with the serious losses in tentage, oxygen and butane, it was decided to carry up one camp as high as possible, and to make a two-man assault from there. It was a long shot, but the men knew it was now or never. May 22 was set as the final target date.

This was the signal for the South Col team to start its long-postponed move up the mountain. Lute Jerstad, Barry Bishop and three Sherpas left Advance Base on May 18, while Dave Dingman, Girmi Dorje and two other Sherpas followed a day later. Camp III had been partly buried by an avalanche, but efforts to dig out the tents and reoccupy them were successful. The weather held good, and on the afternoon of May 21 Barry and Lute established themselves at Camp VI, after Pemba Tensing and Nima Tensing had made an amazing carry before returning to the Col.

On the other side of the mountain, Camp 4-W was reoccupied on May 20. All India Radio announced that the monsoon was expected to reach Everest any day now. Time was running out fast. On the morning of May 21, Barry Corbet and Al Auten set off from Camp 4-W to lead the way and prepare the route toward 5-W. Five Sherpas followed an hour and a half later, with Willi Unsoeld, Tom Hornbein and Dick Emerson bringing up the rear. Above camp they first followed what they called the Diagonal Ditch, a long gully slanting upward across the North face. In the ditch itself the climbing was mostly on packed snow, but now and then the men had to negotiate rocky slabs covered with a thin layer of snow, with the well-known rock strata of the North face slanting downward at an unpleasant angle. During a previous reconnaissance, Willi and Tom had reached an altitude of 26,200 ft., at the base of a snow-filled gully several hundred yards west of the famous Great Couloir. Willi had named it the Hornbein Couloir, and here was the route they proposed to follow as far as possible. At the entrance to the couloir Dick Emerson reached the end of the line. Plagued by altitude sickness during most of the time above Base Camp, Dick's achievement in reaching such heights is truly admirable.

With Barry Corbet leading and cutting steps up the steep couloir, the others followed. Hours went by, and the men began to tire. Toward mid-afternoon, right at the base of the Yellow Band, they reached a tiny ledge. It couldn't have been more than eighteen inches wide and eight feet long. Here, at 27,250 ft., Camp 5-W became a reality. Their job done, the support team immediately began the descent to 4-W, some 2,100 ft. below. Willi and Tom spent the next hour and a half chopping out a platform that would hold their tiny tent, working without oxygen





*Photo: W. Unsoeld, A.M.E.E.]*

NORTH FACE OF EVEREST: THE DIAGONAL DITCH

(No. 7)





*Photo: B. Bishop, A.M.E.E.]*

VIEW ACROSS NUPTSE FROM SUMMIT OF EVEREST.

(No. 3)



