

NANGA PARBAT ADVENTURE

A Himalayan Expedition

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN
of FRITZ BECHTOLD

by

H. E. G. TYNDALE

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To
the Memory
of our Friends

WILLY MERKL

WILLI WELZENBACH

ALFRED DREXEL

ULI WIELAND

and their Porters

GAY-LAY

DAKSHI

PINZO NURBU

NIMA NURBU

NIMA DORJE

NIMA TASHI

who now lie on Nanga Parbat

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P R E F A C E

THE mountaineering history of Nanga Parbat begins in 1895, when a British expedition, under the leadership of A. F. Mummery, attempted to find a way up the southern and western slopes. As these offered little prospect of success, Mummery proposed to cross the high ridge running north-west from the summit, with two Gurkha companions, and descend to the Rakhiot Glacier on the north side of the mountain. At some point during this passage, it is presumed, the party was overwhelmed by an avalanche. The immensity of Himalayan avalanches, as compared with those of the Alps, can be realised from one incident during Mummery's attempt on the Diamirai face: "On their way down, they found that the ridge, though standing well up some 200 or 300 feet above the couloirs on the right and left, had been swept by an ice avalanche which took it in its stride, and one of their camps had been swept away."

No trace was ever found of Mummery and his companions.

Thirty-seven years later, in 1932, a party known as the German-American Himalayan Expedition, under the leadership of Willy Merkl, and including Peter Aschenbrenner and Fritz Bechtold, approached the mountain from the north. They discovered a practicable route up the Rakhiot Glacier to the final ridge running westward towards the summit, but owing to porter-troubles and unfavourable weather they could get no further than 23,000 feet. The story of the expedition is told in Miss Knowlton's book *The Naked Mountain* (New York, Putnam's, 1933).

The expedition of 1934 described in this book, being both mountaineering and scientific in aim, received generous financial support from the Sports Clubs of the German State Railways, from the *Notgemeinschaft* of German science, and from the German and Austrian Alpine Club, as the author gratefully acknowledges in his preface to the German text. It was fortunate in possessing photographers of unusual skill and discernment. Photography of high glacier regions is notoriously a difficult art, and the text reveals under what great physical difficulties the pictures here reproduced were taken. From the meadow below the glacier, through the vast labyrinths of sérac and crevasse to the upper plateaux, across the Rakhiot Peak and along the soaring crest of snow towards the Silbersattel, beyond which lay the unknown, each successive stage in the ascent is superbly illustrated. Nothing could serve better than these impressive photographs to enable one to visualise the hardships endured and the bravery of all who partook in this great venture.

Mainly German in composition, the party included three Tyrolese, and two British transport-officers. The porters recruited in Darjeeling were all seasoned men, familiar with high-mountain conditions; and the cordial relationship between them, with their Balti assistants, and the Europeans, the admirable courage and self-sacrificing spirit with which they met fatigue and privation, are reflected in these pages. Of the Europeans, all possessed great Alpine experience, and all but four had visited extra-European mountain ranges. It would be difficult to imagine any party of amateurs better qualified for the undertaking.

The secret of successful leadership is the power to inspire confidence in others. Mummery had this great gift: as one of his companions once said, "he made you feel that you were a jolly good climber." Willy Merkl, to whom Mummery was an heroic figure, inspired the same confidence. Of compact build slightly below medium height, with immense shoulders, his whole bearing impressed one with a sense

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of controlled energy and amazing vitality. He had exceptional powers of resistance to fatigue and cold, as witnessed by sixty hours' exposure to storm, in company with Willi Welzenbach, on the Grands Charmoz. As a leader, he left nothing to chance; "every expedition was of a higher grade than our last," writes his lifelong friend, Fritz Bechtold, "but our aims were never beyond our bodily powers or technical accomplishments." Consciousness of his own abilities did not blind him to the constant need for vigilance; he would always insist on taking every precaution for safety in movement, and this may account for the slow progress of his party in descent from the Silbersattel on July 8th, under that most incalculable of all dangers, the sudden onslaught of excessive cold. All who were privileged to meet him in England will readily echo the tribute paid to his memory in the *Alpine Journal*: "great in resolve and action, sparing of word and gesture—such were of no use to him. But when he did speak, his words carried weight."

The conquest of Nanga Parbat was a great ideal to Merkl and to all his companions. It is the westernmost bastion of the Himalaya, standing unchallenged in isolation above the Indus valley 23,000 feet below; and it is an *Achttausender*, a peak of over 8,000 metres. Now up to the present time no summit of such height has fallen to man. It was natural that Merkl should cherish this ideal, not for personal glory or in the search for new records, but to bring honour to his country and to share this honour with many others. His own words show clearly that he was well aware how grave were the demands which such an enterprise must make upon the physical and moral reserves of a mountaineer. "The conquest of an *Achttausender*," he wrote, "calls for other qualities than those needed for difficult Alpine ascents. It is not a matter of some momentary output of supreme will-power, but far more of steadfast endurance and unceasing vigilance. The decisive factor in the Himalaya is above all the co-operation of men like-minded,

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together with that community of labour which devotes itself, not to personal ambition, but to the great task in hand." It is impossible to read the stories of those porters who returned from the terrible days of blizzard, and the record of the numerous attempts to rescue the exhausted and storm-bound party under conditions of overwhelming difficulty, without realising how fully the spirit of these words was shared alike by all members of the expedition.

My thanks are due to Colonel E. L. Strutt, D.S.O., President of the Alpine Club, for his valuable help in supervising the translation; to Messrs. F. Bruckmann & Co., Munich, for the selection of pictures; and to Mr. John Grey Murray and Herr Fritz Bechtold, for their generous assistance and friendly interest.

H. E. G. T.

WINCHESTER COLLEGE,

June, 1935.

CHAPTER ONE

PREPARATION

KNOWING his own responsibility, and the severe nature of the undertaking, Willy Merkl had selected men, each of whom he knew to be qualified for his appointed task.

These men were :

- Peter Aschenbrenner ;
- Fritz Bechtold ;
- Willy Bernard, doctor to the expedition ;
- Alfred Drexel ;
- Hanns Hieronimus, camp commandant ;
- Willy Merkl ;
- Peter Müllritter ;
- Erwin Schneider ;
- Willi Welzenbach ;
- Uli Wieland.

Heinz Baumeister, who was originally appointed camp commandant, had the misfortune to fall ill on the day of departure, so that Hanns Hieronimus had to fill his place. The scientific group was composed as follows :

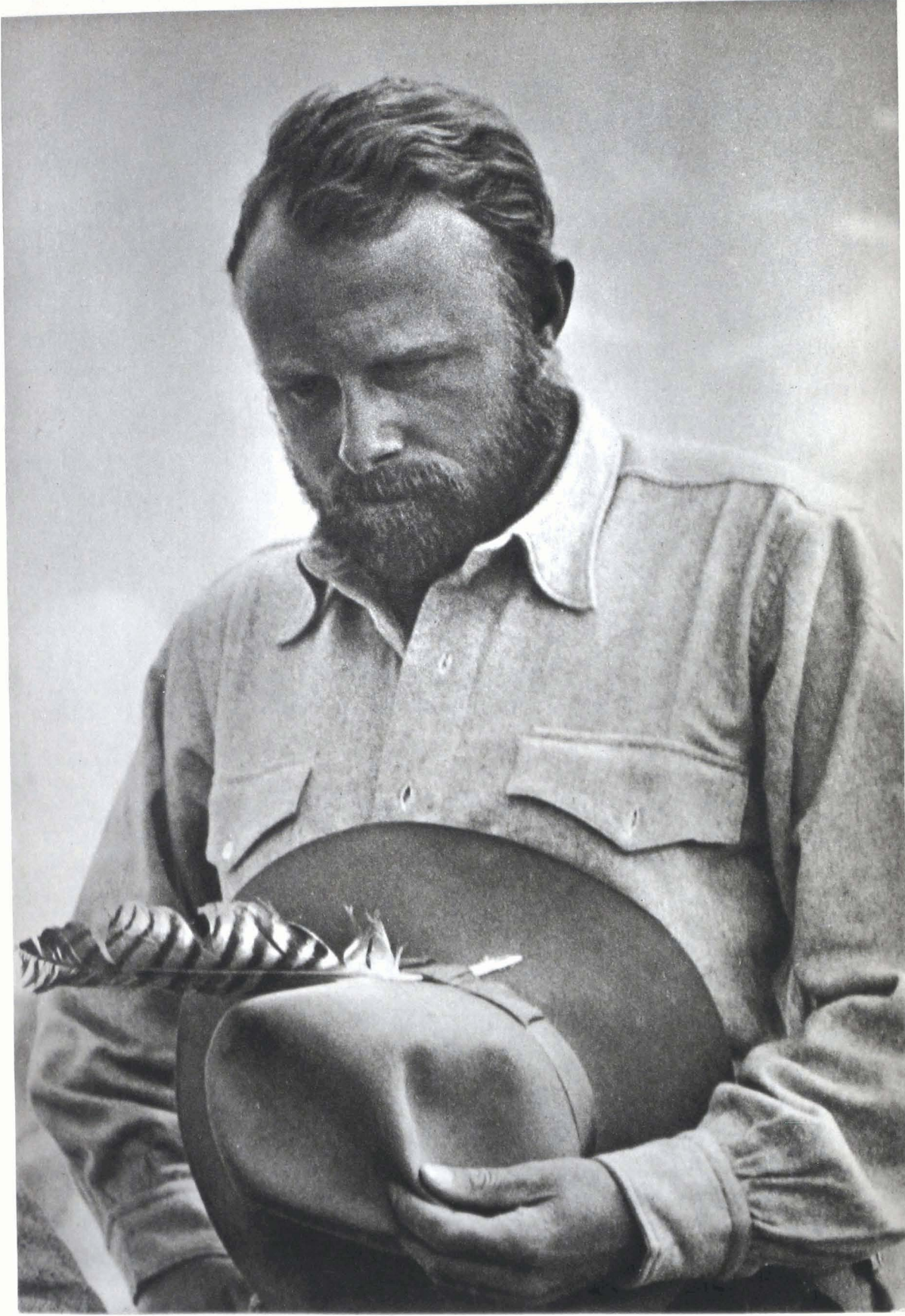
- Richard Finsterwalder, cartographer ;
- Walter Raechl, geographer ;
- Peter Misch, geologist.

Despite the manifold collective experience of British and German Himalayan expeditions, preparation for so great a journey means months

of exhausting work. Careful political and diplomatic steps are needed to secure the entry of such a large climbing-party and its equipment into India and Kashmir, and especially to obtain leave for travelling in the districts of Chilas and Gilgit, which are rarely visited by Europeans. Clearly the necessary approaches had to be made through the German Foreign Office and British officials. Letters passed to and fro between Berlin, England and India. Almost day and night there was a rattling of typewriters in Merkl's office at Munich, and the ceaseless succession of telephone-calls is evidence of the many intricate threads here gathered together at the expedition's headquarters.

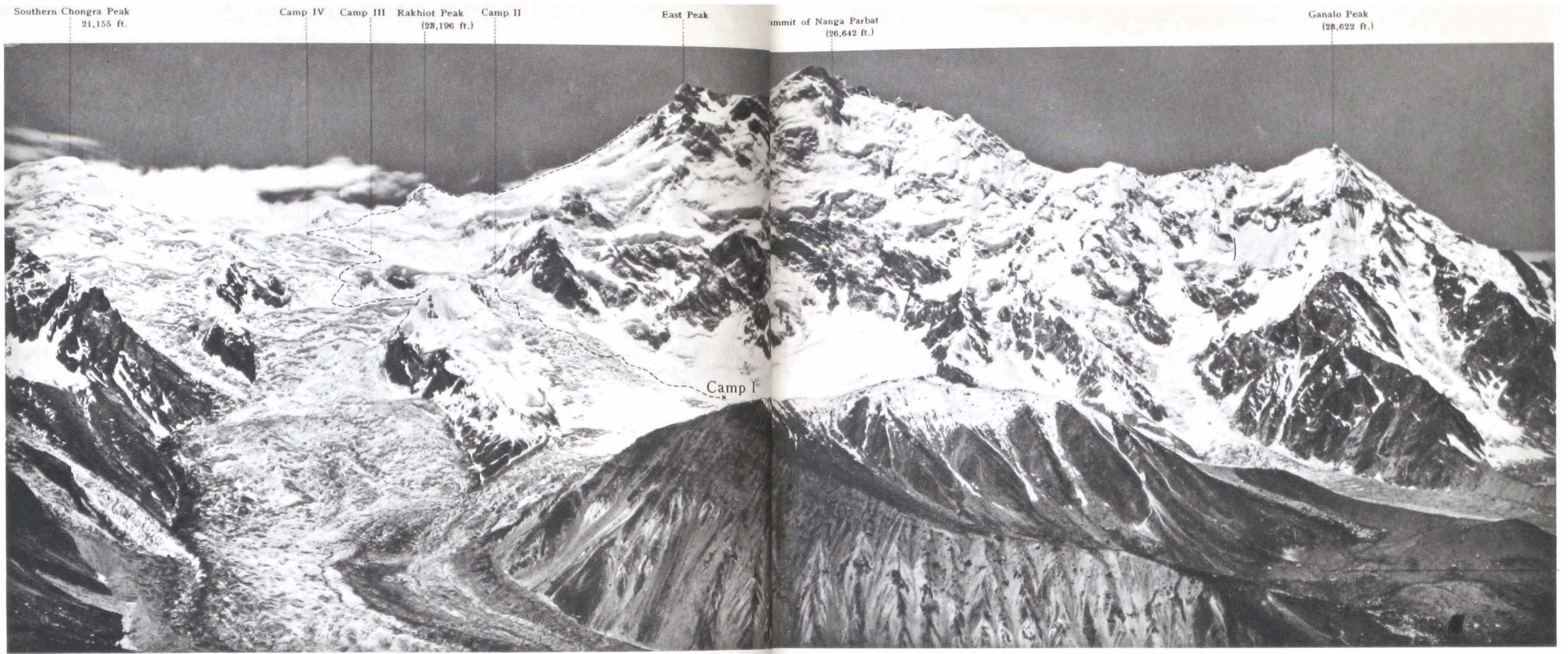
Merkl's gift for organisation found fitting scope for activity. Now he was in Munich, now letters were coming from Berlin, where he was detained on important business. His two journeys to London were a great success. Here, where the conquest of Mount Everest, the highest peak in the world, is a matter of general interest, the idea of a kindred mountaineering expedition fell upon fruitful ground. Wherever he went, from everyone and from every circle he found ready help and support. His lantern lecture at the Alpine Club, concerning the Nanga Parbat expedition of 1932 and the prospects of the coming journey, was received with enthusiasm by a crowded audience.

When at last the financial and political foundations of the enterprise were firmly established, headquarters could then begin to hand over the immense task of supervising details to individual members. Drexel was responsible for personal and porters' equipment, as well as for the short-wave apparatus, for the practising of which we spread our antennae at once over the Oberwiesefeld. There was a constant coming and going at the Sporthaus Schuster. Hour-long, heated debates arose over such small but essential details as tent-ropes and puttee-fastenings. Welzenbach, being in charge of calories, suffered most from the special wishes of his friends: one loved beef stew, another preferred tinned fish, a third wanted a largely increased quota of raspberry syrup. The



Bechtold

Willy Merkl, leader of the expedition, at the grave of Alfred Drexel



Nanga Parbat Group, from the Buldar Peak

Dr. Finsterwalder



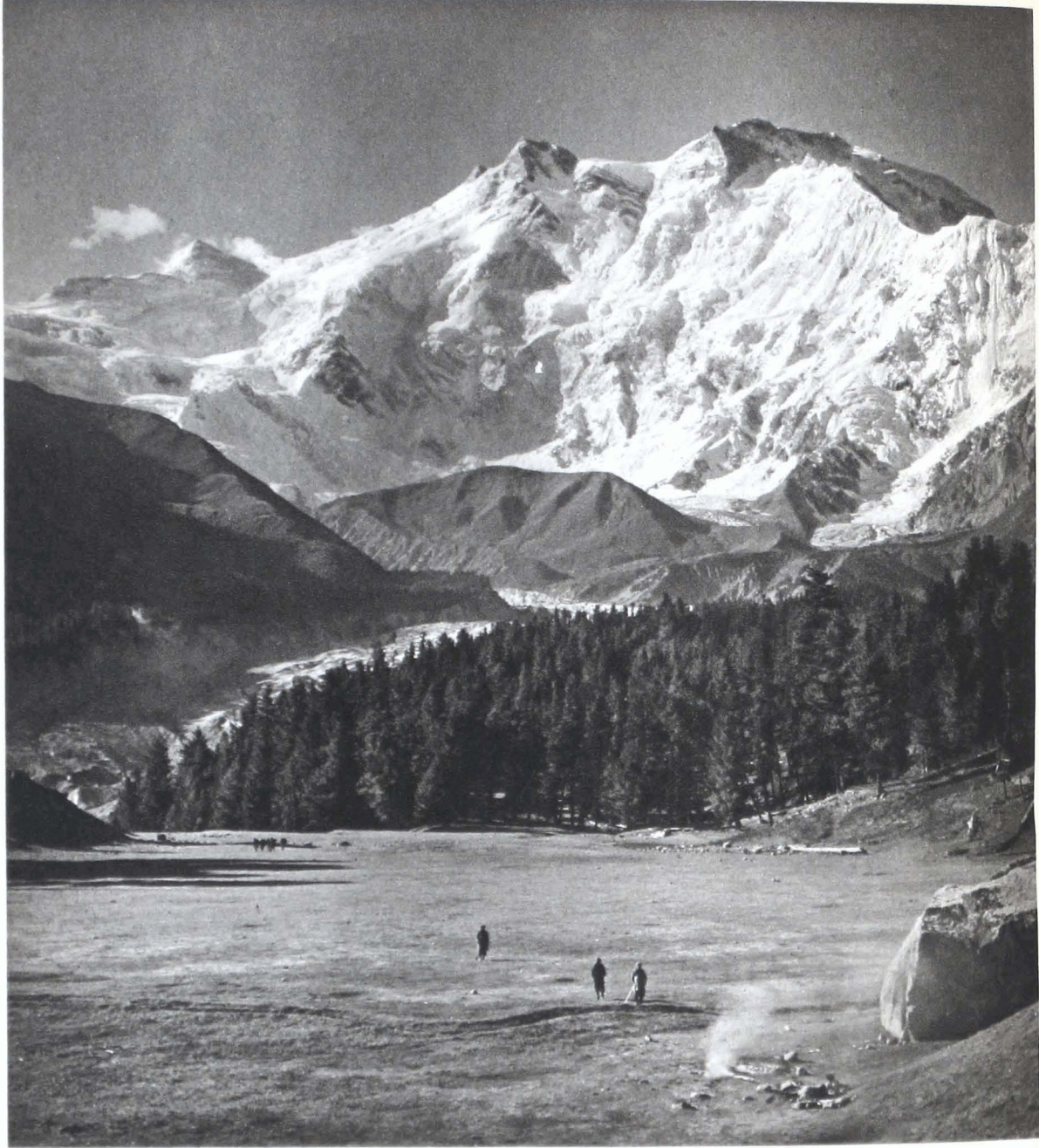
Nanga Parbat, above the Indus valley near Gunar

Dr. Raechl



Nanga Parbat, above the Indus near Talichi

Dr. Raechl



Bechtold

Nanga Parbat, from the Fairy Meadow

PREPARATION

power behind the throne of this responsible referee was Welzenbach's mother. She was tireless in her care for us; no way was too long for her to hunt out the best cured meat, no trouble too great to discover how many pieces of sugar go to a pound.

As each of us was busy with his profession (Schneider was deep in examinations) this period meant many a night's labour. Baumeister was to be found in Munich, in Berlin, in every place where there was occasion for smoothing out paths and establishing links, and his business talents opened every door. In Müllritter's house and in mine there were heaps of the best photographic apparatus and gadgets for us to examine; various methods of development were tested, and the dark-room tent was improved. Finsterwalder and Raechl, the scientists, were busy testing their instruments and packing topographical plates.

One can learn something from each expedition. In the high camps of our previous Nanga Parbat enterprise the failure of our petrol cookers had been a constant source of bother and anxiety; to study this and other questions, Dr. Bernard and I travelled once to Hamburg, where Professor Brauer put all the wide experience of his up-to-date physiological laboratory at our disposal. If one reflects that at 26,000 feet the barometer reads only some $11\frac{3}{4}$ inches, one can easily realise that the evaporation of cooking-spirit is a serious problem. Our apparatus, supplied by Haller of Altona, was fitted out with various openings. In company with the cookers we 'ascended' in the splendidly-equipped low-pressure chamber, with partial use of oxygen, to a height of 26,000 feet, being also able to note our condition during the rapid ascent to greater altitude. On one occasion we forgot to open the airtight stopper of the 10-litre petrol-can; however, a tin can has simpler and more effective methods of working than mankind, and in its distress at the pressure within, the soldering burst and the whole physiological institute reeked of petrol for hours afterwards. Our fountain pens also, in their anxiety to follow the same laws, were cunning enough to shed their

blue contents over coat and waistcoat. Even if we ourselves, at the close of such days in the low-pressure chamber, went home exhausted and sodden with petrol, nevertheless in the days to come our cooks, Ramona and Nima Dorje, constantly expressed their delight at the ready response of our cookers.

In the meantime, at our Munich depot in the Blumenbergstrasse, the incoming loads were accumulating in gigantic heaps. The sight of this frightful chaos of unsorted packing-cases, from glacier-cream to sleeping-sacks and biscuits, was a gloomy reminder of previous unforgettable orgies of packing. One Monday, Aschenbrenner, Müllritter and Schneider turned up at the depôt, pale but collected. They packed for a whole week with the frenzy of despair, day by day and throughout several nights. Seven tons of supplies were portioned out in standard boxes for individual porters' loads of 50 pounds. At last one day came the call: "Expedition depôt speaking, we're ready"; and where a short time previously you could hardly get by for the confusion, there were now just neatly-painted chests, sacks and boxes, beautifully numbered and carefully entered on lists according to their destination. It was a great day for us when finally the huge stacks were on their way to the station in the Intercontinental Company's lorries, and the depôt had become nothing but a sea of empty cardboard-boxes and scattered shavings. The first stage of the expedition lay behind us.

CHAPTER TWO

FROM MUNICH TO SRINAGAR

BETWEEN the conclusion of our labours at home and the final departure, there were feastings and toasting with friends and clubs for each of us to endure with fortitude in his own circle; and pleasant though these were, they should certainly be reckoned among the fatigues of preparation. One particularly hearty farewell feast was given to us by the railwaymen friends of Drexel and Merkl, in the cheerful atmosphere of the club at Freimann's repair-works.

Palm Sunday, March 25th, came all too quickly, and with it the setting-out of the advance party, Merkl, Aschenbrenner, Schneider and Wieland. Many mountain-friends had sacrificed their weekend in order to be present at the departure of the train. The whole station swarmed with people: relations, friends, and press photographers. The train glided out of the station amid a roar of cheering and the waving of handkerchiefs. The main party was to follow in sixteen days' time.

On March 27th the advance party with the main baggage went on board the motor-ship *Victoria*. Cards from Naples and Port Said told us how well and cheerfully they were getting on.

The time gained by the advance party was to be devoted to settling the manifold preliminaries in India. Thanks to the generous support of every German and English official, these tasks were executed with European promptitude. Contrary to all Asiatic traditions of time, the four men hurried hither and thither across the face of India. Merkl

and Wieland visited the Government of India at New Delhi; in Calcutta, Herr von Seltsam, the Consul-General, and Herr Dr. Richter, the Consul, smoothed out every path for the expedition. Banking arrangements were regulated, and connections established with scientific posts. Wieland hunted out maps in the Survey Office, and Merkl gave a lecture in English at the United Service Club on the 1932 Nanga Parbat expedition, which aroused lively interest. Thus everywhere the ground was prepared for the success of the expedition, as well as for the understanding and general sympathy which we were to meet later in India.

Meanwhile, Aschenbrenner and Schneider were conducting the main baggage to Rawalpindi and Srinagar. For the forwarding of loads thence, search was made for a transport firm, which was finally discovered in the Kashmir Express of Captain Lander. At Srinagar, Merkl visited the Resident, Colonel Lang, and the Assistant Resident, Major Smith. A supply of porters and ponies in Gurais and Astor was willingly promised.

During this time Wieland was at Darjeeling, where with the kind assistance of the Himalayan Club, and Mr. Gourlay in particular, the enlistment of porters was arranged. In this place, the point of departure for the British Everest expeditions and Bauer's expeditions to Kangchenjunga, a porters' guild has grown up in the course of years, disciplined and serviceable for mountaineering, whose qualities are to-day an essential preliminary condition of every Himalayan undertaking; and among them are famous names, closely knit with the history of Himalayan assaults.

The Merkl expedition of 1932 suffered from constant strikes, and from the incapacity and lack of reliability of the porters from the Nanga Parbat district; and here lay one of the main reasons of its failure. Consequently, it was decided at home to spare neither trouble nor expense, in order to fetch the Himalayan 'tigers' from Darjeeling to

Kashmir. While still in Germany, Wieland had worked hard at the solution of this important problem. At Darjeeling he found the ready assistance of Mr. E. O. Shebbeare, head of the Bengal Forestry Department, the man best qualified to judge the capability of porters. For all questions of written agreements, pay and porters' contracts, Wieland had his chief support in the enthusiastic co-operation of Mr. Kidd, who is like a father to the porters. The men's diet was calculated according to British data of the latest Everest expeditions.

The 'tigers' presented themselves for inspection in a long line. It was not merely our summons, it was also the fascination of a long journey and the call of Nanga Parbat, to which they responded. Nima Thondup, Smythe's factotum, who had taken part in every Himalayan expedition since 1921; Wongdi Nurbu, and especially Pasang, one of the best of Bauer's 1929 Guard; Jigmei Ishering, son of the famous cook Tenchedar, as interpreter and dispenser; Sonam Tobgay, a former Gurkha, as second sirdar, and the diminutive Nima Dorje as high-altitude cook. The post of first sirdar was given to Lewa, who had distinguished himself in all expeditions by his extraordinary strength of will, both as mountaineer and as leader; it was he who reached the summit of Kamet with Smythe, Shipton and Holdsworth. Among the porters of the 1933 Everest expedition were excellent men, all of whom had been to Camp IV (22,800 ft.), fifteen to Camp V (25,500 ft.), and Nima Dorje II to Camp VI (27,400 ft.). It was most interesting to note the reverence with which this *corps d'élite* showed their testimonials. Every famous name in Himalayan history appeared among the signatures: Bruce, Rutledge, Norton, Bauer, Smythe, Birnie, and Dyhrenfurth. The most competent climbers among the porters are all Sherpas, and come from the large district of Solokhumbo, which lies in the mountains of Nepal near the snow-line. Owing to the density of population, the inhabitants of Nepal are disposed to emigration, the chief point of attraction being Darjeeling, with its large tea-plantations and

busy life, where it is easy to find work. In addition, certain Bhutias had come a long journey from the province of Lhasa and Sikkim. All the porters were medically examined in the Darjeeling hospital.

They awaited the arrival of the Bara Sahib with great excitement. When Merkl at length reached Darjeeling after the conclusion of these preliminaries, and engaged all the thirty-five men assembled, there was great rejoicing and wild delight. Hats flew into the air, and for some time all discipline vanished. Lewa addressed them again with stirring words, and the Himalayan 'tigers' vowed loyalty to their new Bara Sahib in our struggle for Nanga Parbat.

* * * * * * *

The departure of the main body under Welzenbach's leadership took place under no such favourable star as that of the advance party. On the day before, Baumeister arrived in Munich, looking pale and exhausted. A doctor was summoned, and he declared that for the moment it was out of the question for Baumeister to join the expedition, owing to an attack of pleurisy. This was a severe blow.

On April 13th we went on board the Lloyd Triestino liner *Conte Verde* at Venice. Our baggage lay well stowed in the hold, and the final bustle with loads was now over. Anxieties about forgotten details and unfulfilled pledges ceased to oppress us, and the last hours before sailing passed undisturbed.

Late in the afternoon our ship moved majestically out of the harbour of Venice. As the view of the lagoon-city faded into the distance, and its cynosure, the campanile of San Marco, grew ever smaller, a comfortable relaxation gradually spread through us after the unrest and trials of the last months.

