

MAKALU

BY JEAN FRANCO

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HOW can I tell you about Makalu without telling you first of all why we went there?

You remember without doubt the last days of the month of May 1953 during which John Hunt's British Expedition put man on the highest summit of the Earth and brilliantly crowned thirty years of struggle with this giant mountain. We all applauded the marvellous news. The most wonderful alpine conquest of all time put an end to the efforts of several generations and to the sacrifices, often painful, which man had suffered on the long road to the summit.

Perhaps you are even amongst those who asked themselves if new efforts, new risks, and other similar adventures were justified. Certainly the conquest of Everest was a conclusion and the arrival of man at the third pole finished the dream of all climbers. But, for the latter, mountains are made to be climbed, as all the corners of the earth are made to be visited sooner or later. Each of these sets a problem which must be solved; it would be failing to recognise the spirit of *Alpinisme*, which since the conquest of Mont Blanc has besieged all the mountains of the globe, and it would be ignoring human nature to suppose for one moment that it could be otherwise.

For all climbers the Himalaya is a paradise of mountains, more or less unknown, and where above 7,000 m. there are more than a hundred summits surpassing in altitude all the other mountains of the earth. Man will not stop until all these have been climbed.

The few landmarks that have been reached in half a century of exploration are only meagre successes compared with so many set-backs.

Nanda Devi, 7,826 m., remained for fourteen years the highest summit climbed by man until Maurice Herzog and his companions in 1950 reached the summit of Annapurna, the first 8,000 m. peak to be conquered. Then our Geneva friends reached 8,600 m. on Everest, an altitude similar to that reached before the war on the Tibetan side by the British attempts. The following year, Hillary and Tenzing lifted the mystery of the final metres and almost at the same moment Hermann Buhl came back, by a miracle, from the formidable Nanga Parbat (8,125 m.) in a completely exhausted state. Finally, less than one year ago K2, second highest summit in the world, and Cho Oyu (8,153 m.) neighbour of Everest, yielded in their turn, but not without inflicting terrible frost-bite on their climbers.

Many of these brilliant exploits were so near the limit of human possibility and demanded so much sufferance and effort that a mere

breath would have sufficed to change success into catastrophe. Man had only just shown that he was ready henceforth to confront the giants of the earth. Liberated from the physiological fear of high altitude, supplied with new apparatus and equipment always being improved, in possession of a technique specially adapted for the Himalayas, inheritor of experiences bitterly acquired in failure and success, the alpinist little by little has raised himself to the height of the highest mountains. A synthesis of all these factors was necessary to enlarge the margin of security on great climbs.

These facts were all in mind at the meetings of the *Comité Français de l'Himalaya* when we were studying the maps of Nepal and its neighbouring countries. For us there was no doubt the era of Himalayanism was only just opening, and the inventory was easy. Amongst the fourteen summits of 8,000 m., five were situated around or above 8,500 m., the others were about 8,100 m. Those 400 m. not only created an artificial classification but corresponded in reality, to one radical difference of conception. The latter, experience has proved, can be climbed without oxygen. The former, up to our days, necessitated the use of a third lung and in consequence a different and complex method of preparation, of equipment, acclimatisation and progression. Climbers have only partially solved these problems. But following the researches of the late Dr. Oudot, doctor of the Annapurna Expedition, and due to the preparations made in view of an attempt on Everest many of us were particularly interested in the problems of high altitude and the use of oxygen. It was naturally towards one of the big summits that the *Comité Français de l'Himalaya* decided to direct French efforts.

Until recently, Makalu, 20 km. south-east of Everest, was a practically unknown summit. Only a few initiates had found on the simple maps of East Nepal the three coloured symbols of this giant of 8,470 m., fifth highest summit in the world. The British during the 1921 reconnaissance of Everest were impressed by the high ice walls of the Tibetan side which rise above the fertile valley of Kama, so high and so strange that the shepherds did not hesitate to place Makalu as the highest mountain. It was in 1934 that Makalu was spoken of again, at the time of the first French Expedition to the Himalayas. An authorisation by the Tibetan Government was later cancelled.

Twenty years passed, climbers followed other roads and for the shepherds who wander in summer near the Barun Glacier looking for stray yaks, Makalu remained 'the giant who sleeps six months.'

The photographs we had of the Nepalese side of the mountain were taken during the British reconnaissance of Everest. We could examine the upper difficulties of the mountain, but we were never able to see the base of it because of the length and steepness of the smooth rock faces which rise in one leap of 4,000 m. above the Barun Glacier. As for a route in, only a few British Alpinists returning from a reconnaissance in the Everest region had crossed the high chain which

separates Sola Khumbu from the Barun and had had a near view of Makalu. They had reached the Arun tributary of the Ganges after great difficulties in a virgin forest and in a humid and unhealthy tropical region.

Makalu by its altitude, by its situation, by what was known of its difficulties and by the mystery which surrounded it, was a fascinating problem. With the exception of Annapurna, a mountain unknown at the time but discovered, attempted and climbed by one expedition, all the great summits of the Himalayas so far climbed have been first reconnoitred by several expeditions which have determined not only the special conditions of the approach march but also established the best route on the mountain. It was thus for Nanga Parbat, Everest and K2. A circuit of Kangchenjunga was made at the end of the century. But in Makalu we found a new mountain, for which all climbers dream, virgin on its summit and on its flanks.

Because of all this, we went to Makalu.

It was at the end of 1953 that our Ambassador at New Delhi received, for the *Fédération Française de la Montagne*, the permission of the Nepalese Government to send to Makalu two expeditions, one in the autumn of 1954, the other in the spring of 1955. It was decided immediately that the first would be a reconnaissance expedition to study the approach, choose a possible itinerary, determine the difficulties and test new material and equipment on which several of us had been working for a long time.