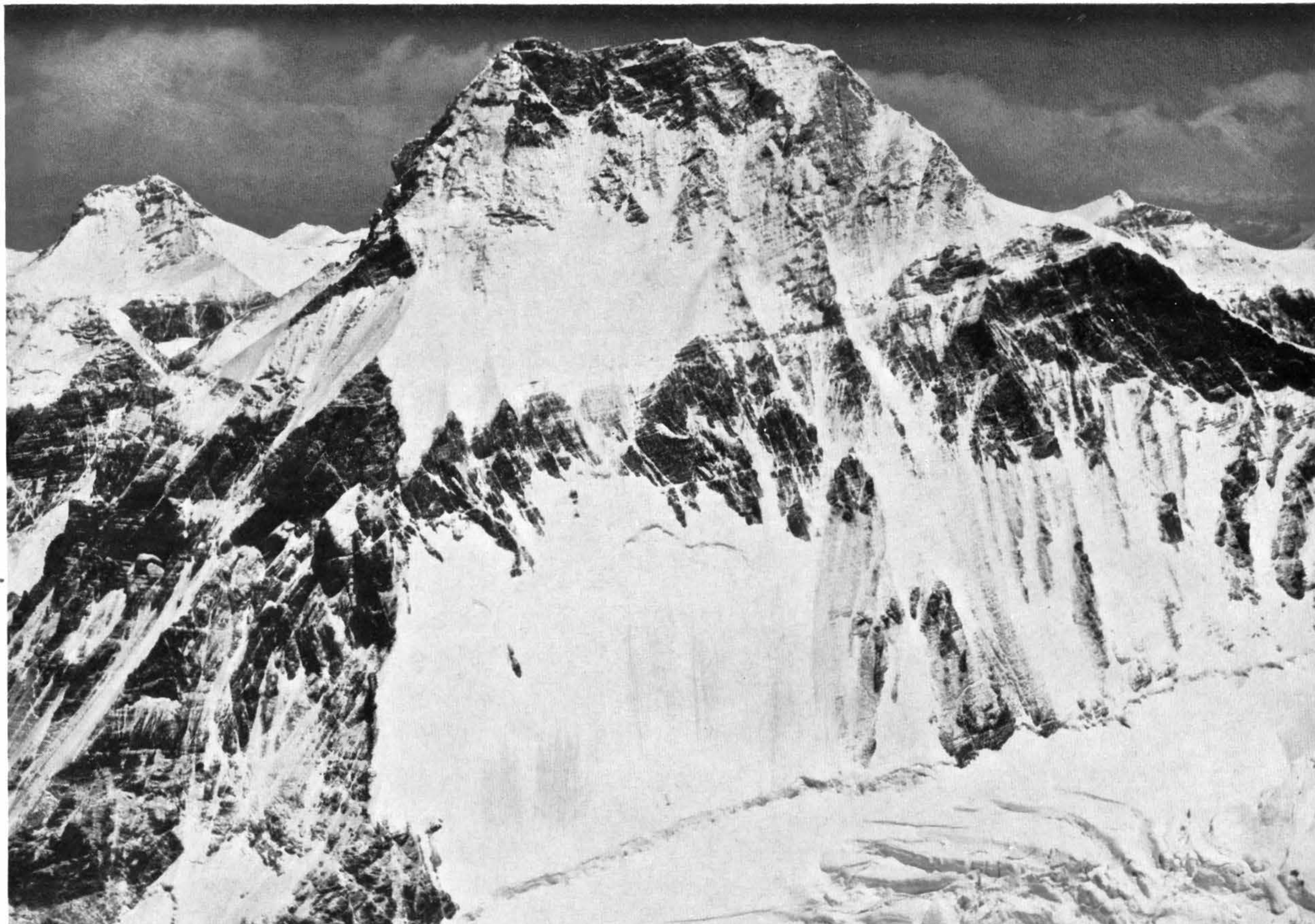
to conserve it for the next day. They set up the tent, secured it with pitons and axes, and crawled inside. Just before leaving, Barry Corbet had made a reconnaissance of one of two possible routes up ahead. He decided that the one which moved out towards the crest of the ridge would not go and suggested that Willi and Tom try the other one first. After the evening meal of freeze-dried shrimps and tomato paste, prepared by the indefatigable Tom Hornbein, they turned on their sleeping-oxygen and managed to sleep until 4 a.m. On the other side of the mountain, some 200 ft. higher, the South Col team too was getting ready for the big push. Everything was still going according to plan.

Around 5 a.m. on May 22, Lute and Barry lit their stove to prepare breakfast. There was a sudden burst of flame. It singed Lute's beard and burned Barry's plastic sleeping mask. The tent was instantly filled with smoke, but the men managed somehow to dive out before suffocating. It was a miracle that they were alive, but the near-disaster greatly weakened them and caused serious delay. It was not until eight o'clock that they were able to get started.

Willi and Tom left an hour earlier, but Tom's oxygen regulator developed a leak which caused them serious concern. Willi was in the lead, and the route turned out to be more difficult than anticipated. They continued up the steep couloir, cutting steps most of the way. At first Tom wasn't going well at all. Each time upon reaching Willi's belaying position, he would gasp for breath and ask Willi to continue in the lead. (It was not until much later that he discovered that due to his faulty regulator he was actually climbing on less than one litre per minute!) The couloir altered in character, at one point narrowing down so much that a man's body could barely squeeze through. Above this they emerged onto a broad shelf which moved up towards the crest of the West Ridge. So far the terrain had been so steep that there had been no place to sit down, and they were getting tired. Above them the couloir degenerated into a very steep, narrow crack. Willi discovered a possible route to the right, another crack which provided a broader break in the vertical wall above. It was with great surprise that they found themselves still moving one at a time on the shelf itself. The angle was still such that there was not a moment's relaxation and no place to sit. By now they were getting close to the top of the Yellow Band.

