

THE ASCENT OF MASHERBRUM¹

BY THOMAS F. HORNBEIN

(Reprinted by courtesy of the Editor of *The Himalayan Journal*)

MAY 27, 1960: *Tea time at the Palace of the Rajah of Khapalu.* During the past four days' stroll from Skardu, 65 miles back down the road, blisters merged into one another, hips ground painfully into a monotonous groove, and the supply of moleskin adhesive rapidly dwindled. The contrast as we sat sipping tea, sampling the curried chicken and beautifully decorated cakes, was welcome. Our conversation dwelt intermittently upon our destination, 25,660 ft. Masherbrum (K1), which lay at the northernmost portion of the Rajah's domain between the Hushe valley and the Baltoro glacier, some thirty miles south-west of the giant of the Karakoram Range, K2. It is perhaps a hundred and ten miles on foot from Skardu up the Indus, Shyok and Hushe river valleys to the base of this splendid summit. There were several things about the mountain that had lured us half-way round the earth to attempt to climb it. Not only was it one of the relatively highest of the unclimbed, but also its complete isolation lent an appearance of great prominence: sheer and Matterhorn-like from the Baltoro glacier, aloof in its gleaming white isolation above the villages of the Hushe valley. James Waller, leader of the first attempt on Masherbrum in 1938, had written, 'Masherbrum is a male mountain. By that I mean it does not throw unexpected avalanches or hidden difficulties at you.'

The Rajah informed us that from Sanskrit the name Masherbrum means 'Day of Judgment' or 'Doomsday Peak'. A most excellent name, provided one is not unduly superstitious. A twinge of nervousness was present in the laughter from at least a few of the ten of us seated about the room.

Dr. George Bell, a Los Alamos physicist, was the leader of this rather boisterous collection of ageing climbers (our average age was 29). George had been a member of the American attempt on K2 in 1953 and the International Lhotse Expedition two years later. Nick Clinch was the organiser of our journey as he had been of the successful ascent of Hidden Peak (Gasherbrum I) in 1958. He and George applied for permission to attempt Masherbrum, and when this came through in November, 1959, the 1960 American-Pakistan Karakoram

¹ For history of previous attempts see *A.J.* 50. 199: 61.29: 63.169.

Expedition threatened to become a reality. All that was needed was to accumulate some companions who might be easily lured away from their happy homes to test their rock-scrambling ability on the summit rocks of Masherbrum. Dr. Richard Emerson, a University of Cincinnati sociologist, contributed his considerable rock-climbing talent in return for the opportunity to observe the response of a group (including himself) to severe stress. Tom McCormack, a California rancher, was a member of the Hidden Peak trip two years before. He and Dick McGowan, at 26, were the youngest members of our party. McGowan devoted his winters to teaching school, his summers to heading the guide concession at Mount Rainier, and his spare time earning a reputation as one of the best ice climbers in the country. Willi Unsoeld brought with him not only a Ph.D. in the philosophy of religion and countless hours of pleasurable discussion, but also a wealth of mountaineering experience from the granite walls of the Tetons, Garhwal (Nilkanta) in 1949 and Makalu in 1954. As the final American member of our joint undertaking I succeeded in escaping my basic researches in high-altitude physiology for a time for the opportunity of observing in a less artificial environment. I was the expedition's physician. Our level of experience was high and the party a strong one; all but two of us had been in the Himalaya before.

Through January and February the expedition proceeded in an almost classical pattern. Equipment was ordered, and McGowan turned his living room into a wand factory, making enough marker-flags to enable us to travel almost blind from bottom to top of our mountain. Medical contributions, poured in through the generosity of many, were packed into sixty-pound loads; and were cast out into the world at the end of February, not to be seen again for almost three months. Perhaps the only atypical aspect at this stage was the relative smoothness with which things progressed thanks to Nick's amazing organisational abilities. Then for two months there was a calm, a period when one could contemplate the physical sacrifices necessary to restore a state of near fitness for the effort to come; a time of immunisations superimposed on prior immunisations, of other medically conceived tortures going under the name of scientific investigation; when families could contemplate the impending departure of their bread-winners and ponder whether this was an escape 'from' or 'to' . . .

While many members of the American Alpine Club were equally engrossed in getting us to the port on time, on the other side of the world our other sponsor, the Sports Control Committee of the Pakistan Army, was busily ironing out problems of our smooth entry into their country and rapid passage northward from Karachi to Skardu. Also the Pakistan portion of our joint climbing team took shape and we were joined by Captains Imtiaz Azim, Mohd. Akram Qureshi and Jawed

Ahkter Khan. To Imti and Quresh the Himalayas were a new experience, but they were both to contribute invaluablely to the solution of many entangling problems as well as becoming enthusiastic beasts of burden along with the rest of us once the need for brain could be replaced by brawn. Javee had been with the British-Pak Forces Expedition the previous year. He was thin and wiry and only his determination exceeded his endurance.

The farewell gathering at the American Alpine Club in New York on May 7 was followed a few days later by a similar, though perhaps more lavish, affair in Zurich. The hospitality of the Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research, which had packed our food, supplied our oxygen and performed countless other invaluable services, was overwhelming.

On May 12 Karachi greeted us with a blast of hot, dry air and a chance to pit our skills against a few of the classical problems that afflict all Himalayan expeditions. In our case it was a late boat, not unloaded; various other items if not 'lost, stolen, or strayed' at least seemed to have been 'misaid' at the wharf. All this provided us with countless hours of futile contemplation in our one air-conditioned room at the Hotel Metropole. In the end our expedition motto (When in danger or in doubt, run in circles, scream and shout) pulled us through and we were ultimately northward bound, supplies and all, by the Khyber Mail.

At Rawalpindi we were met by Nick (who had preceded us to avoid all those problems that crept in behind him) and Imti, both the picture of confident disorganisation. We were delivered to the hospitality of Eric and Bill Goodwin in a home which invited relaxation in an atmosphere that clung to the memories of the North-West Frontier, the tales of Kipling and Jim Corbett. Our evenings, while waiting for a break in the weather to permit our flight to Skardu, were spent in listening to classical recordings, the piano, or more commonly conversation long into the night. On the morning of May 19, we finally boarded a P.I.A. DC-3 for the slow, ridge-skinning climb to 16,000 ft., past the glittering face of Nanga Parbat then down into the Indus gorge and Skardu; literally a breath-taking prelude.