We slipped past Brindisi, and Crete two days later, and the shimmering lights of the Nile delta: lands and seas which I now saw for the third time. I was by this time past horror at the Oriental pedlars and beggars of Port Said, who descend upon travellers like a swarm of



Luise Scherdel

Merkl, Baumeister, Drexel; the railwaymen



Müllritter

Preparations in Munich: Schneider and Aschenbrenner packing the oxygen apparatus



Müllritter

Loads stacked in our depôt



Hanns Hubmann

The first party leaving Munich: Merkl, Aschenbrenner, Wieland, Schneider



Müllritter

Members of the second party on board the Conte Verde. From left to right: Raechl, Bechtold, Misch, Müllritter, Finsterwalder (standing); Drexel, Bernard, Welzenbach (seated)



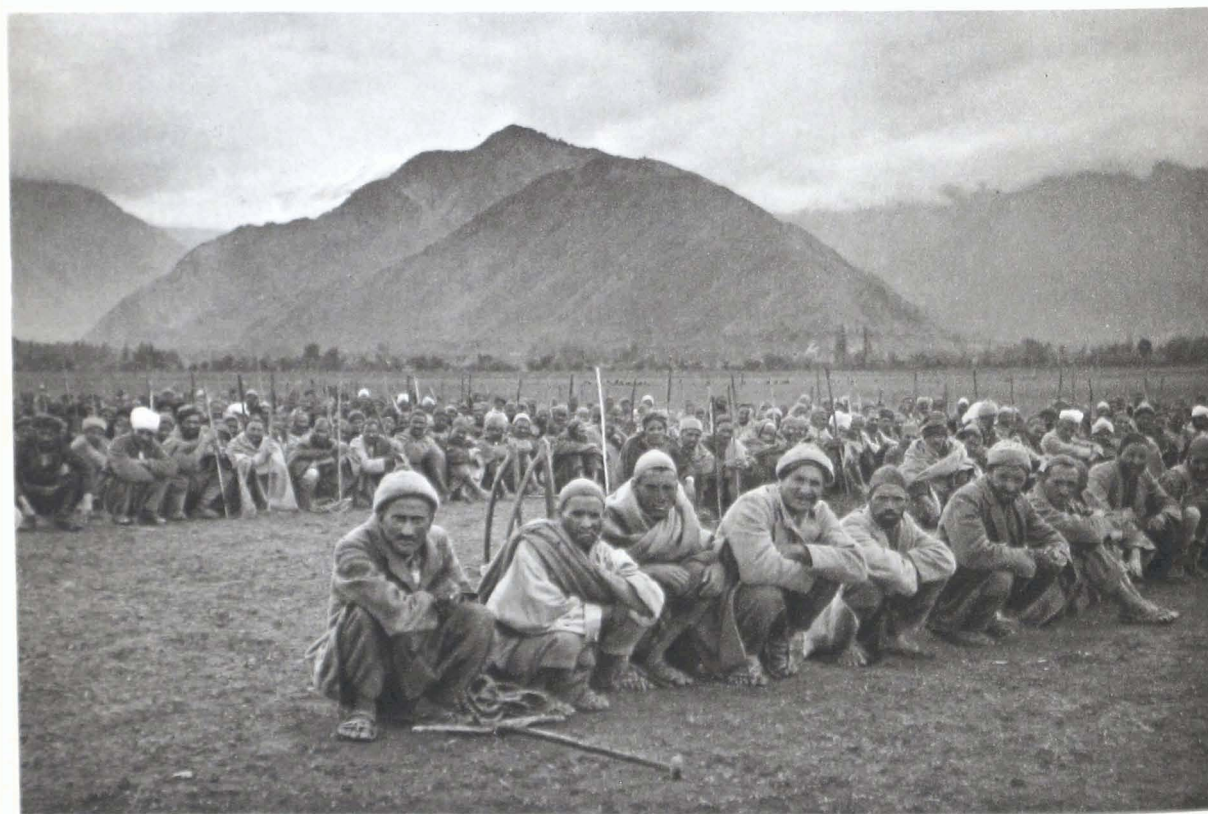
Bombay

Mullritter



At Srinagar, capital of Kashmir; our house-boat lying in a quiet canal

Schneider



Six hundred porters waiting for our loads at Bandipur

Mollitter



At the Base Camp. From left to right: front row, Schneider, Welzenbach, Aschenbrenner, Merkl, Kapp, Müllritter, Kuhn; back row, Bernard, Wieland, Sangster, Hieronimus, Bechtold



The three Tyrolese: Dr. Bernard, Schneider and Aschenbrenner

Schneider



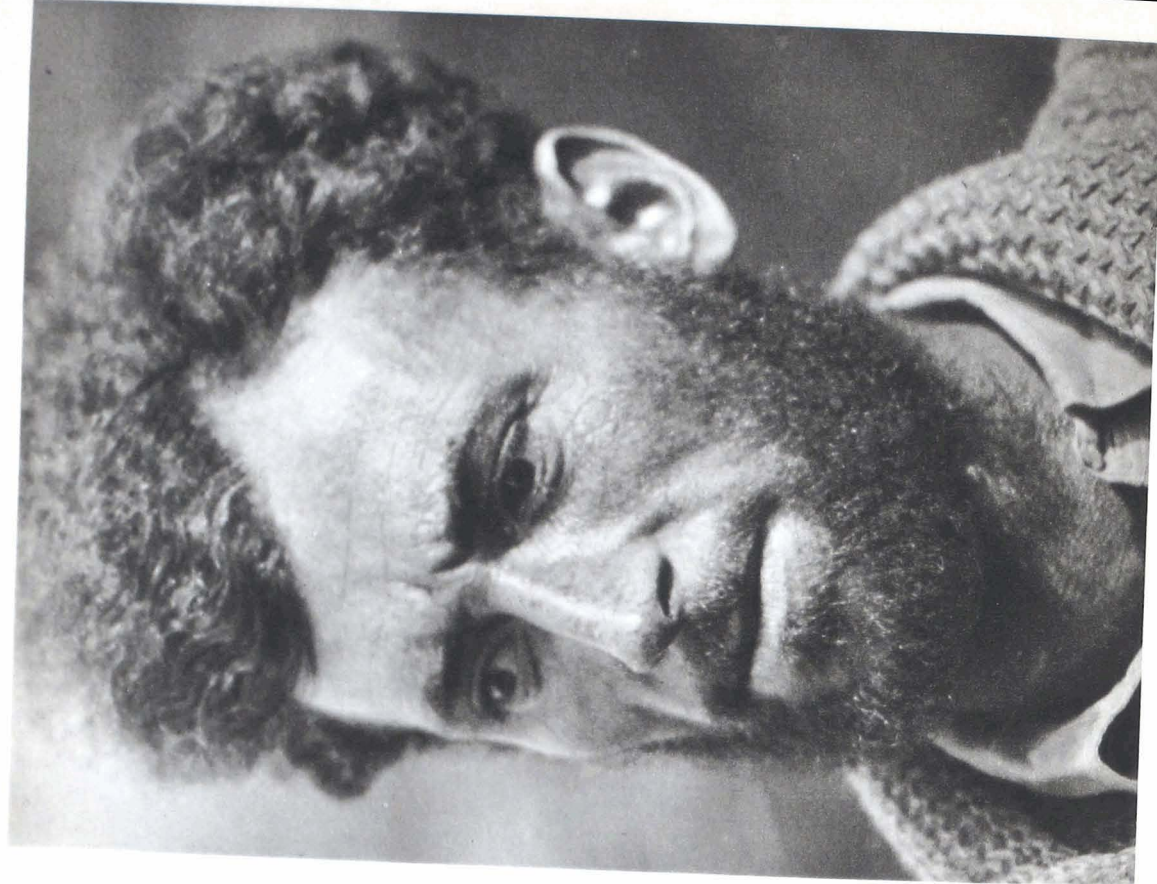
Müllritter

Alfred Drexel on the way to the Tragbal Pass



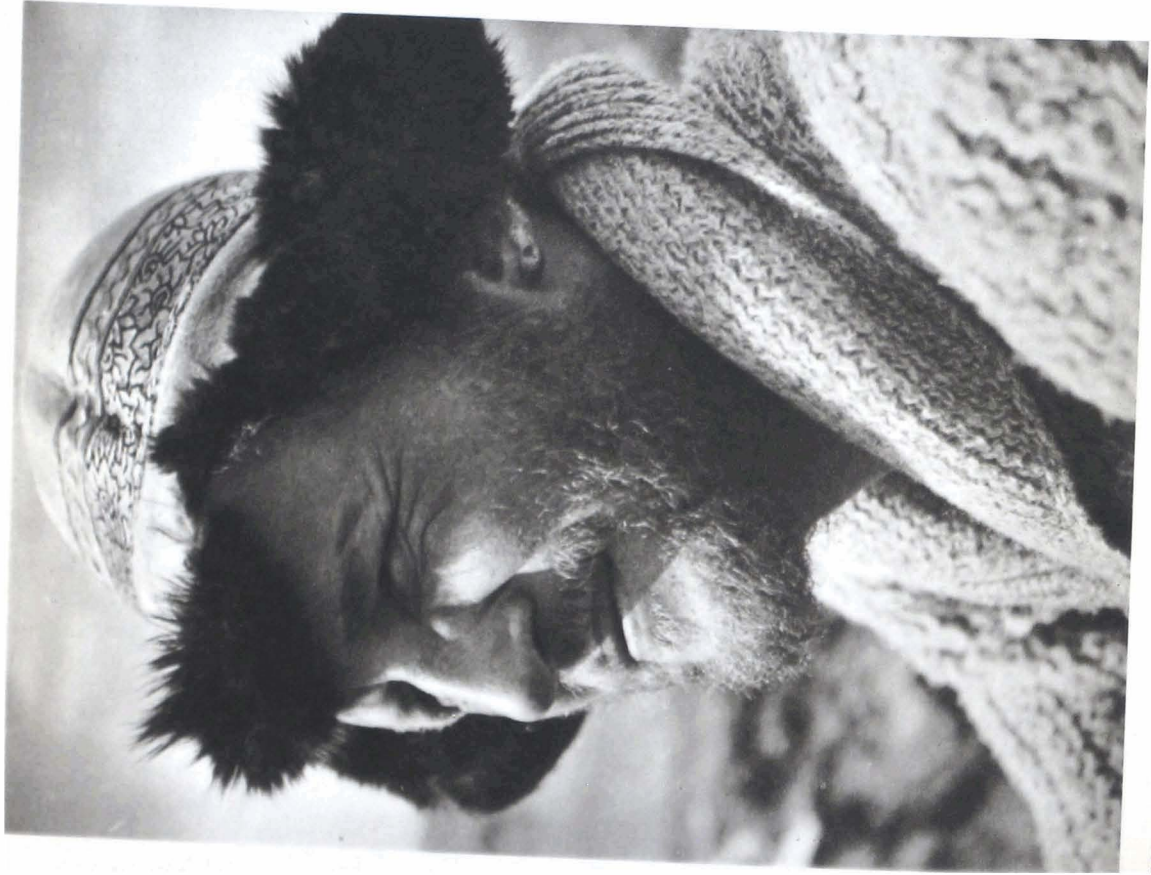
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Uli Wieland with the voracious wolf-cubs



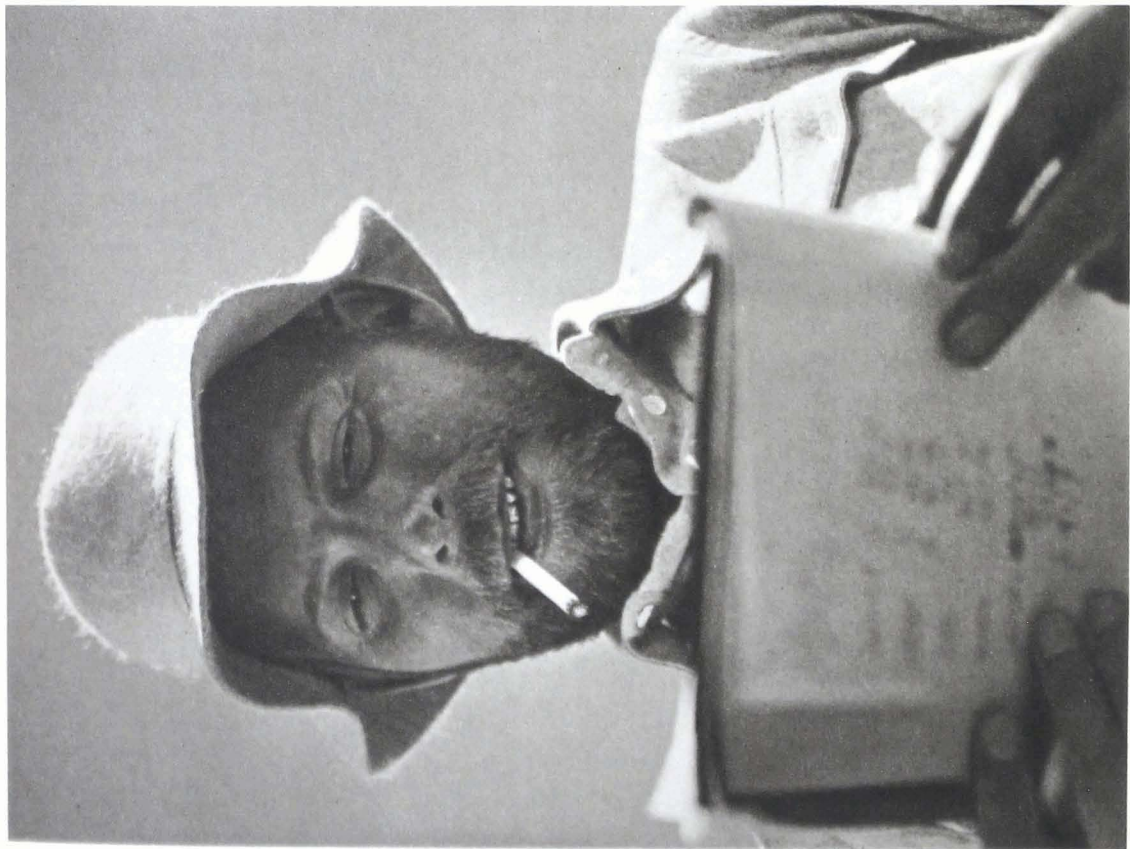
Fritz Bechtold

Aschenbrenner



Willi Welzenbach

Mullritter



Müllritter

Hieronimus, the Camp Commandant



Bechtold

Peter Müllritter, nicknamed the Khane Wala Sahib



Mullritter

Walter Raechi, the geographer



Mullritter

Peter Misch, the geologist



Mulleritter

Bernard at his blood-tests, a task as absorbing to himself as it was unpopular with his friends



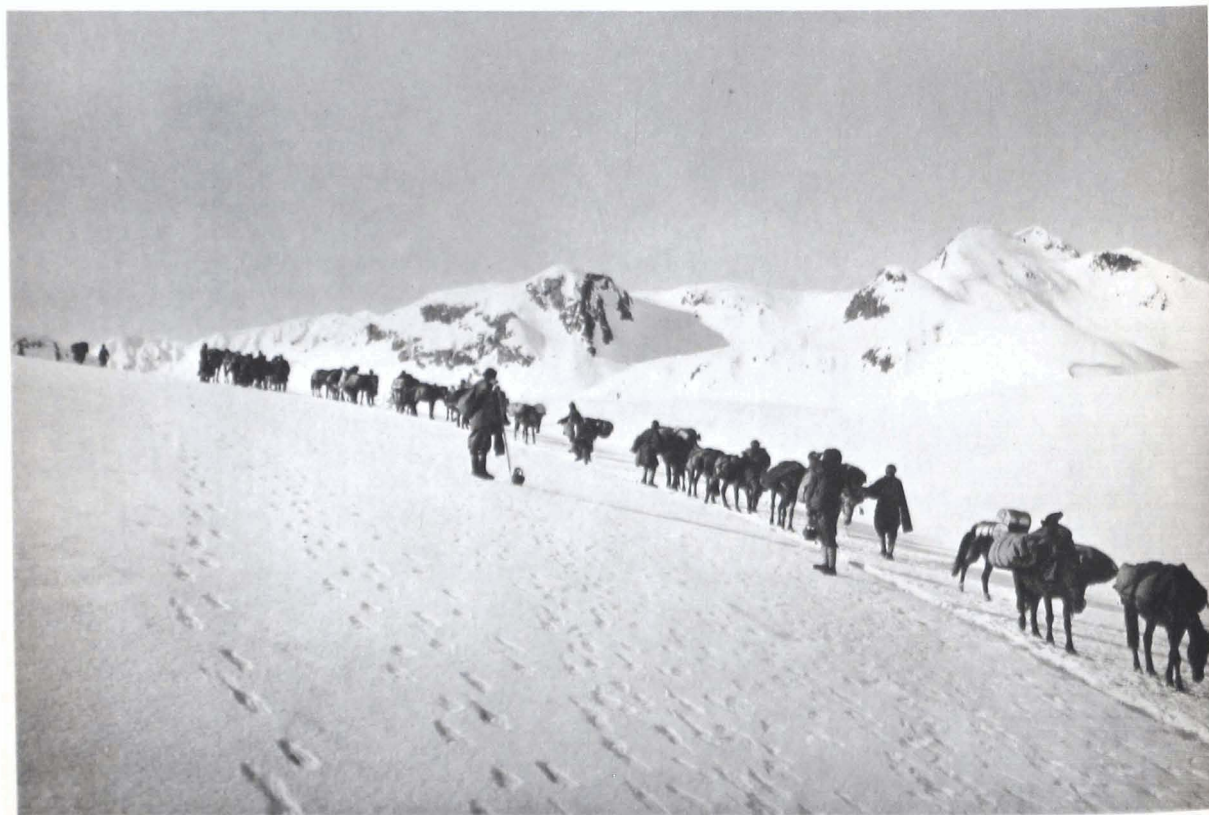
Mulleritter

Finsterwalder, leader of the scientific group, at the theodolite



Mullitter

The long column of porters crossing the Tragbal Pass (11,800 ft.)



Mullitter

On the summit of the Burzil Pass (13,800 ft.)

angry hornets. This preliminary skirmish was a warning to the newcomers of what awaited us in India, and especially in Kashmir.

One is constantly asked at home: "How long does the voyage to India last?" From Venice to Bombay, the *Conte Verde* took rather over eleven days for the journey of some five thousand miles. Deducting the pauses at intermediate stations, the average speed works out at some twenty miles per hour.

Side by side with our cabins were those of the International Himalayan Expedition to the Karakoram, under Professor Dyhrenfurth's leadership. When our correspondence was finished in the late afternoon and we met the members of the other expedition on deck for a game of quoits, I wished we could have had with us that astonishing journalist who thought well to write, concerning our voyage, of the 'bitter rivalry' of two Himalayan expeditions.

After the Turkish bath of the Red Sea, the first fresh breeze of evening in the Indian ocean, blowing from the mainland of Arabia, brought a welcome coolness. We travelled towards the great distant land of India through days of unbroken blue skies, through the starshine of tropic nights and the phosphorescence of southern waters. The magic country awaited us like a gay carpet in all its glory.

On landing at Bombay on April 25th, we found a telegram from Merkl at Srinagar ordering us to continue our journey the same day. Each of us knew what his task was under these circumstances. Herr Frauenrath of the German Consulate met us on board, and his forethought helped us quickly through the formalities of forwarding baggage, customs, and the introduction of arms. With Herr Kapp, the Consul, we found ourselves under the protection of one who knew the land intimately, and it was good news that he was able to accept Merkl's invitation and spend his leave with us in the Base Camp on Nanga Parbat.

For the moment, there was no sign of the glamour of India. Bombay

is in fact a European harbour, the gateway to the great north of India, a place whose character is determined by economic reasons. To experience its marvels, you must get clear of shops, tarred streets and trams, parks with their dust-laden palm-trees and everything which apes European style, out into the native quarter. However, we had no time for this. The last purchases and visits were completed by evening, and at length, after a farewell dinner, we were on our way northward, tired out but relieved, in the roomy carriages of the Frontier Mail Express. It was a marvel to us how we had managed to achieve everything in one day at Bombay.

For two days and two nights we travelled through the parched landscape of northern India, speeding past sweltering stations with mobs of trafficking, mendicant Hindus: Ahmedabad, the sacred city of Delhi and its seat of government, Lahore. Wherever the mighty streams bear their sluggish waters seaward, vegetation grows luxuriant and fruitful, forming tropical islands in the midst of wide desert spaces. At many stations great troops of monkeys visited the train, walking unabashed down the whole line of carriages in search of a friendly hand to give them fruit.

In our compartment there was a constant queue for the washing-room; once a man had got under the cooling waters of the wonderful shower-bath, it was a hard matter to get him out. It was not until we reached Jhelum, and the train began to climb up in a great curve to the plateau of the Salt Range, that the air became perceptibly cooler and fresher. On April 27th we were cheerfully greeted at Rawalpindi by Wieland, Schneider, and Emil Kuhn, the Swiss.

Here we found everything carefully prepared by the advance party, coaches and baggage-vans all ready for the morrow's departure. Telegrams arrived from Germany and from Bombay. Hanns Hieronimus of Altona was to come in place of the invalid Baumeister as camp commandant; and since Emil Kuhn, who knew the language well,

was ready to meet him and Kapp in Rawalpindi, we could count on splendid support in rear of our great step forward.

After an exhausting nine-hour journey by car, we had crossed the chains of the Punjab Himalaya and were now at last in Kashmir. The wide basin of Kashmir was spread out before us, marked by the broad meanders of the river Jhelum. Where the waters from melting snows combine, as here, with a natural fertility of the soil, the earth weaves for itself a coat of many colours. Green, red, white, these are the colours of Kashmir: green, the broad rice-fields with their terraced irrigation channels, green the slender-limbed poplars; red, the gentle outliers of the mountain range; and above them, spotless white, the shining snows of the Himalaya.

Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir, is the city of house-boats. These floating houses on the picturesque Jhelum, in whose waters the Himalayan summits are mirrored, offer accommodation such as we scarcely found elsewhere in India: dining-room with china and brasswork on the walls, sitting-room hung with heavy Kashmir rugs, and bedrooms with bath attached, to satisfy the most luxurious tastes. Srinagar is a piece of Venice in a genuine Oriental setting, and the Jhelum is its Grand Canal. Men and houses gather beside the stream, where the whole life and bustle of the city is centred.

At Srinagar we had a cheerful reunion with Merkl and Aschenbrenner. Here also everything had been so thoroughly done by the advance party, that we were spared the hectic packing-days of 1932; and when next day Wieland arrived with the thirty-five Darjeeling porters, besides Captain R. N. D. Frier and Captain A. N. K. Sangster, the British transport-officers, our numbers were complete, and nothing now stood in the way of immediate departure.

The porters who were allotted to the sahibs as personal servants (orderlies), had in fact already been picked out in Darjeeling. Merkl chose the muscular, grave-faced Kitar, former orderly of Rutledge,

leader of the 1933 Everest expedition; Welzenbach got the strong Jigmey, Aschenbrenner the good Nima Dorje, with his height record of 27,400 feet. Finsterwalder's allotted companion was Nima Thondup, a man full of honours, now on his ninth big Himalayan expedition, while I got the cheerful, talented Pasang, an intelligent pupil of Brenner on two Kangchenjunga undertakings, as his camera assistant. Wieland, the responsible authority for all porter questions, secured for himself the reliable-looking Kikuli, who, like his sahib, was a non-smoker and had the same sweet tooth.

Our 570 loads were stacked on large baggage-boats which were to travel up the Jhelum and across the Wular Lake to Bandipur. Many an eager porter who wished to make a good first impression in his master's eyes, could be seen going from the store to the boats with three loads at a time.

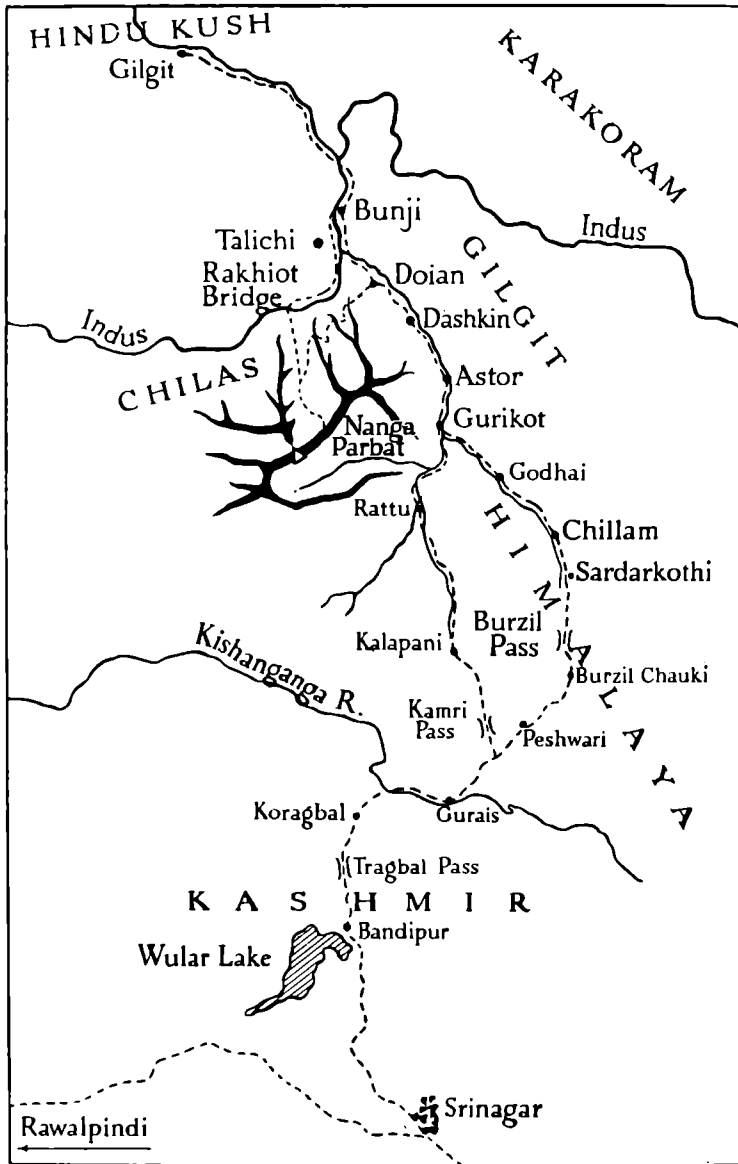
It had been raining for days. The newspapers had exaggerated the description of this rain into terms of the Deluge. The fact was that the roads to Bandipur, in themselves bad enough, had been completely washed away by the downpour; and motor transit being at that time impossible, we were compelled to take the longer route by water with the baggage. Yet even though the baggage-boats of our proud flotilla had to cast anchor in the heavy storm of the night of 1st-2nd May, the next morning we could continue our journey confidently towards the Himalaya.

CHAPTER THREE
INTO THE HIMALAYA

AS we floated across the picturesque Wular Lake, the sun broke through the threatening clouds and shone sparkling upon the snowy foothills of the Himalaya. The crowd of 600 porters, whom Captain Lander had already engaged for us, were waiting on the flat shore. If 600 Kashmiri hurl themselves yelling on a towering heap of baggage, with an Oriental eye for a bargain and the savagery of dervishes, there is bound to be a certain amount of noise. The 'tigers' set to work on the transport of loads with immediate success, leaping upon the Kashmiri like cats, while Lewa, the Darjeeling sirdar, stood like a rock in the raging surf. It was necessary to apportion loads and men in corresponding numbers for simplification of the march. The smaller body with Wieland, Schneider and Sangster was to follow at a day's interval, while Merkl led the way with the remainder of the force.

Individual parties some fifty strong were by now under way, followed and supervised by two Darjeeling porters. There was no time for the leading sahibs to have a proper meal. Off we went on horseback, a jubilant party bound for the Himalaya, myself mounted on a keen pony procured by Pasang. Soon we were on the ancient highway from Srinagar to Gilgit, now an important British military road. The Wular Lake, with its curious twisted delta, sank deeper and deeper below us, as we left Kashmir behind for three months.

Late in the evening we reached the Tragbal rest-house. The party was scattered at long intervals, and the loads dribbled in one by one.



APPROACH TO NANGA PARBAT

INTO THE HIMALAYA

We had an hour's vain search for lamps: a proper chaos, where it took Aschenbrenner's orderly three hours to find his valise. A great business like this needs time to straighten out; the old Nanga Parbat guard of 1932 smiled a perplexed but superior smile, as the new-comers sampled this *apéritif*.

The night was cold and clear, just what we wanted for the Tragbal Pass, with its 12,000 feet, and it was a brilliant blue morning when Willy Merkl turned us all out of our warm sleeping-sacks. The servants dragged away the blankets from beneath us; there was barely time for breakfast. The loads were already on their way, in detachments of thirty men. Lewa stood with a stick at a gap in the fence, grimly counting off the porters as they set out.

The magnificent Kashmir basin steamed in the morning sunshine, and white fleecy clouds sailed about the summits. We made rapid time upward, and arrived very soon at the snow-line, a moment of anxious expectation. However, everything went well, and the men walked safely and nimbly over the hard-frozen snow. It is astonishing how they trudge through the snow shod merely with home-woven straw sandals. The glare was intense, at this height of 12,000 feet. We had not got enough snow-glasses for 400 men; however, Bernard, the expedition doctor, was standing at the nearest zigzag, treating each porter with eye-protective lotion. The men conducted themselves finely; it was an impressive, almost soldierly sight, to see this endless column of porters crossing the wintry pass.

The brilliant weather of the morning deteriorated towards midday, and during the long descent to Koragbal a severe thunderstorm broke. By the time we arrived at the rest-house, we were soaked to the skin. The porters as they entered at intervals created a somewhat slovenly impression. The downpour continued. We sat down to table very tired but in excellent spirits, congratulating ourselves on the successful crossing of our first pass.

Next morning the porters arrived promptly. The distribution of loads was like a noisy popular festival. We galloped off beside the roaring Kishanganga, throwing up clods of earth. The greatest practical joke between Koragbal and Gurais was reserved for Willy Bernard, whose horse put him down for a fresh morning dip in the stream.

Kashmir has most peculiar arrangements for transport of loads. The area of a contractor for porters and horses is closely defined, and at its frontier new men and beasts must be hired, and the old ones paid off, as happened to us in Gurais.

A gloomy day! Great activity reigned in the large bungalow, with every sahib on the run. Each man had his special duties. The loads were carefully checked on arrival and stacked in their appropriate heaps; it took a long time before we could know for certain that not one load was missing. Then the 375 Bandipur porters were discharged. Willi Welzenbach had already arranged all the silver and copper on a table, when a telegram arrived from the rear party that Wieland had already settled with the contractor in Bandipur for the transport-fee of our advance party. Ten minutes later, and we should have had all our trouble for nothing!

From Gurais the old pass-road crosses the second mountain-chain. It is higher than the first, and has two parallel passes, the Burzil (13,800 ft.) and the Kamri (13,400 ft.). In the present wintry conditions, the Kamri was impossible owing to avalanche-danger, and there remained only the Burzil. For days we had been speculating about the prospect of success in this passage.

We left Gurais on May 5th, a grey morning. It began to sleet, and we had to keep our cloaks on while riding. Willy Merkl stayed behind to see after the rear party. It was a quiet day for us. Later, the sun came out, and the weather improved. Beyond Gurais some of the men lately engaged ran off to their native villages to fetch provisions for themselves and bid good-bye to their wives. Here and there

one could see a sahib galloping up to these farewell scenes and cursing roundly as he dismounted, in his anxiety for missing loads. Rich Bavarian oaths mingled with the wailing and tears of the womenfolk.

Not far from Peshwari we overtook Willi Welzenbach, whose horse had refused to do more than walk since leaving Gurais. We determined to bring him to the rest-house at a gallop, and so put him in our midst. I rode in front, and four sahibs came racing after me. My horse shied suddenly at a valise lying on the ground, and dug his toes in, while I flew over the horse's head in a high curve and landed on the road, amid the shameless mockery of the others. My first fall!

As there was not enough room in the small rest-house, we put up tents. Late in the evening Willy Merkl and Frier, our good companion on Nanga Parbat in 1932, arrived with the welcome news that all was well with the rear party under the charge of Wieland, Schneider and Sangster.

At Minimarg there was a continuous covering of snow on the ground, a phenomenon with which we had not reckoned. Unfortunately, Willy Bernard had not got his medicine-chest at hand, and so could not treat the porters with eye-salve. They went splendidly up the valley through deep soft snow; but at Burzil-Chauki many were snow-blind, and Bernard had his hands full. In the afternoon our skis were brought out and adjusted. The day passed in feverish preparation for the morrow's struggle.

This evening Peter Aschenbrenner was the guest of honour, as it was his birthday. Spirituous liquors, however, were with the rear party; how then were we to celebrate the feast? After a long search Peter Müllritter, who has a genius for such things, discovered a case of wine, which being unnumbered he had managed to smuggle in. Frier, who has a Homeric thirst, was let into the secret, and then we rushed uproariously in upon the unsuspecting party at dinner. The wine was amber-coloured '21, and may a blessing rest upon the benefactor!

We had only enamel cups to drink from, but that did not interfere with our enjoyment.

The alarm went just after midnight, a grim summons. The porters were cowering on the flagstones in front of the bungalow; wherever you went, you trod on legs and arms, and moaning and complaints resounded everywhere in the meagre candle-light. Some were snow-blind, holding their hands before their eyes; others had eaten too much snow, and were groaning and pointing to head and stomach. Certain disorderly fellows had overturned the stove in the crowded porters' shed, right on top of three slumbering porters, and blood was streaming from their faces. Bernard bandaged the unfortunate men, and they had to be sent home.

When 314 porters begin their work daily with wild shouts and fighting over the loads, one learns in time to bear it with Oriental calm; but on this occasion, in snow and darkness, it was pretty bad. Lewa stood sternly by, callously striking at backs and heads with his stout stick, till the place rang with his blows. One porter, who wanted to divide his load and appoint himself second-in-command, was seized by Lewa with both hands and flung head-first over the verandah out into the snow. Two legs were visible for a moment silhouetted against the stars, before their owner ran off quickly, very quickly, in search of a load. Asiatic methods, if you will, but perhaps not always the worst methods. As Peter Müllritter and I set out in the starry night at the head of the column, we could still hear for some time the shouts of quarrelling porters and the sound of Lewa's baton.

It was not specially cold, but the snow was firm enough. We could see the lights of the porters' columns flickering far below us. At the top of the steep rise we put on our skis, and Merkl, Drexel and Bernard overtook us. On the large snow-plateau above, there is a tall wooden tower built for the mail-runners, to indicate the route and give shelter during snowstorms. We climbed up the rickety ladder to the

INTO THE HIMALAYA

tiny guardroom, but unfortunately there was no firewood. We slept for half an hour on the snow-covered wooden floor, until daylight, when the porters began to arrive at wide intervals, in groups of four or five men.

The sun disappeared soon behind clouds. The light was poor, the way up endless; we almost fell asleep as we walked. At last we reached the top of the pass. The porters here created a comparatively good impression. From the top of the pass we had a rapid, refreshing run down on ski over hissing snow; but for the wretched porters the sunshine was scorching hot. Everywhere they were lying about with their loads in the snow, exhausted. The Darjeeling men kept them together by vigorous measures, getting them on their legs time after time. It was a long, tedious journey downhill.