Maurice Herzog would have been the man to lead these two expeditions, but for reasons which are all to his honour he refused. Lucien Devies, President of the *Fédération Française de la Montagne* and great organiser of French expeditions since the war, was not able to go as he was asked to do, and once more had to let go the dream of his climbing life. Both of them were the soul of the organisation and when I was asked to take the responsibility I accepted all the more willingly because I knew that they would always support and assist, and also because I could count on Jean Couzy and Lionel Terray, two veterans of Annapurna, and on Guido Magnone who had achieved in less than two years two of the greatest climbs of all, the West face of the Dru and FitzRoy.

All preparations were hurried on. Advice was taken, visits made abroad, and experiments made in Paris, in the laboratory and at the Col du Midi. Jean Couzy, the oxygen specialist, could order a new model of bottle, charged to a pressure of 230 atmospheres, which was used with a light-weight regulator giving a variable flow rate. Guido Magnone made experiments in the battle against weight, enemy No. 1 of expeditions; for six months he worked on choosing and ordering the 400 articles of equipment that would be necessary. Lionel Terray dealt with food, since we had great confidence in his big appetite. H. de Ségogne repeated often at numerous meetings 'For an expedition to the Himalayas the best is only just good enough'. And this was not

just a joke. Doctor Jean Rivolier of the French Polar Expeditions had been chosen as our expedition doctor and, following the results obtained by Dr. Oudot, he started to plan a method of acclimatisation and of oxygen use. We had with us our friends of the 1936 expedition to Hidden Peak, those of Annapurna in 1950, the Geneva team whose efforts on Everest had been profitable and all those near and far still capable of being passionately interested in the last secrets of the earth. We had also the support of the big French manufacturers who always enthusiastically undertook research and tests of special fabrics and who often finished by making the most extravagant gifts. We received great support from Government departments, from the Foreign Office, the Ministry of Education and in particular the *Direction Générale de la Jeunesse et des Sports*. We received finally the patronage of the President of the Republic.

At last the team was completed by two of my friends whose worth and great experience I knew, Pierre Leroux, who had climbed the greatest faces of the Alps, and Jean Bouvier, who had been a student of mine at the Ecole des Praz, a solid and complete type of mountaineer.

Whilst furious activity reigned in the offices of the French Alpine Club, Makalu received two visits before going to sleep for long months in the monsoon snows. An American Expedition led by Dr. Siri had established its camp at the foot of the mountain and made an attempt on the S.E. Frontier ridge, which for its greater part is rocky. This was one of the routes we had considered. We soon learnt that the Americans had been stopped by insurmountable difficulties before reaching 7,000 m. and that the monsoon, precocious and fierce that year, had stopped their attempt before the end of May. Another expedition led by Hillary had also, in the spring of 1954, gone to the Barun region and had carried out a fine series of ascents on the surrounding peaks with the obvious intention of looking closely at Makalu. Hillary, however, fell ill when the members of his team had forced the defences of the N.W. sector as far as about 7,000 m.

We received this news in August 1954 when we collected at the entry of the Arun gorge. Our first contacts were stern; the region was hostile, hot, wet and unhealthy, and the smallest stream was transformed into a torrent.

Along the flooded paths, at the cost of numerous detours thanks to which we avoided the bottoms of the impracticable valleys, in spite of the tumultuous rivers, forests infested with leeches and the extreme fatigue of our porters, we managed after three long weeks to reach the foot of our mountain. We could enjoy then in mid-September the marvellous Himalayan autumn.

At that date the clouds disappear. The sun is still warm enough to melt the heavy snow fallen in July and August, the weather is sunny, the sky blue and, as long as one does not aspire to very high altitudes, the temperature is acceptable. From our Base Camp situated in the last fields, at about 4,900 m. we acclimatised progressively in the course of small ascents in the surrounding district up to 6,500 and 6,800 m. We

were divided into several groups; this allowed us quickly to achieve a good knowledge of the Barun, to study Makalu and to test our equipment.

Nevertheless it was the problem of a route that absorbed most of our activities. If ever you should wish to meditate the problems of infinity and you find yourself in the desolate Barun you will agree that no place in the world is more suitable. The surrounding mountains lift enormous walls, and Makalu from this point is so extraordinary that even after several weeks it is a surprise to see its summit so high in the sky. You have before you one of the greatest walls on earth, so abrupt and so inhuman that only the clouds may visit these red towers and frightening gorges. But if you are looking for a route on Makalu you will, like us, look elsewhere.

We put out of the question the S.E. ridge made up of very steep steps which we compared to numerous Grépons posed one above the other. We understood why the Americans had been quickly repulsed. On the other hand the N.W. Sector seemed more favourable. We had examined it on many occasions during the preliminary reconnaissances and we had observed that there would be no important obstacle to getting on to a glacier plateau situated at 6,400 m. at the end of the N.W. Cirque and at the foot of the Makalu Col. Between the plateau and the Col the slopes are steep and subject to avalanche. In order to follow the line of least resistance and the one least exposed, the route has to make numerous detours, but at about 7,000 m. a suspended balcony was just made to support a camp. If the Col was reached at 7,400 m. the N.W. ridge would be a possible ladder for Makalu itself and although a little worrying because of an enormous step of 300 m. we would have access to the North face of the mountain which could not be more repulsive than all that which we had seen from this side.

The long establishment of camps began. We left Base Camp on October 1, three camps being necessary in order to reach the plateau. The placing of our camp there necessitated many comings and goings with the small number of Sherpas at our disposal. From this advance base we decided then to force the route as high as possible. On October 15 we took possession of Makalu Col where we set up our Camp V.

The first objective reached, we felt we had wings and some amongst us were already thinking of a possible attempt on Makalu itself, but at that date and at that altitude the cold is intense (it was usually minus 30°) and above all on the high ridge the tempest often blew at 150 km. an hour.

All our attempts to climb higher than Camp VI on the North face of Makalu were repulsed, but we had the luck to profit by two days of relative calm and make the first ascent of Makalu II (7,660 m.) and Chomo Lonzo (7,797 m.), two summits situated immediately to the north opposite the only side of Makalu which was then unknown to us. We brought back from there extremely important observations. This North face, occupied by a gigantic glacier, gave a route relatively certain as far as 8,100 m.; beyond, the slopes considerably steepened

and we hesitated between two different routes, but between one and the other, we came back certain that technical difficulties would not stop us.

