

INDIAN MOUNT EVEREST EXPEDITION 1960

BY BRIGADIER GYAN SINGH

EVEREST was first climbed in 1953, when Hillary and Tenzing were the successful summit pair of Sir John Hunt's expedition. Tenzing's prominent part in the first ascent gave a tremendous fillip to mountaineering in India. Mr. Nehru and Dr. B. C. Roy decided to commemorate this event by setting up the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute in 1954. Since then, more than five hundred young men have been initiated into the craft of mountaineering, and about a dozen expeditions have been out to peaks ranging from 21,000 ft. to 26,867 ft. In 1958 an all-Indian expedition climbed Cho Oyu, the seventh highest peak in the world (26,867 ft.). Encouraged by this success, the sponsors set their eyes on Everest for 1960.

The Sponsoring Committee of the Mount Everest Expedition consisted of a number of senior officers from different government departments who willingly undertook a tremendous amount of hard work. Their first problem was that of leadership. Three or four outstanding names were selected, but for various reasons none of these were available. As a last resort, the Sponsoring Committee approached me. Although I felt I had no claim to leadership of an expedition to the highest peak in the world, after some hesitation I accepted this honour. I was encouraged by the thought that I had Mr. K. F. Bunshah, the leader of the Cho Oyu expedition to help me, as Deputy Leader.

I had two immediate problems: the first to select a team, and the second to procure the equipment. Selection of the team was made easy by the fact that the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute had planned to run an Advanced Course for its ex-students in the autumn of 1959. This course was therefore inflated to include candidates provisionally selected by the Sponsoring Committee. The course was trained on Kabru ice-fall by Tenzing and, at the end, the Sponsoring Committee selected the team on Tenzing's and my recommendations.

Three Sherpa instructors from the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, Da Namgyal, Ang Temba and Gombu, were included in the team. Da Namgyal, who climbed to 27,400 ft. on Everest with Sir John Hunt, was a veteran of many other expeditions. Ang Temba and Gombu, also very experienced climbers, had climbed up to the South Col, nearly 26,000 ft. Capt. Narinder Kumar of the Kumaon Regiment had led the three-man expedition which climbed Trisul in 1958; Sonam Gyatso had climbed Cho Oyu in the same year; Kohli was the

leader of the expedition to Nanda Kot in 1959; Flight-Lieut. Chowdhury and Rajendra Vikram Singh, a scientist from the National Physical Laboratory, had varied experience in mountaineering; B. D. Misra, a professor from Saugor University; C. P. Vohra, a geologist; Capt. Jungalwalla of the Gurkha Rifles; these men completed the climbing team.

An expedition to Everest imposes heavy logistic problems. It requires at least ten to twelve climbers and over forty high-altitude Sherpas to establish eight to nine camps from the Base to the Summit. After adding scientific members, including a physiologist, a doctor, a meteorologist, a geologist, a signals officer and a photographer, the Indian Everest team had nineteen members. Nearly eighteen tons of baggage had to be transported from railhead at Jaynagar in North Bihar to Base Camp. It required nearly 700 porters to shift all the equipment and stores required for our three months' sojourn in the mountains.

I drew up a plan for delegation of work to the members. We had three months in which to place orders for the equipment and have it delivered in Delhi, where the team was to assemble on February 20, 1960. While oxygen equipment and about 10 per cent of other essential items had to be imported, it was decided that the bulk of the special clothing and technical equipment should be manufactured in India. This was a major task since our industry had not handled the manufacture of these items before. The Bata Shoe Company undertook to manufacture the boots; the Bengal Waterproof Company produced a prototype of air mattress, and several items were made by the Ordnance Factories. All this equipment looked as good as the imported products, although it was felt that a try-out under conditions similar to an expedition was essential. Lieut. Kholi was rushed off to Gulmarg in Kashmir to subject the samples of clothing and equipment to a severe trial. The results of the trials were very encouraging indeed.

Keki Bunshah had a hectic time chasing up the items from Europe. He received great assistance from the Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research in co-ordinating the work of procurement from various sources in Europe.