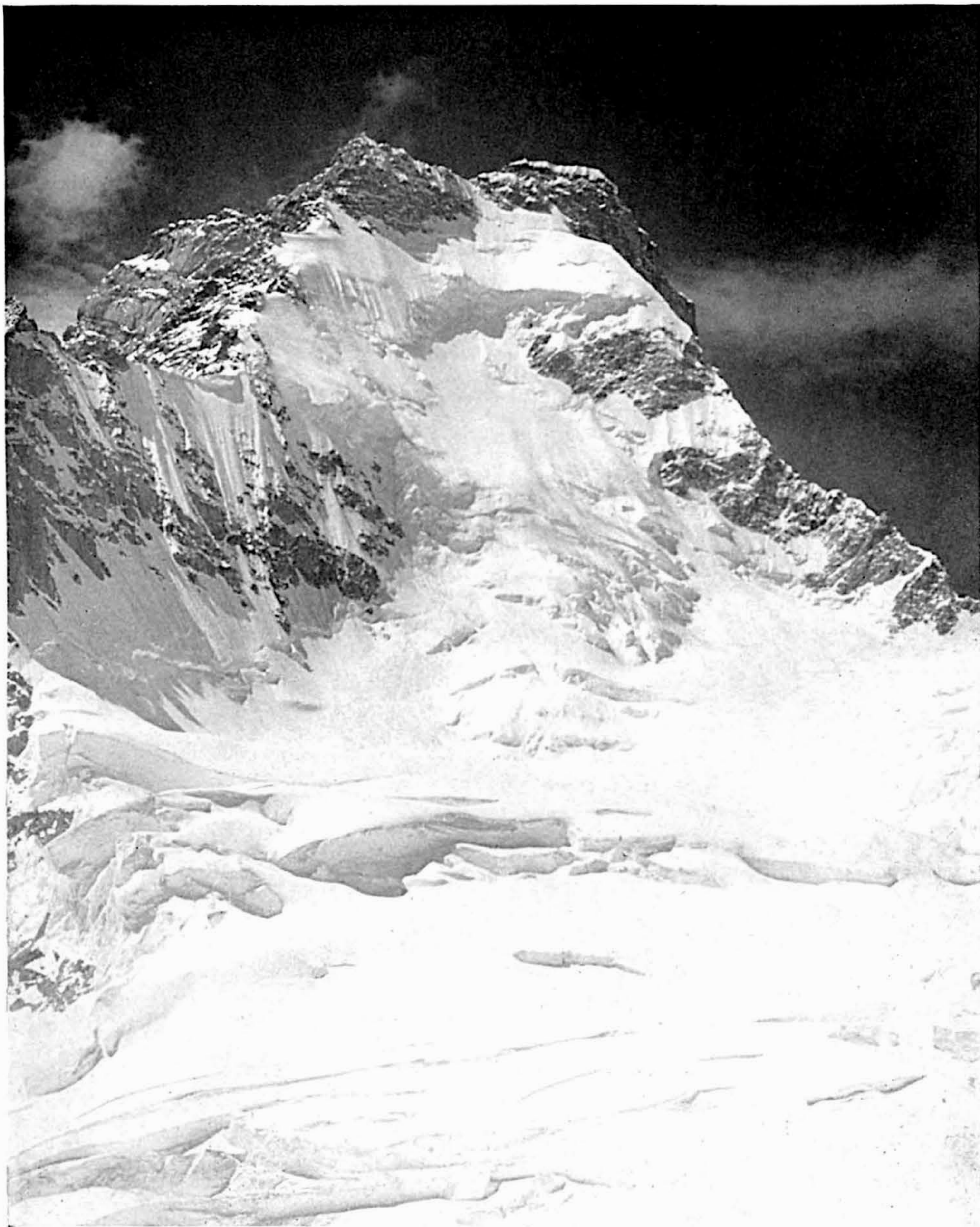
We were in Skardu for four days, repacking equipment into sixty-pound loads, sorting and discarding extra clothing and attempting to contend with such last-minute emergencies as an unexpected increase in the daily pay requirement for the 150 porters we were to need to transport our bulky procession to Base Camp. Our team of six HAPs (High Altitude Porters) greeted us here; to many they were old friends. Ghulam Rasul, our sirdar, Qasim, Abdul Rahim and Rahim Khan had been with Nick and Tom McCormack on Hidden Peak; Hussein and Mohammed Hussein were simultaneously serving the Italians on Gasherbrum IV. Mohammed Hussein embraced George Bell as a

long-lost friend, and indeed he was, for he had carried George out from K2 on his back seven years ago when George's feet were badly frost-bitten. We watched the afternoon dust storms sweep the great plain of the Indus valley, hoping for a break in the weather before we were ready to march. We dined with the Political Agent and early the following morning, May 23, we set out eastward along the Indus River. The marches were long, hot and dry between villages. On the second day we crawled beneath the bridge over the Indus River to seek out the only shade for sixteen miles, there to repatch blisters. Each night a village, sick call, and wearily to rest: Gol, Gwari, Khurpak and finally Khapalu, a village of about 9,000 people, lush, terraced fields, and the constant rumble of falling water. Certain episodes stand out vividly: baths in the Shyok at Khurpak; my private consultation with the dancing girl of Khapalu; and the rather uncontrolled, yak-trampling descent from the Rajah's Palace on his polo ponies following tea.

May 28: Khane. We crossed the Shyok early to rejoin our supplies. The river was small and relatively placid and the three small goat-skin *zaks* scurried back and forth with only brief pauses to re-inflate. The peaks were shrouded in cloud, providing a welcome lack of warmth as we started up the Hushe valley. Here camp was made, a bloated goat bargained for, the water filter set up for its evening task of removing dirt, bacteria and amoebic cysts from our drinking water. A five-minute walk up the hill and there, framed at the head of the valley, towered the object of our adventure, rising over 15,000 ft. above our heads, gleaming cold and unwelcome in the last light of day. We could do no more than stare in silence, as men have often done at their meeting with a mountain. The light left and soon darkness came.

May 29: Hushe, 10,000 ft. We slept in the open, a perfectly clear night; Masherbrum glistening indistinctly in the moonlight.