Tom took over the next lead which turned out to be a very difficult one. Willi drove in a safety piton, and Tom moved up the smooth rock wall. When he reached snow again he thought he'd be able to walk up, but it turned out to be of such floury consistency that he had to clear each step. The snow cascaded down like a waterfall, and Willi, who was also on unconsolidated snow, became increasingly unhappy. Tom did not like the looks of this pitch, but somehow he kept going. When he drove in another piton, the crumbly rock did little to reassure him. By this time





*Photo: W. Unsoeld, A.M.E.E.]*

CHANGTSE (24,720 FT.) FROM THE WEST RIDGE.

(No. 4)



some forty minutes had gone by, and Willi yelled up to him: 'For goodness sakes, come on down! We'll find another route.' So Tom used the doubtful piton as a pulley and rejoined Willi who then attempted another lead further to the right. After one rope length he realised that the vertical wall directly above offered little hope. There might have been a possibility to traverse over to the crest of the ridge at this point, but that too looked forbidding. The wall itself was about 100 ft. high, broken only by a series of vertical cracks which looked rather frightening at this altitude. As Willi looked back it became apparent that the best route was the one Tom had just tried. So back they went to its beginning and Tom, who was not feeling well, asked Willi to try it. With Tom belaying, Willi moved up to the piton and snapped into it. He then had to take off his mittens and climb bare-handed for the next stretch. By using cross-pressure, chimney techniques and jam-holes, he was able to worm his way up for the next 20 ft. It was at this point that he suddenly ran out of oxygen. With rapidly ebbing strength he clawed his way up another 15 ft. to a tiny nubbin of rock where for the first time he was able to bring up Tom with a sitting belay. And here, at 3 p.m., at about 28,200 ft., Willi said: 'Well, Tom, it looks like we have a decision to make.' The decision was whether to go on or turn back. Tom acknowledged the necessity for making it and then ignored it. In complete silence they made it, in fact weeks later upon looking back on it they were convinced that the decision had been made several days before! To descend the way they had come, over technically difficult and dangerous terrain, without adequate piton cracks and without a rappel rope, would have been hazardous in the extreme. They had passed the point of no return and so informed Base Camp via walkie-talkie. Most of us were up on Pumori's South-east spur that day to scan the upper reaches of Everest with binoculars and telephoto lenses, but Big Jim Whittaker had stayed behind to maintain radio contact. Upon being told by Willi that they were going on, he became greatly concerned. He begged them to reconsider and not cut off their only escape route. But Willi and Tom knew that retreat was impossible, and on they went.

Meanwhile Lute and Barry had moved up the South-east Ridge to the South Summit. Barry, after a very bad night at Camp VI and the almost disastrous explosion, felt extremely weak and close to exhaustion during the entire ascent. This made it necessary for Lute to do all the leading and cutting of hundreds of steps. After a much-needed rest on the South Summit during which they took stock of their dwindling oxygen supply, they continued along the final ridge on reduced ration.

And then, shortly before 3.30, they saw the American flag flying from the summit of the world. Placed there three weeks before by Big Jim, the aluminum pole still stood straight and tall, only the ends of the flag were slightly tattered. Tears of emotion and relief came to their





*Photo: W. Unsoeld, A.M.E.E.]*

VIEW FROM THE WEST RIDGE: NORTH COL AT EXTREME LEFT, AND NORTHERN SLOPES OF EVEREST.

(No. 6)



eyes, and together they stepped up to the summit. For the next forty-five minutes they took pictures of the world around and beneath them—with Lute taking the highest motion pictures ever—and they looked down the West Ridge for signs of the others. They waited, and they shouted, but finally, with the shadows lengthening, they began the descent.