By and large all planning went according to schedule, but we had our moments of anxiety. Three of our members had tonsillitis, but all three recovered quickly. Then there was a complication over the employment of Darjeeling Sherpas; the rules of the Himalayan Society of Nepal made it difficult for Darjeeling Sherpas to go on an expedition in Nepal. However, with the goodwill of the officials of the Himalayan Society and H. M. Government of Nepal this problem was solved amicably. As with the last two expeditions to Everest, the main consignment of oxygen for our expedition had to follow behind us.

The team left Delhi for Jaynagar on March 2, and arrived there two

days later to find most of the Sherpas and porters waiting for them. The baggage wagons had arrived the night before. After a heart-warming send-off by the people of Jaynagar, the first party of the Expedition with most of the members and 300 porters entered Nepal on March 6. The second party followed a day later. For the next fifteen days our caravans wound their way through paddy fields, Terai jungles and mountainous terrain with abundant rhododendrons and magnolias and cherry and apricot blossoms.

On March 21 we reached Namche Bazar. On the 24th we passed through Thyangboche Monastery where we were received by the Incarnation Lama. We met this dignitary in a simple but solemn ceremony. He promised to pray for us until our return. The same afternoon we reached our acclimatisation camp Pangboche, 13,200 ft. on the southern bank of Imja Khola nearly three miles north-east of Thyangboche. Here we paid off most of our porters and retained only 200 to start carrying loads to Base Camp.

I divided the acclimatisation training programme into two phases of one and two weeks' duration. During the first phase we climbed in small parties to heights of 16,000 to 18,000 feet. The idea of acclimatisation being 'to climb high and sleep low', members went up every day and came down to sleep at the camp. Some interesting ascents were made, including perhaps some previously unclimbed minor peaks. Climbers were also made to increase the loads in their rucksacks progressively and most of us eventually carried loads of 50 lb or over. In the afternoons we held classes on subjects like oxygen, familiarisation with new equipment, first-aid, causes and prevention of snow blindness and dehydration. Members were also made to wear the oxygen masks periodically to get them used to climbing with the masks on.

During the first week the two doctors and I watched the performance and behaviour of the climbers carefully. Capt. Das also carried out some physiological tests. Towards the end of this phase we weighed all members and were pleasantly surprised to find that no one had lost any weight. In fact, some of us had put on a pound or two. Ever since we left Jaynagar members and the Sherpas had been given multivitamin, Vitamin C and salt tablets.

For the second phase, I divided the climbers into three parties. Each party of four members had its own team of ten high-altitude Sherpas. They had to work together during the acclimatisation climbs and, later, on our first major obstacle, the ever-shifting ice-fall.

The first party (Ang Temba, Keki Bunshah, Kohli and Jungalwalla accompanied by one medical officer Bhagwanani) left for Lobuje on March 31. This place is at 16,400 ft., two stages from Everest Base Camp. During their two or three days' stay at Lobuje, members of

the first party climbed up to heights of approximately 18,000 ft. This party's acclimatisation period had to be a little shorter than the others, because it went into the Khumbu ice-fall first.

The second party (Da Namgyal, Kumar, Misra and Vohra) selected the area of Ama Dablam as the base of its operations. I accompanied this party to its camp at Dingboche on March 31. On April 2 we worked round to the north and north-east of Ama Dablam until we reached the Base Camp (17,000 ft.) of last year's British Expedition. Ama Dablam (22,494 ft.) though not very high is considered quite a challenge. During last year's British Expedition two climbers, after overcoming much difficult rock, were seen very near the top and then disappeared for ever. Da Namgyal, who is very fond of looking through the binoculars, spotted a fixed rope and a rope ladder along the North-east ridge. A couple of days later this party climbed another very interesting landmark of the area, named the 'Yellow Needle' by the Swiss Expedition in 1956, and reached the top after fairly difficult rock climbing. This party spent three days in the Lobuje area before going up to Base Camp to relieve Party No. I on the ice-fall.

Party III with Gombu, Sonam Gyatso, Chowdhury, Rajendra Vikram Singh and the photographer Gopal camped on the southern slopes of Taweche on March 31. This is yet another peak which, though under 23,000 ft., is technically very difficult. For two or three days the party trained on rock and ice up to 18,400 ft. before they moved to Chukhung glacier.

The Headquarter group consisting of the Secretary, Meteorological Officer and the Liaison Officer left Pangboche on April 5 and, after staying at Pheriche and Lobuje, reached Base Camp on April 13. The oxygen consignment escorted by Grewal arrived at Lobuje on April 8.