June 1: Base Camp, 13,500 ft. It is a big mountain, even as Himalayan peaks go. The summit is over 12,000 ft. above us here at the junction of the Sérac glacier and the Masherbrum glacier. It looks foreshortened and closer than is reasonable to hope; snow streamers blow from the summits into the blue-blackness of a cloudless sky. Yesterday was preparation: more repacking, lessons in operation of the oxygen apparatus which we intend to use for the summit assault, the emergency care of sudden pneumonia; blood-letting to quench the voracious appetite of the investigator in our midst. Today we learned a lesson. Willi, McGowan, Javee and I wandered rat-like through the maze of the ice-fall to locate a safe site for Camp I at about 15,500. On the return to Base we took two different routes. Before reaching bottom we found ourselves floundering waist-deep in the sun-softened snow, totally sapped by the oven-like heat in the windless hollows of the ice-fall. For the lower part of the mountain, at least, we must plan to



Photo, Tom McCormack]

SOUTH-EAST FACE OF MASHERBRUM TAKEN FROM THE SUMMIT OF SÉRAC PEAK ON JULY 8, 1960. THE APPROXIMATE SITES OF CAMPS IV, V, VI AND VII ARE VISIBLE.

start with the first light of day and be back in camp by 10 a.m. Also Scaly Alley, the relatively uncrevassed chute beneath the cliffs along the right edge of the ice-fall, should provide a faster and more direct route.

June 6: Camp I, 15,500 ft. Sheltered from the heat of the afternoon sun, lying inside our Himalayan tent. Cloudless weather has its disadvantages! But it has permitted excellent progress. Base Camp was abandoned five days after having reached it, and now over a ton and a half of supplies are at 15,500 ft. or above. This is a result of our 'Pyramid People Plan' to get Advanced Base established on top of the Dome as fast as possible. Fifteen Hushe men with shoes scraped up from the ancient past have joined the six HAPs and ten Sahibs for the daily journeys from Base to I, and six of the sturdiest have been furnished with crampons to continue the carry to II and hopefully III.

This morning Willi, McGowan and Javee left their tent at 18,500 ft. to attempt to plough a route up the long, steep slope to the top of the Dome. Their start was late, and as George and I came across the top of the upper ice-fall they seemed to be bogged down in the very delicate task of cutting steps up a 60-70 degree ice-slope in the middle of what appeared to be a potential avalanche gully. Some time after they broke loose on to the open slopes above, a small sérac broke off and plummeted down the gully, passing over their recent tracks. George and I watched fascinated from the slope just below Camp II until suddenly a few stray missiles whirringly intersected the space between us. We hastily took off towards the left while the party coming up from below stared spellbound at our sudden increase in vigour. When the others finally rejoined us at II, it was decided to move the camp to a more open spot higher on the Dome face, in spite of the fact that this made the vertical distances from I to II a 3,500 ft. climb.

June 12: Camp II, 19,000 ft. From my diary: 'Several inches new snow last night. Hushe-wallahs won't go to III so Nick and Qureshi will take them to Base today and pay them off. Snowing and poor visibility. ? whether we shall be able to go to III today. Also one HAP, Hussein, sick and must watch him closely. Still, all in all, we go good and three more days should finish Advanced Base.'

June 18: Camp III (Advanced Base), 21,000 ft. 'After ten beautiful, sun-broiled days to the 10th of June, we have been buffeted almost continuously by wind, cold and snow. Temperatures at night are ten degrees below zero Fahrenheit. Our tents are nearly obscured by the virtually continuous fall of snow; about five feet of it in the last few days. Still, technically the going is easy, and with the routes well marked with McGowan's wands we have been forced to sit out only one day because of weather.' Willi and McGowan moved to IV yesterday to flag a long, gentle route to a site just below the East ridge



Photo, George Bell]

CAMP II, 19,500 FT. UNNAMED PEAK IN LEFT BACKGROUND. DR. TOM HORNBEIN, ON LEFT, AND THREE H.A.P.s. NOTICE SNOWSHOES; THEY WERE NOT USED AND WENT NO HIGHER.

at 23,000 ft. today. The six HAPs are carrying mightily; only the Sahibs' ranks seem temporarily decimated: Tom McCormack and Dick Emerson at Base recovering from persistent sinusitis; Javee immobilised by snow-blindness; Imti slow to adapt to 21,000 ft.; and Quresh suffering a traumatic arthritis of the knees that was eventually to prevent him from going high.

June 20: Camp IV, 22,000 ft. A good day as days go now. Nick, Javee, George and I moved up to join Willi and Dick McGowan, enjoying in the process a clear view of tier on tier of the most rugged range of mountains in the world: K12, Saltoro Kangri, the four Gasherbrums. The summit of Masherbrum, four thousand feet above our heads, looks very inviting. Optimism is high and an afternoon conference in Willi and Dick's tent has yielded the following plan: tomorrow we'll all (six Sahibs, four HAPs) carry heavy to put in V; the following day Willi and Dick McGowan shall open the way to VI mid-way up the South-east face and beyond the end of the ice-wall that now almost transects the entire slope. Nick will see them settled there and then return with the four HAPs to V. We shall try to omit a seventh camp by using oxygen from 24,000 ft. George and I shall follow one day later as support for the summit team and for a second assault should it be necessary.

June 24: Camp VI, 24,000 ft. 'We are 1,500 ft. from the summit, can look almost straight up to the snow gully between the tops. Looks so close, especially when contrasted to the hazy depths of the Hushe valley from whence we came, or even the very tiny spots that mark Camp IV directly below. But looking at it from a climbing point of view it seems a long way off—all the technical difficulties lie ahead.'

Today we had planned to open a track to the couloir at 25,000 ft.; tomorrow to try for the summit. Accordingly George and I rose early to a clear but unsettled day, descending the slopes below VI to procure all the fixed ropes that had been placed there. In relay manner Willi and Dick were to then take the line up and fix it to the glassy slopes above. But by the time we returned to camp the stagnant heat had sapped all ambition from the four of us and we were content to lay sweltering in the 102° F. temperature of our tents until the mid-morning snowfall began to make us uncomfortably cool.