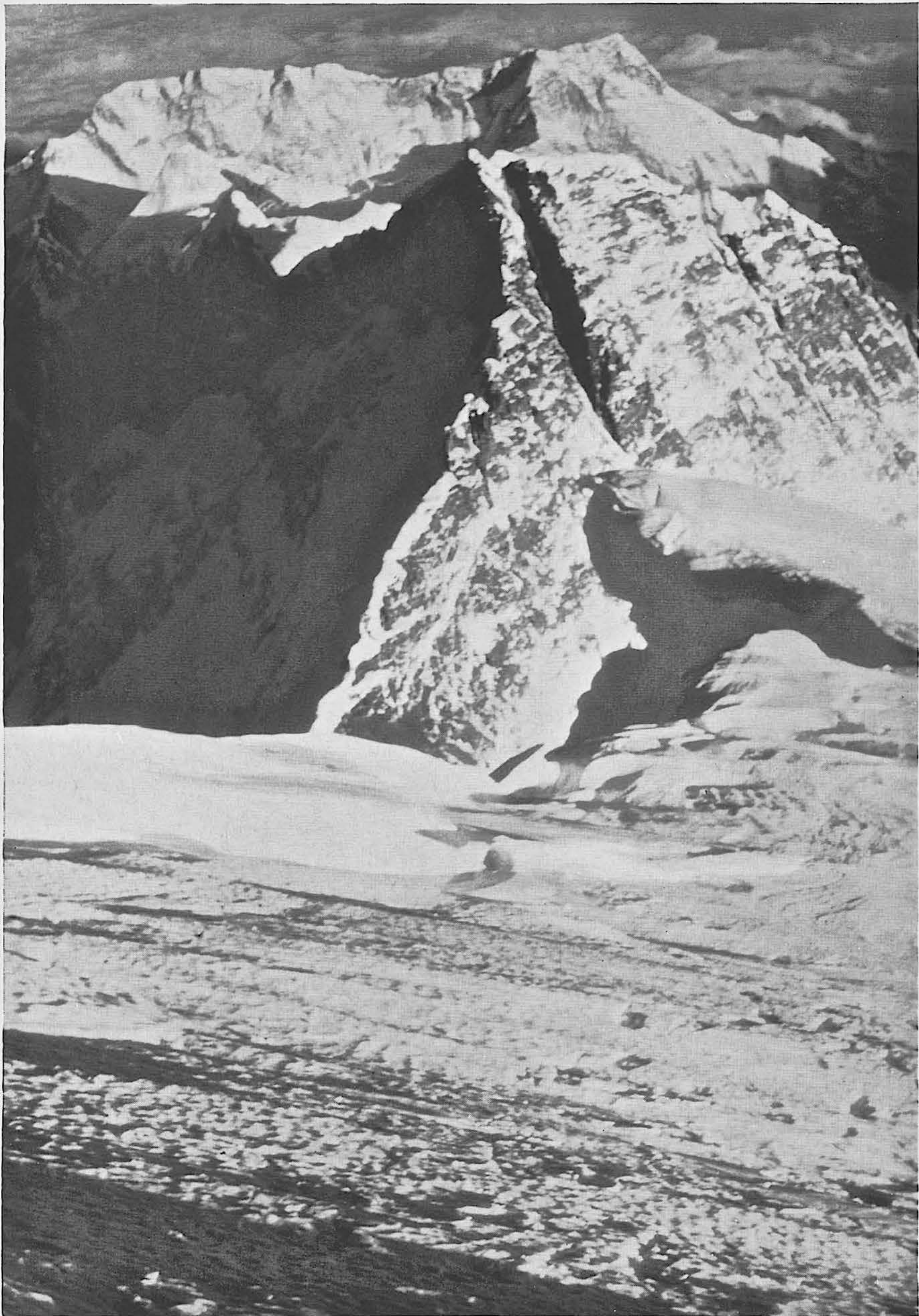
For a while Willi and Tom weren't certain of their exact location on the mountain. Again they contacted Big Jim at Base, but nothing he could tell them about the configuration of the summit seemed to fit their immediate surroundings. At last they were able to orient themselves: they had come out of the couloir to the east of it, in the direction of the North-east Ridge. At one time they had planned to follow a route marked in Hugh Ruttledge's book which would have taken them on to the crest of the North-east Ridge and the base of the final snow-slope leading to the summit. But now they couldn't find a previously selected gully, and everything looked unfamiliar. They then traversed back to the west across long, wide, open slabs and reached the crest of the ridge. At this point the wind hit them with full force. The climbing became increasingly difficult, and finally the ridge narrowed to a near-vertical knife-edge. There they took off crampons and overboots and soon became involved in the most enjoyable and exhilarating four rope-lengths of exposed rock-climbing of the entire venture. Tiny ledges, relatively good rock, and just enough handholds to be able to use them with their mittens on. To their right they could see across the top of the South Summit. And then, moving up slowly across the final snow-slope, Willi raised his eyes and about forty feet ahead was the American flag, shining in the slanting rays of the sun and flapping wildly in the breeze. He turned around, raised his fist, and waited for Tom to catch up. They threw their arms around each other and together moved up to the summit. They were quite beyond words.