At Sardarkothi the sahibs threw themselves down on their camp-beds like tired horses. I congratulated Merkl with a hearty shake of the hand for his splendid organisation of this magnificent crossing. We had no suspicion of what was in store for us. It was still deep winter, and there was no firewood to be found! This meant another six miles on to Chillam. The unfortunate porters made a supreme effort. The sun lay heavy over the monotonous gorge beneath veils of cloud, and the air was stifling as we crossed the deep mushy snow. Many of the porters lay down on their stomachs, to cool themselves. The last mile into Chillam was endless. Finsterwalder and I crawled towards the rest-house. "There's the house!" Willy Merkl called out, to spur us on; but it was a matter of indifference to us, we refused to believe it and were too tired to rejoice at the thought.

By evening all the porters and loads had arrived in camp. We sat comfortably round the crackling fire in the bungalow, smoking our pipes. Ramona, our faithful mountain cook of 1932, who had joined us again at Rawalpindi, had a busy evening replenishing the tea-urn for throats parched with the furnace of the Burzil Pass—or was it with joy at our success in this glorious crossing of the pass?

CHAPTER FOUR
TO THE INDUS

OUR camp at Chillam was a proper wintry bivouac, but with none of the delightful romance of nomad life, no settlement of tents or glowing camp-fire, with contented porters singing their songs round the blaze. However, two hours down the valley we reached the edge of the snow, and put up our tents at Das, to wait here for the rear party.

As you enter camp, you will generally find the tents already pitched, the orderlies standing there to greet you with friendly salaams, your sleeping-sack laid out on the ground-sheet, a comfortable pair of camp-shoes in exchange for the sahib's nailed boots, a clean shirt handy and a hot bath ready. The servants exceed themselves in their sedulous care. No matter how small may be the article, or however deeply buried in a cavernous rucksack, it cannot evade their watchful eyes. If I call out to my orderly, "Pasang, where's my *gidnap*?" a cheerful, proud grin spreads over his features, and before I can look round, there is the much-sought note-book at hand. On one occasion I watched two porters in front of the tent quarrelling over a piece of soap, each maintaining that it was his master's property; and both were right, because their sahibs had the soap in common. Such is the care that these men take for the personal outfit of their masters. They are invariably good-tempered and willing, and no matter how hard the work, there is always a cheerful song on their lips.

Gradually we learnt to read their Asiatic faces, and despite the

difficulty of language we had plenty of good personal conversations. They had an original way of distinguishing between the sahibs by name; Merkl was, of course, the Bara Sahib, but Müllritter was given the name of Khane-wala Sahib (the voracious), Misch the Chota Sahib (the little man) and so forth. Their joy knew no bounds when we got the two big porter-tents set up at Das for the first time; they returned again and again to thank the Bara Sahib for their beautiful *tambus*.

In the afternoon Merkl and Frier rode on in front to Godhai and Astor, in order to arrange for the fresh relay of porters and horses. Next morning there was driving snow. The rear party marched into Das at wide intervals, and we all met again for a cheerful lunch. Das is a small, dirty settlement with primitive mud-huts crowded close to each other against the hillside. But owing to the presence of two cunning horse-dealers who refused to come to terms, much time was spent before Sangster's diplomacy cleared up this contretemps, and we could at last get our horses and ride off. It was not until late afternoon that we were able to pitch camp at Godhai.

As you climb down from here into the Astor river-basin, the valley becomes steadily drier, hotter, and more barren. Woods and meadows disappear, and you enter a landscape which, as Schneider told me, much resembles that of the valleys of the South American Andes. Beyond Godhai, in 1932, we had our first, awe-inspiring view of the huge southern face of Nanga Parbat: the highest mountain-wall in the whole earth, and so steep that no glaciers can lodge on its sides. It is not surprising that the Hindu who gazes up at this fearful wall of ice from his heavy toil in the fields, should regard the summit towering above the clouds as the home of all those evil spirits that bring disease to his family, sickness to his cattle, and storm to his harvest. To-day the mountain was wrapped in cloud.

At the point where the waters of the Rama Glacier flow into the main valley, lies the village of Astor, with its many poplars, its rich

fields and meadows, a friendly island of green in the midst of the bare rocky wilderness; the largest place between Srinagar and Gilgit, with school, post-office and hospital. Its reputation contrasts with its favoured situation: throughout Kashmir "bad Astor" is by no means popular. Every climbing or hunting expedition has a tale to tell about that keen eye to the main chance which its inhabitants possess, especially the contractors for porters and horses. On our arrival we found Merkl and Frier, who knew the country well, engaged in acrimonious negotiations with the Naib Tahsildar (the local mayor) and Mirza the horse-dealer, who began every sentence with hands folded as in prayer, but apart from that had the countenance of one of the blackest rogues ever created. The opening of such negotiations is always a source of entertainment, and a perfect illustration of Oriental calm and indifference to time. Generally they begin with remarks about the weather; it would be ill-bred to speak of business, still more of money. After an hour's desultory talk about religion and the rights of man you can lead the conversation to the real reason for calling on the gentlemen, that is, the need for horses.

As the negotiations dragged on until the next day, we got our first real day-off since leaving Srinagar. In the afternoon we had an open-air test of our short-wave apparatus, which had stood the transport well. The reception was excellent; even Schneider, who had wanted to trample on 'that stupid box' at Bandipur, was compelled to give his blessing. We laughed till the tears ran down, when our Darjeeling porters got talking at the two stations: Pasang sitting in front of the apparatus and trembling with joy and excitement at the distant sound of his friend Palten's voice. It was a difficult job to get him away from the microphone.

Owing to the unreasonable demands of the Astor men for the hire of horses, we had to make up our minds to use porters for transport of loads to the Indus. It took a long time to engage 570 porters and

divide them into groups. At last, on a rainy day, May 13th, the first columns were able to leave Astor. Meanwhile we got through a great deal of work at the bungalow.

Towards midday the last four sahibs rode off, on keen mounts, perhaps the best of the whole march. The bad weather of the morning had cleared up, and we had a magnificent ride along the picturesque Astor River. Here you can get the direct impression that this is Asia: its mountains, just as you have pictured them; steep, bare walls of rock, with the zigzags of the road clinging to them, and far below, the foaming mountain-torrent; sand, fine drifting sand over every path and in every cleft. At first you hate it as a hostile element; by the time you have absorbed it and skin and clothes are crusted in sand, like verdigris on a copper roof, you realise that you are now indeed part of the soil of Asia.

At a bend of the road we found Misch sitting with his hammer, surrounded by a choice heap of stone-chips. His delight was manifest; here was a geologist's paradise—'sterile landscape', no meadows or forests, no vegetation to hide the secrets of nature. The body of Mother Earth here lies open as a book for him who has the knowledge to read it.

We met the others enjoying a long midday halt at the point where the road forks, the upper track leading to Doian, the lower to Muskin. Thanks to the courtesy of the Kashmir administration, Merkl had obtained leave for a journey to Chilas. This is not such an easy matter as perhaps it sounds: at this corner of Russian and Chinese Turkestan, such a large expedition demands special consideration. The land is extremely poor, and the purchase of supplies would denude it to some extent of the bare necessities of life, and thus inevitably lead to disturbance among the restless folk. We were now able to dispense with the long, exhausting route of 1932 for our main transport of supplies, over ridges still deep in snow, the simpler, safe approach by the Indus being open to us.

Our halt was followed by a memorable stretch of the way among gaunt walls and above dizzy precipices. A fall from one's horse, and then good-bye to all dreams of Nanga Parbat ! There was a fascination in the drop below, and we galloped wildly along. The Muskin rest-house stands high above the stream, a tiny oasis in the rocky desert of the Astor River, where the Darjeeling men could hardly find room for our tents. News of our expedition must have spread like a prairie-fire through the neighbourhood, for everywhere we saw familiar faces, men who had carried for us in 1932 and now offered their services once more ; and among them especially our old friend Abdul Japar, the excellent mail-runner and Lambardar (headman) of Doian.

A crystal-clear morning followed a night of heavy rain. I sent Pasang on with my cine-camera, in order to film the passage of this picturesque road, intending to catch him up quickly after breakfast on my keen mount. The horse, however, had disappeared, some envious companion having effected an exchange at my expense, leaving in place of my noble steed, a nightmare of a horse, with the gallop of a buck goat and a convulsive trot. Meanwhile Pasang had vanished with my outfit.

The road wound up and down in a very striking manner along the steep walls of the profound gorge. Every bend of the road was a magnificent subject. At last, when the road dropped steeply to the Indus basin—the sun was at its zenith and the shadows lay vertically below man and horse—I sighted Pasang, seated on a boulder on the far side of the Ramghat-Pul bridge, and singing away cheerfully as ever.

When you come down from the mountains into the Indus basin, another world reveals itself. It is like emerging from the twilight gorges of American cañons, and stepping suddenly into the limitless sunshine of the Arabian desert. The eye travels unhindered across the gentle surf of soft sand-dunes as far as the neighbourhood of Gilgit. The Indus



Mulhitter

In the rocky desert of the Indus valley. Porters on the way to the Rakhiot bridge



Porters on the march

Mullitter



Bechtold

Many-poplared Astor



Mullritter

The ox-hide ferry over the Indus at Talichi



Müllritter

The Rakhiot bridge over the Indus, before the melting of the snows. On the left bank, our camp



Müllritter

Drexel, Bernard, Wieland, Welzenbach and Merkl in the temporary base camp



Müllritter

By the camp-fire, after the day's labour



Muller/riter

Arrival of the loads at the Fairy Meadow



Ramona's kitchen at the Base Camp

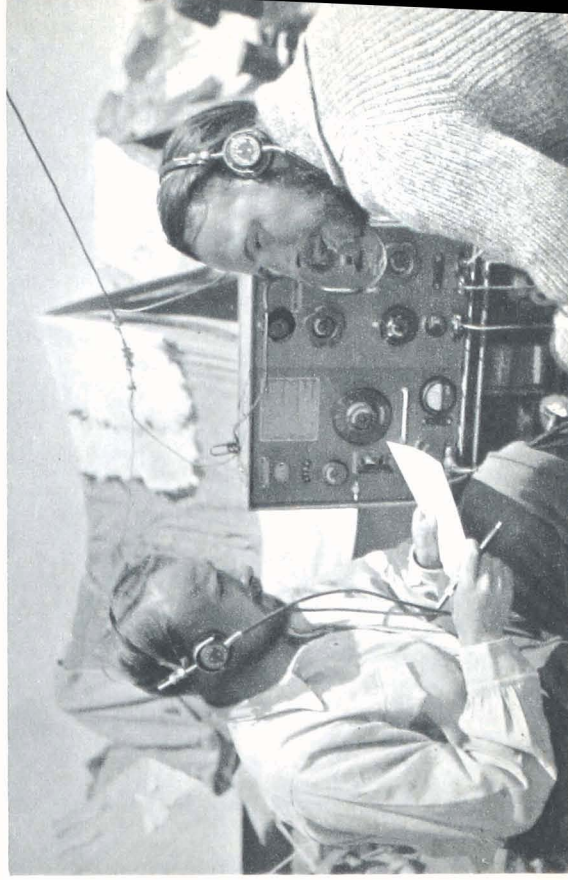
Mullritter

Above: our luncheon-table at the Base Camp



Mullritter

Merkel and Hieronimus getting news of the advance party at the short-wave apparatus





Müllritter

Replete. Our young wolves Nanga and Parbat at their siesta



Müllritter

Urial shot by Aschenbrenner

flows immediately beyond a ridge of sand-dunes. At this point, so close to its source, the condition of the water-level is entirely dependent on the melting of snows in the mountains, the influence of the monsoon not reaching so far to the north. Owing to the early season of the year we were able to use the ferry at Talichi, while the party following a fortnight later (Kapp, Hieronimus and Kuhn) had to take the *détour* by Bunji.

The porters lay down with their loads on a soft sandbank beside the Indus, already divided into groups for the ferry. Frier had ridden on in front during the morning and arranged everything with his customary skill, so that the crossing went much quicker and smoother than we had expected.

There were two ferry-boats. One was a stout raft-like boat, with one antediluvian oar worked by four shouting men, and a sharp-featured ferryman at the helm, with a huge flowing beard, anointed after the time-honoured fashion of his guild. The other ferry-boat was highly original, dating back to Noah's Ark: four enormous oxhides floating in the water, each of them inflated through the four legs by human bellows and then tied with leathern thongs. If the boat lists in the water owing to one side becoming less taut, it is rapidly blown up again. The four oxhides are bound to each other with a grid-like arrangement of poles, and on this contrivance you float cheerfully across the chocolate-brown waters of the Indus. Later, when the stream subsides, the whole boat is lifted out of the water, and then you can see four oxen travelling on spits up the Indus through the countryside, after the manner of our October festivals.

The crossing went without a hitch. We sent the horses home, Merkl, Finsterwalder and Frier alone riding on to Bunji, in order to make the necessary arrangements with the postmaster.

Owing to heavy rain, the film of the crossing, on which I had counted so much, was literally a wash-out. The weather did not clear

up before Talichi, a charming oasis in the midst of the sandy vegetation of the Indus basin. The beautiful situation of the bungalow appealed to us all, and especially the prospect of a hot bath.

It was a marvellous evening. Above the blue shadows of the Indus valley, the citadels of eternal snow among the Kailas range were spread in a magnificent circle, with the gigantic walls of Haramosh and Rakaposhi towering towards Gilgit. Behind the poplars about the bungalow, Nanga Parbat revealed itself beyond the trough of the Rakhiot nullah, the huge ice-wall slowly piercing through the clouds. The mountain shone like silver hanging in the air, and we were all conscious that its spell was now upon us.

We dined in front of the bungalow beneath the warm starlit night, in high spirits. Dinner was long past, and our cigars alight, by the time the Bunji party arrived fairly tired out.

Next morning the columns of porters marched out of Talichi in good discipline, carefully checked by Lewa and Sonam Tobgay. To-day our march lay along the road to Chilas, which is seldom trodden by Europeans. The Indus cuts its bed ever narrower and deeper between gaunt, towering walls of rock. After six miles, you come suddenly, at a bend of the road, to the huge Rakhiot bridge, spanning the gorge from wall to wall, a splendid type of suspension-bridge. If you note the high-water mark of 1929 on the footpath, a hundred feet above the present water-level, you can get some idea of a Himalayan flood. The bridge itself was built for strategic purposes in 1915-16, and is now kept under supervision. Our camp was splendidly situated on a ledge of rock, directly above the brown, tumbling waters of the Indus. The porters had a real orgy of bathing; you could see brown figures leaping into the stream from every jutting rock. The sahibs had a splendid bathe further upstream in a sandy bay.

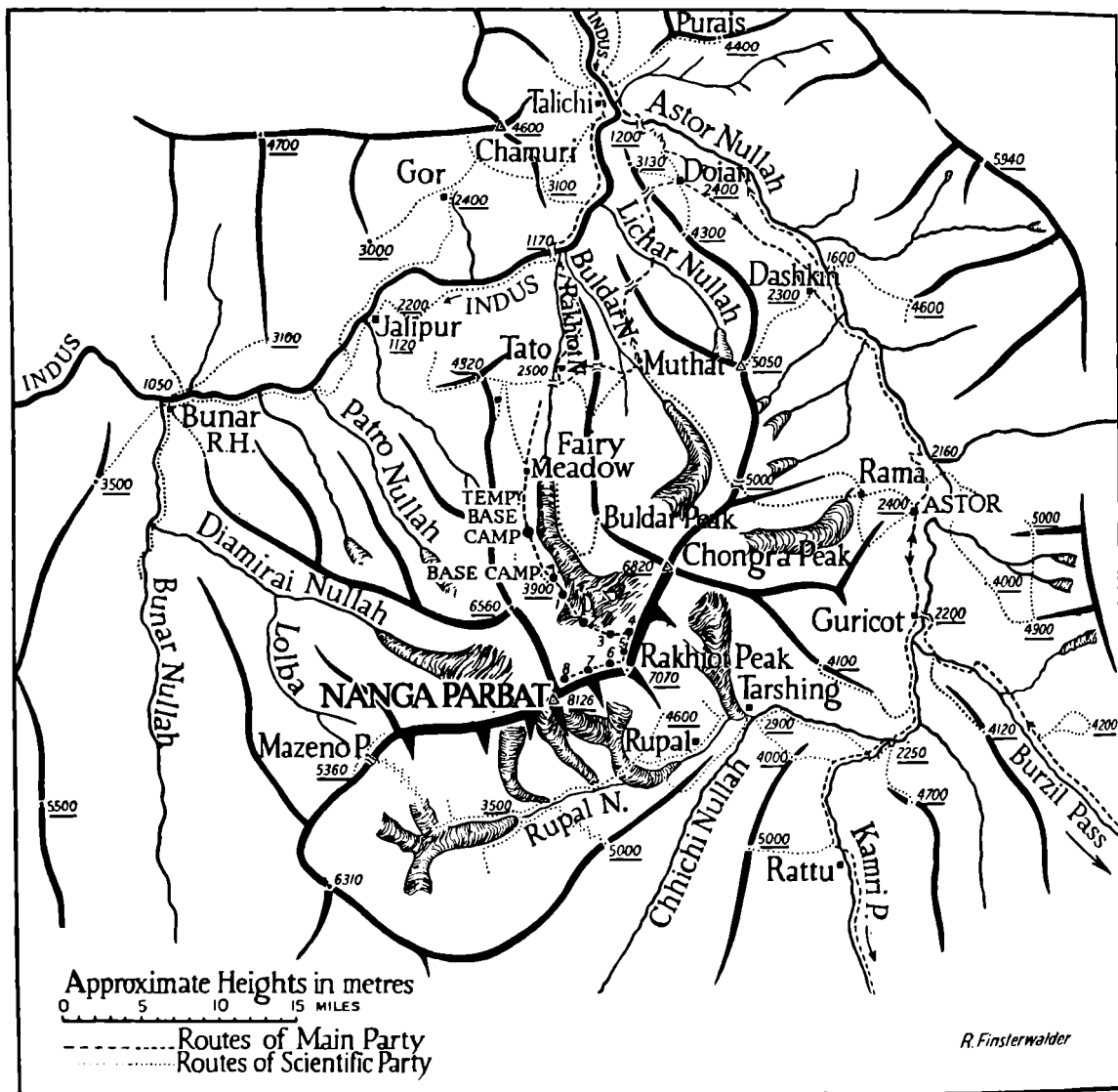
Captain J. G. Trotter, representing the Assistant Political Agent in Chilas, was waiting for us in our camp. During dinner, where our

TO THE INDUS

cooks had excelled themselves, Merkl invited him to accompany us as far as the Fairy Meadow.

Now at last we were at the foot of Nanga Parbat. Exactly four weeks had gone by, from our departure from Munich to our arrival on May 14th at the Rakhiot bridge: not too long a time, if one reckons up all the difficulties and hindrances which beset this long and exhausting march. Even allowing for all Merkl's careful preparations and the cheerful co-operation of every member of the party, this journey would not have gone so smoothly had we not enjoyed such magnificent support from British and Indian officials and from the Kashmir administration.

From the bed of the Indus to the summit of Nanga Parbat, 26,642 feet above the sea, there is a vertical rise of nearly 23,000 feet, as measured accurately by Finsterwalder—the greatest relative difference of height in the whole world. Could it be that we should succeed in overcoming this height?



SURROUNDINGS OF NANGA PARBAT

CHAPTER FIVE
IN THE RAKHIOT NULLAH

“**S**UPERSTITION is that form of reverence which regards even chance as a dispensation of higher powers.” In this sense, we had no ‘reverence’. We were thirteen in number, we left Venice on April 13th (and a Friday, too); on board the *Conte Verde* our table was No. 13, and our imposing force was divided into thirteen sections. Seeing how splendidly this division had hitherto justified itself during our march, there was no reason why things should go otherwise on the steep climb into the Rakhiot nullah.

Reveille was at 5 a.m. in our camp by the Rakhiot bridge. To get such a large camp on its legs, to strike tents and enable the columns to set out on their way, is always a matter of considerable time; and it was already 6.30 a.m. before the rearguard with the last of the sahibs left the camp. A good track mounts very steeply up the sharp rocky ridge dividing the Buldar and Rakhiot nullahs, with a magnificent view back over the wide Indus valley. Four hours’ severe ascent brought us to the bluff whence the route leads over into the Rakhiot nullah. The vast icy palaces of Nanga Parbat rise superbly at the head of the valley. Small as man may feel in their great presence, he may yet by their influence grow to realise how the unconquerable spirit will strive always toward the farthest frontiers of space.

Tato (‘hot water’) takes its name from a sulphur spring which comes hissing and steaming from the earth with a temperature of 212° F. The water when cooled tastes revoltingly of rotten eggs; very good

for the health, no doubt, but not for us, thank you. Beyond this hamlet our tents were erected on a level meadow, where our flags waved their first greeting to the radiant snows of Nanga Parbat and the Ganalo Peak.

A glorious morning found us on the way up to the steep lateral moraine of the Rakhiot Glacier, with the first cooling breath from the glacier-tongue blowing towards us. We were soon in sturdy forest-growth, reminding us of the rustling forests of our home mountains, but the trunks were closer set and the giants of the forest seemed greater in my eyes. On the long stretch of plateau above there were charming little settlements between neat fields. When we reached that magnificent open space, which in our first delight two years ago we had christened the Fairy Meadow, one disappointment after another awaited us. Here, where in 1932 a gay carpet of forget-me-not and edelweiss was outspread, the whole ground was now covered with dirty, repulsive remnants of winter snow. The next blow was reserved for our photographer, Müllritter. While at home, he had sworn a thousand oaths that he would bring back the most glorious pictures of the Fairy Meadow; for the moment, this was out of the question. The weather was misty, and Nanga Parbat lay hidden behind an opalescent sheet. But the worst blow of all was to hear that our Fairy Meadow had long possessed a local name. The natives had not been so poetically-minded as ourselves, and this glorious place, we found, was called Pungadori, 'the tousled beard', after the inordinately long beard of an old shepherd who once in time past here tended his sheep.

While we were busy pitching our tents on the Fairy Meadow (10,500 ft.), and Finsterwalder and Raechl were directing their photogrammeter on the huge ice-stream of the Rakhiot Glacier, Aschenbrenner, Schneider and Welzenbach went up the valley to inspect snow-conditions. The report which they brought back was not exactly cheerful: the snow-line began half-way between the Fairy Meadow

and the temporary base camp of 1932, where deep mushy snow was now lying in masses. It could serve no possible purpose to push on with the loads through the snow to the Base Camp at the foot of the mountain. We were employing a large body of porters, and every extra day's journey meant a heavy burden on the funds of the expedition; and it was impossible to wait with so many men until the route to the Base Camp should be made practicable. Consequently, in view of the present situation, Merkl issued the following order that evening:

"All sahibs and porters will go up to-morrow to the snow-line. The local porters will then be discharged. As soon as the route to the Base Camp is made practicable, the loads will be transported thither in relays by the Darjeeling porters and fresh Baltis."

Next morning we got very quickly up to snow-level, where our camp was to be pitched beneath gigantic trees (10,800 ft.). Off came our rucksacks, and soon sahibs and porters were to be seen in busy rivalry at the construction of the camp. Tent-sites were levelled out and dug round with channels, a large space for the fire was built up, and the main lines of communication paved with slabs. One could note the great experience of the *élite* among the men of Everest and Kangchenjunga in the skill with which they set about their work. Their tents were erected under two tall, gnarled birch-trees, carefully divided into families of Bhutia and Sherpa porters. The cooks established their kitchen in the lee of a large boulder. Our mess-tent stood in one corner of the camp, with fresh pine-twigs for brushing our feet in front of the entrance, and here the cooks and orderlies slept by night. In the open space between the sleeping-quarters of the main body we laid out our loads under waterproof tent-covers. By the evening the whole city of tents was ready, everything purposefully and pleasantly arranged, and to crown our labours we ran up our flags to the mast.

In the meantime Drexel and Welzenbach were arranging the money

for paying off the porters. Sangster and Frier took charge of the actual paying out. It was not our fault that the consignment of money from Bunji had not yet arrived, and that we could not pay them all in cash. The Astoris received a cheque which enabled them to get their money from the postmaster at Astor. There was a tremendous hullabaloo about this. The porters crowded round the mess-tent, pressing closer and closer and uttering threats, but the two Englishmen mastered the situation with their customary skill, and at times by stern methods. The refusal of the porters to see reason so angered our simple Darjeeling men that they threw firebrands after them. At last all the porters went off. During the night we safeguarded the camp against theft by means of two enormous fires and the posting of guards.

Once we were properly settled in, we could proceed with the despatch of certain urgent business, and also prepare for the transport of loads to the Base Camp.

Next day the camp was under heavy snow. The Darjeeling porters had spread their prayer-banners in a long row between two twisted birch-trees, and were bringing their first offerings to the snow-gods of Nanga Parbat. While a lama chanted his monotonous prayer, the others with a smile cast their offerings of atta (meal) upon their faces. Their happiness infected us all, for we now knew that they had no sort of religious scruple against our enterprise.

Our scientists, Finsterwalder, Raechl and Misch, were hard at work packing, heaving boxes, and hauling sacks. They were to leave the main body of the expedition on the morrow, and begin their great journey round Nanga Parbat. The snowstorm continued unceasingly. Müllritter and Schneider disappeared into the dark-room tent, to get abreast with arrears of development; but to their dismay a luxuriant growth of ice-flowers soon formed on the wet films. In the evening we sat cheerfully round the camp-fire with the scientists before bidding them farewell, and in honour of the occasion, Nanga Parbat unveiled

itself from the clouds. The huge slopes, flooded in moonlight, shone like burnished silver.

Whitsunday morning gave us a very stern welcome with driving snow. One porter, who acted as huntsman, came into the camp with the news that he had sighted game on the far side of the Rakhiot Glacier. The effect upon Peter Aschenbrenner was electrical: he abandoned the kitchen duties over which he presided, snatched up his rifle, pocketed a few cartridges, and loaded up the porter with sleeping-sack and provisions. Before leaving the camp, he swore by all his gods that he would not return without his quarry.

Whitsunday was fixed as our mail-day, and everybody was busy, Drexel brooding over an essay, three typewriters rattling incessantly in the mess-tent, two people dictating simultaneously. It was bitterly cold, and we sat writing in full expedition equipment. Towards midday we heard two shots from the direction of the glacier. Could Peter have brought down the promised game? Provisions for the attack on the mountain had to be used sparingly, we were sick to death of the eternal rice-diet, and we had a craving for meat. In the afternoon Peter himself arrived, on the war-path. Despite his fatigue, he could not resist drawing his long-bow. If his story were true and he had really brought down the game in this bad visibility, he could not have been back by now; we knew him too well for that. In a few minutes' time he was calling for ten porters, and half an hour later two fat bucks were deposited in front of the kitchen, a most appetising vision.

Just as days of delicious urial-cutlets now succeeded a vegetarian period, so also the sun broke once more through the threatening snow-clouds. This morning there was an unwonted stir throughout the camp. "Nanga Parbat", the word ran round. Even the sleepest among us crept out of their sleeping-sacks to gaze up in astonishment at its colossal ice-walls. The first rays of sunshine banished all fears of storm and cold, as the stupendous vision filled our hearts with the

thrill of battle. And there was Uli Wieland already at his post, untiringly busy, running about through the camp, equipping porters, and distributing loads for the first main transport to the Base Camp. We had brought with us a plentiful supply of good equipment for porters, and the putting-on of this was a high festival for them. Immediately they rigged themselves up with all their clothes, one article upon another—clean underclothing, then thick woolly waistcoats, grey suits and stout windproof garments—and marched through the camp bursting with happiness and pride.

On May 29th the first solemn train of loads worked its way up towards the Base Camp through deep fresh snow. Every available porter, from Lewa to the kitchen staff, was called into service. The sahibs made the track, and immediately behind them came the long column of laden porters, closed up as on a route-march. From a distance it looked like a huge centipede ploughing its way deeply up the mountain through powdery snow. There was all the appearance of a powerful attack, with the dull boom of heavy artillery in the distance, where the first avalanches were roaring down the steep face, 13,000 feet high. Immense clouds of ice-dust settled upon the level glacier. The old campaigner's heart could feel nothing but joy: at last we were off to Nanga Parbat.

On the sharp crest of the moraine, the last stunted birch-trees were marvellously outlined against the gleaming ermine of the Chongra Peaks. Needle-like towers of ice stood on the Rakhiot Glacier, like the clustering pine-trees of our native mountains, a "Turkish encampment" of Himalayan dimensions. It was a severe grind up the steep slope to the Base Camp plateau in deep mushy snow. One is reluctant to confess that even at a height of 12,000 feet heavy track-making is a tax on the lungs; gradually, by virtue of necessity, we adopted the correct pace for working. Finally we arrived, panting for breath, at the place where two years ago, after many a severe day's struggle on

the mountain, we had run about like young colts on flowery meadows. Now there was nothing to be seen but snow and the desolation of winter.

It was no easy matter to discover the exact site of our former camp. At last, after a lengthy search, Merkl came upon two wooden poles still sticking out of the snow. Feverish digging revealed our old kitchen, with its roof buckled in beneath the weight of snow. Before long, the channel was cleared with much labour. These were the first steps in constructing the Base Camp. The porters shovelled away the snow with enthusiastic zeal, digging out a crater 7 feet deep and 30 yards square, in order to pitch the tents on the turf. Their prayer-songs rang out in cheerful rhythm as the clods of snow flew out before their powerful spade-work; and whenever they struck upon some outstanding piece of turf, they stroked the long, bleached grass-stems with tender fingers. They love the snow, these Sherpas and Bhutias, and most of their prayers are toward the gods of the snow. If you ask one of them about his native place, you will get some local name with the proud words added, 'near the snow'. It is with a true form of worship that they regard the snow.

The shadows of evening were already travelling up the icy walls of Nanga Parbat by the time we returned to the temporary base camp, with the full satisfaction of a day's work accomplished. The first breach had been made in the mountain's defences. The track we had trodden out would soon become a road, and then all loads could be brought up to the Base Camp in regular relays of transport.

Aschenbrenner, who had enjoyed a well-earned day of repose after his hunting exploits, was waiting for us in the camp with a cheerful surprise. He had shot a she-wolf which was prowling round the camp, and later discovered two charming cubs in a small cave. These were now taken on as expedition mascots, and promptly christened: the bitch-cub Nanga, the dog Parbat. They were soon favourites with

every member, and the pride of the whole camp. For the moment they were a pair of awkward puppies, but even now in many of their movements, and especially in their boundless appetite, one could detect the ravenous beast of prey. They ran behind us through the camp, shameless and unabashed, wrestling together for bits of meat, creeping into the tents and selecting our sleeping-sacks for their place of rest; and as they were not yet fully house-trained, the indignation of the victim was a constant source of malicious joy for others. When in process of time they were somewhat cured of this habit, they showed a preference for the dark-room tent, overturning the fixing-bath and pressing their way in through the tent-fastening at the very moment when some particularly important photo was being developed. If we were not actually discussing fresh supplies of provisions or the summit-ridge of Nanga Parbat, the question of their education occupied whole evenings of talk.

CHAPTER SIX

THE FIRST ASSAULT

AFTER the arrival of the reinforcements of Baltis under their headman, whom we had known in 1932, the huge pile of stores in the temporary base camp grew smaller and smaller. Load after load went across the Rakhiot Glacier on the porters' backs, up to the Base Camp. Now at last we could begin our reconnaissance of snow-conditions on the mountain. With this end in view, Merkl ordered Müllritter, Wieland and myself to push on to Camp I, which would give us opportunity of photography and filming in the icefalls. We arrived at the Base Camp on May 26th, to find that our snow-crater, enlarged daily by the porters, had by now grown to considerable dimensions. Camp-life here was delightful. Above the high wall of snow we could look straight up to the summit of the Ganalo Peak. We made our first open-air test of the petrol-cookers, and they worked splendidly. Nima Dorje boiled us fragrant cocoa, a welcome variation in our menu. Then the short-wave apparatus was set up, and connection established with the main body. Wieland erected his meteorological station under an overhanging rock and worked out the altitude of the Base Camp as 13,012 feet. We crept into our sleeping-sacks in quiet anticipation of happiness to-morrow.