June 25: Camp VI. Willi and Dick left at 3 a.m. for the summit, with oxygen. Two hours later George and I finished our morning cup of Ovosport and set off in their tracks, rather heavily laden with a thousand feet of manila line, aluminium pickets and ice screws with which to fix the route from 25,000 ft. down the very steep slopes to VI. This had been McGowan's idea to contribute a small bit of safety to the steep (variously stated as 40° to 70°, probably somewhere mid-way between), heavily snow-laden slopes down which they must return from



Photo, George Bell]

ON THE SOUTH-EAST FACE BETWEEN CAMPS V AND VI. CHOGOLISA IN BACKGROUND.
PEAK IN RIGHT FOREGROUND IS THAT CALLED 'FANNY' BY 1957 BRITISH PARTY.

the summit either late tonight or tomorrow morning. Also this would provide invaluable assistance should a higher camp prove necessary. The day dawned suspiciously cloudy, but Willi and Dick were on their way so we set out after them. We passed their headlights, cached beneath an ice-wall, and after a time virtually overtook them, primarily because of the prodigious effort involved in breaking trail through 50° waist-deep snow. The oxygen valves did not seem to function properly. Snow began to fall; Willi and Dick faded to near invisibility through an eerie yellow-white haze, though we could hear the sound of their conversation. We saw them begin the traverse towards the couloir at 25,000 ft.; then we turned to begin our rope-fixing descent.

We reached VI about mid-afternoon. We were now twenty-five days out of Base, moving fast and perhaps wearing a little thin. Our hopes were strong for the success of the two above, though the thought of their being forced to bivouac in such unpleasant weather caused us deep concern. We thought often we heard voices. Supper sat bubbling on the stove: Knorr mushroom soup, with sliced tongue, thickened to a glue-like consistency with dehydrated potato mix.

Towards evening there was a shout carried by the wind; and half an hour later out of the snowing invisibility around the corner of the ice tower that sheltered our tents came Dick and Willi. Dick was breathing like a steam engine, face coated thick with frozen rime, having shortly before been engulfed by a small powder-snow avalanche as Willi secured him from above; and soon thereafter walking off the edge of a cliff in the flat featureless light, to enjoy once again the reassuring support of Willi's ever-faithful belay. They had traversed nearly to the bottom of the final couloir, only to decide that time had run out, much as the weather had done hours before. They cached pitons and other hardware in the schrund beside the couloir and turned down.

June 26: Camp VI. A planned day of rest, continuous snow. It was now apparent that it is too far from VI to the summit, especially with an unbroken track. We must put two men into a small Camp VII in the schrund beneath the couloir; now that oxygen and hardware were already there this could be easily managed by the four of us carrying twenty-pound loads. All we needed was weather: two good days to the summit. Food and gas were running low. Was deterioration a serious problem at 24,000 ft.? By the end of the day we all felt much stronger. Tomorrow we must go, either up or down.

June 27. At 5 a.m. the sky was totally clear. By nine snow was falling through a warm, bright fog. George gazed frequently out to the distant peaks—Gasherbrum, Chogolisa—as one by one they became bundled in multiple layers of ominous cloud. He warned that we had best be out and down before we were caught in a real Himalayan storm. But we waited, reluctant to surrender so near our goal; then at about

11 a.m. slowly made ready to descend. By the time packs were loaded and crampons strapped on it was no longer a gentle snowfall but a vigorous wind-whipped blizzard into which we plunged. Our first few steps from camp suddenly brought full realisation of the depth of new snow that had piled up on this steep face in the last two days. Thanks to the closely placed wands we made good speed in our flight towards V.

Then our progress was halted; a flag was missing. We traversed blindly, diagonally across the slope: Willi first and lowest, then McGowan, George and myself highest and farthest out in the gully; seeing nothing in the flat whiteness except the indistinct outline of each other; not really lost—just confused. A small slide began running about my legs, not alarming; but then with an incomprehensible suddenness it was over my head. With that I was ripped from my stance and carried with rapidly increasing speed downwards by an incredibly powerful, yet gentle force, enjoying that strange fatalism of thought that we really hadn't done too well on this mountain. One's breath-holding time is not great at this altitude and soon I was forced to a deep inspiration of cold, wet snow. For all the discomfort I determined to do better on the next breath and by the time it was ready to burst forth I found myself suddenly and uncomfortably immobile, upside down, well pinned by my pack, staring into a whiteness of snow-filled goggles and failing miserably at all efforts to pant, cough and extricate myself. From above came Willi's yell: 'George', and an answer, 'Dick', and George answered for him as he lay on the slope just below, 'Tom'. For a moment I struggled for the extra wind necessary to make a reply, then came out with an irrational 'I'm great'. Instead of being top man on the rope I was now several hundred feet down. Dick was lying eighty feet above, gasping for air; George had managed a self-arrest somehow; and Willi, highest on the slope now and closest to the edge of the avalanche, had driven his axe into the snow to bring himself and McGowan to a halt. So here we clung, untangling ourselves, as our antagonist continued its merry way down over the ice-cliffs below.

Suddenly Willi shouted, 'Dick's pack: catch it!'. I saw it rolling down the slope some feet to my left and, still totally breathless, reflexedly shot three steps to the left, reached out, and snatched it by a loop of rope hanging from under the flap. Then George called that Dick was having trouble breathing and I must hurry to come up. I plunged into the snow with help from the rope from George, yet it was amazing how inadequate were my movements to my will. Dick had apparently inhaled considerable snow and was now in a state of near shock, coughing so continuously that there was scarcely time for inspiration between coughs. He complained of severe pain in his chest. Willi ploughed out a trough to the shelter of the ice-cliff we had been groping for originally, and we moved Dick over there with some codeine for his

pain. The snow had almost magically ceased and a small hole of blue sky hovered over our heads for perhaps a half an hour before the storm took possession once again. During this break we undertook the laborious job of descending to V where Javee and Nick had heard our shouts and were valiantly trying the almost hopeless task of opening a track uphill to us. As the snow began to fall again we reached the tents of V, carried Dick inside and got him bedded down. Willi and George continued down to III as there was virtually no food remaining here. I climbed into the tent with Dick to examine him thoroughly and shoot him full of antibiotics as prophylaxis against pneumonia. He was very uncomfortable and intermittently delirious. During the night the wind rose to shake and rattle the tent alarmingly; Dick suddenly woke thinking he was in another avalanche. I lit the stove and heated some tea, but it took quite a time to convince him all was well and that he was safe in a tent at Camp V.