Above all we had sprung the trap of Makalu which was this Col, wide and debonair in appearance, but inhabited by the tempests and able to become a trap in case of persistent bad weather. To succeed, it was necessary solidly to hold the Col by establishing so far a route sure and practicable in all circumstances. To succeed without too many risks it was necessary, once the Col was equipped, to live as little as possible beyond there, that is to say, to make the last assaults as short as possible.

These decisions conditioned our technique for the assault expedition : the equipping of the Col should be studied and carefully executed like a siege and the final assault should be made by lightning thrusts. We then fixed our needs in men, material, high-altitude food and oxygen.

On return to France at the end of November, we made our report to our friends, and the Himalayan Committee decided to organise straight away our assault expedition for the spring of 1955. There was no delay, for we knew that the monsoon normally arrives at the beginning of June in the Nepal Himalaya, with a margin of less than a week. We established our plans so as to be able to make our attempt on the summit from May 15 ; we would then have nearly three weeks in front of us in case Makalu showed itself particularly unfavourable.

This meant that we must leave France at the beginning of March and that all our material must be ready by February 2.

At Rue la Boetie the agitation had re-started. In the room reserved for the expedition, Guido held the telephone and sent out orders to the far corners of France imposing on everyone records of speed. Lionel, in the realm of food, had numerous surprises for us and sometimes was able to discover products totally unknown to us which we received with a certain scepticism. Happily our equipment had proved itself excellent and it was only a matter of securing the articles needed.

For some items, however, such as high-altitude tents, boots, radio sets and oxygen masks we were very worried, and according to the latest news we passed days of hope when everything seemed to go well and others when discouragement reigned. Sometimes we had agreeable surprises ; the underclothes of nylon and wool (which we called electric because they gave a very queer effect on the skin) were chosen, ordered, delivered and stocked at the firm who did our packing in less than an hour and a half. Others were less agreeable : Guido had perfected some super-light weight high-altitude over-trousers which should protect us against almost everything ; the makers did very well but they lacked the last buttons of a lightweight type, tried, verified and stamped, which permitted us to fix the over-boots and also to do many other things at the same time—*le dernier chic* in buttons. The trousers were taken to a specialist who alone in France could put on these buttons of the future. We never heard of them again.

Couzy worked in secret and we never knew exactly where he was, but the things in his charge were ready in time as though by a miracle.

The oxygen which had been ordered by telegram from Nepal after the autumn expedition was ready at the end of December and our 450 bottles duly filled and verified were loaded in the cargo vessel *Lenzkerke* due Calcutta on March 1.

For the rest of the material, some nine tons, it was only air transport which allowed us to have everything in time. Thanks to the goodness of Air France all our gear, carefully packed in greaseproof packages and re-covered with plywood or waterproof cases, left France at the end of February, in three lots, and arrived without trouble at Calcutta. We had complications at the last minute with French customs but this administration has a soft spot for people of good faith and very modern methods which permit it to proceed, by telephone, with the routine check in a record time without greatly upsetting the loading.

The last week passed in general excitement, each one of us putting his personal affairs in order before the departure. We soon had with us Pierre Leroux from Chamonix and Jean Bouvier from Briançon, who had already been with the autumn expedition. Jean Rivolier, not able to come, had been replaced by a young surgeon from Lyon, André Lapras, who, in his enthusiasm, in less than eight days filled the offices of the French Alpine Club with several hundred kilos of various medicaments and instruments of which it was understood none could be abandoned. The Abbé P. Bordet of the scientific mission limited his equipment according to the experience of the previous autumn and left in Paris several heavy geological hammers and an amount of other material. He was joined by a young geologist from Grenoble, a well-known climber, Michel Latreille. Finally, we thought in the Himalayan Committee that it would be well to add two more to the climbing group, which had been six men strong in the autumn, for we had experienced how quickly one is used up at high altitude and how desirable it is often to replace the forward team with well-rested men. So we chose André Vialatte, chief engineer with the technical services of the Air Force, as well known by his successes on the great routes of the Alps as by his calm and phlegm; and Serge Coupé, a young Chambéry guide, who had made himself known on the great problems of the Dauphiné by his enterprising spirit and his extraordinary quality as a climber.

We had all known each other for a long time; common memories gained on the principal routes of our Alps wove a strong thread of friendship and confidence. At the last meeting of the Committee, on the day before our departure, we did not know what we were going to find, but something told us that Makalu would be hard put to turn us back.

When one goes from Orly to Nepal on an official mission and with all sorts of recommendations and complications, when the journey has been prepared for months, when everything has been thought of and when one has collected in one's brief-case an imposing number of

documents covered with stamps and signatures one would believe that everything should pass without trouble. But if you seek to get through Calcutta with nine tons of material and equipment arriving from different places on different dates, to which are added personal equipment and baggage which no-one knows anything about, everything is equally suspect. When you penetrate the immense offices of the Bengal administration, which is the most serious in the world, then there you understand that all is lost and you have an enormous wish to return to Paris as quickly as possible. At the last moment you find the right door to open and the miracle happens ; the first of a long series of miracles which always accompanies expeditions and without which no summit in the world would ever have been approached. Our special guardian angel was found in the French Consulate General. Our angel had all the keys to open all the doors and pierce all mysteries. Monsieur Batbedat, vice-consul, in whose house we had our headquarters, was our able helper. What should I say ? He conducted transit operations with such a rapidity that in less than eight days we knew all the regulations of the police and customs and knew how to accommodate ourselves accordingly. If M. Batbedat had not fixed on a diplomatic career we would have proposed him for the position of Permanent Secretary to French Expeditions.

On March 18 we flew from Dum-dum, the Calcutta airport.

Several hours later three Dakotas of a special Indian Air Line service turned above Biratnagar at the far end of the Indian plain in view of the first mountains.

Biratnagar is the first Nepalese town, several miles from the frontier. The year before, we arrived there after having crossed India by train, which had the advantage of taking a long time and making a more gentle transition. This time we were thrown suddenly into the furnace, the mosquitoes, the dust and the dirt.