Base Camp was at nearly 18,000 ft. on the Khumbu glacier itself where it takes a sharp turn to the south-west. All parties concentrated here on April 13 (Ang Temba, Keki Bunshah, Kohli, Jungalwalla and Bhagwanani established Base Camp on April 6, but were not able to put in appreciable work on the ice-fall till April 10), when after an arduous day, Kohli and five Sherpas were able to establish Camp I. They spent the night at this camp while the others made the route secure. The following day the route towards Camp II was reconnoitred. Party II took over the task from this point, while Party I returned to our Rest Camp at Lobuje.

After an initial reconnaissance of their work on the 12th, Da Namgyal and Misra left for Camp I on the 13th, followed by Kumar and Vohra a day later. I accompanied this party. On arrival at the Base Camp a couple of days earlier Da Namgyal and many other experienced Sherpas had remarked that the ice-fall was in a worse condition than ever before. This they attributed to the poor snowfall and mild winter.

We spent a very comfortable night at Camp I, which had been excellently sited by Ang Temba and Kohli. Da Namgyal left early with some Sherpas, and I followed later with Misra and my Sherpa Sathi. We had intended to leave at 8 o'clock on April 14, but a small accident with a stove delayed our departure by nearly an hour. After nearly three hours we were almost level with the lower end of the Western Cwm. We could see the Nuptse wall rising almost vertically to our right and watched stones hurtling down from the western shoulder of Everest to our left. Beyond the Cwm we could see the Lhotse glacier and above it the black rocky face of Lhotse itself. The famous Yellow Band was also discernible.

During the previous four days we had done much work on the route. Half a dozen wide crevasses were bridged with logs; four were bridged with aluminium ladders (to be negotiated on all fours). In many places rope and wire ladders were used to climb vertical ice-walls. Fixed rope hand-rails had to be arranged at sixteen different places. The route was marked with more than two hundred differently coloured silk flags.

At about 3 o'clock we noticed Da Namgyal and four Sherpas returning towards us. We could see them stopping at various obstacles and improving the route by fixing new rope lines, cutting steps and felling small ice towers. When they reached us Da Namgyal informed me that Camp II was established and that, after a little more improvement of the route the next day, ferries of loaded Sherpas could reach Camp II without much difficulty.

We returned to Camp I at 4.30 in the afternoon to find Kumar, Vohra and Gopal (photographer) waiting for us; it was their task to improve the route between Camps I and II. They reported that they had had to divert the route at many places because of new crevasses opening up, and they had blown up two *séracs* with plastic explosive.

On arrival at Base Camp I found that our Liaison Officer from the Government of Nepal, Dhanbir Rai, was dangerously ill. He was suffering from cerebral anoxia and was unconscious. Capt. Das said he must be moved to a lower altitude forthwith. Movement over the moraines was very difficult with the awkward load of an improvised stretcher containing the patient and the oxygen apparatus. We were relieved to learn from a wireless message a few hours later that Rai had come round but was very weak. Next day he was declared out of danger.

Kumar and Da Namgyal spent the night, April 15/16 at Camp II. On the 16th they left early in the morning and after careful route finding through a maze of crevasses reached the site of Camp III at 21,200 ft. Before leaving to reconnoitre the route beyond Camp III they pitched a tent as a token of having established the Advance Base Camp. After

that they pressed on towards the Lhotse face and reached the site of Camp IV in the afternoon. Having marked the site of Camp IV with a flag, they turned towards Camp II, which they reached late in the afternoon. Here they found Vohra, who had escorted a ferry to Camp II, waiting for them. After spending the night there they came down to Base Camp on the 17th, and then moved to the Rest Camp.

Party III (Gombu, Sonam, Chowdhury and Rajendra Vikram Singh) were to take over the task from Party II. They reconnoitred up to Camp II on April 16 and returned to Base Camp. On the 17th, Gombu, Sonam and Chowdhury with a party of Sherpas were seen carrying a Buddhist prayer flag up the ice-fall; they reached Camp III on April 18 and established Camp IV on April 19.