Next morning the thermometer showed two degrees above freezing-point, a warmth which augured ill for the weather. However, the morning was brilliantly fine, and the snow hard frozen. Uli again took over the whole bother of porters and loads, while Müllritter and

I went on to take photographs. On the crest of the moraine, in an instant, the whole fantastic realm of Nanga Parbat revealed itself. Far up, some 13,000 feet above us, the summit stood aflame in the first light of the new day. The dazzling brightness spread slowly downwards over the gigantic slopes to the glacier below; the first avalanches roared down the ice-cliffs. We looked up at the mountain, as at something unreal. Slowly, almost reluctantly, we took out our cameras. Nanga Parbat again! This was the world where two years ago we had striven and suffered, where we had clung to our faith and our hopes till the last moment; but now, it was with a more experienced eye that we looked up at the North Peak, apparently so near.

We roped up on the crevassed lower glacier. The Darjeeling men, with their mountain experience, handled the rope as if they had done nothing else all their lives. In the icefalls, the séracs were like giant mushrooms, crowned with snowy cushions 4 or 5 feet high, necessitating many awkward détours. Higher up, snow began to fall. We were by now immediately opposite the steep drop above the right arm of the Rakhiot Glacier. Here we decided to erect Camp I. It had a gloriously open site, with a wonderful view of the Chongra peaks and the incomparable face of Nanga Parbat.

In the afternoon the enthusiastic Wieland went back to the temporary base camp, to give a favourable report on the snow-conditions. Müllritter and I stayed behind, waiting for an avalanche to photograph. One can scarcely believe how difficult it is to catch the correct moment. Towards evening the weather broke, and it snowed and blew so heavily that we had to fasten up our tents. Nanga Parbat was wrapped in cloud, and avalanches thundered incessantly.

Next morning the weather had taken a definite turn for the worse, and in order to avoid needless waste of petrol we decided to get down quickly. The descent through deep snow and in dense driving blizzard was extraordinarily difficult and laborious. In the icefalls we often

broke through into crevasses up to the waist, and were constantly losing the track. At last we hit upon the decisive bridges over the two big crevasses. We reached the Base Camp in the afternoon, to find Aschenbrenner and Schneider, with twelve porters, already packing for their attempt to reach Camp IV, but without any special enthusiasm. Their usually high spirits had dropped to zero; it is not a pleasant thing to attack Nanga Parbat in such disgusting weather. However, orders are orders, and the sun will eventually shine again.

Unfortunately, we had to go back again to the temporary base camp. The snow was dropping from the birch-tree branches below the moraine, and the white landscape was broken by patches of green turf, for it was thawing in the valley. At the camp everybody was full of happiness and confidence. The next day Welzenbach and Drexel set out in high spirits to reinforce the advance party on the mountain. For a long time we cheered them on their way, until they disappeared behind the first bend in the valley. Towards evening they reported through the short-wave apparatus that everything was in first-rate order at the Base Camp.

They had set out just one day too soon to enjoy the unexpectedly early arrival of our admirable rear party, Kapp, Hieronimus and Kuhn. A delightful surprise! All work was abandoned for some time, in the excitement of questions and hearing their adventures. Hieronimus, whom we called Hansei for short, at once unpacked the presents he had brought: a few letters, a box of German cigars, a good book, and various other consolations in the wilderness. The meeting would rapidly have developed into a Christmas festival, had not our grim Bara Sahib welcomed Hansei in a less genial manner than he had perhaps really deserved. No sooner had he recovered his breath after the steep climb, than he was forced to pay the penalty for his literary skill by typing English letters. It was noticeable how rapidly he fitted into our rough frame.

From the moment when Kuhn's admirable culinary skill entered the camp, our diet became better and more plentiful. Alas! Sangster, Müllritter, Bernard and I could not long devote ourselves to these delights, for May 30th saw us definitely on our way to the Base Camp, to act there, and later in Camp I, as forwarding station for the transport of loads. At the Base Camp the melting snow had converted the bottom of the snow-crater into a quagmire. The brilliant forenoon weather had changed into horrible rain, snow and hail intermixed; and in these repulsive conditions we had to sort out the loads, which were all out of order owing to the rapid departure of the advance party, besides fitting out several Baltis with clothes. Consequently our tempers were not much better than those of Aschenbrenner and Schneider a few days ago.

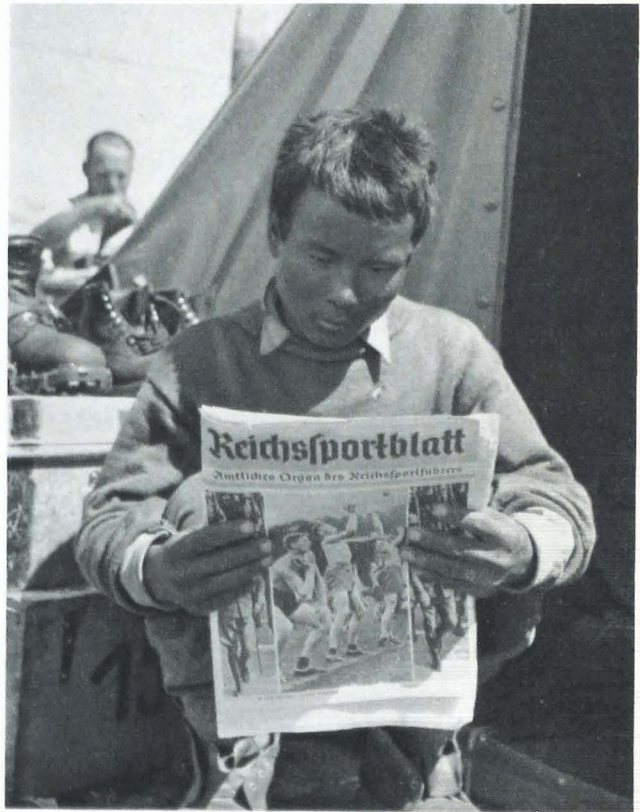
Next morning Wieland and Kuhn came up, just in time for the first serious strike of porters. All the Baltis refused to carry. Kuhn and Sangster bargained with great patience, but to no purpose. Somebody had got hold of the simple folk and spread the lie that the Darjeeling men were paid five rupees a day; and naturally they now demanded the same. As luck would have it, we needed the Baltis, but just now we were not in a position to make concessions to them. At the correct moment Lewa intervened. Knowing their kidney, he promptly removed their equipment, and left them standing in the snow with nothing more on them than a loin-cloth. Then he marked out an impossibly large stretch of snow with four poles, which would have to be shovelled away before they might depart. That did the trick. Twelve men declared themselves again willing to carry for the Bara Sahib, and the others were discharged that evening. Kuhn went down with them to the temporary base camp, to report the latest news there, while Wieland stayed with us at the camp.

A message from Wieland to Merkl gives a comprehensive picture of the activity of these days:



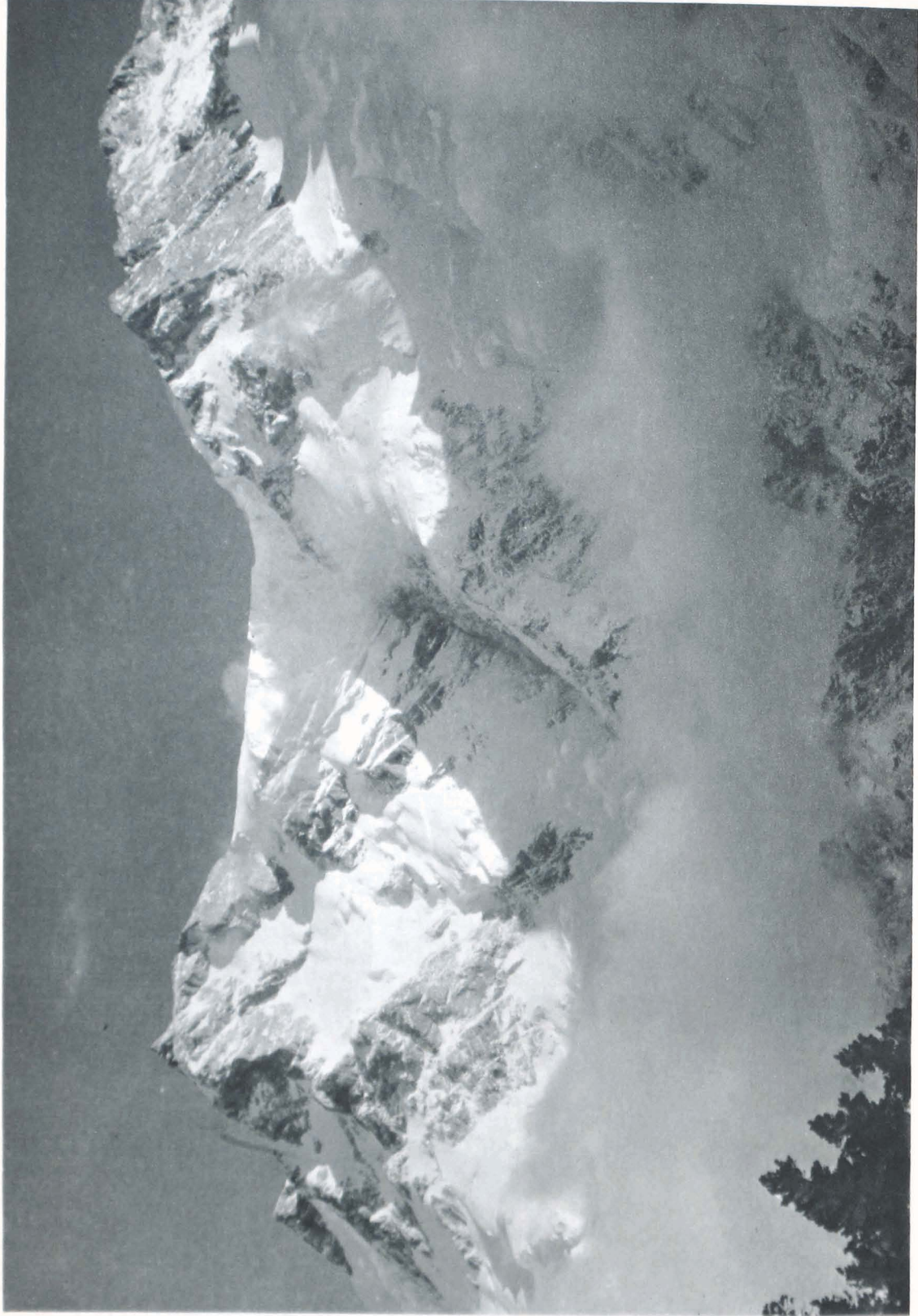
Bechtold

Construction of the Base Camp:
left, part of the stores-dump; in the foreground, excavation of the snow-crater



Nima Dorje, one of the Darjeeling
porters buried in a newspaper

Müllritter



Summit plateau of Nanga Parbat: left, east peak; right, north peak

Mullritter



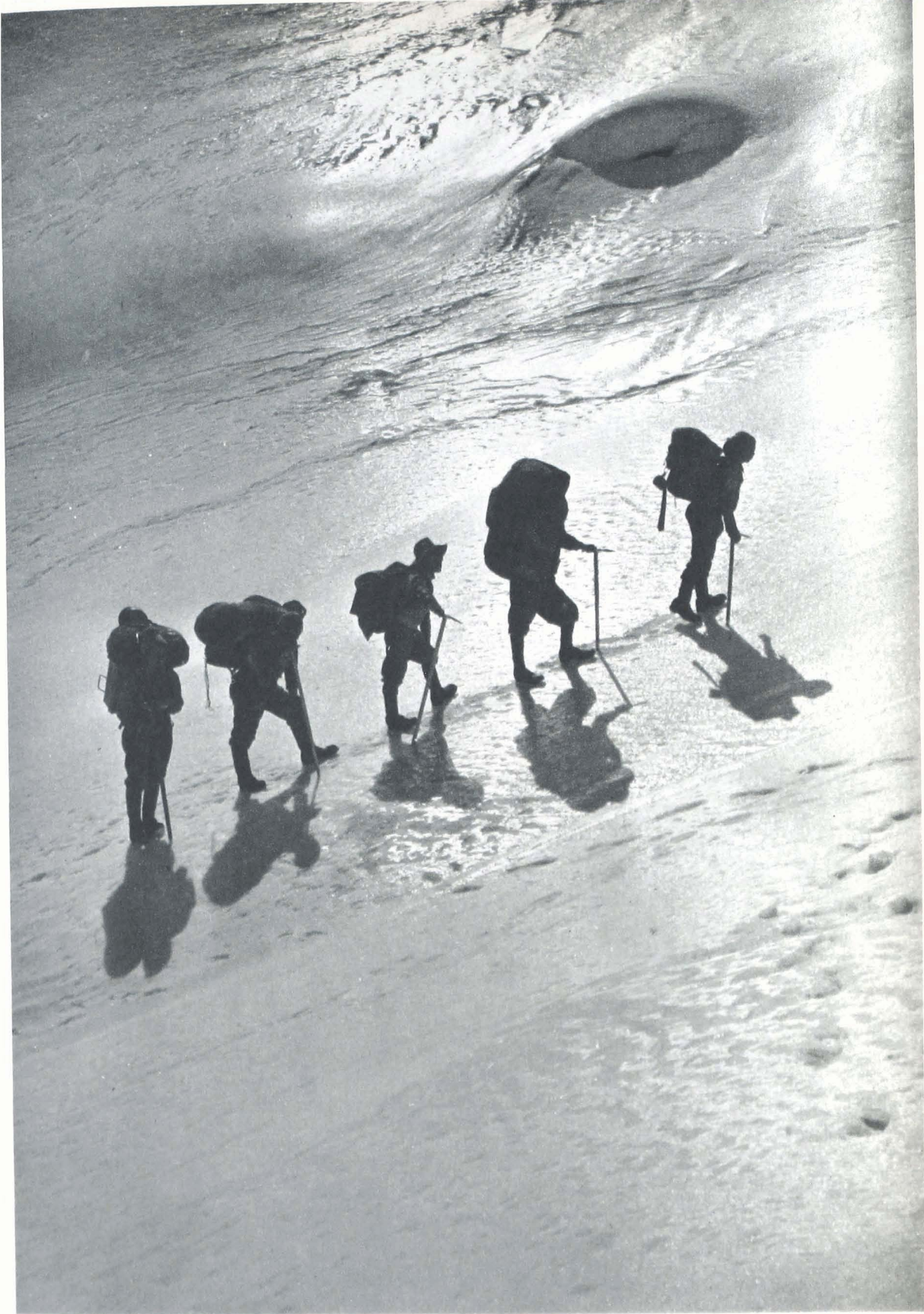
Mullritter

The last birch-trees below the Base Camp. In the background, Chongra and Rakhiot Peaks



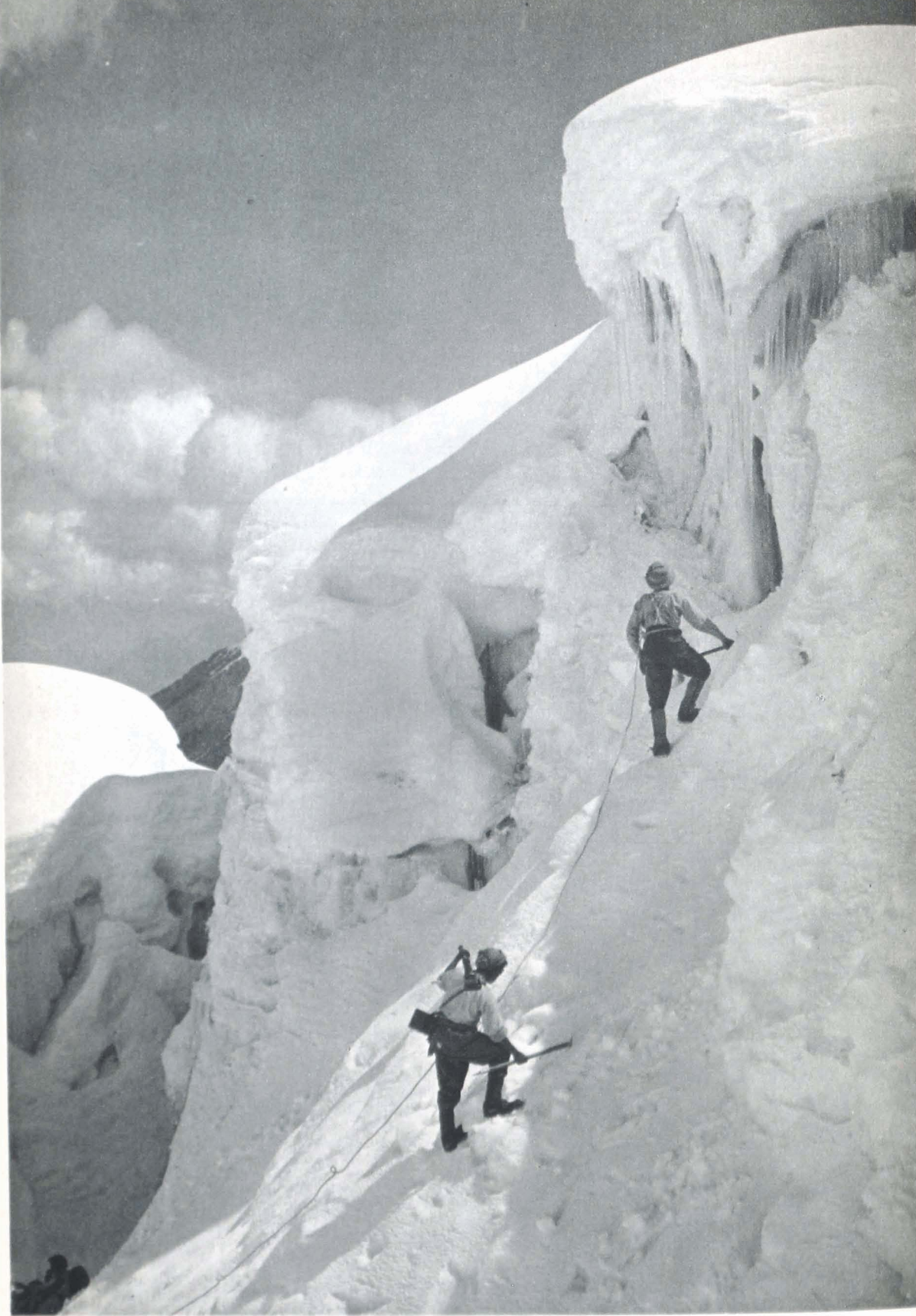
Müllritter

Transport of loads to Camp I. Face of Nanga Parbat, with lower Rakhiot Glacier



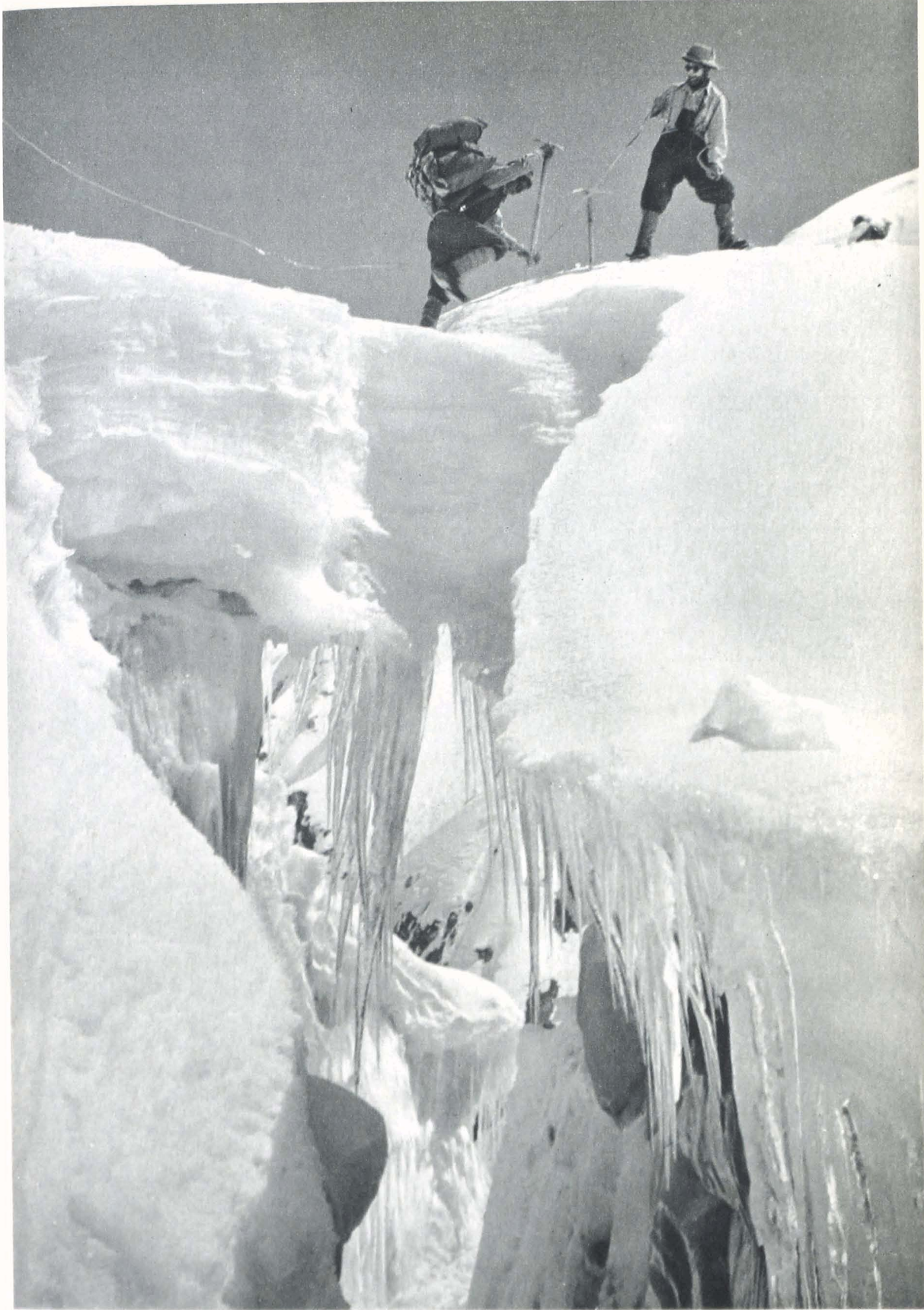
Müllritter

Heavily laden porters setting out at sunrise for the upper camps



Mullritter

On the way to Camp II: Bechtold and Pasang



Merkl

Müllritter safeguarding his porters across a delicate snow-bridge on the lower Rakhiot Glacier



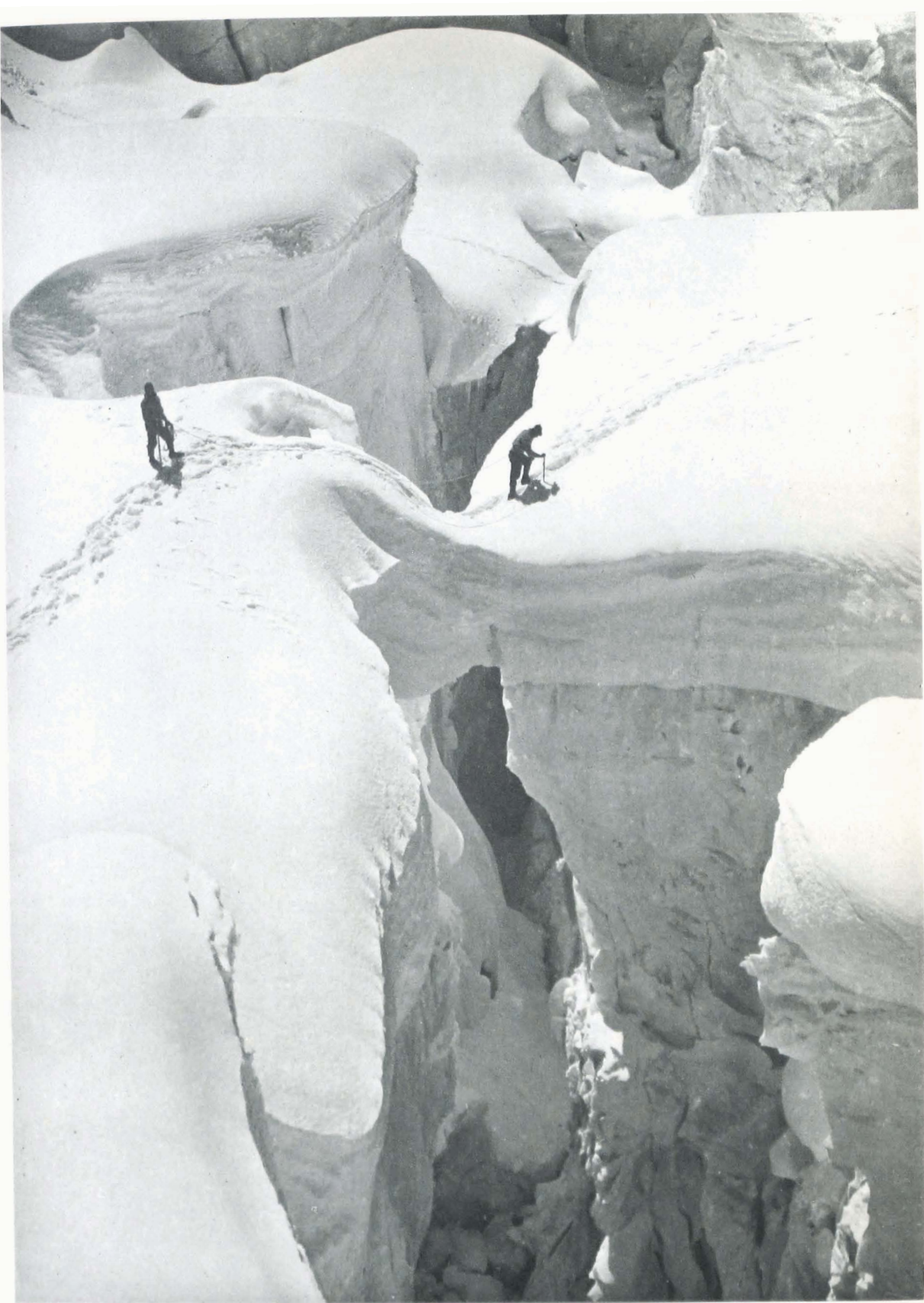
Müllritter

Evening at Camp I



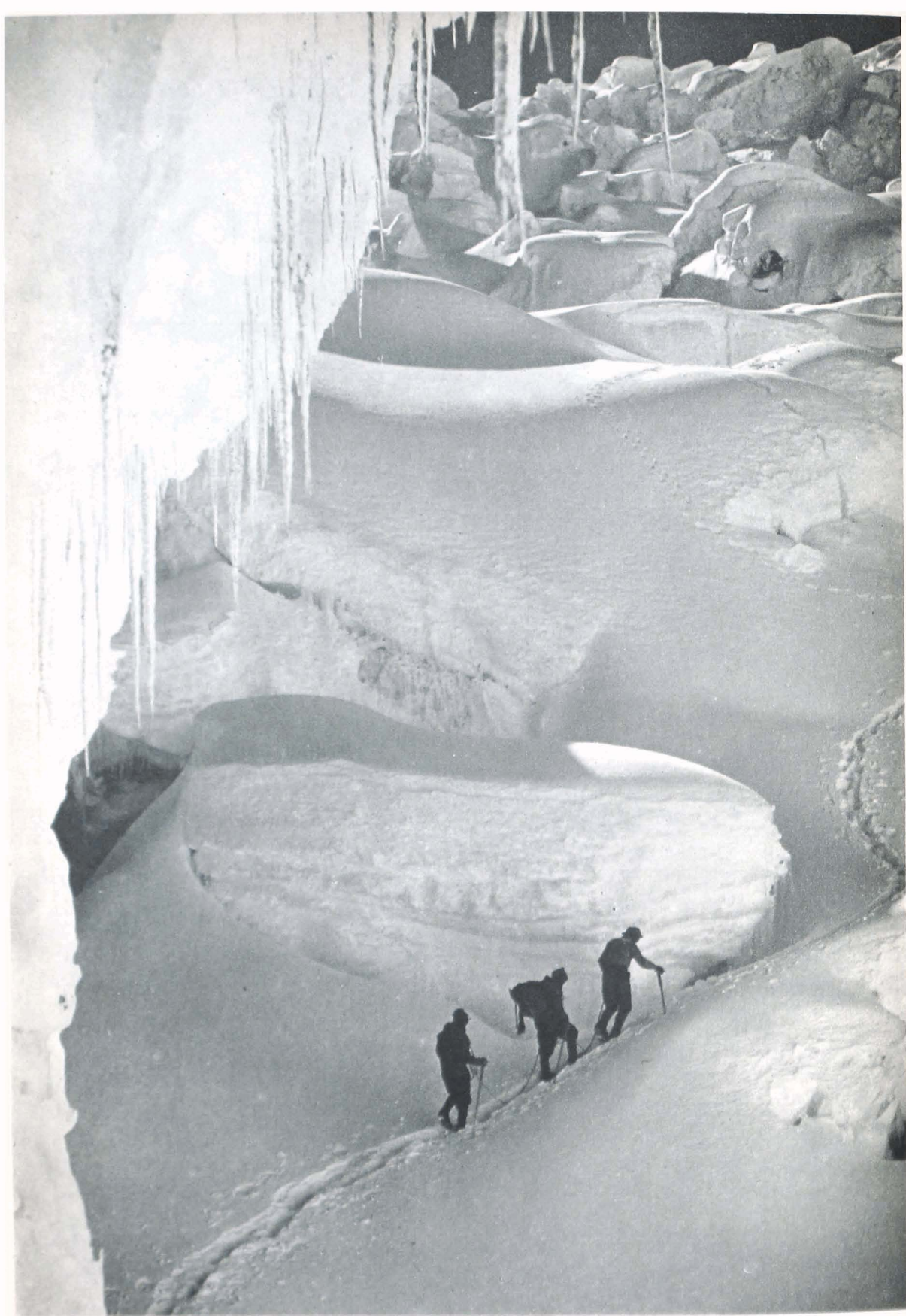
Müllritter

Bechtold and Pasang on the way up



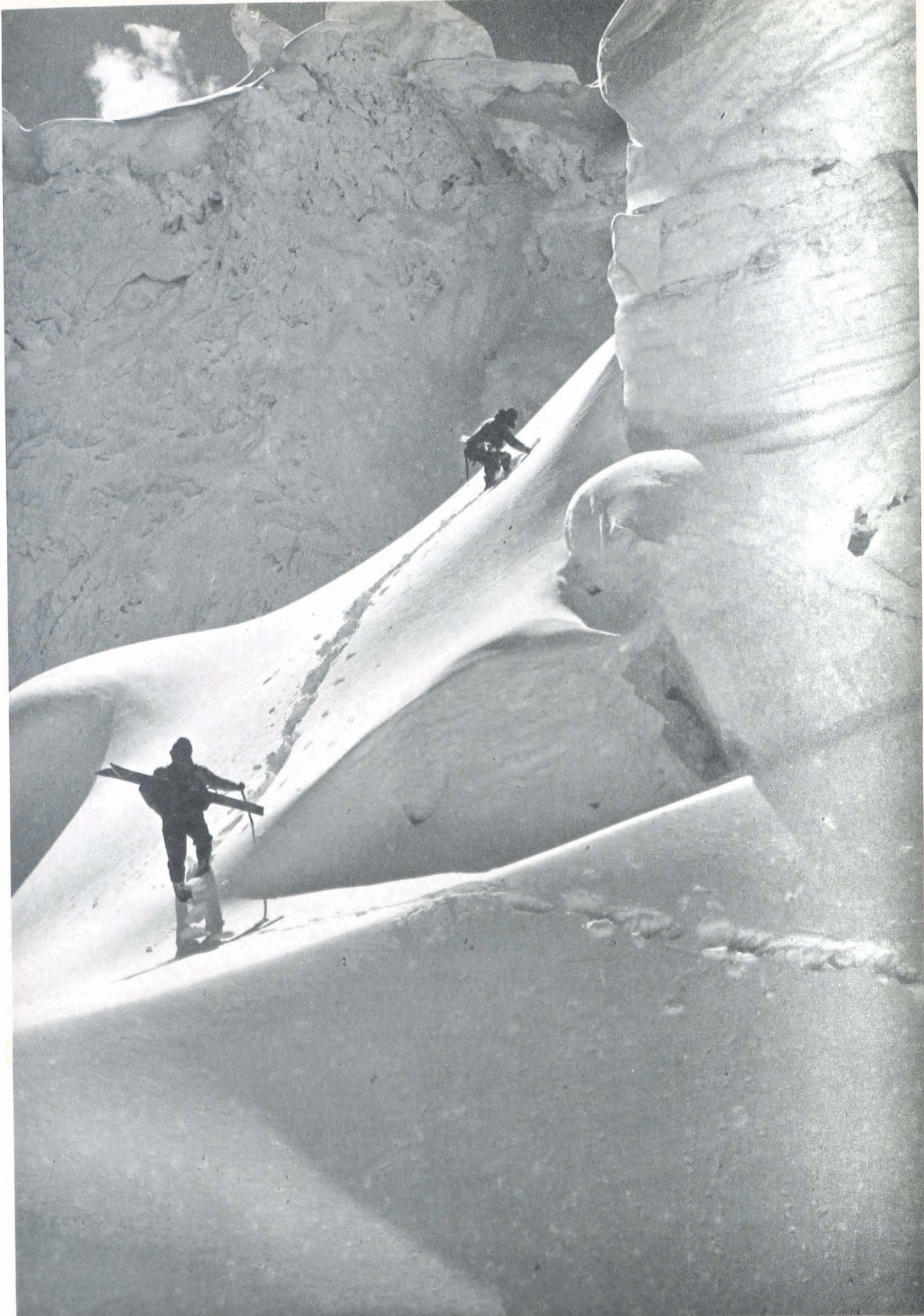
Mullritter

Snow-bridge on the way to Camp I



Mullritter

Among the séracs between Camps I and II



Weizenbach

After many false trails, the advance party discover the route to Camp II.
Aschenbrenner and Schneider on the way up