Here the latest innovation of Nepal is the customs service ; several months before, this institution was still unknown in this happy country. This day we bumped into a customs officer, who asked simply to see the contents of our 267 cases and sacks, not to mention our personal baggage, all of which had been carefully packed in Paris, sealed and catalogued and which until then we had preserved from all interference by prodigies of eloquence and persuasion. We made a formal refusal using the most fantastic arguments and exhibiting documents covered with seals. Finally everything was arranged, we exchanged signatures like autographs and less than two hours later all the expedition was loaded into the oldest lorries that I have ever seen.

Fifty kilometres further on, at Dharan, the Ganges plain dies out at the foot of the first Himalayan foothills. The road which leads there, a tormented track, disappeared in a stony field. It was there that four stricken lorries, smoking like locomotives, put down the French Expedition. This time it was the end ; I put definitely at the bottom of a box the fat folio of signatures and the expedition started to live otherwise than by lists and figures.

It was at Dharan that we made a general assembly and put up our first camp. It was there that we organised our transport for the march which was to last three weeks according to the humour of the rivers and our porters.

Our Sherpas arrived from Darjeeling a few days earlier. First of all were those with us in the autumn, already on call, who shook our hands laughingly and enthusiastically. The new ones, more timid, were introduced by the Sirdar Gyalzen Norbu. In their books we read of their Himalayan past and of the expeditions they had been on. Aila and Panzy were on Annapurna, Mingma Tenzing had been twice to the South Col on Everest, Ang Tsering had been twice with the British on the route from the North Col. One to Nanga Parbat, another on K2; Ang Bao, the veteran, had been with Bauer's team on Kangchenjunga. All Himalayan history was there in the few lines reciting the praise of these magnificent men.

The youngest had only a few expeditions to their credit but their smiles said that we could count on them. The Sherpas do not engage themselves on an expedition. They attach themselves, and once they are with you, you can take them to the end of the world, and you will hear only one reply: 'Yes, Sahib.'

For the moment there was no question of climbing. Eleven of them were attached to the personal service of the sahibs, putting up tents, washing, installation of the camp, and kitchen service. The others would look after the transport, each one at the head of a small group of coolies. Sherpas do not like having a load during the march, they are the aristocrats of the porters and only take over at the edge of the snow, above 5,000 m. There we would see what they were capable of.

For the time being our 267 loads passed to the backs of 267 coolies. Coolie transport at low levels has always been a source of worry, sometimes involving a total strike. To avoid this we had sent for eighty porters from Darjeeling—used to difficult work they would form a solid core; and 115 porters from Sola Khumbu who came in fifteen days from the foot of Everest. Their Mongolian faces, their long hair in greasy plaits, their goat-skin boots and their long tunics which smelled of rancid yak butter made a marked contrast with the half-naked Nepalese coolies. The weighing, control, registering and splitting of loads to an average of 40 kg. gave excuse for the usual barterings and discussions, but Gyalzen is an old fox, and Kinjock, the chief of the coolies, the most methodical of men. In less than 48 hours all was ready and the caravan left Dharan on March 20.

The Arun is a river as big as the Rhône and its basin between Kanch and Everest marks the approach to Makalu. From Dharan to Base Camp as the crow flies is 140 km. but more than 300 km. by the Arun track through forest and maize fields. We already knew the way and in spite of the heat the stages were made according to the arranged timetable and we found again the pines of Dhankuta, the hot sands of Legua Ghat, the silver waters of the Subaya, the shaded ridges of Num and

everywhere the sweetness of the hills of Nepal, brick-coloured under a blue sky. This approach march constituted a progressive training, necessary after the excitement and fatigue of Paris life. The porters did not slack although certain stages are particularly tiring, but the resistance to hardship of these men is surprising. At evening when camp is made they gather in small groups around the bivouac fires and sleep without shelter. Their faces in the firelight, the smell of their cooking and clothes, their shouts and songs, bring to mind the hordes of Gengis Khan bent on pillage, but the people of the Himalaya, in spite of the enormous kukris which hang from their belts, are the most peaceful of all.

Stage succeeded stage. From ridge to ridge, from village to village we went, happy and without a care. From time to time in the mist of the morning there appeared in the distance the white chain of Chamlang and Makalu.

The journey passed without incident. We had certain anxieties about transport and our cargo of oxygen. Our precious cargo had left France on board the *Lenzkerke* and should have arrived at Calcutta on March 1. In fact, several delays were successively signalled and we had followed with anxiety the slower and slower progress of our ship, in the Red Sea, along the Arab coast and on the shores of the Indian Ocean. Then we lost sight of it and learnt later that the phantom ship had touched Rangoon without any scruples whatsoever and had postponed her call at Calcutta. We were then in India and important measures were necessary, so we decided to go looking for our bottles—1,600 kg.—by plane. A commando consisting of M. Batbedat and J. Couzy were to unravel this unbelievable entanglement with customs, the passport office and Indian Air Lines to which were to be added the complications of maritime regulations. At Dharan Bazar I had left S. Coupé with two Sherpas and fifty Sola Khumbu porters who were to wait for Couzy and bring the oxygen up by forced marches. I had kept in touch with Coupé, thanks to the special postmen, and we were kept informed of the Rangoon operation. We were only definitely reassured much later when I learnt that the cargo had arrived at Dharan.

Divided between the peaceful life of a sahib reserving himself for future efforts, and the ever-fresh problems of the journey we arrived soon at Num, traversing the famous bridge which crosses the Arun at Sedoa.

Sedoa is the last village on the right bank of the Arun at 1600 m., or, more exactly, a long line of houses beyond which stretches thick forest. For our porters the Sedoa valley was the promised land; there we left them, most of them being too tired and too ill-equipped to go further. The men of Sedoa are Sherpas and are known for their robustness; we engaged a hundred of them.