June 28. 'Sitting here with Dick in our Logan at V, I can see our hopes travelling up and down with the weather. We still want the summit badly, but our experience yesterday has taken a bit of starch out of our sails, and the feeling is superstitiously that somehow we are not welcome on "Doomsday Mountain". If we get a break in the weather of four or five days, we'll climb it.' That afternoon Dick Emerson came up from IV and we took McGowan down to Advanced Base to recover.

July 1: Advanced Base, 21,000 ft. The wind rose at night to a tent-shaking pitch, Dick and I comfortably warm in our down sleeping bags. Tea simmering on the butagas stove. I was deeply entrenched in *Doctor Zhivago*. Dick searched the short wave for a piano concerto from the B.B.C. after finishing the evening news from Radio Pakistan: 'And now the special weather report for the Pak-American Expedition to Masherbrum. Weather fair with a chance of some snow flurries. Wind thirty knots and temperature 26° F. at 18,000 ft. (they were a bit behind us, or we ahead of them). This weather report is valid until 1700 tomorrow.' Our existence, as Dick recovered strength from his ordeal with the avalanche, contrasted sharply with the wind-swept plateau outside.

There was contrast, too, to the waiting of the six above us on the mountain. June 29 was fair and Willi, George and Javee, with but a single day of rest, returned to IV, then on to V with Nick, Dick Emerson and Tom McCormack. For several days now they had waited it out there, hoping for a change in the weather. Food was running low; they had been on half rations during this period of enforced inactivity.

July 2: Advanced Base. Some blue sky but the mountain was still shrouded. Qasim and Mohammed Hussein are off to V with food. Dick and I took a walk along the ridge and watched Imti and Quresh

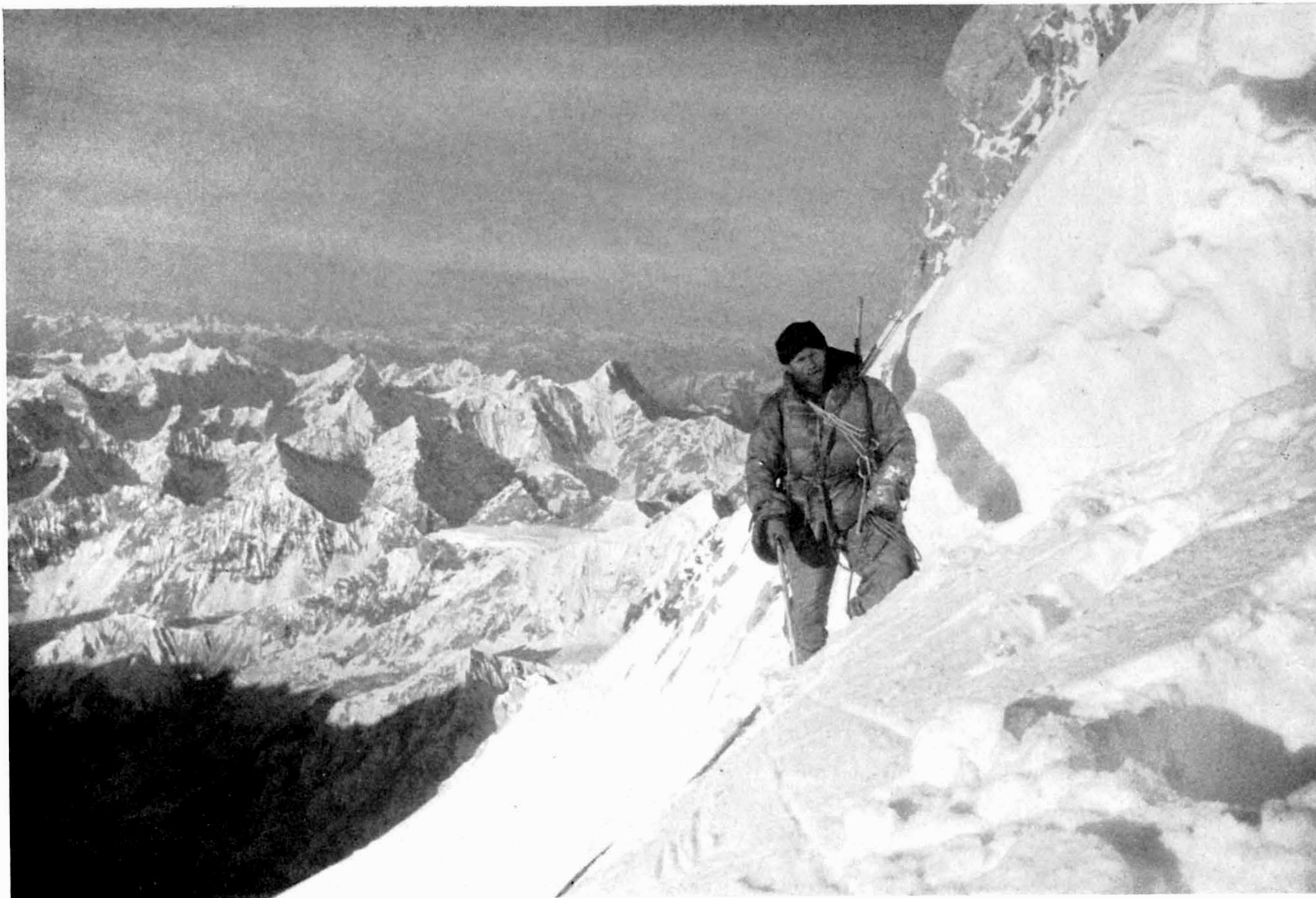
descending the Dome face on their way to Base for rest. Suddenly there was a loud crack as the sound of a very distant explosion and we looked up to see the billowing cloud of a huge ice avalanche which had just swept the South-east face of Masherbrum. Was anybody out there today? In the early afternoon the two HAPs returned from above, having left their loads at IV, seeing no one. We were still worried. They could not possibly have gone above V in the weather of the last few days. Tomorrow we must go up to V and see that all are well.

July 3: Advanced Base. Much new snow and a very high wind. The HAPs are just beginning to move at 10 a.m. Mohammed Hussein stays abed with complaint of a severe headache. Rahim Khan entered our tent with severe back pain; he would be unable to carry. Qasim's feet pained. Only Rasul and Abdul Rahim suffered nothing except lack of enthusiasm. Nothing for it but to hope tomorrow is better.