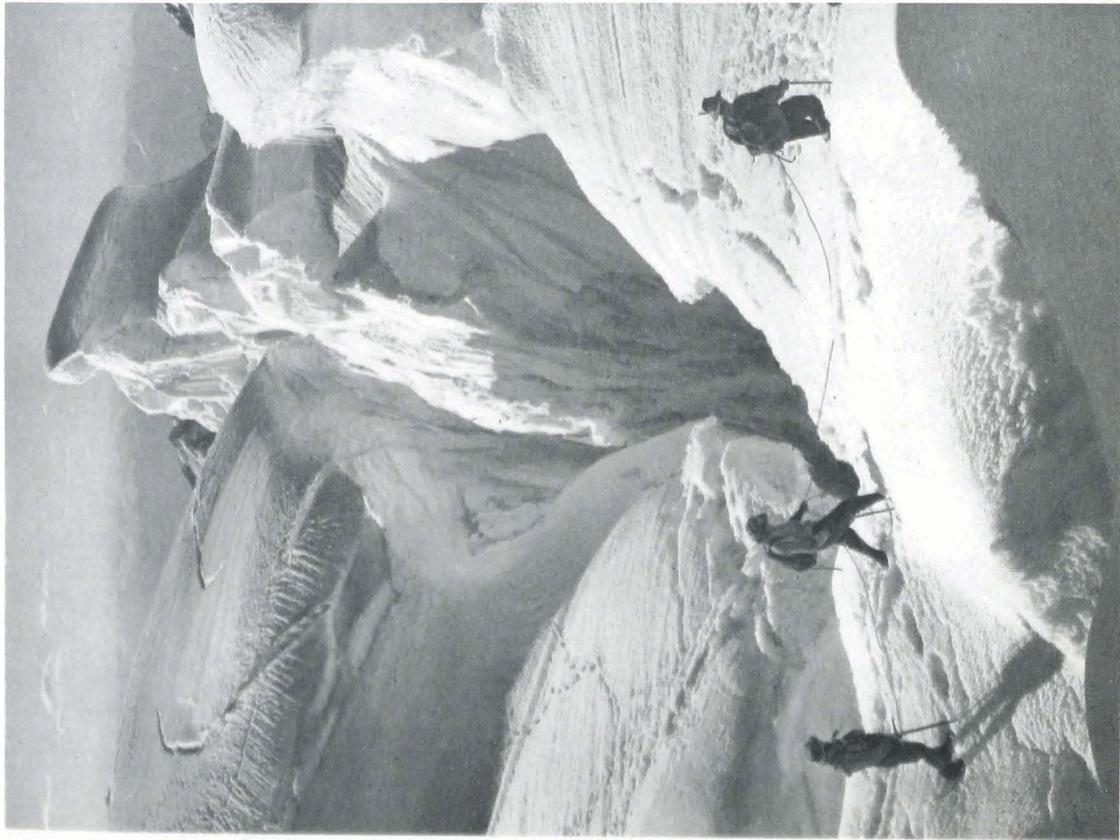
Schneider

The final passage through the séracs below Camp II (17,550 ft.)
Aschenbrenner ascending



Müllritter

Porters descending to Camp II.
In the background, the Buldar Peak



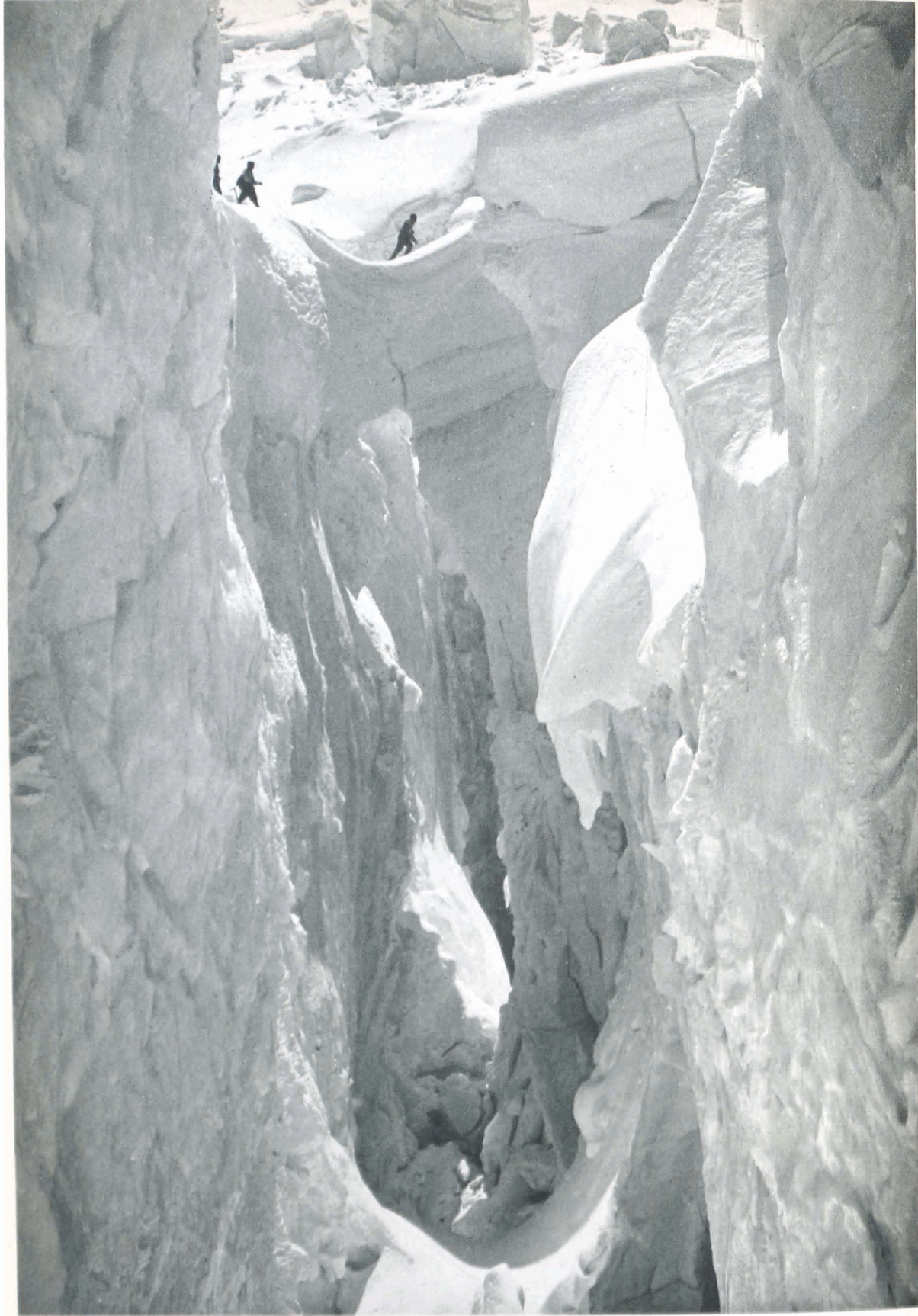
Müllritter

Sahibs on the way up to Camp III



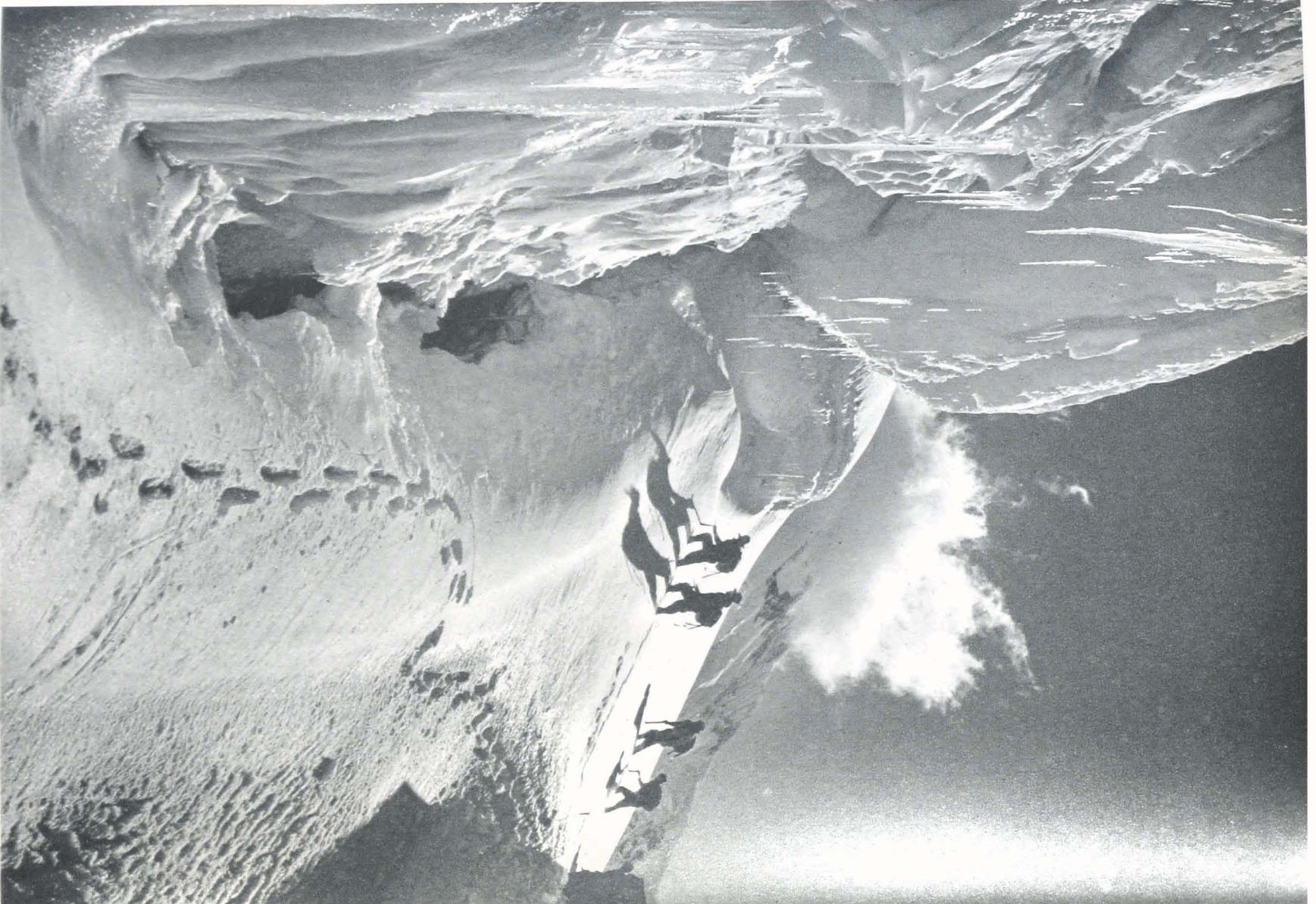
Müllritter

On the broken glacier by Camp II.
In the background, Karakoram range



Bechtold

Delicate arches of snow spanning crevasses 150 to 200 feet deep



The route beyond Camp II, winding between gigantic towers of ice

Mohr/ptc



Schneider

Camp II

THE FIRST ASSAULT

“ Report from the Base Camp to the temporary base camp.

June 1st, 10.30 a.m.

1. Weather fine, everybody at work, packing, shovelling, filming, etc.
 2. Bernard and Sangster, Bechtold and Müllritter are off to-morrow June 2nd for Camp I with seven Darjeeling men and sixteen Baltis, i.e. twenty-three men.
 3. Bernard and Sangster are going the day after to-morrow, June 3rd, with three to four Darjeeling men and, with any luck, sixteen Baltis to Camp II, in order to bring up as many loads as possible for the advance party. Bechtold and Müllritter will film near Camp I.
 4. To-day Willi Welzenbach sent down one sick Darjeeling man (Nangyel) and one sick Balti, with the report that all of them—four sahibs, eleven Darjeeling men, one cook and four Baltis—were going on to Camp II. They ask for more loads to be sent after them; that should be executed through Point 3.
 5. Tell Frier that we shall equip twenty Baltis. You must see about the rest (discharge as many as possible).
 6. Bechtold sends from 16–16.5 hrs., 16.10–16.15 hrs., etc., until 16.55 hrs. on wave 76.50, frequency 392.00, and receives you from 16.5–16.10 hrs., 16.15–16.20 hrs. on wave 46.68, frequency 642.50. Most important!
 7. Still more important! Bechtold and Sangster suggest telegraphing to the competent authority that interference with all our waves should cease.
 8. Party in first-rate form!
- Best wishes to you all,

ULI.”

Even if everything did not go eventually according to programme—Bernard and Sangster, Bechtold and Müllritter had to make three journeys with loads to Camp I before there could be any thought of establishing Camp II—we knew that the provisional supporting party under Wieland was in the best of hands.

The severe work of the advance party is best illustrated by Welzenbach's letter, referred to above, which reached us while we were still at the Base Camp.

" *Camp II. June 1st 1934.*

To the sahibs in Camp I.

We left Camp I yesterday at 7 a.m. However, at 11 a.m. we were still stuck in the icefall. The porters were greatly overdone, and were incapable of further progress in the heat. Apart from this, we lost much time in searching for the way and in various false trails. We decided therefore to establish a temporary camp (about 16,400 ft.). The last porters did not arrive there until 3 p.m.

Start this morning 6-6.30 a.m. Time lost at first in looking for a route among the crevasses. Then we made rapid progress. At the upper end of the séracs, more false trails. At 10 a.m. we reached a fine plateau of snow, where we established Camp II (17,550 ft.). It is just about the same place where the 1932 camp stood.

We are now sending all the porters down, with the exception of the cook and the orderlies, as we have nothing more for them to eat. The men who remain here will be provided for in part out of our rations. To-morrow we shall try to erect Camp III, with the help of our orderlies; then in the evening we shall send them back to Camp II. We are taking tents and blankets from the men who are going down to-day, as we are quite happy about everything up here. We hope you have got all the necessaries at Camp I, otherwise you will have to send them on to the Base Camp.

Now for the most important thing. If our advance is not to be held up, send up to us by to-morrow evening, June 2nd, a column of porters with provisions, especially porters' rations, one load of petrol, one box of sahibs' provisions and if possible also our personal sacks. The porters will have to be off again soon. Don't load them too heavily, so that they may come up quickly. Above all, don't forget: (1) snow-glasses, (2) cigarettes for sahibs and porters, (3) radio valves RE 84 and high-frequency valves. Very best of wishes.

WILLO."

THE FIRST ASSAULT

In the evenings, when the porters returned from Camp I after their heavy transport-work, they chose the steep moraine-slope above our camp for their descent. They would take the long, steep slope at a rush on the seats of their trousers in a very practical manner, if not in the best Alpine style. This was always a very popular entertainment, and the best toboggan-run imaginable.

I managed once, with our third radio-set, to intercept a connection between Camp III, which had meanwhile been established, and the temporary base camp. Drexel was speaking up above, and Merkl at headquarters. We were thus promptly informed of the latest progress and decisions: an impressive demonstration of the great advantage of the short-wave apparatus.

On June 3rd, just as Sangster, Müllritter and I were setting out for the third time for Camp I, Merkl, Hieronimus and Kuhn arrived in camp. Merkl's intention was to accompany us to Camp I, in order to see after the assault. Hieronimus and Kuhn were now to occupy the Base Camp. In a rash moment, on the way to Camp I, we were seduced into filming among the crevasses. It was a constant marvel to me how Peter Müllritter could get his porters to climb up and down the séracs, which were none too safe, without a murmur. My Pasang had a decidedly poor day. When finally we reached the top of a difficult sérac, it was discovered that he had brought up the wrong packet of films; and he was as much upset by a few stinging Bavarian words as by the fact that he must again climb down the sérac. We reached Camp I in the sweltering heat of midday, in a state of solution resembling artificial honey. The others had been lying for hours in the shade of the tents. There were a few more decisions awaiting Merkl, and a letter to be written to the advance party. The same evening, after a strenuous day's work, he went down with Sangster to the Base Camp.

The silvery grey of twilight still encompassed the mountain when we set out next day for Camp II with five Darjeeling porters and eight

Baltis. We waited for the coming of day on the baroque carving of a curiously-shaped sérac. High overhead, 11,000 feet above us, the first rays of sunshine struck the immense ice-cliff at the edge of the summit plateau. Then came the first salvo. The blue glittering mass of ice spread itself out slowly across the wall, as the glacier gave birth to the avalanche. A wave 700 feet high rolled over the fearful north face of Nanga Parbat. Cataracts of ice beyond the power of imagination roared down, striking against the mountainside, bursting over the citadels of granite, and finally hissed their way as fine ice-dust on to the level glacier below. After a breathless silence the cloud of dust grew up in white bubbles, climbing higher and higher, and covering us with its icy breath. We looked on shuddering. Was it the beginning or the end of Creation? A distant glimpse of eternity rose before our eyes.

Without a word, we climbed up the steep glacier between shattered séracs. Behind us the porters were murmuring their prayers. The route wound in many sweeps among innumerable crevasses, which covered the ground like a spider's web. After an exciting passage through séracs we came suddenly on the tents of Camp II standing in the sunlight.

We were soon comfortably installed. During these days there was a continual coming and going at Camp II, Baltis climbing up with loads from the Base Camp, Darjeeling men escorting them on to the advance party, disposition of loads organised and messages carried up and down.

While we were in charge of transport at this intermediate station, the advance party was working at the route on to Camp IV under difficult circumstances, as is evidenced by the following extract from Aschenbrenner's diary:

" Provisional Camp III, June 6th.

In the morning the snowstorm was lashing round the tents. Willo (Welzenbach) and Balbo (Drexel) explored a short-cut from Camp II

THE FIRST ASSAULT

to Camp III. Schneider and I on skis made the track upward. The glacier had altered so entirely since 1932 that we had to make our way through much further to the right, in order to establish a proper route for the porters. At last we discovered a suitable place for the genuine Camp III at a height of 19,400 feet. We trod out the track again in a downward direction, to make the way easier for the ascending porters. When we returned with them, we were met by a raging snowstorm, the like of which I never encountered in 1932. Welzenbach went down again a short way, to look for Drexel and his porters who had lost the track. Drexel was the last to reach camp to-day. He was in an exhausted state, and complained of severe pains in the head; despite his fatigue he did not get a moment's sleep all night.

June 7th.

Temperature 22° F. Thin clouds, and the storm now over. In the morning Willo came into our tent and told us that Drexel had been delirious during the night. We advised him urgently to descend, but Drexel did not agree to this. Schneider and I explored the way on towards Camp IV. We were back again by the afternoon. Drexel used the short-wave apparatus and established splendid connection with the Base Camp, where Merkl expressed his delight at our activities. At 4 p.m., however, Drexel decided to go down to Camp III with his orderly Angtenjing. He said good-bye with the words: "See you again at Camp IV."

While Drexel was struggling down, painfully supported on two ski-sticks, to join us in Camp II, Müllritter and I, without any suspicion of trouble, were sitting in our tents and getting ready for the night after our hard day's labour.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A GRIEVOUS BLOW

ON June 7th Alfred Drexel's orderly, Angtenjing, arrived at the camp in a state of agitation with the news that Balbo Sahib (so the porters called him) was seriously ill and would soon follow. Müllritter and my Pasang at once hurried off towards Camp III, while I quickly prepared tea and soup. Ten minutes later they were back again with Alfred. He was somewhat blue in the face, and breathing heavily. Beyond this, there was no sign to give cause for serious anxiety.

In Camp II, there were then only one sahibs' tent and one sleeping-sack available. To make the necessary room for the sick man, Müllritter decided to go down before nightfall through the crevassed region to Camp I. He was to inform the doctor immediately and return with him next day.

A short time later I was lying in the sleeping-sack beside Drexel. It was pleasantly warm, and we chatted for a time about impersonal matters, such as the short-wave apparatus and our plan of attack. At bedtime he was worried by a fearful cough, which lasted half the night. Towards midnight he fell into a broken sleep, with confused feverish dreams. It was with anxiety that I listened to the sick man's coughing. We lay close to each other, and at every movement the snow crunched beneath the sleeping-sack. It was a long, anxious night until the grey of early dawn entered the tent. At 8 a.m., contrary to my expectations, Alfred was much refreshed, and I explained to him at once that we

A GRIEVOUS BLOW

must descend to Camp I. But even as I was preparing for the descent his condition altered so alarmingly that there could be no more question of our setting out. In my anxiety I sent Pasang with a message to Camp III, that Welzenbach should come down to me with tent and sleeping-sack. Pasang was back again in the incredibly short space of three hours.

“No sahibs, no porters!”

Suspecting nothing, the advance party had gone on to Camp IV. Meanwhile, a further message was sent to Camp I, to report Drexel's serious condition.

From 10 a.m. Alfred became unconscious. I called his name loudly to him, and rubbed his temples with snow. It was in vain. The kindness of nature had sunk him in a comfortable state of unconsciousness and freed him from his pain. The avalanches roared from the steep face of Nanga Parbat. I was alone with my sick friend and my sorrow for him. From hour to hour he was visibly sinking. In my distress I sent Pasang down again with an urgent message to Camp I. At 5.30 p.m. he returned with Müllritter and Bernard. It was a great relief to me, and a spark of hope flickered up again in me when the doctor arrived.

Exhausted though he was from the ascent, Bernard took neither food nor drink, but at once devoted himself to the invalid. He diagnosed pneumonia, and was greatly alarmed at Alfred's condition. In order to do all that was humanly possible, he sent Pasang and Palten at once as express messengers to Camp I, to fetch oxygen. Müllritter helped the doctor nobly with manual assistance. I was no longer capable of doing so.

A raging snowstorm lashed against the tent. It was as if nature herself would strive for the young life here fighting with death. Once, for an instant, the clouds of evening were parted, and the sun stood red over the Hindu Kush.

Soon all was over. At 9.20 p.m. Alfred slept his life away, smiling.

Bernard cast himself in lamentation upon his dead friend. All the pain and grave anxiety of the last hours found relief in our tears, and we wept unashamedly. Three men knelt in the snow, and said the Lord's Prayer for our dead comrade. The porters, led by Angtenjing, Drexel's orderly, came to the scene of death and wept without restraint.

We sat waiting in a porters' tent. The painful lamentations of the porters rang through the night. Slowly, like the trickling of a sand-glass, the hours went by. Our thoughts sped home, to Alfred's parents, to his sorrowing mother and father. And we spoke with them, as if they were present.

About 3 a.m. a torch flashed before the entrance to the tent, and there was a crackling of firm footsteps across the snow. The stout-hearted Uli Wieland and the brave porters with him had achieved the incredible and brought up the oxygen in darkness and snowstorm through the labyrinth of crevasses. Too late! When Uli heard the sad news, he was overcome with grief.

Before sunrise the first news was sent to Camp IV and Camp I. The heavy work of transporting the body, at a height of 17,000 feet, through the crevasses was another severe tax on our strength. During Alfred's last journey there was a solemn splendour over the mountains, where lay the whole spirit of his life. The salvo of avalanches rolled incessantly across the face of Nanga Parbat.

How the whole strength of the expedition was devoted to save their comrade is clear from a passage in Willy Merkl's diary.

June 8th 1934.

The moment I began to write, there was a shout from the next tent: "Look, look, an avalanche coming, a huge one!" I rushed out of the tent, and it took my breath away: the biggest avalanche I ever saw was falling over the north-east face of Nanga Parbat down to the broad level glacier in front of our camp.



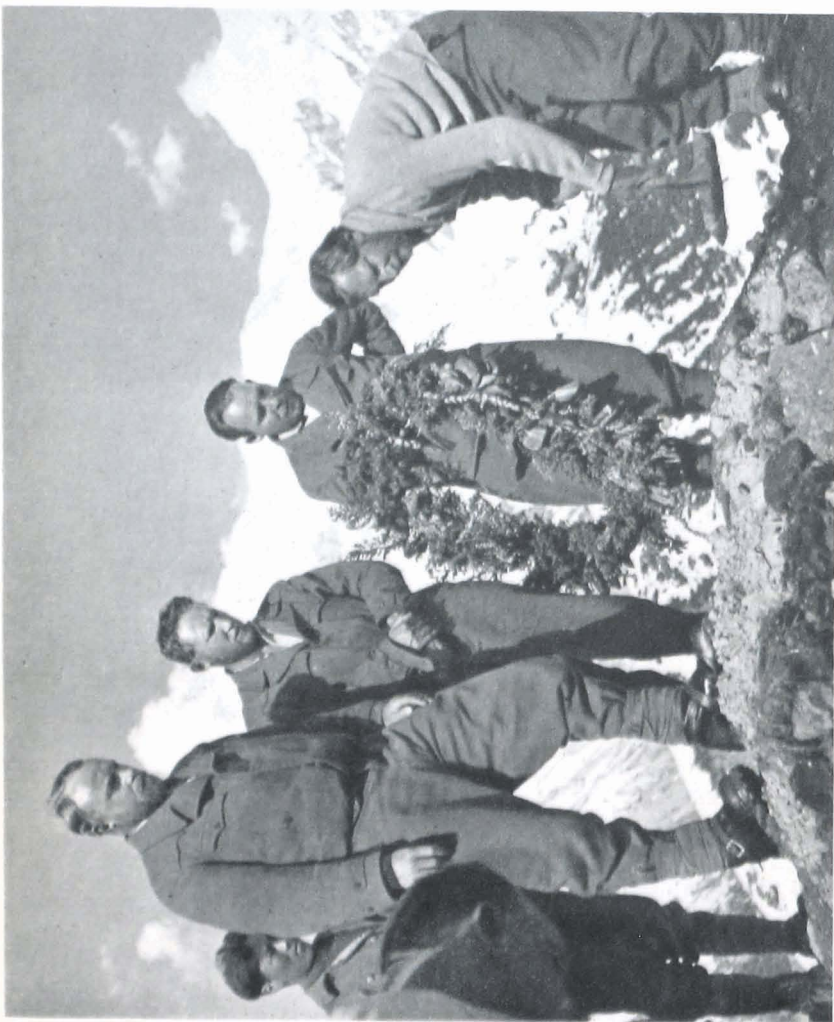
Müllritter

Alfred Drexel's last journey



Müllritter

Alfred Drexel



Müllritter

Final service



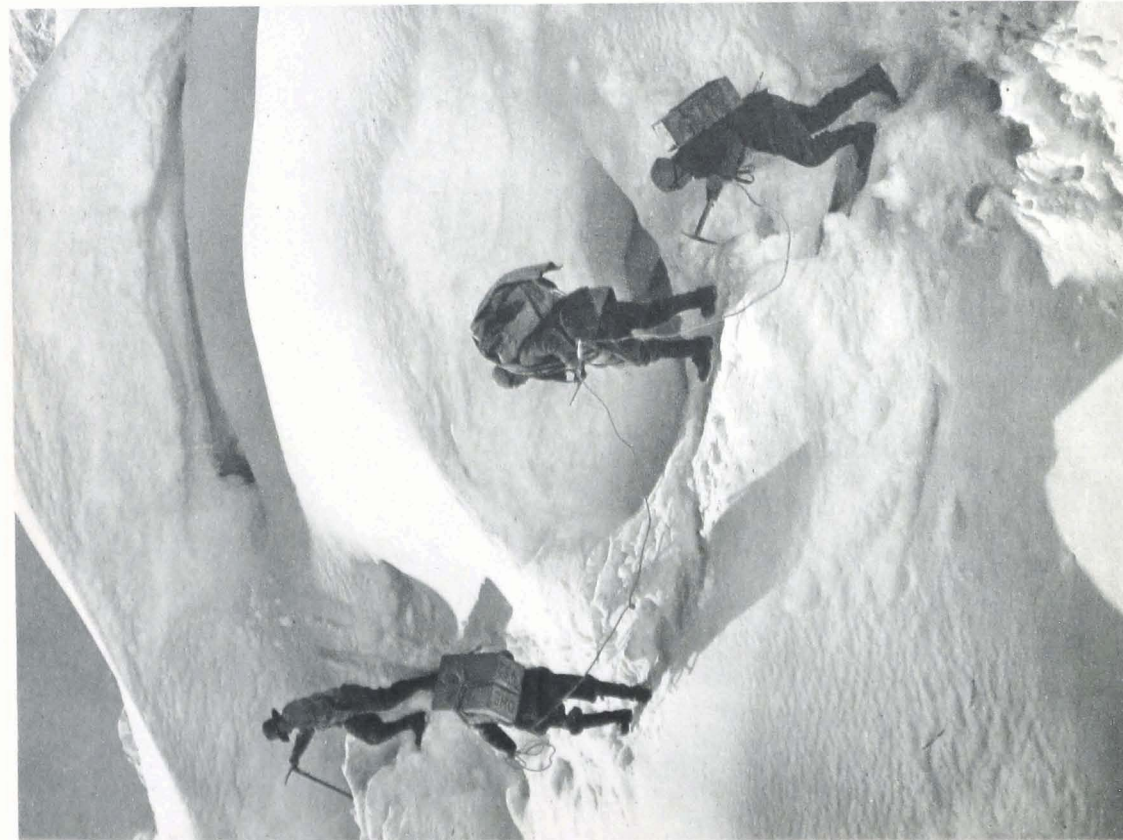
Schneider

Alfred Drexel's grave on the moraine hillock by the Base Camp, below Nanga Parbat