On reaching Camp IV, the climber finds himself enclosed by steep faces on three sides. Barring his advance is the great Lhotse face. This obstacle has to be tackled before the South Col can be reached. All past expeditions have found that, in addition to the problem of hard work and technique, two other factors have made progress agonisingly slow over this stretch; the first is the effect of the altitude, and the other is strong winds of over 50-60 miles per hour which keep blowing relentlessly over this face most of the time.

Lhotse with its black rocky turreted tops has hardly any snow on its upper reaches. Lower down the Lhotse glacier flows down the right half of the Lhotse face and pours into the Western Cwm. This consists of a number of ledges separated by crevasses and almost vertical ice-walls. On the left of the Lhotse face the Geneva spur runs diagonally to the right from the South Col in the direction of the Cwm. The famous Yellow Band, which consists of limestone slabs, skirts across from the lower end of the Geneva Spur and, rising to the right, reaches the Lhotse glacier where it disappears. The Band appears again to the right of the Lhotse glacier and continues to stretch across the Nuptse wall.

Various routes from the Cwm to the South Col were explored by different expeditions, but the most practical one is the Lhotse glacier part of the way and then left across the Yellow Band along a contour towards the Geneva Spur which has to be crossed at an appropriate point in order to reach the South Col. This alignment takes the climber along the vertical walls on the Lhotse glacier and later over glassy hard ice on the Lhotse face on which steps have to be cut and hundreds of feet of rope fixed to make the movement of the loaded Sherpas secure. From the description of the Lhotse face given by Sir John Hunt and Albert Eggler it appears that over this face there were a number of stretches with hard snow in which steps could be kicked, but this year, owing to a mild winter, practically the whole face

was devoid of snow and all one saw was granite-hard ice surface with a bluish tinge.

The spectacular momentum of advance during the first ten days after reaching Base Camp could not be maintained. In order to support the climbers working on the Lhotse face it was necessary that the Advance Base Camp (Camp III) and Camp IV should be adequately stocked with tents, food and equipment.

During the initial push the administrative tail had not caught up with the forward elements and our resources in man power were a little stretched because quite a number of Sherpas were employed supporting the teams working on the Lhotse face. Then bad weather, strong winds and the altitude slowed down the advance considerably. A systematic ferry plan was put into operation to push the supplies up.

The ferry plan was divided into two main phases. The first phase consisted of shifting nearly two tons of stores from the Base Camp to Camp III. The second phase, which had to overlap the first to a certain extent, entailed lifting three-quarters of a ton over 4,800 ft. to the South Col. Keki Bunshah and Grewal were made responsible for the first phase of the ferry plan. Quite often the ferry party would arrive at a particular point on the route and find that a portion of the track had disappeared over-night. Where there might have been a ridge which had to be climbed over a rope ladder, there would probably be a big crevasse, which had either to be bridged or round which a diversion had to be found.

As heavy traffic through the ice-fall was inevitable, the route had to be kept in a good state all the time. This diverted our resources considerably. In the initial stages the Sherpas found it very difficult to carry the full loads to Camp II in one lift and we had to resort to dumping the loads a few hundred yards short of Camp II. This last section had many objective hazards and it was not considered safe to expose the Sherpas to the dangers at the tail end of their up-hill journey when they were very tired, but later on the route had been improved and the Sherpas gained more confidence, and also by reducing the loads slightly, we were able to get the ferries to go from Base Camp straight to Camp II and return to Base Camp the same day. While the main effort was diverted to the lift from Base Camp to Camp III we had to keep a gentle trickle of stores moving from Camp III to Camp IV, and beyond.

By the beginning of May most of the stores were shifted by the lower ferry to Camp II and it became possible to make Sherpas available above Camp II. During this slow-moving process of ferrying up it was necessary to place members at Camps II and III to keep a check on stores. It was also found necessary for Keki Bunshah and Grewal

to visit the higher camps personally to see that the stores were handled properly.

