

the bloody damn city stay out of our private life? The happy young cub reporter acted like the whole affair had been staged to earn ~~his~~^{him} his first byline. We'd not pressed Bob for details of Sunday and Monday. The P-I necrophiliacs had no qualms, brazenly pushed into the tent. Dumbly I followed, too groggy to obey my instinct to give them a Bramani in tender places. Bob didn't know what was happening and answered questions freely, if slowly, from some great distance.

The two-man team leapfrogged rapidly on delightful granite until mid-morning, barely noticing the streamers and curdles of weird cirrus. Then a darkening, bright lights and loud crackles and booms, and they huddled under an overhang to escape the burst of rain and hail. The strikes were close~~x~~ and they considered retreating. But flashes and crashes moved off, clouds thinned, blue appeared, sun shone. Wet rock slowed progress. Sky again was thickening. Should they turn back? Slippery pitches^{below} would take a lot of time, maybe even rappels. The summit was near. No noise yet. The quickest, safest way to the valley was over the top and down the dog route.

Bob, in the lead, clambered up the final wall -- and thrilled with horror.

Unseen by them on the West Ridge, from the Columbia Plateau to the east had rolled a black-as-death world-swallowing cloud and the edge was yards away and closing. Bob half-hauled Paul to the summit and ran from the crest -- until rope drew taut on waist.

"Just a second!" yelled Paul. "Got to sign the register!"

He unlatched the big metal box beside the big metal plaque memorializing a long-ago death. A large mass of metal. He scribbled, dropped book in box, secured latches, and stood to follow Bob, a hundred feet off.

Precisely then the bolt struck.

Bob awoke in a deluge of rain and hail. Another bolt exploded, ground currents knocked him out. Awake, another blinding bolt, unconscious again. Another, and another, and another.

He crawled to Paul, poor weeping Paul, who'd taken the bolt direct and was sobbing about the girl he loved and never again would hold in his arms, about how his mother never would get over it, she'd always worried from the time he left for a climb until he walked in the door. He wanted to get back to girl, to mother, but couldn't, he was too tired, he hurt too much, he couldn't hang on. Bob begged him not to give up. Paul slept, And so did Bob.

He opened eyes under brilliant stars, lying on naked granite at 9415 feet, soaked clothing stiff with ice. And closed eyes.

Warm Monday dawn. He was alive. Dusty soon would be sending the alarm to Seattle, friends would arrive tonight, reach the summit Tuesday. But he couldn't last another summit night.

He crawled to Paul, dead Paul. He was worried about Paul's expensive new camera. Paul was proud of that, he'd worked hard and given up a lot of climbing weekends this spring and summer to earn the money, he wouldn't want to lose that. Bob put it in his rucksack. But didn't think

to take any of Paul's food or water and his own were gone. The last time forever he unroped from Paul and dragged paralyzed legs over frost-cracked granite blocks toward the false summit, the way of the dog route. He couldn't pull himself up to the false summit.

He knew nothing about Stuart's steep south slopes but had no choice and began lowering himself down a gully. He came to pitches whose bottoms he couldn't see and descended anyway. If stopped that was the end. So what? Another night on the mountain also would be the end.

All the hot Monday on the hazy edge of fainting he lowered himself by his arms and at last emerged from cliffs — and the beginning of the worst, slopes too gentle for gravity to do most of the work. Down talus and ~~brush~~^{grass} on stomach. At dark he reached Ingalls Creek and drank, and drank trying to slake the fierce thirst of flesh dehydrated by electricity and sun, and lay by the stream and slept.

Tuesday dawn. Shouts. He summoned a feeble "MOO!" Tom answered with the loud imitation I heard. Tom was there, building a fire.

The summit party stumbled into camp. Haggard Cam, long legs tangling, fell by the creek, drank deep, and sprawled in the shade. I joined him and heard the story.

At dusk the survivors reached the top, and Paul. The first bolt certainly killed him instantaneously, if not the strike itself then the resulting fall that broke his neck. Bob had hallucinated the conversation in the storm; his still believing it happened meant he wasn't yet right in the head.

They strapped Paul to the haywired stretcher and started down the gully of Bob's descent, the easiest route for lowering a body. Stretcher and sloppy boots of exhausted rescuers triggered volleys of rocks. The night was loud with ~~tearful~~ warning yells and cries of pain. Cam was pulling the lower end of the stretcher when weary hands on the top end lost grip and weight of stretcher and Paul shoved him outward in airy darkness and he tumbled and slid to a ledge. Looking over the brink, he saw a bad bounce would have been the last he ever knew. He asked Ome how many more had to be sacrificed. The group stopped and shivered ^g out the long hours of cold stars and at dawn was too weak and sane for further risks and left Paul on the mountain. He was in no hurry.

Cam stared into space. Paul and Bob and Dusty and Tom and I, novices when he was Climbing Chairman, were "his boys." At home he had two other boys who in a few years would be old enough for the Course.

"I've got to get the hell out of this country," he said. "I don't want my sons growing up looking at mountains."

A year ago Cam was hauling to high camp on Robson, the biggest peak he'd every ^g attempted, and here on Stuart was renouncing mountains altogether. In May I'd seen ^{another} former Climbing Chairman permanently embittered, frustrated dreams turned to rancid hate.