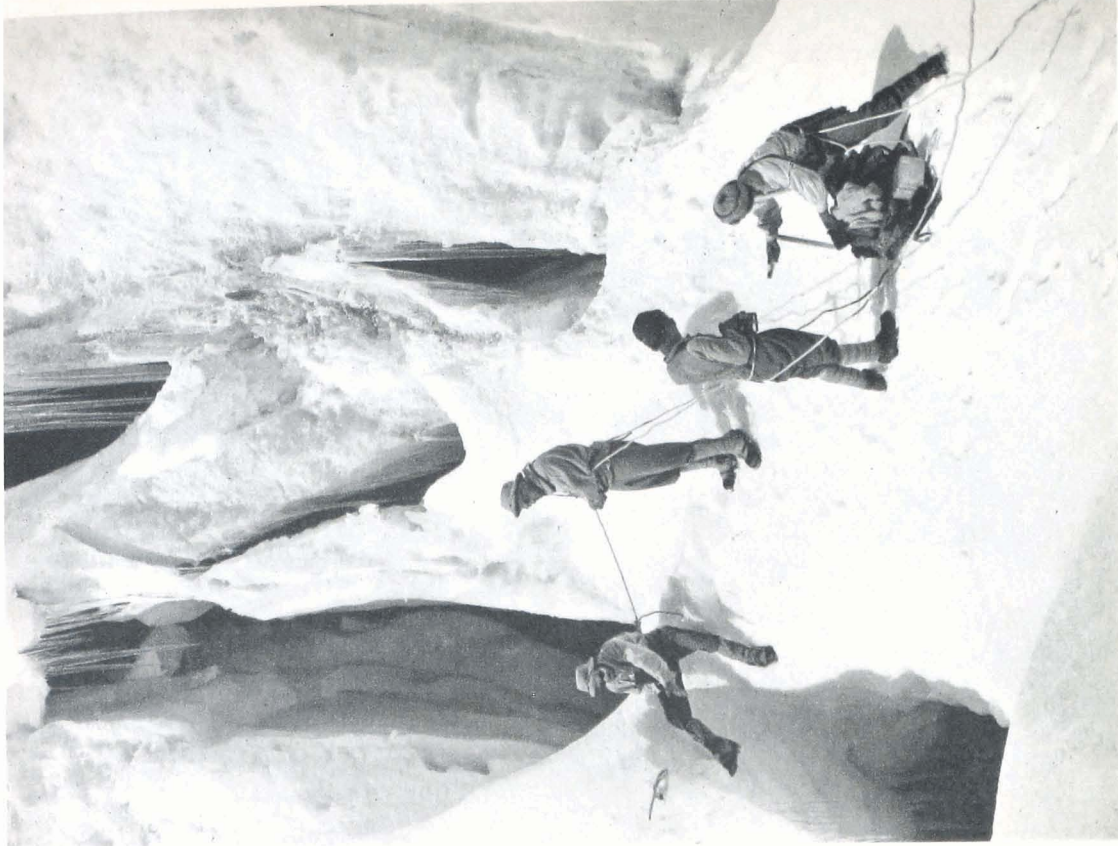
Bechtold

Ice avalanche from the face of Nanga Parbat, 13,000 feet high, from the route to Camp II



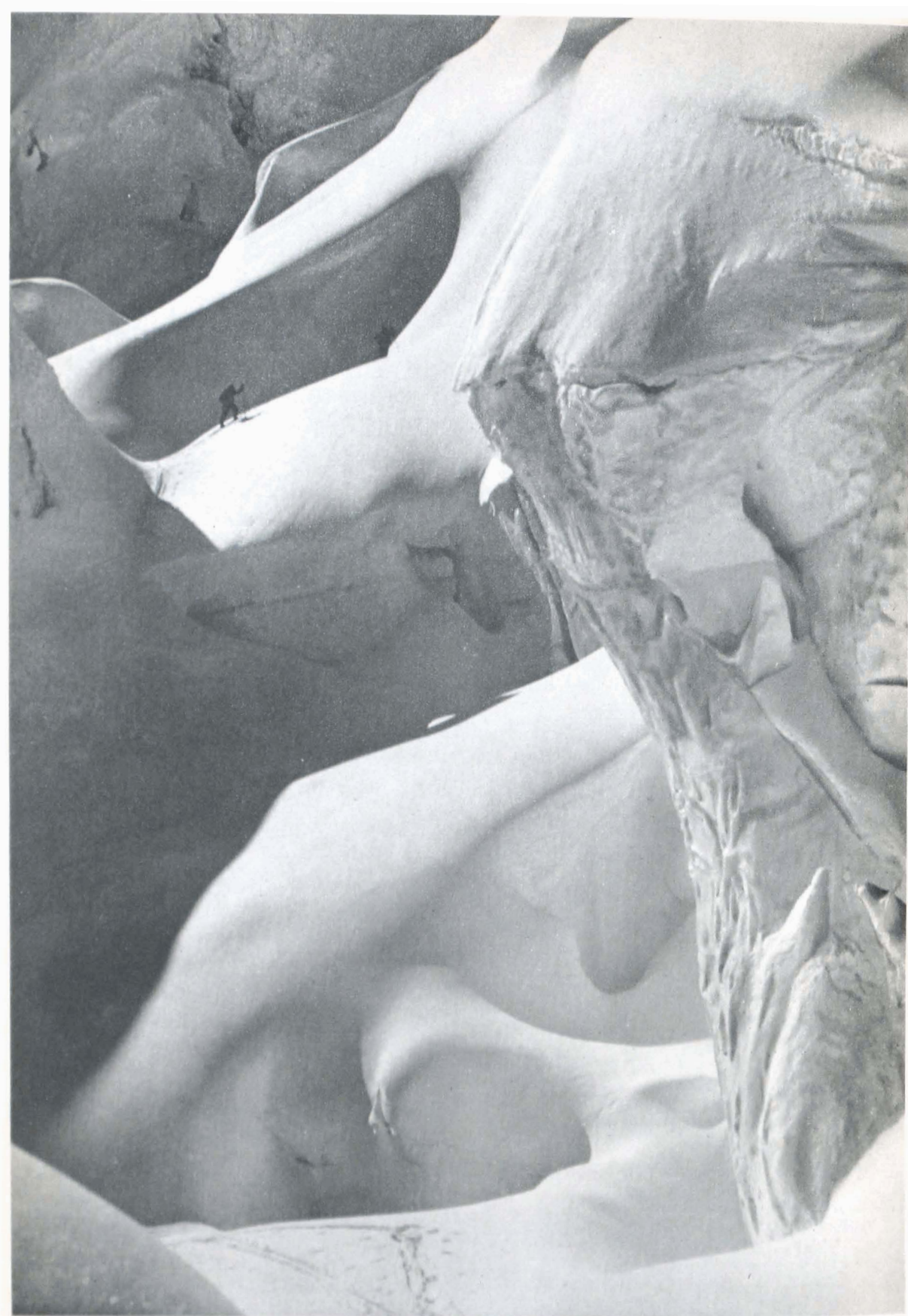
Müllritter

Willy Merkl leading a column of porters to Camp I



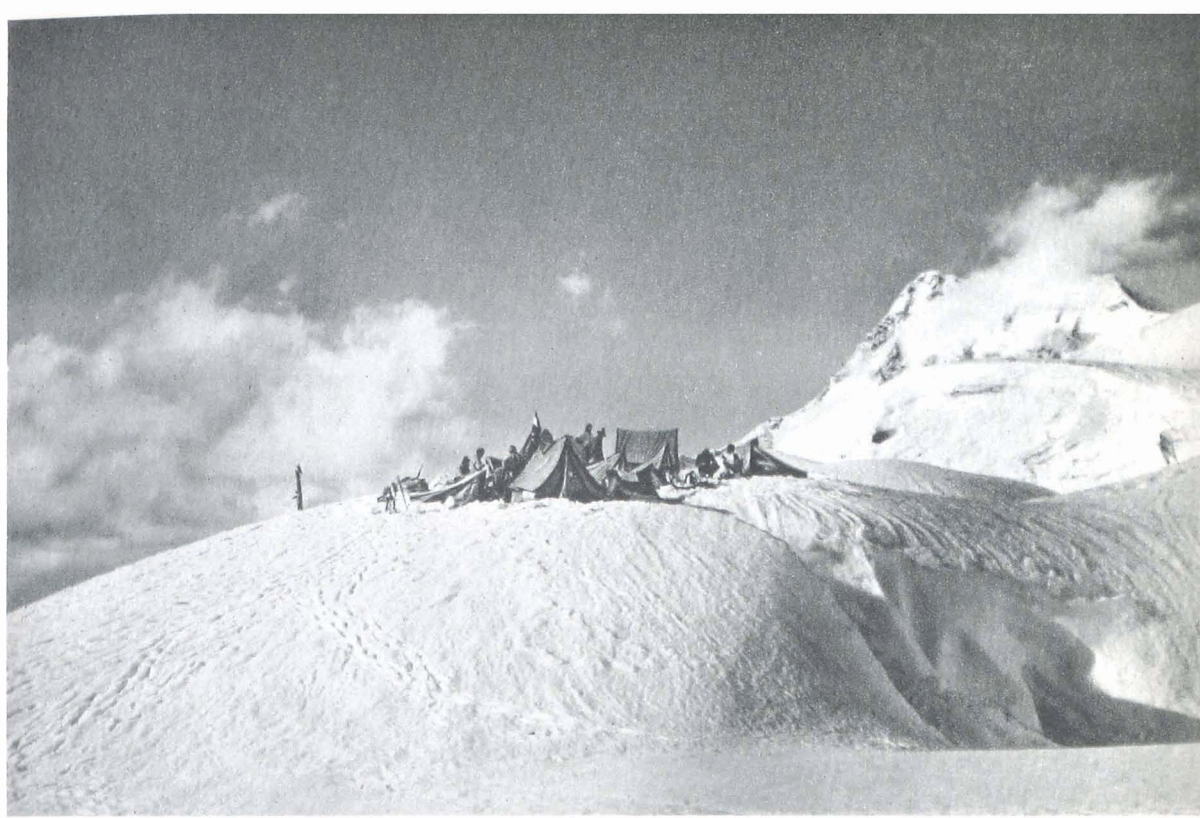
Merkl

Müllritter, held by Bechtold, photographing the passage of a crevasse



Schneider

The advance party making the track through deep powder-snow, from Camp II to Camp III



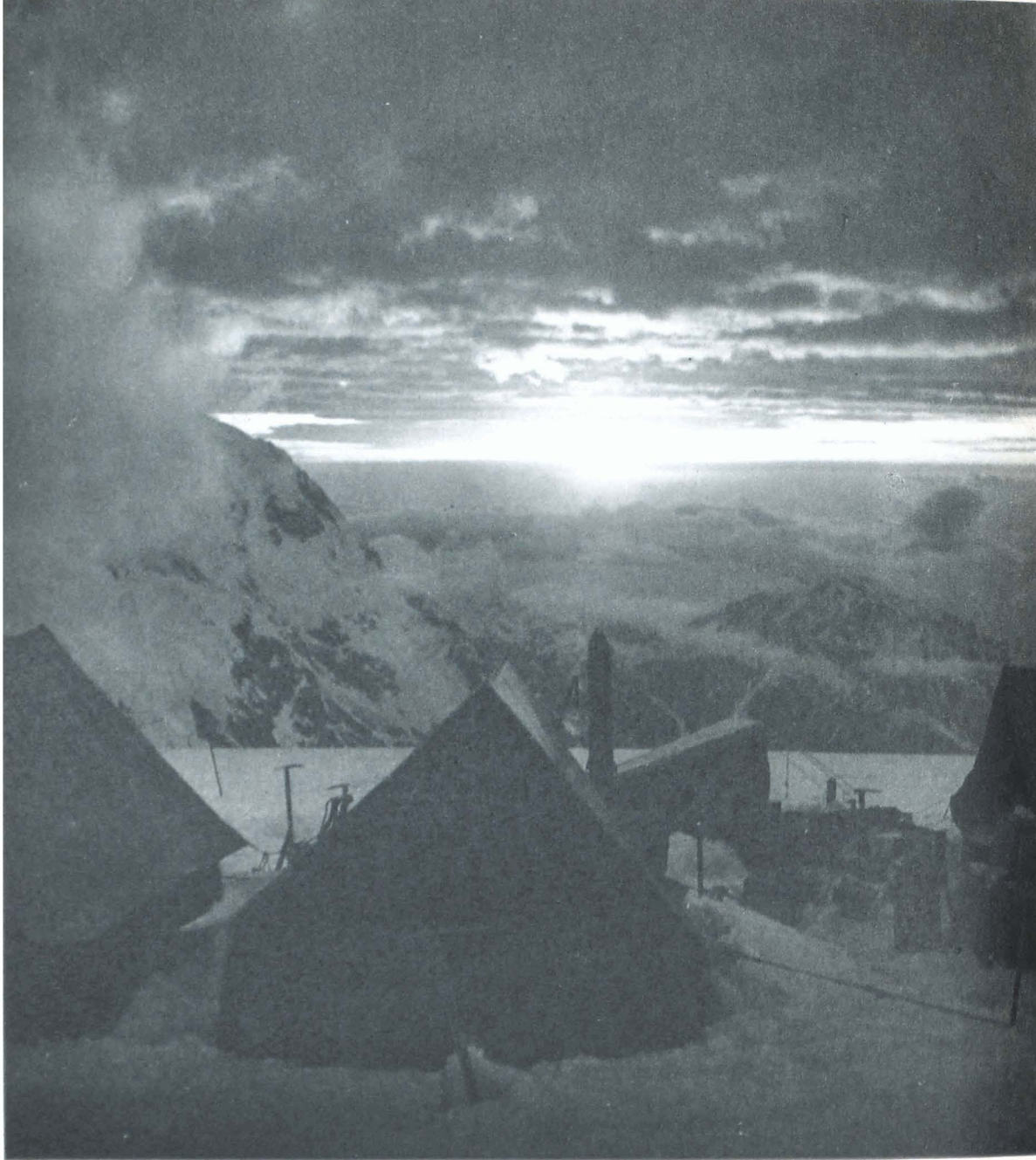
Looking towards the Chongra Peak from Camp III

Mullritter



Darjeeling porters in Camp III (19,400 ft.)

Mullritter



Mullitter

Evening at Camp IV (20,300 ft.), the base camp for the final assault

A GRIEVOUS BLOW

Thank God, there was no need for anxiety. Bernard and Müllritter with four Darjeeling men were already high up the icefall and clear of danger. This overpowering impression is, indeed, to-day in keeping with the gravity of Bernard's journey to Camp II. Alfred Drexel telephoned to me yesterday that he felt ill and wanted to come down for medical treatment. But when I reached Camp I, with Uli Wieland, Kapp and Bernard, there was no Drexel, only Müllritter waiting for us.

Soon afterwards we saw two Darjeeling men coming down. They were Angnima and Angtenjing, Drexel's tireless orderly, bringing a message from Fritz that Balbo had had a bad night and was much weakened by attacks of coughing: his condition had deteriorated so much that at all costs, even by night, the doctor must come up. "Balbo can't get his breath, and looks very ill. Not a moment to lose!" were Bechtold's closing words.

The weather was most unfavourable, a heavy hailstorm. Suddenly two roped figures appeared in front of the tent: Pasang and Palten, sent by Bechtold. They had taken the last ounce out of themselves, to deliver the note as quickly as possible. It did not take long to read the few words: "Send up more oxygen to-day, it's a question of Balbo's life."

A short consultation. Uli Wieland at once volunteered to go. Kikuli, his orderly, and Jigmey our interpreter, hurried off immediately (it was 7 p.m.) in the hailstorm for the Base Camp, to get the oxygen-apparatus brought up to us by the best goers by 10 p.m. at latest. Meanwhile, those who were to make the difficult journey through the labyrinth in darkness and snowstorm—Wieland, Pasang and Palten—rested themselves.

Towards 9 p.m. the thunderstorm was over. I lay awake in anxious fear for our friend. At 10.25 p.m. I heard the dull sound of hurrying steps, and lit the lamp. Gay-Lay and Dakshi laid the oxygen-chest in front of my tent. They were thankful to get tea and cigarettes from me. The two men had come at a splendid pace over the glacier in pitch-black night, with one petroleum-lamp. How absolutely one can rely on these Sherpas! I called over to Wieland's tent that every-

thing was here, oxygen, medicine, lamps. He got ready quickly. Our personal cook of 1932, Ramona, loyal fellow, rapidly boiled more cocoa. Pasang and Palten were wakened up, and at 11 p.m. the party was under way. Let's hope that all this labour is not in vain. . . .

I can't sleep to-night, I am too anxious about Balbo's life. So I took up my diary, as I couldn't rest for fear, and am writing down these impressions. And then I look out into the dark night and follow the three flickering lights of the party bound for Camp II. They are getting on with amazing speed. I can see them twice again, and then no more. Wieland and his brave Sherpas must by now have reached Camp II. But how may things be going with Balbo? . . .

At 5 a.m. I woke up Ramona. Kapp was already prepared for starting, but we were delayed by the necessity of re-packing the loads. At last we were ready to start at 7 a.m. The first rope was already on the level glacier. At that moment two porters appeared, hurrying down and signalling to us to wait. I went a short way towards them. Wongdi greeted me in military fashion: "Salaam, Bara Sahib! Balbo Sahib dead!" Then he handed me a note from Bechtold.

CAMP II. 5.15 a.m.

MY DEAR WILLY,

I am very grateful to you for not leaving us in the lurch. Uli arrived in camp at 3 a.m. It was too late. Balbo died of pneumonia at 9.20 p.m. I am notifying the advance party in Camp IV simultaneously, to return at once.

Will you please leave all loads behind, and come up towards us, travelling light, quickly and with as many porters as possible. We expect to begin the transport of the body at about 8 a.m.

In deep sorrow, your

FRITZ, WILLY B., PETERL.

As many men as possible to come up without loads, and soon.

ULI.

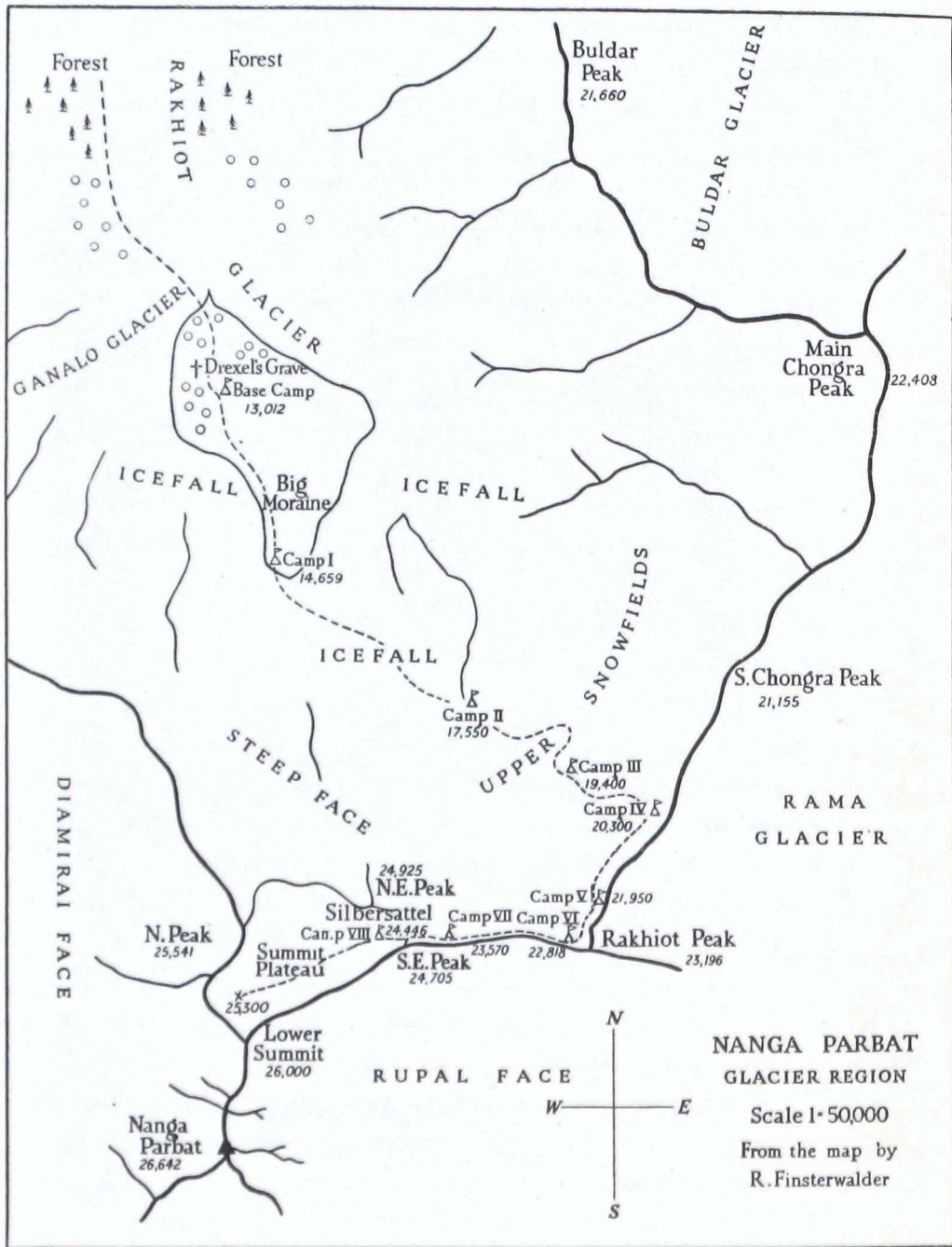
While I read these lines, grief at my friend's loss overpowered me. Tears rose to my eyes. I had to pull myself together with a mighty effort, in order not to break down. At this moment of urgent business, I became quite calm and deliberate. . . .

A GRIEVOUS BLOW

News of the disaster reached the advance party up in Camp IV, and they came down likewise to give the last escort to the dead companion. The whole attack was called off. Among the porters now present were many who in the last days had done superhuman feats: no mere porter-service, but comradeship in the purest sense of the word, loyalty even to death. A feverish activity reigned throughout the camp, in order to prepare a worthy burial. The porters vied with each other in bringing flowers; Bernard made a bright wreath, and Aschenbrenner carved a simple wooden cross. Meanwhile the others dug out the grave on the moraine hillock above the camp. A mountaineer's grave, irradiated by the eternal snows of Himalayan peaks; and dominating all, the giant Nanga Parbat himself keeps vigil.

Late in the afternoon of June 11th the long procession of men moved up towards the hillock. Willy Merkl and Kapp in front, behind them our beloved Alfred, borne by his friends, and shrouded with the flags of his native land. Then came the British transport officers and the long column of brave porters, thirty Darjeeling men and thirty Baltis.

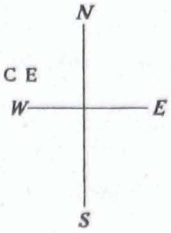
Willy Merkl spoke at the graveside. In few words, he sketched out the high purpose for which Alfred Drexel had died, saying how great was the gap thus made in our circle. He led our thoughts homeward to the stricken parents, and again back to Nanga Parbat, there gladly to continue the struggle with the iron determination of our dead friend. Thus he bore our hearts to higher regions, and gave the stern spirit of a soldier's burial to this last journey. Kapp spoke after him, as a friend and as the representative of Germany. His speech ended with the Lord's Prayer. The national emblem and the tricolour flag fluttered down into the grave, wherein we cast earth, flowers and evergreen juniper. Hoarse throats sang the mountaineer's song; and then in the clear evening light from the snows a silent procession moved down towards our tent settlement.



**NANGA PARBAT
GLACIER REGION**

Scale 1:50,000

From the map by
R. Finsterwalder



THE ROUTE ON NANGA PARBAT

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE SECOND ASSAULT

THERE was no need for our leader Willy Merkl to look far in order to discover who among his men was ready for the second assault on Nanga Parbat. To hold steadfast to the goal was clearly an article of faith within us; to continue the struggle for the mountain was the legacy of our dead companion, who would never for one moment have hesitated to do the same, if Fate should have stricken down another of ourselves. Those at home will understand our spirit; and among them, surely, Drexel's father, himself an old mountaineer.

Our splendid Darjeeling porters had indeed given a great display of loyalty in the last days. We could always rely upon them, and they would gladly resume their heavy toil for us in a fresh attack on the mountain.

Consequently, in this quarter, we could go forward in peace to settle everything behind the front-line before getting to grips again with Nanga Parbat. Letters and telegrams were written to relatives at home. Hieronimus' typewriter rattled all day and through many nights. Sangster and Uli Wieland worked untiringly at the collection of loads and the arrangement of porters for the new attack. Kuhn and Hieronimus did the clerical work for the transport of loads up the mountain. By June 12th Lewa and twenty Balti porters were able to leave the Base Camp for Camp IV, conducted and supervised by Kapp and Frier. Meanwhile the remainder of us continued our building of the

grave. Slabs of rock were carried up the hillock and arranged to form a great sarcophagus; we strewed earth upon them, and planted the whole grave with flowers.

In the clear summer's warmth of cloudless days the snow melted round the camp, and the waters ran down chattering merrily. One could actually see the green carpet spreading over the soil.

A few days later Lewa returned, with bad news from above. The immense rush of air from the many avalanches pouring off Nanga Parbat had blown in the tents at Camp I, despite the distance and the 'safety' of its site. Of the ten Baltis to carry loads to Camp IV, seven were sick. Not one of them had got higher than Camp III. Their alleged trouble was a disposition to giddiness; but when Bernard examined them in the Base Camp, their temperatures were absolutely normal. Lewa adopted the approved method: eight men who refused to carry again were deprived of their outfit and dismissed.

Kapp had come down with Lewa from Camp II, as his leave was running out and it was time for him to think about descending. Kuhn prepared a farewell dinner, which threw all our previous experiences far into the shade. When Kapp left after a hearty farewell, the expedition lost a valuable assistant, and ourselves a true friend; he himself would gladly have remained to help us in the new assault.

Bernard was troubling us again with his medical examinations. Each man's lung-capacity was put to the test, and here Welzenbach broke all records. The painful occupation of keeping one's breath by the watch is reminiscent of champion divers' feats. But when Bernard attacked the lobes of our ears for his beloved blood-tests, sucking the blood like a vampire, he would often find himself looking an ice-axe in the face! Apart from this, the experiment was of interest: the average count of red corpuscles of the Europeans, compared with that of the porters, was in the ratio 5:1:8:2.

During all this time, Frier was stationed at Camp II, in charge of

THE SECOND ASSAULT

the ascending loads. He sent us bad news: Pasang II, Schneider's orderly, was seriously ill with bronchial catarrh and rheumatism of the joints. So the harassed doctor had to make another awkward journey to Camp II, in double-quick time. It was a matter of the utmost difficulty to get the unfortunate Pasang down to the Base Camp.

Alas, these Job's tidings were not the only ill news which greeted us in these days. In consequence of a snowstorm during the passage of the Burzil Pass, our anxiously-awaited delivery of tsampa (ground barley, the indispensable high-altitude food of our Darjeeling porters) had suffered a delay which upset our programme. Nothing could be done before its arrival. Thus again we lost some valuable days. The idle delay in camp gave time for further exploration. Uli Wieland and Sangster climbed the Buldar Peak; Merkl, Welzenbach, Mülleritter, Hieronimus and myself went up a point about 16,500 feet high on the true-left boundary ridge of the Rakhiot Glacier, with a valuable view of the north-west face of Nanga Parbat. Next morning we were as supple and fresh as after a bath: a sign that we were in the best of form.

One day the mail-runner or dak-wala arrived in the Base Camp. Mail-day is always treated as a festival. Even if the postman, as on this occasion, arrives late, nothing happens to him, for everyone is busy enough with his letters and cards. Every land in Europe, every part of India, and all the capitals of Germany are represented on the postmarks. The sight of gaily-coloured stamps from every quarter of the globe would gladden the heart of a philatelist. Each letter speaks of the sympathetic interest which everybody at home was taking in our expedition.

In an interesting letter Finsterwalder told us that he had been able to survey and measure the summit mass of Nanga Parbat from the mountains east of Astor. A sketch enclosed, with heights marked, illustrated his information, and was of much value for our plans of

reaching the summit. Immediately, Nanga Parbat is on everybody's lips and in all our conversation beside the camp-fire.

Meanwhile, Wieland and Sangster had worked out an exact timetable for the second attack. It was to be carried out in two parties, with an interval of two days. Everything was provided for and laid down as the result of careful calculation. Each sahib and each porter knew his duties for each day and each party. When at length the news reached us of the arrival of the tsampa-loads, we wrote our last letters home. I walked out again in front of the camp, where the young wolves were playing on the big moraine-boulders. Nanga bit firmly into my hair. I carried the wild cub a short way through the camp, dangling her in front of my face: the last caress for many a day. In the evening four rockets went up into the starry night-sky, the appointed signal for Frier in Camp II that the attack was opening.

On June 22nd, the first party, six sahibs and fourteen porters, left the Base Camp, singing as they went. Beside the last bushes on the steep moraine-slope the porters kindled their sacrificial fires. For a long time we looked back on the greetings waved by those who remained, and the clear sound of jodelling came up to us.

Owing to the bother of packing, we were too late in leaving Camp I. Consequently, the sweltering midday heat caught us in the midst of the séracs. The huge Rakhiot Glacier, flanked by the steep walls of Nanga Parbat and the Chongra peaks, had the effect of a gigantic convex mirror, and our party was ploughing through the soft snow in its focus. Every snow-bridge over the numerous crevasses was softened. Time and again the burdened porters sank in above their hips. Over the specially dangerous places they were secured with the utmost precaution. Our throats were parched, our breathing quick, high-pitched and spasmodic; we panted for a cooling drink. Merkl kept a sharp look-out lest any of the porters should take internal harm from eating snow.



Willi Welzenbach pausing for breath in the rarefied atmosphere



Müllritter

Camp IV (20,300 ft.)