Towards nightfall the clouds lifted from the basin above IV. In the last light we could see one—or was it two?—descend the slope from V.

July 4. A cloudless sky; activity everywhere. At III Dick and I rose to eat and found our five HAPs totally recovered. They had lashed their loads and were waiting impatiently to be off. We crawled into our bulky loads and started slowly in their tracks. Slow as we went, Rasul seemed determined we must have our share of trail breaking; thus we rejoined the HAPs for a long pause and observed a lone figure coming toward us from the slopes below Camp IV. McCormack soon joined us with eagerly awaited news. Four of them had come down to IV the previous evening as food was nearly gone. All six planned on returning to III today if the weather remained poor. But, with the sudden change, Willi and George were already reopening the path from V to VI while Dick Emerson and Javee were off from IV to join them that same day at VI. Nick was waiting for us at IV. After attempting to place a temporary filling in the gap left by a large gold inlay in Mac's tooth, we trudged slowly on to IV, snacked with Nick, and the three of us strolled leisurely, chatting as we walked, on to V. Emerson and Javee were just leaving V for VI. George and Willi were almost straight above us, sinking deeply in as they finished the climb to VI. We reached Camp V about 6 p.m. along with the evening cold, said good-bye to the HAPs who had just completed a superb carry. It must have been a heartening sight to Willi and George to look down on all this flurry of upward activity and all the supplies it must represent. The evening of the 4th of July was crisp and clear with a promise of more good weather.

July 5: Camp V, 23,000 ft. We spent the day in camp, according to plan, and watched the exceedingly slow but persistent progress of the four on the wall above VI. How much had it changed? Was it safe? As the afternoon passed and the sun left the slope, we found it



Photo, George Bell]

WILLI UNSOELD AT THE BERGSCHRUND BELOW THE COULOIR LEADING TO SUMMIT RIDGE. ROCKS OF SOUTH OR WEST PEAK IN BACKGROUND. TAKEN ABOUT 6.0 A.M. ON JULY 6, 1960.

hard to imagine that Dick and Javee could leave Willi and George at VII and still be able to return to VI before dark. The weather looked unsettled to the south with a cap over the summit of Chogolisa. As night came on we saw Dick and Javee reach the end of the fixed line just above VI. So now Willi and George were camped in a tent just six hundred feet below the summit of Masherbrum. Tomorrow, Inshalla, was the day!

July 6. McGowan, Clinch and I left Camp V at 5.30 a.m., headed upward. Fifteen hours later McGowan and I sat outside this same tent in the brilliant moonlight of a warm Himalayan night, almost too exhausted to remove crampons and crawl inside for food. Between, a lot transpired.

As we climbed rapidly toward VI in the brilliant early morning sun we caught sight of two tiny figures entering the bottom of the couloir high above; the upper one was stationary, the other moved up with surprising speed to join him. So Willi and George were off. We reached VI about 9 a.m. in time for a second breakfast which Dick Emerson was preparing. I was surprised that both Javee and Dick looked so fresh after the long labour of the day before. It was decided that McGowan and I, with the benefit of a week's rest at III, should continue up to VII as support for Willi and George, and to make a second attempt on the summit should it be necessary. Javee was to accompany us to VII to become a part of a second ascent party tomorrow if all went well today. Nick and Dick Emerson would go it from VI with oxygen and a very early start. It had long ago been decided that once the mountain was climbed one of our next objectives was to have one of our Pakistani members reach the top, if at all possible. So we three were to go to VII and Willi and George were expected to make it back to VI this same day.

About 11 a.m. we started from VI; the sky had become hazy now. To our surprise the climb was as much an effort as always, for most of the steps had become solidly drifted with snow since Dick and Javee descended the evening before. After a time we broke out on to the open slopes below the traverse to VII, and with this reopening of the view above we searched for signs of our summit party. Dick McGowan began to slow, admitting to severe stomach cramps. We continued on, hoping this touch of 'indigestion' would pass. About 1 p.m. a tiny figure appeared against the skyline at the top of the couloir, then another; they had made it up the snow in slightly under eight hours. George and Willi were now higher on Masherbrum than anyone had been before. Between them and the summit lay a gentle but narrow snow ridge blocked by two rock steps. As we moved slowly upward, one at a time, we watched them travel rapidly along the ridge, hidden from view for a time then reappearing beyond the first step. Our

upward progress seemed to stop as we followed the unfolding of the final chapter high against the sky. For a long time they seemed to sit immobile at the base of the second step, a granite wall about fifty feet high, vertical along the ridge, quite as steep on this side. Then suddenly they were there, first one, then the other atop the final step! Two almost imperceptible spots against an intense blue-black sky, moving rapidly along the crest towards the summit. Exultant, I yelled at the top of my voice, 'Shabash! Shabash!'—about the only bit of Balti I had mastered. And surprisingly, from high above, came the faint but unmistakable reverberation of Willi's triumphant reply. So the mountain was climbed. Weeks of labour and waiting had been all for this one moment, which we three were privileged to witness as an audience perched on the slopes below.

But the joy was short-lived. Dick's distress was steadily becoming worse. Another disturbing thought entered our minds: it was now nearly four in the afternoon. Willi and George could not possibly make it to VI today. It might be a trifle crowded with five squeezed into a single two-man tent, precariously hung on the lip of a rotten schrund; but perhaps it could be done for a single night. We stopped to lighten Dick's load, rest, nibble some chocolate. Javee started diagonally up beside the fixed line, the rope between him and Dick hanging in a long loop down the face. As Javee started off Dick suddenly began retching and shaking. It seemed, alas, time to head downwards. I yelled at Javee who reluctantly turned to descend. I was totally absorbed in Dick's difficulties; hence Javee was not on belay, but the entire slope was well protected by the fixed line. Dick, watching Javee, suddenly shouted, 'You had better get him on belay, Tom.' Then, 'He's going to fall!' which he promptly did. Clutching desperately for the fixed line and missing, Javee was off down the slope, head over heels in ever-accelerating bounds. Time seemed to stand still as we paused to ponder the consequences. Dick sank his axe deep into the bottomless snow while I, closest to Javee, wrapped one arm many times about the fixed rope and the other about the top end of the line to Javee, a rather unorthodox approach to belaying; I was determined that nothing short of avulsion of a shoulder would part my contact with the mountain-side. Javee took one last huge bound and while still in mid-air slammed into the end of the rope—a most undynamic belay. The rope stretched, my arms stretched, and I shuddered to think what was happening to Javee as he was suddenly plunged head downward into the snow 120 ft. below us, much like a huge fish as the hook is suddenly sunk home. He lay there inert for a time as Dick yelled at him and I lay pinned to the slope by the spread-eagling tautness of the rope. Then slowly he began to stir, to unwind and untangle himself and finally resume an upright position with a weak