The essence is going to the closest possible examination of whatever lies beyond the edge. If you haven't climbed to your limits, or tried, you haven't climbed at all. And if you don't come close enough the

reward for years of striving may be poisoned memories -- or a poisoned life. ~~And even if you do~~

For a limit-seeker there's ^{no} standing still. It's up or out. Once not reaching toward limits you're not climbing, you're hiking. How many years can one press constantly to the edge?

Perhaps I'd come as close as I dared and wanted. I seemed, now, merely to be repeating myself. After Forbidden in 1951, Spire in 1952 was a hike and so too would ^{have} ~~be~~ been American Border and Triumph. After Sir Donald in 1950, the Southern Selkirks in 1951 were ~~walking~~ hills. Only the first time was Rainier an adventure halfway to the sky. You can't do the same climb twice. ~~Any more than you can drink twice from the same river, as that old Greek said.~~

I'd no stomach to do much of anything the rest of 1952. I was scheduled to lead Three Fingers over Labor Day and likely would let that wrap up an 8-peak season. In 1953 I'd hike eagerly, yet with son or daughter at the 200^{meter} hut undoubtedly would step very cautiously when limits loomed distantly in view. Had I come close enough to live happy? Or was the end of it ^{all} to be worse than if I'd never tried?

Friends would proceed to greater glories than we'd dared hope for when we began. It was an exciting era. With the French having made the first climb of an achtausender, Annapurna, in 1950, and the English currently scouting a new approach to Everest, the American Alpine Club was organizing an expedition to K-2 and Pete was a strong candidate. Tom had been talking about the Yukon and after recovering from the sacrifices

probably would resume the march north. Without me. Yorick had been invited on an expedition to Greenland and though he couldn't afford to go there'd be other opportunities. Kermit, Naval Reservist yanked back onto active duty in Korea, during various leaves had climbed Fujiyama in Japan and Hecla in Iceland and now was angling for a berth with the Navy expedition to Antarctica.

As for Lardy Bob, even if he quit climbing he might do better than any of us; in a couple years, geology degree in pocket, he'd not visit, he'd live in our home hills — and in ranges of Alaska and Canada, possibly Africa, Australlia, Tierra del Fuego. I could be on the same road had I not switched to English literature. But hell, fossil worms were absolute boredom and squinting into a microscope at thin sections drove me crazy. I was no more a scientist than a scholar or intellectual, was a plain dilettante. A mountain bum with no excuse.

Guided by our smoke column the helicopter flopped in the meadow, rotors coasting to a stop. The pilot and two crewmen jumped down.

"Well," said the smiling pilot, "I got in. You're going to have to do some logging to get me out."

He pointed to his downvalley exit lane and the trees blocking the way. He explained the meadow he'd wanted was above the trail, on a bench he could drop off rather than in a hole he'd have to climb out of.

The trail-crew kids took axes and began beavering at subalpine firs, which though only 25 feet tall were ~~some~~ ^{a couple} feet thick at the butt, and

close-grained and tough.

The long-overdue boss rode up the Ingalls Creek trail leading two loaded horses.

"I had a bunch of fishermen at Stuart Lake, on the other side of the mountain," he said. "Sunday morning, back at my spread, I took a look at the sky and knew I was going to have some wet and unhappy customers so I headed up there with my string. Got them out in the first squall. We were down in the woods when the main show started. Been quite a spell since old Stuart's taken a pounding like that."

He was kind enough to offer only a few mild comments on dumbfool Westsiders who didn't know Eastside weather. He wondered why they brought in the dumbfool Coast Guard — if they'd called him he'd have had Bob home in his own bed yesterday. He saw the beavering, expressed an opinion of the dumbfool kids you get nowadays for a trail crew. He went down to show how it's done and trees began falling like he was swinging a giant scythe.

At length the pilot said, "Well, I'd as soon see the whole valley ^{clean} mowed [^] but maybe we can make it now. I want to be out before the air gets any lighter and thermals start. At this elevation my cushion is awful thin."

Gently we loaded Bob aboard, the damn P-I photographer underfoot. So we'd make the front page and more nuts would rush to the smell of blood, mucking up our mountains.

The engine fluttered to life, the rotor hurricane blasted us, the big machine rose unsteadily on a slippery cushion of air, abruptly leaned forward and roared downvalley, skimming treetops, and was gone.

At Long's Pass we hoisted packs. Wednesday afternoon. Not since Monday morning, arising to don suit and tie, had I known true sleep. The job done, muscles wilted. Slow was the descent to the Teanaway road.

Paul's folks were there. I was ^{dismayed} ~~horrified~~ to see they'd brought a picnic feast. In 2 days I'd eaten only a bowl of stewed tomatoes but wasn't hungry.

I remembered lying in the snow beside Paul on Persdex, and his words: "All I want is to come home alive from every peak I ever climb."

I remembered the final entry in Scott's ^journal, written at Death Camp on the return from the South Pole: "I do not regret this journey . . . We took risks, we knew we took them; things have come out against us, and therefore we have no cause for complaint . . . For God's sake look after our people."

I went to Paul's mother, a quiet ^{shy} woman. Many a time, leaving for a climb, I'd seen her standing in the ^{doorway} ~~door~~, worrying, as her only child drove off in the Jeep. I tried to say something, couldn't.

She patted my arm. "Go eat," she said.

I went to Paul's father, extroverted, ~~introverted~~, Paul-like. I couldn't say anything, stood dumb.

"Have a beer," he said, opening a bottle, pressing it in my hand.

Into Cam's car, silently home to Cougar Mountain.

Beginnings were ending, endings were beginning.

for those
who'd
come to
help
their boy.