The march continued along the only track in the virgin forest for days. On April 1 we crossed the snow-covered col at 4,200 m., a very hard day in the cold and the mist. Thirty-five of our Sherpas left

us and two sheep we had bought at Sedoa died of fatigue and cold. That night, camping, it was so cold and the men so tired that they slept as they were in the rhododendron bushes, without food, without fire and without shelter. We feared the worst for the night in the snow and the wind, so I asked the Sherpas, usually so hard with the coolies, to light fires everywhere and to see that all groups could shelter under the big tarpaulin sheet that we were keeping for our final installations.

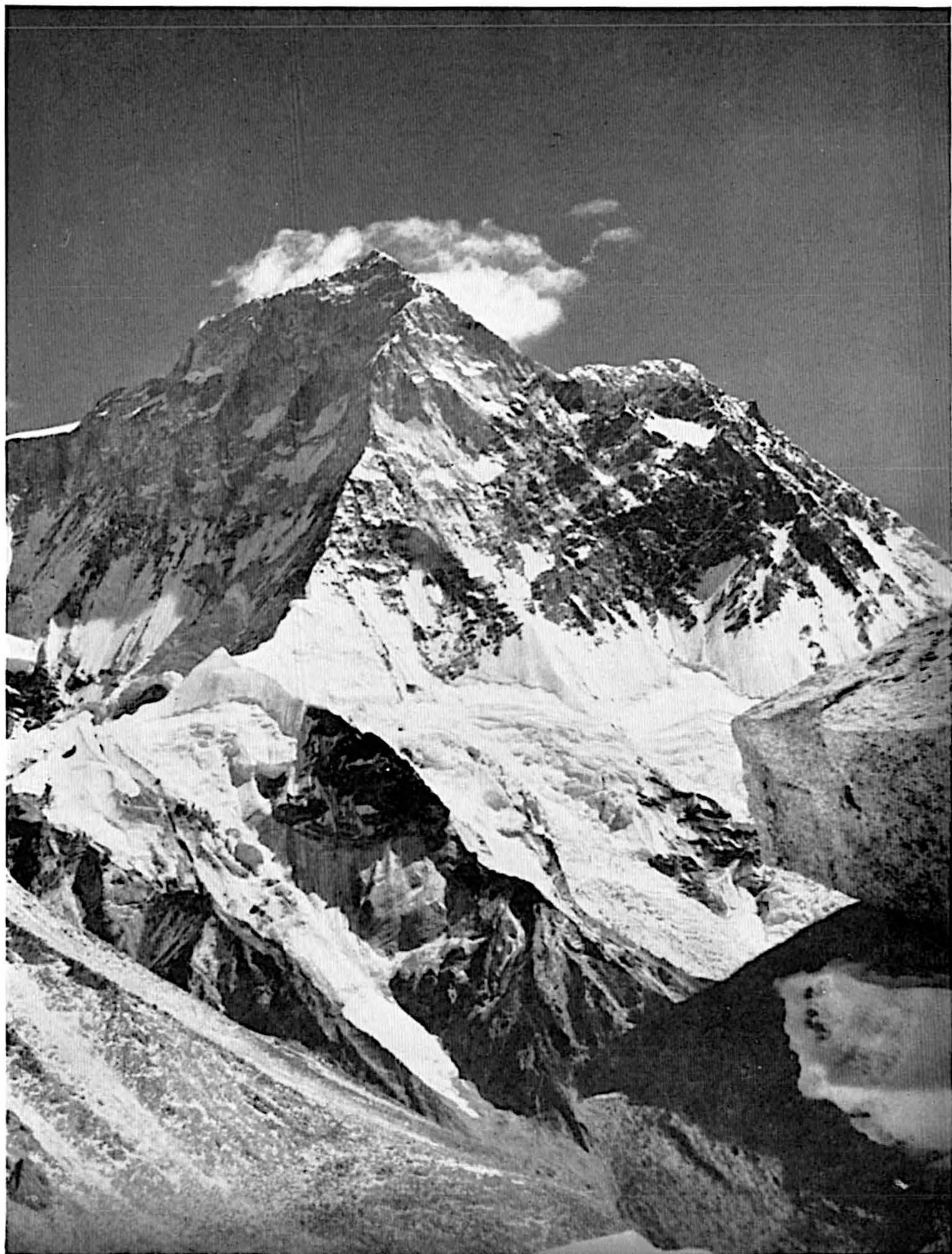
April 4. At last, in the grey and desolate country of the high Barun we arrived with the snow at our Base Camp at about 4,700 m., at the foot of Makalu. There it was still winter ; all was dried-up, destroyed and blown away by the icy winds from Tibet. The torrent, half held in the ice, was silent. The mornings were relatively sunny, but from mid-day the sharp wind came up and the snow fell, so fine and cold that it penetrated everywhere. We quickly sent back all our valley porters, still barefoot in the Siberian cold. We kept with us, beside the twenty-five Sherpas, twenty auxiliary porters who would do the lower carries and keep us provided with firewood for Base Camp (the nearest forest was a good day away) ; and six postmen, who in teams of two would keep liaison with Jogbani, the first Indian post office, some 350 km. away. The postmen, chosen from the fastest of our porters, were to go there and back in twenty days. One of them did the journey four times during the expedition. Men of this calibre would be formidable contestants for the marathon at the Olympic Games. For us they were the only tie that attached us to the living world.

On April 6, at the end of a sad day when the sun did not reach the moraine, Couzy and Coupé with fifty-five porters arrived at Base Camp. They had crossed the Barun Cols and doubled the last stages. But the oxygen was there. The following day violent snow-storms cut the track and, for long days, the Barun Cols were not usable. We were cut off from the valley.

It was in this hostile land that we were to live for several weeks, so we spent several days installing ourselves as comfortably as possible. More than twenty tents of different models were put up for ourselves and our Sherpas ; more primitive shelters were made for the auxiliary porters. P. Leroux and J. Bouvier constructed out of stones a special shelter for the kitchen, and a shelter, half dug into the ground, covered with tarpaulin sheets with a turntable chimney, very comfortable, which we called the Makalu Hotel and which served as mess and living-room.