The Lhotse face turned out to be a much harder nut to crack than we had imagined. While administrative machinery was busy with unspectacular work and the drudgery of ferrying loads up to higher camps day in day out, the climbing members of the Expedition were hammering away at the Lhotse face. Sonam and Gombu made good progress on April 20 and very nearly reached the site of Camp V where they dumped one tent. Having used up all the Manila rope line they had with them and their reserves of energy, they returned to Base Camp fairly tired. Ang Temba who took over was not very lucky, because just about that time the western disturbance hit this area and biting cold winds gave one of the Sherpas mild frost-bite on his fingers. Ang Temba, however, made a little headway before Da Namgyal took over from him. Da Namgyal made some progress and established Camp V (a little under 24,000 ft.) on April 28 in spite of strong wind and a temperature of minus 22°C. Unfortunately, he fell victim to the ill effects of wind chill and anoxia and had some intestinal trouble. He returned to Base Camp, quite weak and fairly beaten. Actually, he should have used oxygen for this work, but being a veteran and thinking that oxygen apparatus would be cumbersome for such work he omitted to use oxygen and suffered for it.

Kumar who followed Da Namgyal was no luckier. Strong winds and high altitude retarded his progress considerably and he also had to return to Base Camp after working on the Lhotse face for nearly twenty-four hours.

Gombu now returned to the Lhotse face, this time with oxygen. He made excellent progress for some time, during which he cut steps and fixed rope lines up to the Yellow Band, crossed it and traversed across to the Geneva Spur on the other side. From here onwards, the route to the South Col was comparatively easy. He went a few hundred feet up to a height of approximately 25,000 ft. when he discovered that it was getting late to return to Camp V. He had also run out of line, in fact he had used up one of his nylon climbing ropes for a fixed line and had also utilised quite a number of rope sections which he had found on the face left by the Swiss Expedition of 1956; secondly, earlier in the morning his oxygen apparatus had developed a technical fault. Although it was quite easy to put it right, he did not remember how to do this until the following morning at Camp V, by which time he had suffered considerably as a result of lack of oxygen. He had strong nausea and was forced to come back.

Next, two of the youngest members of the expedition, Vohra and Chowdhury, took up the challenge and on May 5 reached Camp V. On May 6 they were able to reach a height of nearly 25,000 ft. along

the Geneva Spur and in the afternoon were seen coming back to Camp V. They had to return because two of their three Sherpas were not well. They stayed two nights at Camp V and did not feel any ill effects of the altitude. Their appetites were good but they did not sleep too soundly. On May 7 they returned to Camp III and were back at Base Camp on the 8th, quite fresh and not at all tired. Ang Temba and Jungalwalla left on May 7 and after spending a night each at Camps IV and V, reached the South Col (nearly 26,000 ft.) at 2.30 p.m. on May 9. They took with them six Sherpas who carried a tent, some oxygen bottles and other stores. They returned to Camp V the same day and after spending a night there they came down to Base Camp on May 10. Incidentally, our team reached the South Col on the same date as the Swiss Expedition of 1956. Ang Temba found a diary there belonging to Dr. Hans Grimm, a member of the Swiss Expedition.

Acclimatisation carried out earlier played a very important part in our performance on the mountain. Up to the Advance Base Camp hardly anybody suffered from mountain sickness, poor appetite or inability to sleep. After 22,000 ft., however, hardly any permanent acclimatisation is possible and as soon as our climbers and Sherpas started living in this zone, altitude started telling on them. Those who had to do intense physical exertion, such as cutting steps at 23-24,000 ft. without oxygen were the worst affected. Extreme cold and strong winds also claimed their victims. Base Camp started receiving casualties of minor ailments. While two or three patients, like a mild frost-bite case and Da Namgyal's intestinal trouble, took longer to recover, most cases returned to normal health after two to three days in Base Camp. We had at one time as many as a dozen Sherpas and two or three members sent back by the mountain who had to return to Base Camp in order to regain their strength.

The route to the South Col having been opened, the high-altitude ferries had to be organised to move nearly a hundred cylinders of oxygen and other essential stores over to the South Col. Progress was bound to be slow, because of the rarified atmosphere; the Sherpas did not use oxygen up to the South Col. Rajendra Vikram Singh, our oxygen expert, moved to the Advance Base Camp to check the oxygen apparatus and also to tie up details regarding communication with the transistor sets, Walkie-Talkie sets. Our Communication Officer, Lieut. Nanda, spent four days in Camps II and III laying telephone cable between the two camps. This was perhaps the highest successful telephone link ever established.

South Col is the final firm base from which the summit teams had to be launched. The difference of height between the peak and this base being a little over three thousand feet, it is necessary to have another camp nearly a thousand feet below the peak.