Müllritter

At Camp IV. The final assault begins

Midday rest at Camp IV.
Schneider, Bernard and Merkl



Müllritter



Lewa (right) weighing off loads of
50 lbs. for each porter

Müllritter



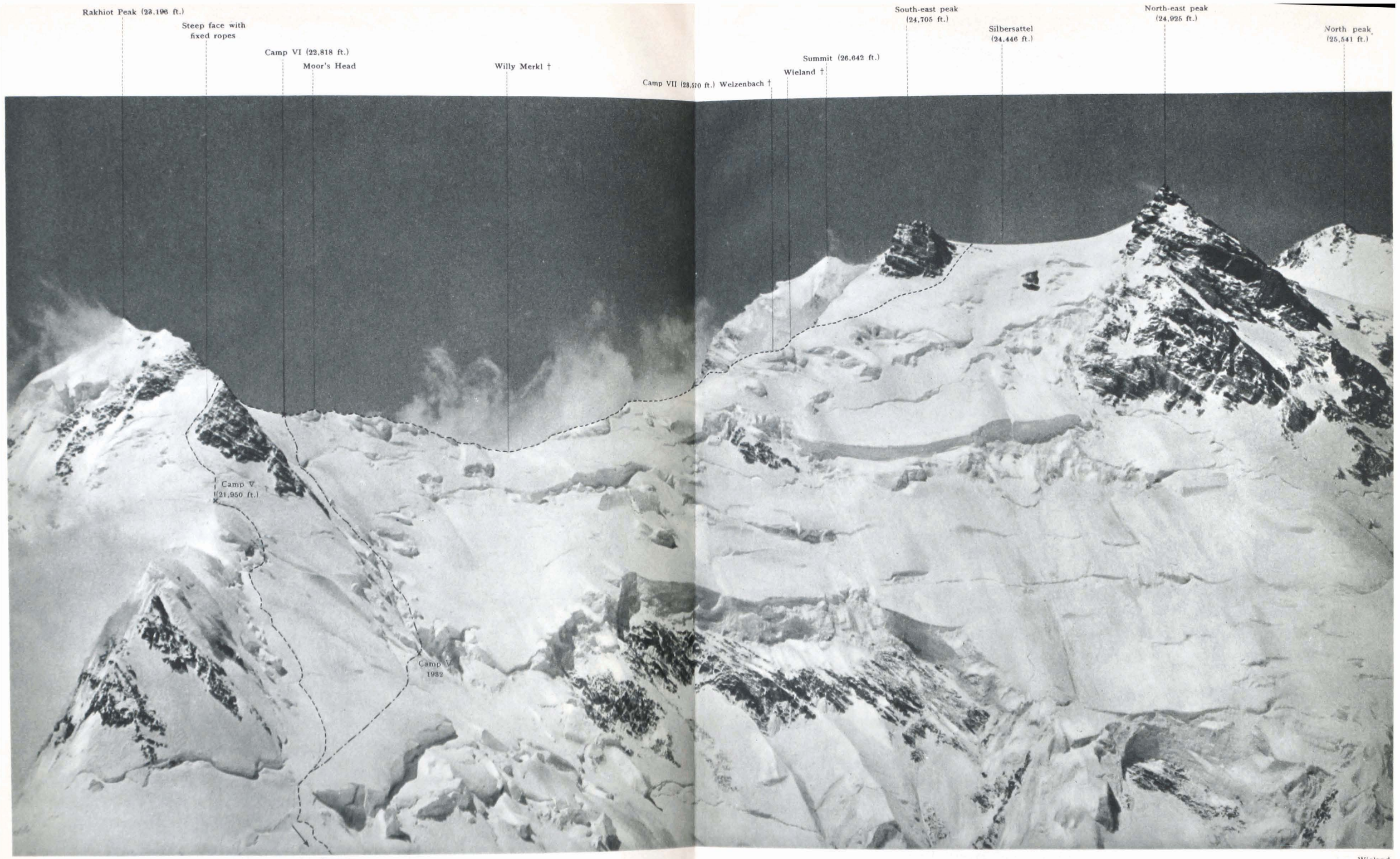
Merki

The Southern Chongra Peak. The route through the ice-fall to Camp III



Schneider

Looking down from the Southern Chongra Peak to the Rakhiot Glacier



Nanga Parbat Group from the Southern Chongra Peak



Aschenbrenner

Chongra Peaks, from the way to Camp V. In the background, Karakoram



Schneider

Chongra Peaks, from Camp V

THE SECOND ASSAULT

Frier was thoughtfully waiting for us in Camp II, with raspberry syrup. He had been living here alone for a whole week, and throughout this period his seat at mealtime was a wooden box, contents unknown. It was the whisky-box, belonging to Bernard's medical outfit, and therefore prudently stacked among scientific loads. Frier had often yearned for it, and who would have expected Fate to be kind enough to preserve it from a thirsty British throat !

The old Camp II had been in a veritable spider's web of crevasses. It was undeniably a service on his part that Frier had shifted the dangerous site of the camp. Unfortunately there were but few opportunities of finding a clear space in the broken icefall, and as an experienced climber has no desire to risk his life during his morning constitutional, the safest place for the new camp was clearly indicated for Frier. Here our tents were standing, and above them stretched the burning snowfields.

The shattered ice of the glacier rose in gruesome savagery behind the camp. Between Nanga Parbat and two huge rocky summits, which stood out like dark reefs in the blue shimmering surf, forces beyond description pressed forward the vast glacier stream. The track made by the advance party of the first assault wound between icy ruins of gigantic séracs and ice-boulders big as the citadel of Salzburg, between towers bold and fantastic as Dolomite pinnacles. Airy, fragile arches bridged the enormous crevasses, 150-200 feet deep. In the binding frost of morning they were still firm enough, but in the midday heat we could not venture to cross them.

The track led up steeply through immense icefalls to the level ground of the upper Rakhiot Glacier. As we arrived here, choking for breath, a thick mist came on. After a wide sweep to the right, we found ourselves in the presence of our small tent-city of Camp III (19,400 ft.). Owing to dearth of sleeping-sacks, Aschenbrenner and Schneider planned to push on to Camp IV the same day. For the moment they waited for the feeding of the assembled herd ; Ramona, the high-

altitude cook, had got everything ready with a swing. But after the meal men and tents were wrapped in deepest slumber, while the air lay heavy as lead above the glowing cauldron of snow.

Erwin Schneider was the first to feel the pangs of conscience. He sought out his companion Peter Aschenbrenner, lying in the shade of a tent-cloth between four ski-sticks. At the sound of the invitation to start, Peter muttered "Götz" in unadulterated Tyrolese Hochdeutsch. Erwin was not insulted, far from it. A minute later he was again snug beside me in the sleeping-sack. However, an hour later came Peter to rouse Erwin. "Willscht bald aufschtehn!" he cried from a distance. Erwin's answer was short and to the point—but not less classic. It silenced Peter. In the absence of agreement, each went on alone to Camp IV, Peter snorting with rage at 4 p.m., Erwin some two hours later with a smile of sacrificial devotion. We watched him for a long time, until he disappeared over the rise in the last evening light.

The way from Camp III to Camp IV is gentle ski-ing-ground, but very exhausting to the spirit. One must admit with reluctance that the powers of achievement are seriously reduced in the sun-filled glacier hollows, and that even the greatest effort cannot improve them. Further, our acclimatisation was inadequate. Here, on the verge of 20,000 feet, the perceptible thinness of the air is a determining factor in every movement. As soon as you climb too fast, or make too quick a turn, as for instance to pick up a fallen match-box, it takes thirty or forty seconds to calm your rapid breathing. The need for rest is then imperative and inevitable. All one's will-power must be devoted to lung far more than to limb. Once you can manage to get the lungs working evenly, the limbs obey spontaneously.

On June 25th we reached Camp IV (20,300 ft.), which was sited on the highest glacier plateau below the northern precipices of the Rakhiot Peak. It has a magnificent open view over the Buldar ridge, now sunk below, to the shining ice-castles of the Karakoram. At a

THE SECOND ASSAULT

great depth below, the Rakhiot Glacier hurls its huge waves valleyward between green meadows and forests.

Without delay we set about making Camp IV the point of departure for the further attack. Two years ago, Ramona the cook had loyally and patiently carried out his arduous duties here for six weeks; now he obtained a kitchen-tent for himself, to his intense pride. The porters slept in the two large porters' tents. The flags of our tent-city fluttered proudly towards the snows of the Chongra peaks.

On the morning of June 26th Aschenbrenner, Schneider and Welzenbach, followed later by Müllritter and five porters, set off to erect Camp V on the saddle below the Rakhiot Peak. We watched them labouring up the steep part. On the ridge there was a battle in progress between north and south wind. The south wind won, and drove its streaming vapours across the Rakhiot side. Four hours later the men returned. In the thick mist they had failed to find the ascent to the gap, and had turned back after dumping their loads. The same misfortune again befell Welzenbach and Aschenbrenner on June 29th.

As the porters had to descend again to Camp III for further loads, we took a holiday and climbed the southern Chongra Peak. It was a brilliant morning, and I shouldered my cine-camera, including accessories. Provided I did not sink into the crusted snow, I dreamed of great opportunities for filming to-day. However, little came of it. Each man went alone in great fettle up the gentle snow-dome, Willi Welzenbach leading and making the track. My disappointment in filming vanished before the magnificent view from the summit. Directly below us, at a colossal depth, lay the soft green meadows of the Ramallah, a charming idyll in the midst of this great world of ice and snow. And straightway with this downward view there mingled a longing vision of shady trees, gleaming camp-fires, roast leg of mutton, clucking hens and golden-yellow eggs.

Across the snow-ridge of the Silbersattel, for the first time, we sighted

Nanga Parbat, shining unveiled like a Castle of the Holy Grail. From the summit the slopes fall in one direct, breath-taking plunge of 17,000 feet to the Rupal nullah. At this sight, we all pressed the hand of Willy Merkl, as if to show him our faith.

* * * * * * *

The second attacking party under Wieland and Sangster arrived with porters and loads on June 28th. Kuhn alone had remained behind in Camp III, as he did not feel up to the mark. Next morning, as disquieting news came concerning his state of health, Bernard had to ski down again to Camp III. It was a great distress to us all that serious anxiety seemed to be his constant fate. Fortunately, Kuhn was soon sufficiently recovered to be able to go down in the company of two Baltis to the Base Camp.

Our first disappointments arose with the short-wave apparatus. We heard every possible military station in India, but not a sound from Hanns Hieronimus in the Base Camp. Probably our watches were not synchronised. Instead, he sent up to us juicy legs of mutton, vegetables, and cheerful letters. One of his numerous epistles shows how well the supporting party fared under his vigilance:

“BASE CAMP, *June 30th* 1934.

TO THE SAHIBS IN CAMP IV!

To-day I managed to discover another twelve Baltis who are ready to go to Camp IV. When all the loads are up, send the men back again, so that I can send them to the Rakhiot bridge. I am sending you a shoulder of mutton, a box of asparagus, two boxes of tomatoes, one of artichokes and one of beans; included with them, a packet of matches.

Your press messages came like a long-awaited rainstorm. We have purposely held up the postman for one day. In the press telegram I have described your load-hauling in such terms that every Transport Workers' Union will gladly make you honorary members. Merkl should sign the enclosed press forms. Such is the will of God and the Astor postmaster.

THE SECOND ASSAULT

Post arrived to-day in shoals. I am sending it up to you.

My dear Willo Welzenbach, there is a suspicious growth about your correspondence. If you continue like this, you will soon have outstripped Peter Müllritter.

Herewith another watch with the official Base Camp time.

Good luck to you all,

HANSEI."

The ranks of our porters for the final assault had already been thinned by five men through illness. To counteract this grievous deficiency, Bernard showed a true spirit of comradeship in placing his excellent orderly Nurbu at our disposal.

Before the start from Camp IV, the doctor, with his constant feeling of responsibility for the lives and the health of his friends, again demanded this promise of all: each man was to go no further on the mountain than the point whence he could retrace his steps unaided. He impressed upon us again that under the influence of altitude recognition of one's own limits goes overboard.

Willy Merkl and Sangster, with the help of Lewa, took over the organisation of porters for the assault. Uli Wieland worked indefatigably at weighing off the loads and setting them ready. The men were extraordinarily devoted to him; to Wieland Sahib alone they came, in full confidence, with each of their requests. On the morning of July 1st came the moment of departure. The whole camp breathed the thrill of assault. It was bitterly cold, the thermometer inside the tent showing 23 degrees of frost. With some embarrassment, one porter brought out his prayer-veil and hung it round Willy Merkl: the sign whereby the Buddhist bids Godspeed to his master for a great journey. Then came the solemn moment of farewell. One porter knelt in the snow and kissed the Bara Sahib's feet. The loads were shouldered, and thereupon we attacked the steep rise towards the Rakhiot Peak.

CHAPTER NINE

THE CONQUEST OF THE RAKHIOT PEAK

FOR weeks our thoughts had circled round the conquest of this peak. This year, in view of the avalanche danger from the deep snow, there was no question of the 1932 route to the summit ridge of Nanga Parbat through the steep bay. Besides, we were longing to exchange the glare from the wide snowy hollows for the freedom of the ridge, where, even at greater altitudes, the rate of progress can be perceptibly raised in contrast to that in the hollows lower down. If success attended this plan, of which Aschenbrenner was the most eager champion, we could cut out the intermediate Camp VI of 1932. The only question was whether we could manage to construct a safe route for the porters across the Rakhiot Peak. It was in great expectation and excitement that we proceeded towards the solution of our next problem.

In regard to acclimatisation, the route from Camp IV to Camp V, with its rise of nearly 1,700 feet, meant an appreciable advance. Movements became more sluggish, pauses for breath longer between each step. Added to this, there was a lack of deciding power, as exemplified by the photographers, who set to work without their customary enthusiasm. The route zigzags up steep and exposed snow-slopes. Unfortunately we were compelled, owing to illness, to send back Lobsang, one of the strongest Darjeeling men, thus losing a sixth high-altitude porter.

Camp V (21,950 ft.) was in many ways an excellent site. It is

THE CONQUEST OF THE RAKHIOT PEAK

far enough advanced towards the foot of the Rakhiot Peak for one to tackle the decisive, exacting face well rested and with fresh strength. The eye travels freely across to the long glittering chain of the Karakoram. In the welter of icy citadels we could make out, to our amazement, the huge K2 and the bold, incredible form of the Mustagh Tower. Our proud southern Chongra Peak had sunk below us to an insignificant hummock.

Next morning, while we and the porters were bringing up the loads dumped lower down, Aschenbrenner, Schneider and Welzenbach attacked the Rakhiot ice-slope. During our slow, heavily-laden progress, we looked up again and again at the progress of their work, in admiration mixed with some anxiety. They were clinging like flies high up on the wall. We saw them driving in a few ice-pitons, building a zigzag line of steps, and fixing the first rope ladder. It would certainly have been an easy matter for them to skim up the ice-wall; but this would have served us nothing. The route had to be constructed like a safeguarded climbing-path for the porters, rendering a descent possible even in bad weather. More than half the wall was already 'prepared' behind them, when the first twilight of evening compelled them to return. They entered the camp parched with thirst but full of the joy of battle, to be welcomed by us with steaming tea.

The wind got up during the night, and drove fine drifting snow against the flapping tent-walls. Müllritter and I had a bad night in our joint sleeping-sack. Chilly snow trickled through the tent-fastening on to head and shoulders. Every movement of one was the sign for a corresponding turn from the other, so close-pressed were we to each other. Nevertheless, certain periods of light unconsciousness apparently visited us during this night. Next morning Müllritter felt unwell. He decided to return to Camp IV, whence he could also bring up the rest of the supporting party to the higher camps.

To-day the highest portion of the face was to be accomplished.

Aschenbrenner and Schneider took a well-earned day off. Willi Welzenbach, the indefatigable, could not abide in his tent. Wherever there was dirty work to do, he was eager to be at hand. He was the first to leave the camp, and made the track towards the face, followed shortly by myself with Angtenjing, who carried the ropes. I overtook Willi by the first rope-piton. He was breathing heavily and troubled by severe coughing; but he had indeed an inexhaustible reserve of energy. Schneider once said: "Any of us can do with whole chunks of Willi's energy." At this moment I marvelled at his insensibility to cold; while I was getting some fingers of my right hand frostbitten in the keen north wind, despite my woollen gloves, he continued to work without any sort of hand-covering.

The route up the steep face is certainly the limit of difficulty which can be mastered by laden porters. The wall rises in one sweep, and a fall would continue as far as the small tents of the camp. However, the severity of the ice-work and the immense open view downward stimulated our senses. Meanwhile, Merkl and Wieland had come up with two porters, overtaking us by the last rope fixed the previous day, on a boulder, by Aschenbrenner and Schneider. The rate of progress now became slower from the necessity of step-cutting, but we drew gradually nearer to the rocky arête which still hid all view of the way beyond. At last we sat panting on the sunny rocks of the sharp north ridge of the Rakhiot Peak. Our first glance was not for the giant Nanga Parbat, but for the long traverse to the snow-ridge leading to the Silbersattel. The route beyond looked good; certainly, after this preparatory work, we should be able to establish Camp VI over on the ridge to-morrow. We sent shouts of triumph down to our companions below.

Now we set about the heavy task of safeguarding the whole wall from above with ropes. We fastened the first section of 200 feet to a large pinnacle on the ridge, the second likewise to a boulder jutting out



Schneider

View from Camp V (21,950 ft.) towards the Chongra Peaks. In the background, Karakoram; left, in the hollow below, Camp IV



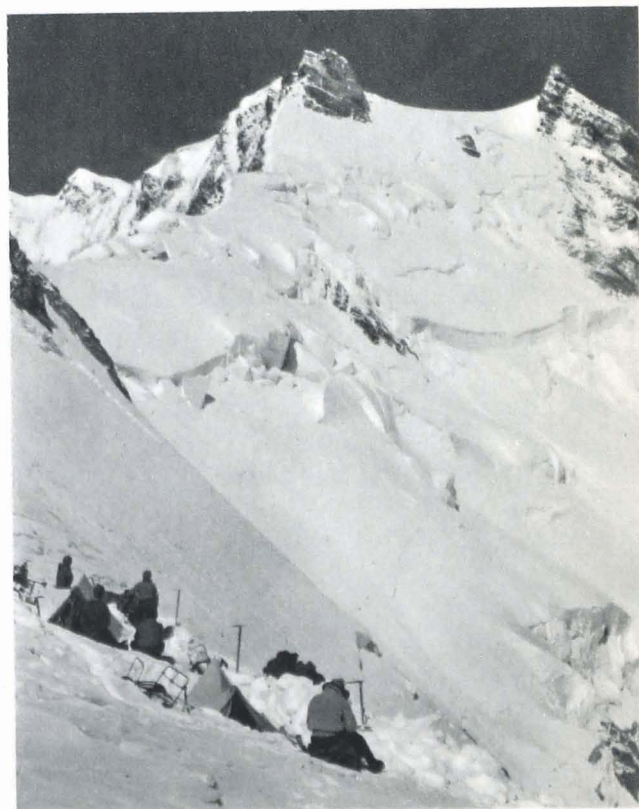
Aschenbrenner

Darjeeling porters, heavily laden, ascending to Camp V



Mullritter

Our tents at Camp V



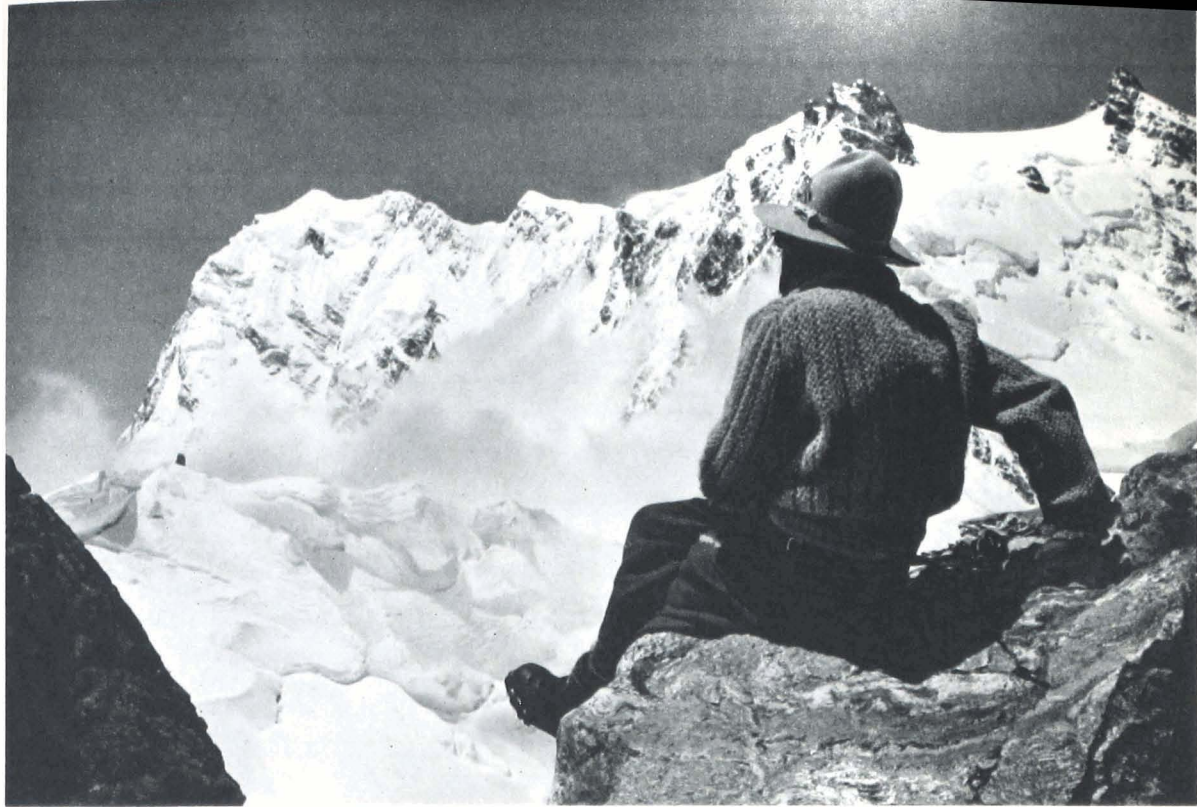
Schneider

Camp V, looking towards the Silbersattel and lower summit of Nanga Parbat (26,000 ft.): left, foot of steep face of Rakhiot Peak



Aschenbrenner

Schneider on the difficult place at the beginning of the long traverse over the Rakhiot west face



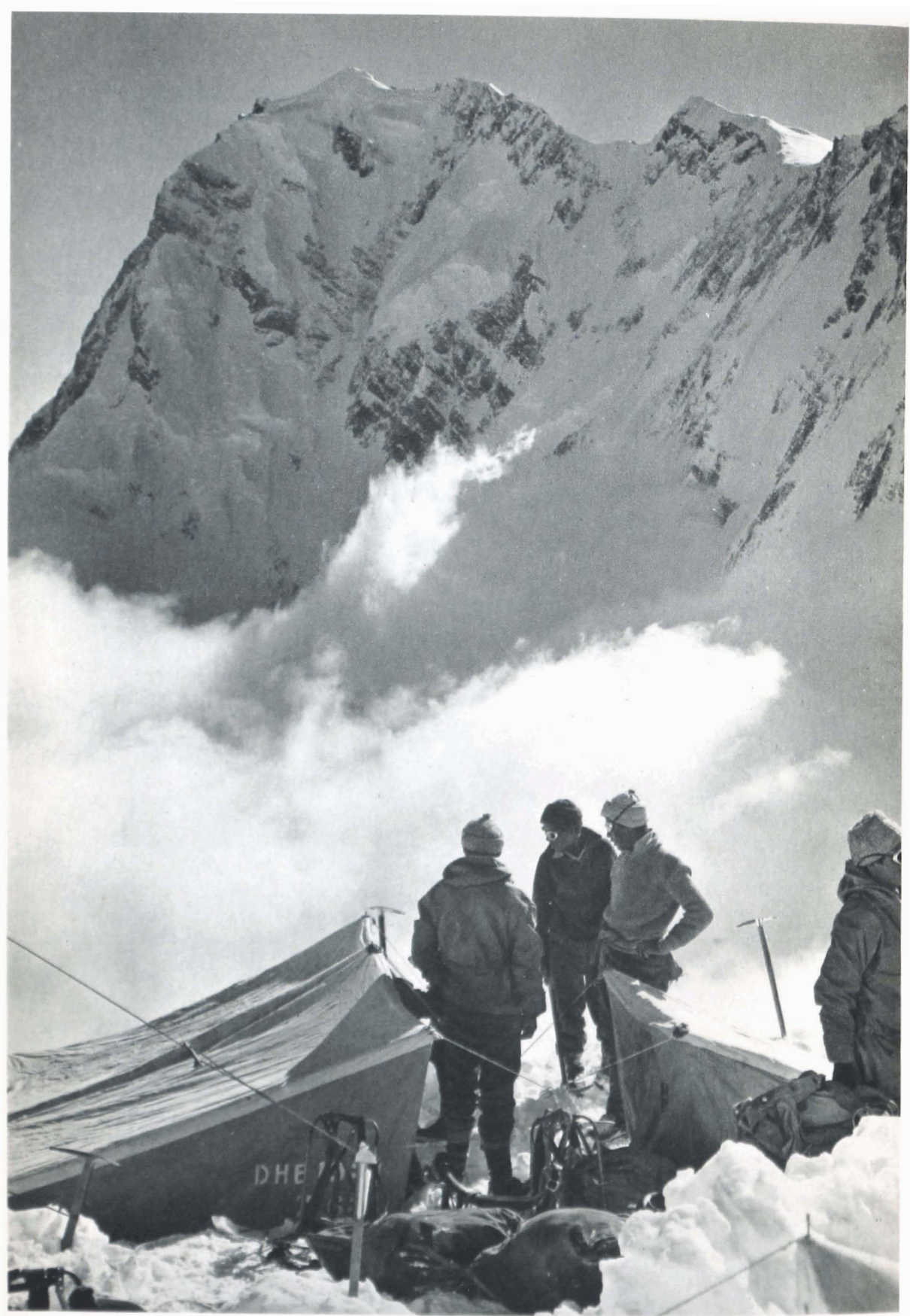
Aschenbrenner

Schneider on the north ridge of the Rakhiot Peak. Left to right: Nanga Parbat summit, lower summit, Silbersattel



The first laborious slope above Camp IV

Bechtold



Schneider

Camp VI (22,818 ft.) with summit of Nanga Parbat: left, highest portion of the 17,000 ft. south buttress



Aschenbrenner

The snow-arete to the Silbersattel, from the Rakhiot Peak



Aschenbrenner

The snow-arête to the Silbersattel, from Camp VI. Wieland making the track towards the Moor's Head

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from the ice. It took a long time before the wet ropes were all knotted. Hard work at this height of some 22,500 feet is fearfully laborious and taxing. By the time we had finished, 600 feet of rope were hanging on the Rakhiot face. We got down quickly by their aid, and reached camp dog-tired.

We soon warmed up in our sleeping-sacks. That evening an almost solemn atmosphere prevailed in the tent; we were deeply moved at the thought that in a few days would come the decisive moment.

The fourth of July gave us a beautiful morning for our day of battle on the Rakhiot Peak. Willy Merkl got the whole camp on its legs early, and gave his last orders for departure. The individual parties moved off in good order, with Aschenbrenner and Schneider in front, unhampered by porters and loads, as they intended to make the track for the traverse across the west face of the Rakhiot Peak, or if occasion should arise to 'prepare' it. Merkl, Welzenbach, Wieland and myself followed at considerable intervals, each with two or three porters. Some of the men had never yet been on an ice-slope of such angle and hardness. To-day was to put the Darjeeling porters' school to the test. All went well; whenever I looked back during a halt for breath, I caught sight of smiling, enthusiastic faces directly below. We advanced quickly. Up on the ridge there followed a passage demanding close attention with the loads. Beneath the glazed rocks the west face of the Rakhiot Peak falls steeply to the upper glacier plateau by Camp IV, and here the leading party had in the meantime stretched a guide-rope. I could just see Schneider disappearing round a corner. Every porter, secured from both sides, was carefully taken over this difficult and exposed place. The first men were obliged to move on at once, as there was no room for so many on this perch. Wind-slab snow lay on the long traverse across the west face. Gradually we drew near to the snow-ridge leading towards the Silbersattel. Schneider and Aschenbrenner were waiting for us in the level niche where the memorable

Camp VII of 1932 had been; they were freezing, and welcomed our arrival with the tents.

It is hardly possible to exaggerate the fear of frostbite at this altitude. Apart from low temperatures, this danger has another origin: for the most part, acclimatisation depends on the increase of red corpuscles, but the thickening of the blood brings with it a greater viscosity. If there now come a contraction of the veins through cold, every condition for frostbite is present. It is nature's universal provision that trees must not grow too high.

Clouds had risen during the afternoon, but now, while we were working at our camp, the sky cleared. Nanga Parbat slowly unveiled its glacial beauty. From the seething cloud-sea below us, the colossal southern buttress of the summit grew before our eyes. The porters forsook their half-erected tents, and stared with us in amazement towards the peak. All the suspense of the last weeks fell away from us; the icy calm, the magnificence of the mountain filled our hearts.

The last rays of evening sunshine lay upon the Silbersattel; and the snowy hummocks on the ridge gleamed like glittering bars of silver. In just such an hour, two years ago, we had thus christened the gap between the two eastern peaks.

There was nothing of the conqueror about me on my entry into Camp VI (22,818 ft.). During the advance over the traverse that weakness overcame me which we climbers call mountain-sickness. Struggle as one may against it, the finest fighting spirit at once collapses. On this splendid evening I regarded my cine-camera as so much superfluous ballast. When I arrived in the camp, it was almost a matter of indifference to me whether we succeeded in reaching the top of Nanga Parbat or not.

Once in the tent, all traces of weakness vanished. I began to enjoy my food again, and a cigarette too. Unfortunately my tent-companions, Merkl, Welzenbach and Wieland, were the only non-smokers of the

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expedition. They threatened to put me outside together with my "noxious weed". In this respect, it was pleasanter to be with Aschenbrenner and Schneider in the small storm-tent, where reigned the principle: better suffocate than freeze.

Conversation continued far into the night, and our thoughts circled round the one single goal: Nanga Parbat.

CHAPTER TEN

THE FINAL CAMP BELOW THE SUMMIT

DESPITE our cramped quarters, we slept excellently. But the dawn brought no cheerful awakening. Three of our best high-altitude porters—Welzenbach's Angtenjing, Müllritter's Nima, and my Palten—reported sick, and asked for leave to descend. Thus the porter situation had now become precarious.

To-day, for the first time during the whole assault, Wieland handed over the work of departure to Merkl and myself. While we bustled round busy with the loads, Wieland and Welzenbach, followed later by Aschenbrenner and Schneider, climbed up the next snow-hummock towards the 'Moor's Head', a tower some 50 feet high of dark rock, the only rock in the gleaming white of our neighbourhood. The traverse beneath on the sharp, exposed ridge is extraordinarily attractive. Unfortunately it is followed by a drop of some 400 feet to a flat saddle below. Our companions had already made an admirable track for the descent, and in the hard ice with its thin covering of snow we found clean, plentiful steps, which took us quickly and safely down with the porters.

The further route over the finely-shaped snow-arête brought one surprise after another. The view upward towards the huge summit-fortress of Nanga Parbat is of a savage splendour. Clouds surged up the Rupal and Rakhiot flanks, thus hiding our progress from our friends in Camp IV. In the high midday sunshine the cloud-sea rose higher and higher, like an oncoming tide. The first wisps of cloud crept over

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the ridge, and soon we were enveloped in a milky grey. Our halts became more and more frequent, as the way stretched endlessly forward. Our porters, however, behaved splendidly. On a broad snow-terrace we came suddenly upon our expectant friends. This spot, which we called 'Whipped Cream', from its peculiar billow-like formation, was to be the site of Camp VII, at 23,570 feet. Storm and cold had rent a gap through the ridge, which was to hold our tents.

Towards evening the weather cleared up. Close at hand, above the steep snow-slope, was the Silbersattel, a gentle arch spanning the gap between the two gigantic obelisks of the East Peak. From our camp-site we could look across the edge of the plateau to the summit of Nanga Parbat. The exhilarating vision passed like a dream through our tired brains; to-morrow or the day following, after our unspeakable labours, the great peak might fall to us.

Before the last rays of sunshine had vanished, we rolled into our sleeping-sacks. We had no anxiety about the weather, only about the prospect of a bad night before a decisive day. Last night we had slept splendidly in the big tent; now it was just the opposite. Welzenbach and Wieland complained of difficulty in breathing; I cannot say how many times they turned their sleeping-sacks. At my side, Merkl growled at this continuous disturbance. Finally Welzenbach began to write up his diary in flickering candle-light. There were 27 degrees of frost.

Next morning, the porters Tundu and Nurbu reported mountain-sick at the moment of departure. They looked much exhausted. One of us had to accompany them, and apart from this the supporting party must soon be brought on. It was with a heavy heart that I decided to take down the sick men. In four or five days I could be up again with fresh provisions. The column of stout-hearted porters for the attack was now shrunk from seventeen men to eleven.

The severe grandeur of this landscape is no place for an effusive gesture of farewell. A firm grip of the hand to each man: "Macht es gut!" "Du auch!" And so we parted from each other.