Thanks to these important works we had a relatively agreeable stay, despite the altitude, the cold and the wind and, putting on one side a bad cough for most of us and the inevitable diarrhoea, we had no serious worries.

In our plan of operations we had decided to reserve three weeks for acclimatisation and for the last preparations ; we fixed the date of May 5 as the end of the installation and carry to Camp III at 6,400 m. in the N.W. Cirque.



Photo, French Himalayan Expedition.]

WEST FACE OF MAKALU. RIGHT, THE S.E. RIDGE WHICH THE AMERICANS CLIMBED AS FAR AS THE BLACK GENDARME BELOW THE SHOULDER. FACING THE CAMERA IS THE E. SPUR ENDING IN THE TWO BOSSES OF ICE NAMED THE TWINS.

The Barun is in the centre of a belt of extraordinary summits of 6,000 to 7,000 m. which tempted us. But we had the wisdom to resist, preferring to keep our strength intact for Makalu. Divided into several groups, according to the whim and occupation of each, we chose easier peaks in the direction of Peak 3 and towards the Hongu plateau, and climbed progressively to 5,700 m. and then to 6,400 m.

During this time all the available Sherpas, under Gyalzen's direction, took the moraine track to Camp I and each day did an enormous carry over the unbelievable chaos of stones, besides which the rubble and moraines of the Alps are just agreeable walks.

From April 23 we took up residence on the balcony of Camp I at 5,300 m., magnificently placed at the foot of the gigantic West wall of Makalu in view of Lhotse and Everest. Sore throats gave Coupé and Lionel some days of discouragement, but our training continued. We climbed several times to a small summit of 6,200 m. which dominated Camp I, then effected the first ascents of the two ice bumps on the West ridge of Makalu which we called the Twins; this allowed us at 6,500 m. to make the double traverse of a sharp snow ridge, in an alpine fashion. Each time we came back to Camp I, which was a lively scene with our goings and comings, the arrivals and departures of the Sherpa groups, and the passages of the extra porters under Kinjock carrying from Base Camp. Michel Latreille and André Vialatte made a brief diversion towards the bottom of the Barun and did the third ascent of that strange peak Pethangtse. Then the geological party split into two groups; the Abbé Bordet left for Namche Bazar by the valley route via Sedoa and Iswa Khola, whilst Latreille crossed the high Hongu Cols. We made rendezvous at Calcutta.

For the moment, on Makalu, the siege had begun methodically. The Bouvier-Leroux rope first, and then that of Couzy-Terray, pushed as far as Camp III and dug some deep shelters in the ice for our tents (the experience of the previous autumn had shown us the need to install ourselves as comfortably as possible in this storm-swept spot at 6,400 m.). Two weeks were employed with this work; at that height the Sherpas still carried 25 kg. but they tired quickly and we wanted to keep them in the best condition for the high carries which would follow and for the final assault. Happily the temperature progressively rose, the snow-falls became rarer and the meteorological reports from the Indian radio became better each day. We were in excellent form. Camp III was completed on May 7, nearly 3 tons of material and food had been carried there. The hour had struck.

Beyond, the slopes steepen considerably and the cliffs of the Makalu Col, covered with good hard snow last year, showed themselves now as ice and steep rock. We knew that we would have difficulty in fixing a safe route for the Sherpas, but we did not lose sight of the fact that it was the essential factor of success. Our technique was to operate in teams of two sahibs accompanied by the necessary number of Sherpas, forcing the upper zones in successive waves. We had adopted the principle of never sleeping above 7,000 m. After each



Photo, French Himalayan Expedition.]

HIGH-ALTITUDE EQUIPMENT, ABOVE CAMP V ON THE NORTH FACE OF MAKALU.



Photo, French Himalayan Expedition.

TWIN TENTS AT CAMP VI (7,800 M.), LOOKING NORTH.



Photo. French Himalayan Expedition.]

THE COLS AND PLATEAUX LEADING FROM THE BARUN TO HONGU GLACIER AND IMJA KHOLA.
BARUN GLACIER IN FOREGROUND, CHAMLANG ON LEFT.

attack we descended as low as possible, to Camp III or even to Camp I where the lower altitude and greater comfort allowed better recuperation.

During all this period we enjoyed the most satisfactory health, and thanks to perfect radio communications it was possible to co-ordinate all efforts. Our mountain received a fresh blow each day and gave way step by step.

So whilst Dr. Lapras established his emergency equipment at Camp III, Bouvier and Leroux reached the bergschrund of the couloir at about 6,750 m. and the next day we saw Couzy and Terray cut steps in the very steep ice-slopes above and fix the first ropes. The following day Guido and I put the first tents of Camp IV at 7,000 m., but we were stopped at 7,300 m., below the Col, by steep rocks. Though the first party did not succeed, the next passed and from then on nothing could stop us. On the 9th, Bouvier and Leroux reached Makalu Col and finished installing 800 metres of fixed rope which would then make easy and sure the ascent and descent of these steep slopes. Next day, Vialatte and Coupé, who had waited for two days at Camp III, succeeded in the final operation of the siege: the heavy carry with twenty-two Sherpas of the material for the upper camps as well as the stock of oxygen.

The same night at Camp I, as soon as the news of this success came over the radio, we made preparations for the final assault. To Couzy and Terray fell the honour to make the first strike towards the summit after having made Camp VI in the upper séracs of the North face about 7,800 or 8,000 m. Guido and I were to follow 24 hours later from camp to camp, with radio connections each second day, to support the assault team and to place Camp VII higher up if the difficulties necessitated it. Should these two light attempts fail, the remaining four sahibs, whom I had asked, against their will I must say, to stay in reserve at Camp III, would make an attempt in another way a few days later. Our supply of oxygen, camping equipment and the number and the form of our Sherpas, would allow us, according to our calculations, to make four successive attempts on Makalu, each one with new people well rested and well acclimatised. Oxygen was used day and night above 7,000 m. for the sahibs and above 7,400 m. for the Sherpas.