There was great jubilation on May 9 when we heard that Ang Temba and Jungalwalla had opened the route to South Col. From the lower camps it appeared to be quite calm at the South Col, but when the party reached there it was squally and gusty. As a result of the three previous expeditions having used this broad saddle between Lhotse and Everest as their last firm base, the Col, according to Kumar, looked like a junk-shop with empty oxygen bottles, gas masks, butane-gas containers, tattered tents and sleeping bags scattered everywhere.

Although it would have been logical to follow up the ascent plan soon after the opening of the route to the South Col. it was really not possible for us to do so. The winds on the Lhotse face remained very strong and cold until May 13, but we were able to push up two small ferries of four strong and determined Sherpas each, but they returned very exhausted and beaten and this deterred us from occupying Camp VI at the South Col. Then from May 14 onwards the weather deteriorated and it started snowing intermittently. There was nothing we could do but wait. According to the meteorological report the monsoon was not in sight anywhere in the Bay of Bengal or the Arabian Sea. We hoped for the pre-monsoon lull. It was not very late in the season, and I thought we could afford to wait a little longer because the British had climbed on May 29 and the Swiss on the 23rd and 24th May. We were sure we would get an opportunity before the monsoon came. I withdrew most of my climbers, particularly those ear-marked for the summit, to Base Camp, where they could relax and rest at lower altitude.

However, there was a lot more planning to be done in the preparation of the final ascent. I had sent Keki and Misra earlier to plan the higher ferries and on May 11 I went personally to take charge of the situation at the Advance Base Camp. After co-ordinating the ferry plan for nearly a week I returned to the Base Camp on May 18. During my stay at the Advance Base Camp I fell ill with high temperature and stomach trouble. I had lost nearly twenty-five pounds in weight and although the doctor looked after me very well the oxygen lack at that altitude did not permit my recovery to be quick. After return to the Base Camp I recovered within a week.

The day before I left the Advance Base Camp I held a conference in the big mess tent. There was an air of suspense amongst the members, because they knew that I was going to announce the summit teams. Initially I had decided that, weather permitting, I would send three teams of two or three members each, but when our veteran Da Namgyal, my most experienced leader, fell ill, I dropped the idea of having three teams and planned to send only two. This excluded Capt. Jungalwalla who would have been considered for the summit team, but was given the very important assignment of holding the fort at the South Col in

support of the teams. Had I not been ill, I would have carried out this task myself. I am glad to say that Jungalwalla undertook this job with missionary zeal and spent three nights at the South Col under very arduous conditions.

The first summit team consisted of Nawang Gombu, Sonam Gyatso and Capt. Narinder Kumar of the Kumaon Regiment. The second party was composed of Ang Temba, Lieut. M. S. Kohli of the Indian Navy and C. P. Vohra of the Geological Survey of India.

On the 19th and during the night May 19/20 it snowed heavily, but it cleared up on the 20th. By this time we had heard that the monsoon had reached the Andaman Islands and was advancing steadily northwards. We were, however, given an indication that unless an unexpected depression formed in the North Bay of Bengal we were not likely to get the monsoon in the Everest region until after June 2. All the same we had no time to lose. It was now or never. I could not send a team on the 20th or 21st because of the hazard of avalanches on the steep Lhotse face after the recent heavy snowfall. The first team, therefore, started from Camp III on May 22. In order to save a day, they made for Camp V on the same day and on the 23rd reached the South Col. Capt. Jungalwalla accompanied them to South Col with a couple of Sherpas in a supporting role. On May 24 it was perfectly calm. The team with seven Sherpas started for Camp VII in high spirits. The Sherpas carried their tent, gas fuel, food, sleeping bags, air mattresses and oxygen. This brave batch of Sherpas did the team proud by transporting everything they wanted. On this lap of the journey the Sherpas used oxygen. The oxygen apparatus of the members and Sherpas behaved perfectly up to Camp VII which was established in the afternoon of May 24. At a height of 27,600 ft. the Sherpas then wished Godspeed to the climbers and returned to the South Col. The three climbers were now on their own. According to Kumar they had everything they wanted, a good shelter, air mattresses, sleeping bags, fuel, food and, above all, enough oxygen. They spent the afternoon taking photographs, admiring the view all round, checking up equipment and melting snow to prepare soup and tea. Sonam Gyatso had taken with him his favourite dish, Thukpa, which is made of rice, meat and plenty of chillies. In spite of the altitude, they had the appetite for a hearty meal. They felt strong and fit and full of hope.