reply, 'I'm all right'. The remainder of the descent proceeded at a painstakingly slow, ultra-cautious pace to VI, where we stumbled into the tent with Nick and Dick Emerson. It was decided that Javee would remain here to rest while McGowan and I started wearily on our way back to V. Looking up once again to the couloir we could see two small dots, almost where we had first spotted them fourteen hours earlier, almost back to VII. We were too tired to yell, exhausted by the excessive degree of caution brought on by exhaustion.

July 7: Camp V. Another one of those very clear days. To the south clouds seemed to be slowly piling up, a little more each day. McGowan was tired and very weak. From this time on we became only an audience to the scenes being enacted on the gigantic stage high above. We watched in envious fascination as Nick, Javee and Dick Emerson came into view on the fixed ropes above VI, going up. About 3.30 p.m., as the face fell into shade, two climbers appeared from along the schrund by VII and began to descend the fixed line. The five met a short distance above the site of Javee's tumble yesterday. Through binoculars we could make out only vague silhouettes. Willi and George continued down to VI, the other three toward VII.

July 8: Camp V. '4 p.m. Just put on the Knorr vegetable soup for supper. Dick McGowan does poorly and tomorrow if all's well above, we'll head down to III. Heard a shout about half hour ago—from the summit?... 4.45. Willi and George coming in. More soup! Didn't expect them until tomorrow.' We were surprised to see them down from VI while the others were still above, but as soon as George came into the tent the reason was apparent. Their story:

A rather sleepless night (July 5) at VII with the tent pitched eerily on the edge of a rotten schrund, one side at a rather unpleasant angle; ice and snow falling from above on to the tent, creating a sliding sound as if the entire structure, occupants and all, were just taking off down the face. They started at 5 a.m. for the summit. The snow in the couloir went, but that is all one could say; relentlessly steep, varying from ice to unconsolidated waist-deep powder. To the left they caught sight of the line which Whillans had left hanging from the cliffs three years ago. Safeguarding the ascent with rappel pickets, they eventually reached and circumnavigated a small cornice at the crest, cut two tiny buckets in the knife-edged ridge to sit and eat some chocolate. It was noon. Behind their backs the face dropped spectacularly to the Baltoro glacier. The biting wind was a contrast to the heat of the couloir. Beyond was a small step of rotten rock held together only by its perpetually frozen state. An ice screw sufficed for safety. Then they were on the second, higher step. This was solid; a chimney splitting the eastern wall; a place part-way up where they could sit, packs on laps, out of the wind for a time to eat lunch. From there a



Photo, George Bell]

WILLI UNSOELD ON THE SUMMIT RIDGE. SOUTH OR WEST PEAK BEHIND. TAKEN ABOUT 3.15 P.M. ON JULY 6, 1960.

few hundred yards of almost level snow ridge—Willi said he could have run it—and the summit before 4 p.m. A spectacular view of the immense Baltoro glacier, rubble-covered. The Mustagh Tower was almost unidentifiable below. K2, of course, dominated the scene, magnificent and huge. After an hour they turned down. The descent was characterised by several rappels, one where the rope stuck and Willi frustratedly had to climb back to free it. Down the couloir, and finally into the tent about 8 p.m.

That night George's cough became much worse. He began to wheeze and gasp for breath, incoherently humming nonsense tunes to himself. About 10 p.m. Willi brewed some hot chocolate, then proceeded to throw the emergency kit at him: Digoxin, diuretic, Erythromycin, Achromycin. With all that George dozed sporadically and by 3 p.m. on the 7th was sufficiently improved to make the trip to VI, passing the ascending trio on the way. Another full day of rest and finally late this afternoon they decided to come down to V so I could look at George. He had a severe laryngitis, a deep rattling cough, and definite areas of dullness and moist râles in both lungs—a splotchy but moderately severe bronchopneumonia. We winced and dined them and made plans to send George and Dick McGowan down on the morrow. The indomitable Unsoeld and I would remain to protect the flank of the three above.

July 9: Camp V. 'The weather was deteriorating daily. Whatever is coming has been building up slowly, day by day, but it should be quite a blow when it arrives. No snow yet and the face is still O.K.' George and McGowan hung on until early afternoon. Since Willi and George had seen someone at VII yesterday afternoon, we felt their summit attempt had failed and they should soon be coming down to VI. Finally George and McGowan left with plans to signal by flashlight from III that evening if there was any news. Alone, Willi and I worried; what could be holding them up? Was someone sick? As the afternoon passed we gorged on chocolate 'ice cream', talked of many things. Willi blasted the stillness with periodic whoops that should have been audible on the Baltoro, but no answer came. McGowan and Bell went down to IV. Then, too late to be an echo, a faint but distinct shout from high above! Willi and I embraced each other ecstatically; they were there! The pressure was off. We began supper: Leek soup, a can of roast beef. About 5.30 p.m. we were preparing to crawl into our bags. Willi took one more look at the face: three figures were slowly descending the snow below VII. The first man seemed to slip or lie down often then be up again along the fixed ropes. The sun was gone from the face but still shone on Sérac Peak across the valley, and on two tiny figures just descending from its summit; so McCormack and Abdul Rahim had finally ascended this

tantalising knoll that sat so near Advanced Base. We crawled into our bags happy. As it became dark we suddenly heard the clear shout of Emerson's voice, 'I have you both on my belay.' Tired as they were, there was no doubt they would soon be safely settled at VI. At 8 p.m. I signalled George at III: All's well. We talked late and finally slept.