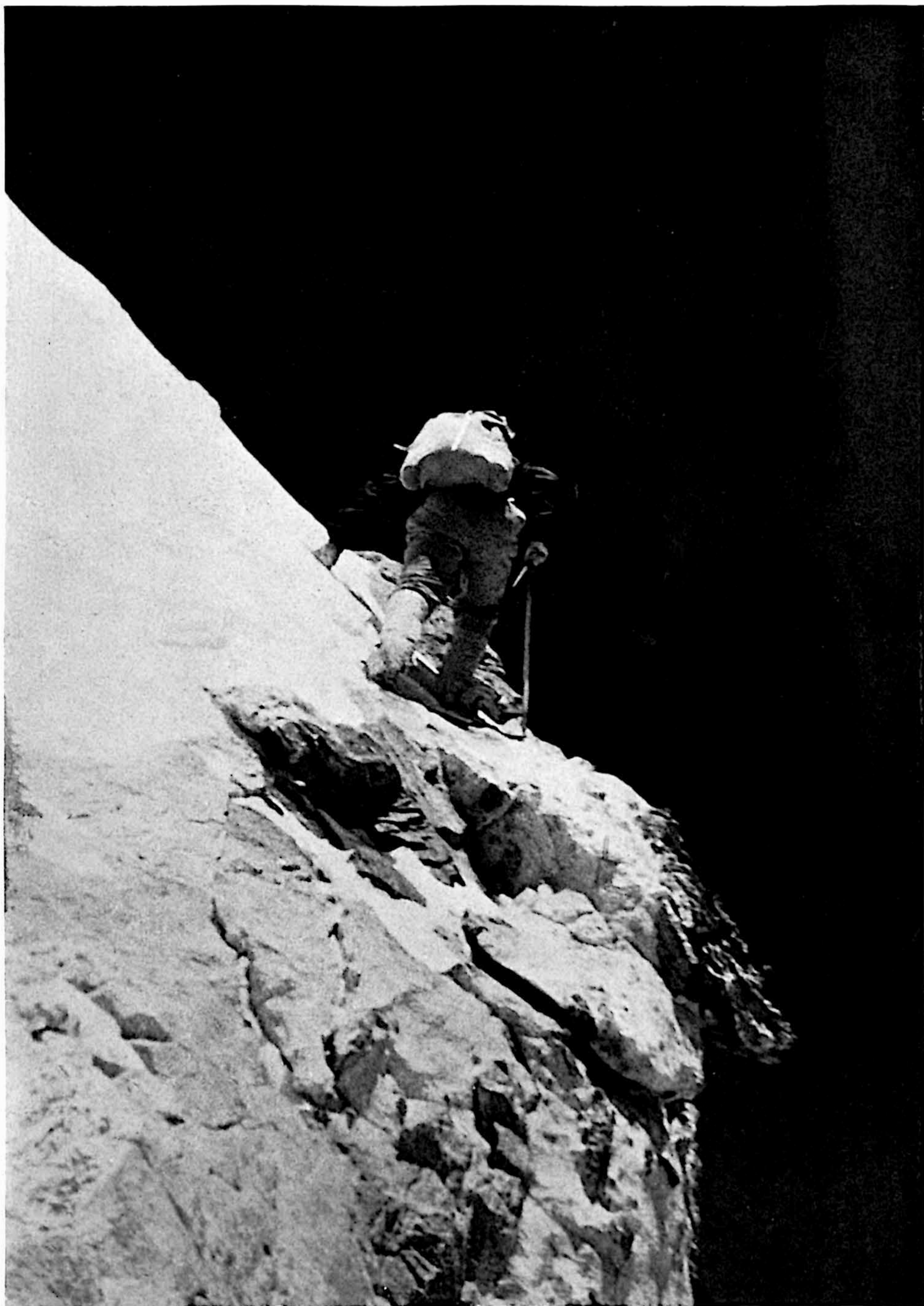
In reality things went simply. We were lucky to enjoy perfect weather, without a single high-altitude cloud for hundreds of kilometres around. Even above on the final ridge the wind dropped. On the 11th, I asked all the Sherpas to stay in their positions and rest after their efforts the previous day.

At 2 o'clock in the afternoon of the 14th, Guido and I accompanied by five Sherpas arrived at the tents of Camp V in the glacial desert of the Col. Lionel and Couzy had left two of their Sherpas there, tired out, sick, suffering from the altitude and in a very bad state. We were worried, above all, about Namgyal, with his eyes turned up and

indifferent to our questions. We gave them a strong dose of oxygen and Guido doped them with injections and stimulants. Our eyes went often toward the upper zone of the mountain to try to see our friends of the first assault, but in vain ; the terrain was too broken and the séracs too far away to be able to see even with binoculars. But soon on the spire of rocks in view of the camp some small black dots descended very slowly, the rope trailing between their legs. It was the three brave Sherpas who had made the carry to Camp VI. On arrival they were so finished that they asked me, as though in prayer, if they could pass the night there, which I refused obstinately because the high altitude of Camp V would only make their condition worse. There were Gyalzen junior, Aila of Annapurna and Ang Phutar, the clown. None of them smiled. The day had been hard. All our friends had used oxygen carefully, keeping it for those to follow, without ever thinking that they should do otherwise. Moreover, during the descent the three Sherpas fell more than 100 m. on a slab of ice and suffered various cuts. No-one will ever know exactly what happened. More oxygen, injections, stimulants, hot drinks and food, we looked after them as well as we could ; then we put the rope on them and pushed them off, not without some apprehension, towards Camp IV. Above, Lionel and Jean had succeeded in putting up their Camp VI in the séracs. Couzy sent me the following message. ' Have passed the séracs at about 7,650 m.—arrived here at 1500 hours—7,800 m.—Good place under an ice wall, sheltered from wind and avalanches—we are very tired because very heavily laden but in good form—Above it is steep but looks as if it will go. Have marked the route but do not follow the first marks—keep lower to reach the séracs—all goes well—Good Luck—Until tomorrow'.