It was 6.15, and the last light of day was fading fast. They left some memento, took a few pictures, and hurried down the ridge toward the South Summit. They were grateful for Lute and Barry's footprints to show them the way. At one point Willi stopped long enough to contact Advance Base and inform Maynard Miller of their whereabouts. To the latter's amazement the next words coming over the airwaves were from Robert Frost:

‘... I have promises to keep,  
and miles to go before I sleep. ...’

The sun had set as they descended Hillary's chimney, and twilight set in before they reached the South Summit. There was a momentary scare when Tom, who by now was in better condition than Willi, heard the loud hiss of escaping oxygen. His fear of having broken his regulator





*Photo: W. Unsoeld, A.M.E.E.]*

LHOTSE AND CHAMLANG FROM THE SUMMIT OF EVEREST: 6.30 P.M., MAY 22, 1963.

(No. 8)



when it banged against a rock was unfounded, and soon he was able to remedy the situation. They traversed the South Summit and started down the steep ridge as fast as they could. By now it had become too dark to follow the footprints of their predecessors, and their rapidly fading flashlight was of little help. They shouted, and to their joy shouts came back from below. Lute and Barry, who were close to total exhaustion, had been descending very slowly and with extreme care. By eight o'clock they were still on the steep portion of the ridge, at about 28,300 ft., and it was here that they first saw the occasional pinpoint of light above, and then they heard voices. They waited for two hours until the West Ridge team, guided through the darkness by recurrent shouts, caught up with them. The moment of rejoicing at the reunion soon turned into sharp disappointment for Willi and Tom, for they had assumed that they had reached the shelter of Camp VI. Together the four men resumed their descent in total darkness, but after several tumbles down both sides of the ridge they realised that they would never reach camp at the rate they were moving. They were out of oxygen, and shortly after midnight, still at 28,000 ft., they called a halt and decided to bivouack on a tiny ledge of rock below the crest of the ridge. But the gods were smiling, and although the temperature dropped to  $18^{\circ}$  below zero, the wind died down. Had there been the usual Everest weather, none of the four would have survived the highest night out ever spent on a mountain.

Dave Dingman and Girmi Dorje, after a sleepless night at Camp VI in the almost certain knowledge that all four summit climbers had perished, went to look for them in the early morning hours of May 23. Girmi climbed without oxygen so as to conserve it in case there were any survivors.

Survivors there were! Thanks to the strong support provided by Dave and Girmi who gave them fresh oxygen, hot food and drink, the mountain claimed no further lives. Together the six men descended to Camp VI, and after a brief rest they continued all the way down to Advance Base that same day. The following evening everybody was back at Base, and on May 25 the expedition began its long trek back to Kathmandu.

Willi, Barry and Lute had to be carried to Namche Bazar, where the former two were evacuated by helicopter on May 27 and taken to the United Missions hospital in Kathmandu. Willi and Barry have since then lost all of their toes, while Tom and Lute suffered no permanent injuries.

On June 9 the main body of the expedition reached Kathmandu, and on July 9 we were assembled at the White House where President John F. Kennedy presented to us the National Geographic Society's Hubbard Medal.