July 10: Camp V. I woke at 4 a.m., Cheyne-Stoking vigorously. Willi, asleep, was doing the same. Crawling out into the moonlight I dug out a tank of oxygen, brought it into the tent and returned to my bag. My pulse was 100, breathing irregular. Turning on a flow of oxygen, my breathing returned instantly to normal and before I could count my pulse again I had fallen asleep. I woke again four hours later. Willi had hot water. We ate apple-flakes, hot-buttered toast, melted cheese. The weather had changed, completely socked in, snowing slightly. We waited until eleven for the three to come down from VI. Snow increasing. As we were preparing to go up, out of the snow from below appeared Rasul and Abdul Rahim, embracing us as long lost friends. With their happy smiles to bolster our morale we set out into the vigorous snowfall, going steadily without pause to rest. In an hour and a half we were level with VI just as they were leaving. First Javee, stumbling wearily as we had seen him do the evening before; then Nick, also having trouble walking, and finally Dick Emerson with a snug hold on the rope. By the time they joined us the blizzard was whistling merrily about our ears, palling only slightly to the competition of Willi's harmonica playing 'Massa's in de cold, cold ground'. We took Nick and Javee's packs, put Clinch between us and dropped off into the blind invisibility, measuring rope lengths like an inch worm, to the point of hasty, nervous traverse across our old avalanche slope. At 4 p.m. we were all at V, safe at last. Quite a blizzard and some small snow slides on the way down, but nothing big this time; another hour and we might have found things less pleasant.

Nick, totally bedraggled, was nevertheless not at a loss for words, and as we finished the mushroom soup and the wind shook the tent furiously we heard his tale of the second ascent of Masherbrum: When they finally reached VII on the evening of the 7th and climbed into the tent all were tired. No one started supper. Awakening about 2.30 the next morning, they began heating soup. Suddenly one of the small bivouac stoves caught fire and this quickly spread to the tent liner. George Bell's down pants were sacrificed to the cause of extinguishing it, after which all three went back to bed, their water having been thrown on the fire. At 7.30 Emerson was suffering an upset stomach and decided to remain in camp. Nick and Javee started the trek to the summit themselves. Using oxygen as far as the ridge, Nick and Javee,

taking turns at leading, climbed up the couloir and along the ridge to the summit at 6.30 p.m. for some inspiring sunset views of the Karakoram. They spent fifteen minutes on top. During a rappel on the descent, Javee lost his right down-mitten. Another rappel jammed, resulting in considerable loss of time as well as rope. After dark they started down the couloir, but without the long rappel line George and Willi had carried they were forced to cut an intermediate ice-bollard. Fortunately there was a moon and the night was warm. They reached the tent at 7.30 a.m., twenty-four hours after starting, and collapsed in the capable hands of Dick Emerson who had spent a lonely fitful night in wait. Nick was totally fatigued and Javee, with the loss of a mitten, had his right hand frostbitten and also the soles of both feet from the long periods of immobility in the couloir. Late that day they descended to VI, cooked until 1 a.m., and in spite of the increasing threat of avalanches lingered there until we came upon them early in the afternoon.

The shaking of the tent by the wind was now supplemented by that of Rasul who was eager to get things moving if we were to reach III by dark. It was necessary to evict Nick almost bodily into the raging storm. Willi and I lingered to help the HAPs pack the tents. Together we turned our backs on the debris and residue soon to be buried deep beneath many layers of snow. It was a strange retreat, for retreat it certainly was, and we realised perhaps more fully than ever its finality. At the end of this last snow-blown day, as the flat whiteness faded to flat grey, we strove to grasp the significance of our adventure. Certainly the mountain was not altered by having been climbed, and the rate at which it was obliterating any trace of our transient occupancy was humbling to behold. Perception was keyed to hold each impression as we tried to fill our memories to the brim with things that would give meaning to this experience during the months and years to come. So there was a certain sadness as we stumbled downwards through the storm and darkness to the near desolation of Advanced Base; little food, gas nearly gone, only mail to stimulate the rapidly growing ties to home. Snow fell and the blizzard continued through the night.

July 13: Base Camp, 13,500 ft. All safe at Base, recovering from fatigue and hunger. The descent of the Dome had been an uneasy labour through deep wet snow with the roar of avalanches all about us. The ice-fall was transformed from the slumbering giant of six weeks before; the giant had come alive. Javee, McCormack and I arrived after dark on July 11; Emerson, Unsoeld and Clinch appeared the following night. The HAPs, alone, were back from a round trip to II with the final loads. Danger was all behind us now. Our six HAPs had done a truly fantastic job, carrying in even the worst weather, with almost none of the 'sickness' that seems so prevalent in the annals

of Himalayan history. They have become competent mountaineers as well as cheerful companions. On this expedition we were privileged to see them 'come of age' by the standards of the Sherpas of the eastern Himalaya. To extol their contribution to our success is almost superfluous: without them Masherbrum would not have been climbed.

July 20: Skardu (exactly two months later). The journey is a series of isolated remembrances: Javee's painful walk down the Masherbrum glacier to a waiting horse; the happy faces of the villagers who constantly greeted us 'Masherbrum finish'; each painful evening after we had broken our daily vows never to overeat again: goat, chickens, ripe apricots. Our senses seemed sharpened to savour each new experience. We were fascinated by the unaccustomed green of trees and the yellow of wheat ripened in the terraced fields, the multitude of tiny purple orchids colouring the meadows at Hushe. At Khane on July 16 we had our last look at Masherbrum, veiled voluptuously in clouds but no longer a thing to whet our appetites for the unknown. The *sak* ride across the Shyok was of a different order this time, a madly seething river nearly a mile wide. We all survived this final hazard, to be suddenly overwhelmed by the happy greetings at Khapalu, the garlands of flower rings, the 'Hip, hip, hooray!' which the Balti school children had so carefully practised, a banquet at the Rajah's Palace, and a final night's lodging at the home of the headmaster. Most of all I remember standing at the edge of the Shyok that final evening at Khapalu, watching the river rush endlessly beneath my feet, hearing the 'bump, bump' of boulders bounding inexorably along its bottom. This was a time of peace, a time for soul-searching introspection.

The jeep ride to Skardu seemed to be the prelude to the end; back in a few hours over those first four painful days of walking. We were being carried faster and faster towards civilisation, away from the new-found understanding and closeness we had acquired. The question remained: Could we take it with us?

December 1, 1960: U.S.A. Javee's hands and feet recovered with the loss of one digit of one finger. Masherbrum is not a 'male' mountain; I suppose it never really occurred to us to give it a sex; somehow it seemed above this. The answer to the final question is, in large part, 'Yes'.