At the 1800 hours evening radio call I gave this optimistic information to Vialatte, whom I had left in charge of Advanced Base at Camp III, and told him the position of the sick Sherpas. As arranged, the four reserve climbers got ready to make in their turn an attempt in case of success by the first parties and I reported the stocks of food and material at the higher camps. Then Vialatte gave me the weather report for the next 24 hours. ' Good weather over all the chain.' It was the first time that the report made no reservation. What luck !

The 15th was the day. Whilst Guido and I with five Sherpas crossed the great ice slope which lead to the séracs we saw above two minute black specks traversing the high couloir and reaching the rib. It was 10 o'clock ; Lionel and Jean would be at above 8,200 m. ; unless there were extraordinary difficulties or a breakdown of the oxygen sets the summit must be reached that day. At half past twelve we were at Camp VI and at the moment when we put down our sacks we heard shouts several times repeated, and they were shouts of victory. No echo replied, but a great joy came over us. The Sherpas shouted in unison the three syllables of Makalu, seizing us and lifting us up and embracing us ; which, at that altitude and on the limited space of Camp VI, is an unusual exercise.



Photo, French Himalayan Expedition.]

8,450 M. THE LAST PITCH BELOW THE SUMMIT OF MAKALU.

[To face p. 26.]

I explained to Gyalzen that we intended to attempt the summit again the following day and invited him to come with us. He accepted with joy. We also kept Da Noo, who would wait for us at Camp VI, and sent back Kinjock, Ganden and Pemba Tenzing ; I explained to them that if Makalu was climbed that it was to a great extent thanks to them and that we were proud of all they had done. They simply smiled and shook our hands. I watched them go with regret. These men of the Himalayas are extraordinary. They are men of high altitude. Without them this Camp VI would perhaps not have existed. And they had come there without other ambition. Ganden, since the Col, had not said a word, he had marched with his eyes fixed on the ground. Pemba Tenzing, a little earlier, panted for breath in the traverse of the séracs and as I pushed the pace in this dangerous spot he pulled on the rope and said : ' Slowly, Bara Sahib.' I saw later that his oxygen set worked badly. Pemba was just being asphyxiated with his defective mask, but Pemba pushed on with 22 kilos on his back. A high-altitude Sherpa keeps going and when you look at him, he smiles. . . .

Soon we heard steps in the snow and we rushed on to the terrace of the Camp. Our friends had returned.

' *Alors ?* '

' *Ça y est.* '

One economises in words at 7,800 m. We opened our arms to them. Gyalzen and Da Noo, excited, jumped towards them to take their sacks and remove their crampons. In the middle vestibule of our joined tents we gave them hot drinks, salted and sweetened, bowl after bowl. They drank without stopping, completely dehydrated.

' Difficult ? '

' No. An Alpine *course de la matinée*.

' The rib ? '

' Steep, but no serious obstacles.'

' The final ridge ? '

' A delicate passage to reach the first summit but the snow is good. The summit itself is like the point of a pencil.'

We passed an hour together in self-congratulation. This time it was sure, we were going all to the top. Devies would be pleased—and all our friends.

The day finished in enchanted content, on our perch between two enormous cliffs of ice, suspended in the séracs of the North face, half the Himalayas below us. The mauve mists of Tibet extended as far as the eye could see. Makalu II and Chomo Lonzo were at our feet. Kanch was so far away that one could easily mistake it for a monstrous cloud. Only Everest rose above the horizon, transparent in the sunset.

Behind us, what we could see of Makalu was all aflame in the gold of the evening. The shadows grew longer. The level rays of the sun threw the shadow of our little tent on to the Tibetan ridge, first at our own height, then growing taller. A light breeze played with the snow

and lifted it in little spirals. Then everything was calm, our great day was finished.

The temperature fell brutally. In our double tent of nylon and silk, that night it was minus 32° C., but our equipment was perfect. We made our last preparations. We put on our masks from time to time, the sets were so handy and we were so used to them that they did not worry us at all during the endless manœuvres we had to make in the narrow space of our tent. Gyalzen and Da Noo prepared drinks; it needed several hours to make enough. Guido assessed the weight of all the objects we were to take the following day, pushing economy to the point of indispensability. We were so happy that we talked late. Then we set our oxygen sets for the night. After taking stock of our reserves, we found we could use 1 litre a minute without interruption. We lay down in our bags. There was total calm, not a breath of wind. It was one of the best nights we passed on Makalu. Already in our dreams our crampons bit into the summit snow, on that cornice-hung summit ridge of which we had dreamed for months.

The summit of Makalu is a perfect pyramid of snow so sharp that one could cover it with a hand, one finger towards Tibet, another toward Nepal, a third towards Everest. The pure lines of the three ridges are so steep that we had some difficulty in keeping ourselves roped together around our three ice-axes driven in up to the head. A sea of cloud covered the valleys, and the big peaks near and far were planted in it like islands. The weather was so calm that we stayed more than an hour on the summit itself, tasting each minute as a bit of life that without doubt we should never find again. Then I put back in my sack, as a souvenir, the French colours that made the ascent with us and I gave to Gyalzen the Nepalese flag with its signs of the moon and the sun. We left this fragile cone of snow to the keeping of the sky.

The next day the third group of climbers of the French Expedition made the third visit to the top, four men strong this time. J. Bouvier, P. Leroux, S. Coupé, and A. Vialatte, on two ropes. They had climbed on the day before in one go from Camp III to Camp VI, a remarkable performance. Like us they slept on the suspended balcony of Camp VI, facing secret Tibet. Like us they rejoiced together half-way to the sky, filled with thankfulness for the finest ascent of their lives.

A few days later the first clouds of the monsoon, driven by a violent wind, traversed the sky, and at Base Camp we fired into the night the red, blue and green lights that we had brought out as distress signals. We wrote of our joy to our friends in France. The Sherpas sang in the thick smoke of their shelter.

(We wish to express our gratitude to the Fédération Française de la Montagne and to the Editor of "La Montagne et Alpinisme" for their help in enabling us to publish this article and these photographs taken by the French expedition to Makalu.)