The tent they occupied was actually meant for two, and they were a little cramped in it, but they did not mind; as Gombu mentioned, it was warmer that way. They dozed off and on and felt quite rested. They woke before 4 o'clock. They had slept fully dressed, including their reindeer boots, and wanted to leave at 4 a.m. They were ready after an early breakfast, but a fairly strong wind was blowing outside;

they hoped it would subside and therefore waited for some time. At 7 a.m., when they found that there was no sign of the wind decreasing, they decided to leave their cosy tent. Throughout the night the climbers had had oxygen at the rate of $1\frac{1}{2}$ litres per minute. Although their oxygen apparatus had worked perfectly since they left South Col, they checked the apparatus again and carried with them some spare parts in case of need. Gombu led up the South-east ridge a little below the crest, slowly and steadily. The wind was very cold and was blowing snow into their faces, but it was not too bad at this stage. Soon Kumar's mask valves froze. He had with him a spare mask and a bladder and was able to change it immediately. Then the climbers had to move on to the ridge itself. Here they were not protected from the wind and they found their progress extremely slow. Then Sonam's valves froze up a couple of times and were rectified. By this time the climbers were about 400 ft. short of the South summit. Here the wind was exceptionally strong and whipped powder snow into their faces, filling their goggles through the small ventilation holes. Visibility was almost nil. At a height of nearly 28,300 ft. they halted for rest and consultation. They looked at each other. The decision to turn back, though obvious, was a difficult one. After waiting for a few minutes they all agreed that it was suicidal to proceed any further. Returning to the South Col was no easy task either. Sonam, who was now leading the rope, lost the tracks many times and had to be corrected by the others. On the way back, Gombu's mask gave trouble and while repairing it, it broke. They had no spare one and he had to climb down the last 500 ft. to Camp VII gasping for breath. Here they were able to replace the broken apparatus with a spare mask. They reached the South Col at 7 o'clock in the evening after having been exposed to the elements for nearly twelve hours. On the 26th they came down to Camp III and were down at Base Camp on the 27th.

Party II left Camp III for Camp IV on May 24. On the 25th, when they reached South Col, the weather was not very good. With Jungalwala, they received the first party returning in a fairly bad shape. Sonam, Gombu and Kumar were given all possible assistance and made comfortable for the night.

After seeing the state of the returning first party one might think that the second party would be discouraged, but that was not so. Kohli, Vohra and Ang Temba were resolved to make a supreme effort to reach the top if the weather was even slightly better; but that was not to be. The next morning it was snowing. Heavy, ominous clouds circled round Everest and a huge plume of driven snow off the peak indicated exceptionally strong winds. They waited another day for the weather to clear but on the 26th it was snowing heavily. They still hopefully waited till 10 o'clock on the 27th, expecting improvement

in the weather, but the effect of the approaching monsoon was beginning to be felt and the unsettled conditions reported by the Meteorological Department promised only worse weather. Finally, at 10 o'clock they decided to turn back. With this, the last hope of success vanished. After spending the night at Camp V they came down to the Advance Base Camp.

Orders for the withdrawal of the men and material had already been given, and all available Sherpas were frantically ferrying loads downhill to Base Camp. The 29th was the last date for all activity on the mountain. By 5 p.m. on the 29th, all were safely back at Base. Most of the important equipment from the higher and the Advance Base Camps was brought back, but owing to very heavy snow on May 28, some heavier tents and kitchen equipment had to be abandoned. The Sherpas were quite exhausted and the weather showed no sign of definite improvement, so I did not consider it wise to send any more men back to retrieve the equipment. I was grateful to Providence for the safe return of my climbers and Sherpas.

I was glad Gombu, Sonam and Kumar took the decision to return and did not take suicidal risks, because mountaineering is a sport and there are certain safety limits in good mountaineering which must not be transgressed. To achieve his aim a mountaineer is justified in taking only calculated risks. No success on a mountain or a peak is worth the life or limb of a man.