As we descended, I looked back often. Aschenbrenner, Schneider and Welzenbach, with Merkl following, were pushing on towards the Silbersattel. On the 'Whipped Cream' notch, Wieland was still busy at work with the loads. To my great joy, the leaders reached the Silbersattel with surprising speed, three small dark shadows in the spotless blue of a radiant morning. One of the final bulwarks of the mountain had fallen. For a moment, I wished that I too were now there, to see the way beyond.

Our own descent proved toilsome. Every minute the sick porters sat down in the snow, and I had great difficulty in getting them up again and again. We went extraordinarily slowly. The rise to the 'Moor's Head' and to the Rakhiot Peak cost us hours. On the ice-wall below the rock ridge, Tundu fell once; Nurbu managed to hold him, but it was a long time before they could gather sufficient strength to continue the descent. All my powers of persuasion and constant succour were needed to bring the poor fellows down the ropes. We found the tents at Camp V deeply snowed up. There must have been several days of severe storm down here, while there was still sunshine on the ridge above. During the further descent to Camp IV, we were suddenly enveloped in dense driving snow. The old track was snowed over. We kept constantly losing the track in the blurred landscape, making many errors. Sometimes I had to be sharp with the porters, who wanted to sit down and sleep in the snow. The driving snow developed into a blizzard, and the approach of night grew threatening. Now that our lives were at stake, my own fatigue vanished, giving place to a feeling of combat. The sick men were at the end of their tether. The conviction grew upon me that I must leave them and make my way alone for help to Camp IV, which could not

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be far off. At length, further down, an answer came to my shouts. A gust of wind tore the clouds apart for an instant, and I saw two figures coming up towards me. Soon I stood gasping in the presence of Bernard and Müllritter. Before darkness fell, the two unfortunate porters, quite collapsed, were in shelter. Nurbu's exhaustion was like a total faint, which lasted for two days. He failed to react even to injections from Bernard.

When my companions in the tent asked me about the prospect of success, I could report nothing else than a convinced "To-morrow the peak falls". The same evening an endeavour was made to collect a small party to carry provisions up to Camp VII; but of the few porters still present in Camp IV, not a man was fit for high work. Angtenjing alone volunteered to go up. Lewa, with a fine readiness to help, offered to act as porter himself.

July 7th, Camp IV.—There was a heavy fall of snow during the night. Bernard and Müllritter told me that it had snowed thus constantly for the last four days, while the weather remained fine up on the ridge. Consequently, we had not the least anxiety about the situation of the advance party. Early in the morning Müllritter and Bernard, with Lewa and Angtenjing, went up towards Camp V. Two hours later they were back, defeated: they had only reached the lowest steep portion of the first slope; deep, bottomless fresh snow kept them constantly plunging in. But it was essential not to be cut off from the upper camp; perhaps to-morrow we might manage, without loads, to get through to Camp V. The day passed in consultations and fresh plans.

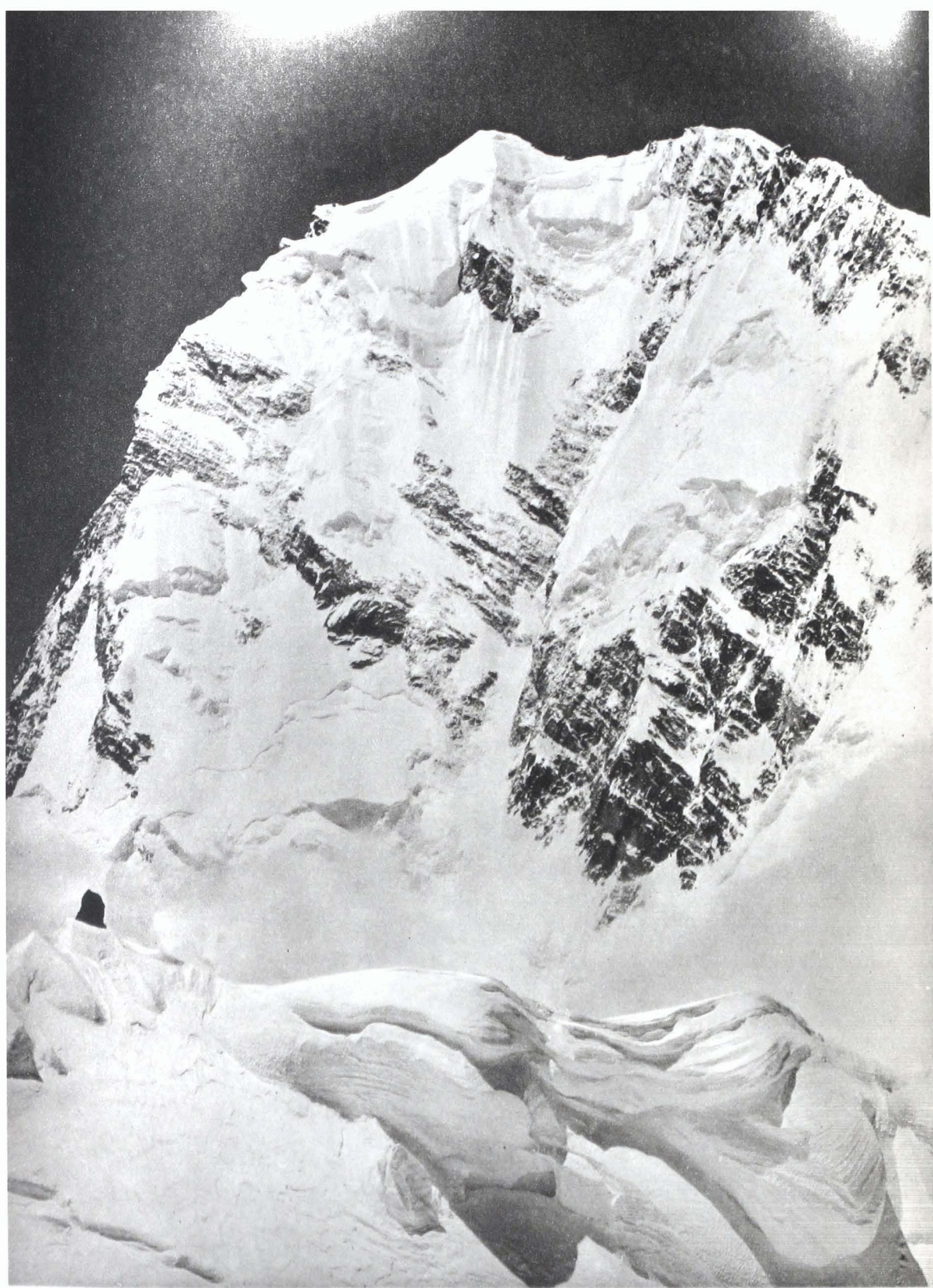
July 8th.—All night long the snowstorm raged round the tents. There could be no thought, on this dim, storm-lashed morning, of reaching Camp V. In the forenoon, the snow-clouds were rent asunder for one brief moment, and we could see up to the ridge and the Silbersattel. Suddenly someone cried out: "They're coming down!" In fact, a

descending party of five men were visible on the steep slope. The larger group was still up on the Silbersattel. Could they have reached the summit? Quick as it had come, the vision disappeared, and left us a prey to questionings.

Towards midday, we tried to set up our short-wave apparatus in the snowstorm, in order to establish communication once more with the Base Camp. After long fruitless labour, at length Hieronimus reported with a cheerful "Base Camp speaking, we can hear you, but speak louder!" It was all very well for him to talk. Our crystal was defective, and I roared into the microphone at the top of my voice. After innumerable misunderstandings, I was able to report to him the main point, that probably the summit had fallen yesterday, while the advance party was now already on the way down. At the end of an hour's conversation, I was as stiff as a block of ice.

The storm continued to rage. This idle waiting was overwhelming to the nerves and brought foolish thoughts. Could they have had the same storm above, while we ourselves were unable to help? We broke into song to banish broodings.

Suddenly, at 7 p.m., the entrance to the tent was torn aside, and before our astonished gaze stood Aschenbrenner and Schneider, clad in their storm-clothes, encased in ice. By a superhuman effort, they had come down direct from Camp VIII, and were obviously exhausted. The summit had not fallen: these were their first words. The porters massaged their frostbitten feet, and Ramona quickly brought them hot tea and warm food. Anxiety for our friends was soon removed. Aschenbrenner said that they would follow at any moment. A vast supply of tea was got ready, so that they might have a drink immediately on arrival. Meanwhile, Aschenbrenner related how they believed that they had held victory safe within their grasp, four or five hours below the summit, but a sudden catastrophic storm had ruined the attack. There was nothing else in his words but joy over the favourable prospect



Schneider

The 17,000 ft. south buttress of Nanga Parbat



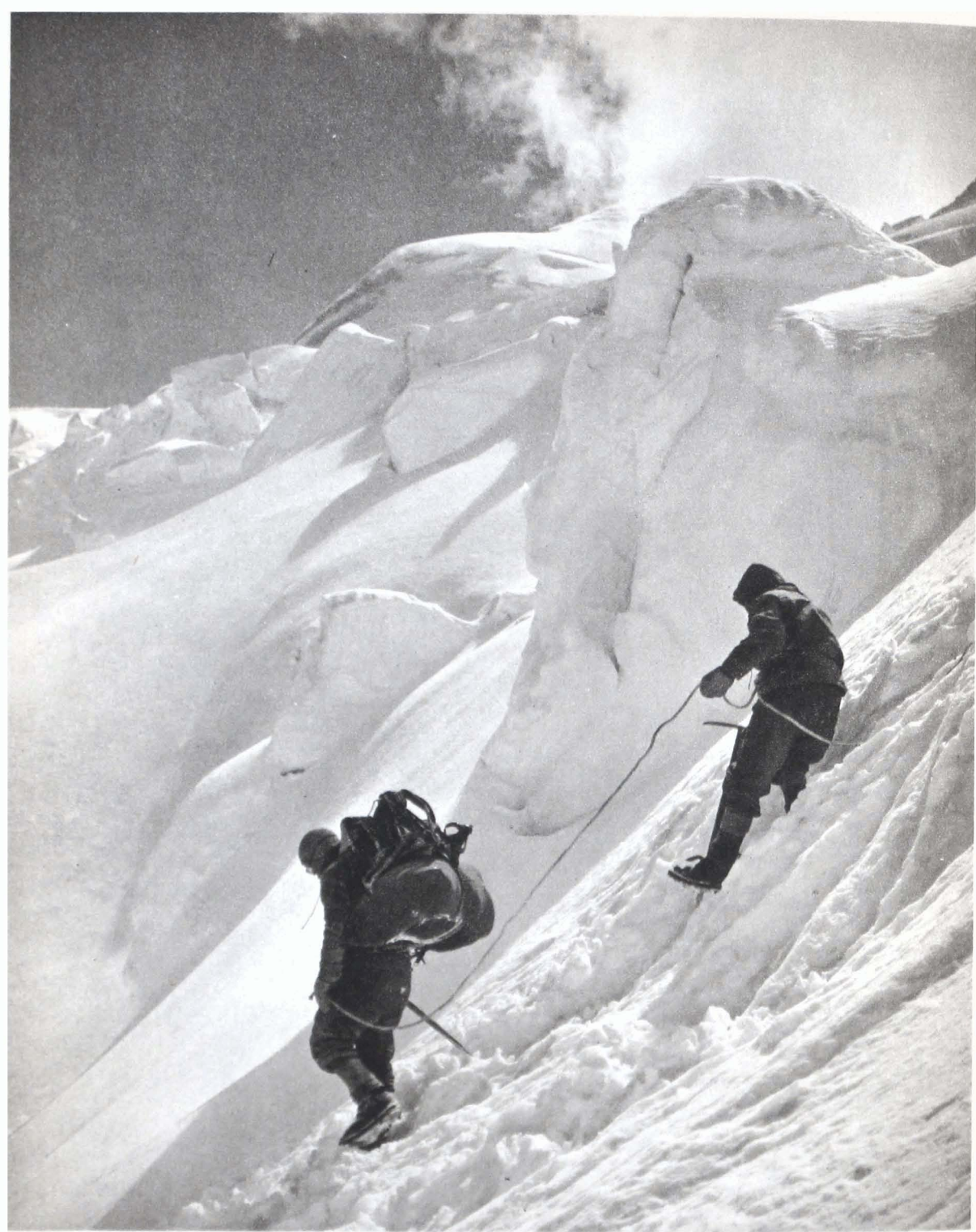
Schneider

Establishing Camp VI (22,818 ft.)



Aschenbrenner

On the way to Camp VII. View back towards the Rakhiot Peak with traverse across the west face. Descending column of porters visible on the ridge



Müllritter

Evacuation of the high camps



Müllritter



Müllritter

The last parties leaving the mountain



Müllritter

The exhausted porter Kikuli being brought into Camp IV after the final assault



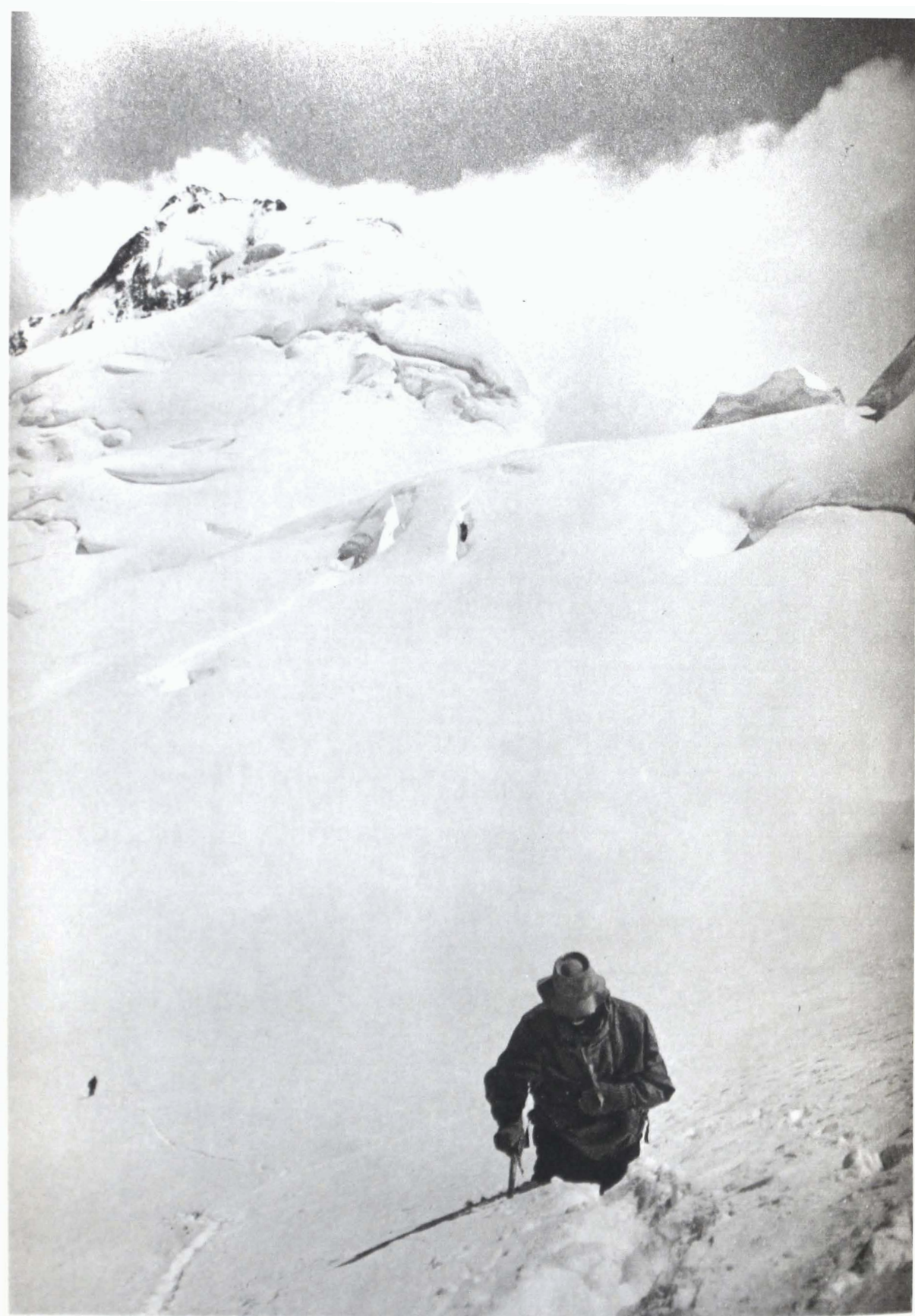
Müllritter

Angtsering, Merkl's second orderly, arriving exhausted at the Base Camp



Müllritter

Pasang's frostbitten hands



Müllritter

Our attempts at rescue fail in the bottomless powder-snow. Peter Aschenbrenner on the way up to Camp V

THE FINAL CAMP BELOW THE SUMMIT

for the summit and regret for the necessity of another long journey up. But let him tell his own tale from his diary :

Just below the Silbersattel, I took over the lead again from Schneider. The last 700 feet demanded step-cutting, to make the route feasible for porters. Despite the severity of ice-work at this height, we made rapid progress. It was with excitement that we looked forward to arriving at the saddle, and the clear view of the way beyond. At last we were there (24,446 ft.). A new world revealed itself to us. From here to the lower summit, the snowy plateau stretches smooth and unbroken. New strength and the joy of victory filled us at this sight. I can hardly find words for our exaltation of spirit. In the biting wind which greeted us on the plateau, we took shelter by the warm rocks of the North-East Peak and smoked cigarettes. We had taken only three hours and a quarter for the rise of some 900 feet since leaving Camp VII. Schneider declined my suggestion of climbing the North Peak. For him there was only one goal, the summit.

We went on further, in order to advance the future Camp VIII towards the summit and to find a more sheltered site for it. At 12.30 p.m., Welzenbach appeared on the Silbersattel, and in our happiness we jodelled to each other, in so far as one can jodel at nearly 25,000 feet. While Schneider went on, I had a short conversation with Welzenbach about our plans. He stayed behind to wait for the others. The route over the plateau, across the many wind-rifts and through crusted snow, was most laborious ; but in our enthusiasm we felt no trace of fatigue. At about 2 p.m., we saw Merkl and Wieland appear on the saddle with the porters. Schneider and I were in doubt whether they would follow us, and we decided therefore to wait where we were. The wind blew with increasing strength from the north-east, driving across the whole plateau. We were now not far below the first summit, at a height of some 25,300 feet. As we noticed the porters endeavouring to erect the camp on the plateau 700 feet below us, Schneider went back to persuade them to advance. After waiting an hour and a half, in which I was miserably cold, I decided myself to descend as well, as Schneider apparently had not succeeded. Towards evening the gale increased in violence, despite blue sky above us. However, nothing

could shake our confidence. We managed to prepare a little soup for our evening meal, and then all retired to their tents. The gale increased from hour to hour, and became a roaring hurricane. In the frightful gusts of wind the big tent, in which Merkl, Welzenbach and Wieland were lying, was entirely blown in. It was not until next morning that we managed to secure the tent with ropes. Fine snowdust penetrated through every crack. The tent-walls rattled incessantly in the storm. We had slight headaches, and for a long time were unable to sleep. We continued to believe that the weather would be kinder to-morrow. So passed the first night in Camp VIII (24,540 ft.), one of the most terrible in my mountain experience.

Contrary to custom, Erwin Schneider was the first out of the sleeping-sack on the morning of July 7th. Our rucksack for the assault was packed. It did not contain much, merely the essentials: a flag for the summit, camera and something to eat. Schneider was busy in the other sahibs' tent with Merkl, Welzenbach and Wieland. This morning the blizzard was raging with such violence that we had to give up our plans for the summit and quickly take refuge in the tent. Dense eddies of snow were whirling at mad speed across the plateau, veiling the sun. It was still quite dark at 10 and 11 a.m. Nevertheless, we felt ourselves well sheltered in the tents. Our porters also were provided with sufficient sleeping-sacks, and had no occasion to suffer from the bitter cold. Although we had with us five to six days' rations, the frightful blizzard rendered the preparation of the simplest meals impossible. During the day we only once managed to melt some snow, for moistening our palates. The hurricane grew in strength from hour to hour. Thus we waited anxiously for the second night. We hardly dared think of an improvement in the weather.

Indeed, the morning of July 8th brought no improvement. To remain in the tents was becoming almost unendurable, an advance towards the summit was out of the question. At 8 a.m., Wieland came to our tent. We were all of the same conviction, that the first assault on the summit had failed, and that we must at once descend to Camp IV. A dreary decision in view of the proximity of the summit! When the order came that Schneider and I should lead with three porters

and make the track, we got ready for the descent. We had the greatest difficulty in getting the porters out of their warm sleeping-sacks into the raging blizzard. While I was roping up the porters, Schneider discussed with the others what we should leave behind in Camp VIII for the next assault. Nobody complained of any ailments; we were all in good condition. As we set off, Merkl, Welzenbach and Wieland were also ready for the descent; we were convinced that they would follow us immediately.

When we reached the Silbersattel, the blizzard grew so violent that it was only with the utmost caution that we could enter upon the descent of the steep slope. Pinzo Nurbu and Nima Dorje were going very badly, while Pasang was in excellent form. We had two sleeping-sacks, one for the porters and one for ourselves. Schneider led down, the porters in the middle, myself in rear, ready every moment to check a slip. About 350 feet below the gap, Nima Dorje was torn from his steps by the gale. It was only with the greatest difficulty that Pasang and I succeeded in holding him and thus saving all from certain disaster. But the gale had torn the sleeping-sack from his shoulders. The huge pack sailed away like a balloon before our eyes over the Rupal side. We five men had now only one sleeping-sack left. Hence the imperious necessity of reaching Camp V or Camp IV the same day, if we did not wish to be frozen to death. In the raging snowstorm we could not see a dozen yards, and often missed the way. In order to save the porters from these exhausting détours, we took off the rope on the easy ground before Camp VII. We impressed on them that they should follow immediately in our track, to which they agreed absolutely. Once, when the storm tore the clouds asunder for a moment, we saw above us the second party descending from the Silbersattel.

The abandoned tent was still standing in Camp VII. On the way to Camp VI, severe fatigue overcame me, and every 30 yards I sat down for a short rest in the snow. The blizzard whipped the snow-crystals like red-hot needles into our burning faces. We had lost sight of our porters, but presumed them to be a short distance behind. Furthermore, they would certainly be brought on by the party following. The tent left at Camp VI was deeply snowed under. Owing to the com-

plete absence of visibility, we thought it better to cross the Rakhiot Peak and not traverse the face, although this meant for us an extra rise of 500 feet. I had recovered my strength; now Schneider fell victim to that fatigue which I had overcome. The descent over the steep, exposed rocks of the Rakhiot north ridge, however, put him right again. Further down, by the fixed ropes, we descended quickly to Camp V. In the tents we found, besides sleeping-sacks, choice high-provisions. We ate copiously, and recovered enough strength to venture the descent to Camp IV. We arrived there late in the afternoon, to be greeted cheerfully by Bechtold, Bernard and Müllritter. At last we were in shelter, like in an Alpine hut.

This is the end of Aschenbrenner's story. The whole evening and the whole night long we waited. Merkl and his men never came. The tea we had prepared was constantly renewed. The snowstorm pattered on the tents, and within them five men turned sleepless in their sacks. With the fine snow-dust blowing in through the tent-fastening, there crept in upon us the chill of anxiety. Our thoughts circled dully about the one question: where are our companions? Perhaps they are safely stowed in Camp V, and will come down to-morrow. If only the morrow were here, and we could see and bring help!

CHAPTER ELEVEN

UNDAUNTED

July 9th, Camp IV

EARLY in the morning we summoned Lewa to a consultation. The blizzard drove in the snow behind him through the entrance to the tent. The cheek-bones stood out firmly chiselled on his bronzed, Mongolian countenance. His calm, well-considered words were already familiar to us: his sick porters would not and could not go up again. Nevertheless, the attempt must be made. We ploughed our way as far as the steep slope. In a few hours we were back again, repulsed and numb with cold. The track-making was vain labour, for the blizzard destroyed our work behind us. Everyone of us knew that we should never reach Camp V in this bottomless powder-snow. Towards 11 a.m. the heavy snow-clouds parted suddenly, and for a few minutes we could see up to the ridge. A fairly large party was visible, descending from the Silbersattel. Good God! Why then had they got no further? High on the ridge, at a greater distance, a solitary figure was wandering behind the descending party. Then he sat down to rest in the snow. Why did he not go on? The vision ceased, for the blizzard drove the snow-clouds once more over the ridge. Later information from the surviving porters proved beyond doubt that the man behind was Uli Wieland, who in his exhaustion fell asleep and died there.

What was hitherto unspoken between us was now dreadfully clear. Up there our companions and the Darjeeling porters were fighting for their lives.

July 10th, Camp IV

A bitterly cold night. When the rattling of the wind-swept tent-walls ceased for a moment between the gusts of the blizzard, I could hear Bernard groaning in the other tent. I knew how he was straining all his medical skill, how he would help his distressed companions—if only, yes, if only we could be with them.

During the night a further 18 inches of fresh snow fell. We had to clear the tents before we could emerge. A stormy day, with the peaks smoking in its icy breath! Snow-flurries a hundred yards long were blown horizontally out on the Rakhiot side. The sharp Rakhiot Peak was like a giant standard; and across this lay the way of safety to Camp IV. We waited. At midday we caught sight of seven or eight men descending the ice-wall of the Rakhiot Peak. The glasses, quick! No, they were not ghosts, they were really coming! I felt a gradual lifting of the load within me. Tea and food were at once got ready, tents and camp set in order, while Bernard brought out his medicine-chest. Then we went out to meet them.

There were only four men, wading down from above: our three companions, we fancied, with one porter. Behind them was a furrow deep as a man's stature. When they came nearer, we recognised Pasang, Merkl's first orderly, Kitar, Da Tundu, and Wieland's orderly Kikuli. Before reaching the last slope, Kikuli, completely exhausted, fell down a sérac-wall. At last we were with them. The wretched men were absolutely played out, at their last gasp. All four had their hands more or less severely frostbitten; Pasang had lost his snow-glasses and was snow-blind. Bernard cautiously gave them some soup, and then each of us took one porter by the arm and led him carefully down to the camp. In the big porters' tent all sahibs and porters set to work massaging the frostbitten men. Bernard distributed his orders. One man sat at each hand and each foot, and rubbed incessantly with snow. When one's own hands grew moist, a relief was exchanged. There

was a battle over each single toe, over each finger. One man shovelled snow constantly into the tent. The worst of the frostbitten porters was Kitar, whose hands were dreadfully swollen. Kikuli groaned at the pain in his back, due to his tumble over the sérac-wall. Da Tundu had come off best. At last, towards midnight, Kitar was sufficiently recovered to describe the agony of their descent. Laboriously, and with difficulty increased by ignorance of the language, he unfolded to us a picture of those fearful days of blizzard on the ridge.

“When we started from Camp VIII, on the morning of July 8th, all sahibs and porters were still in good condition. Below the Silber-sattel, the sahibs said they wished to bivouac, as they could go no further. We had only three sleeping-sacks, two for us porters and one for the sahibs. Welzenbach slept on the snow without a sleeping-sack. That evening we were still unable to prepare a meal, but the blizzard was rather less severe towards Camp VIII. Nima Nurbu died that evening in this bivouac. During the night Merkl had his right hand and Wieland both hands frostbitten. Next morning Welzenbach was still the best of the sahibs as regards condition. To render the descent to Camp VII easier, he fixed a rope to an axe driven into the snow, by which we porters descended; Gay-Lay, Angtsering and Dakshi alone stayed behind in the bivouac, as they felt ill and wanted to wait here another night. After we had waited more than an hour in Camp VII, Merkl and Welzenbach arrived. They told us we had better descend to Camp VI, owing to lack of sleeping-room. We saw nothing more of Wieland. During the descent of the ridge we sank in up to our chests in the snow. The blizzard was so frightful that we could not reach Camp VI, and spent the night in a snow-cave. Next morning, as we were descending over the Rakhiot Peak, we met Pasang, Nima Dorje and Pinzo Nurbu, who were originally a day in advance, and had lost their way in the snowstorm. While we were coming down the steep wall, the blizzard came on so furiously that we could scarcely

descend. Nima Dorje and Nima Tashi were at the end of their strength and died among the ropes on the Rakhiot Peak. We brought Pinzo Nurbu as far as Camp V, where he collapsed and died three yards in front of the tents. We waited for Da Tundu, who had unroped from the two dead men, and then went down together to Camp IV."

Such was Kitar's story; we had to press each word out of him. From what we now knew, it was more than improbable that any of the men above were still alive. When we returned to our tents in the early morning, after all-night labour, we were so tired that we could barely stand.

July 12th

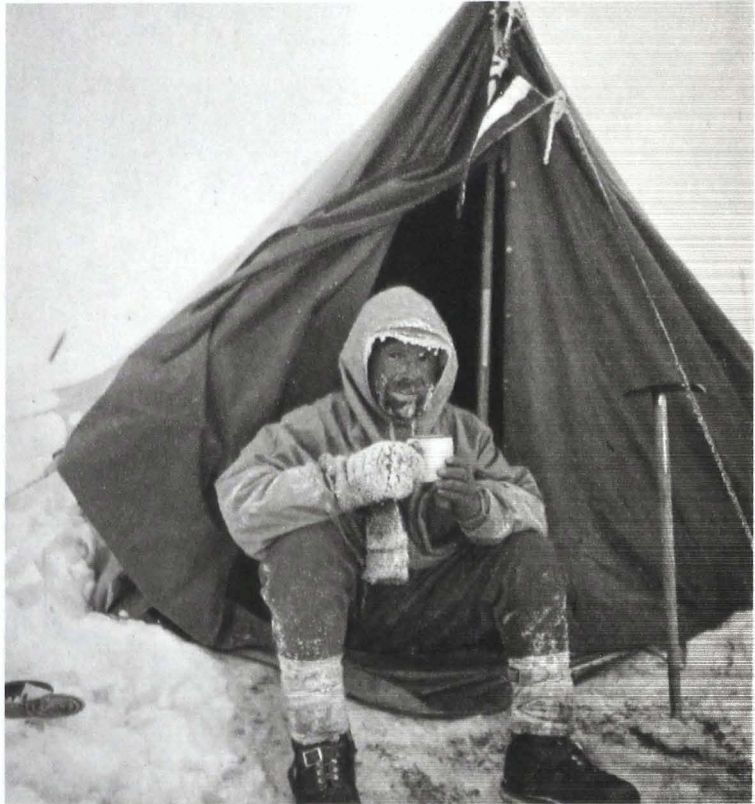
The blizzard prevented any view upward. The sick men were very feverish, Kikuli's teeth chattering. At the doctor's orders they had to be taken down immediately. Pasang alone, being snow-blind, was still incapable of going. Naturally, it was Bernard's job to go down with them; but if the impossible were to happen, and someone should yet make his way back, the doctor's presence was vital here. Finally I declared myself ready to bring the sick men down alone. Bernard gave me further instructions for their treatment, and provided me with drugs. We descended with ceaseless caution. Owing to his frost-bitten hands Kitar was unable to hold an axe. I got them on with fruit-salad and cardiac pills. Half-way down an ascending party of Baltis met us, bringing our mail. Thoughts of another world, of home, rose above my anxieties. What would they say and think, if we failed to bring our friends home? And I knew that they would never return, neither Willy, nor Uli, nor Willo. The consciousness of it came and went without any feeling of despair, so overwhelming was the oppression of a pain beyond measure.

The Baltis, whom I had taken along with me, had to help constantly in supporting the sick men and carrying them over the worst places.



Mullritter

The tents at Camp V (21,950 ft.) under deep snow after the blizzard



Mullritter

Aschenbrenner at Camp IV after an unsuccessful attempt at rescue



Müllritter

Back in the Base Camp after the disaster. Schneider, Aschenbrenner, Bechtold and Müllritter



Müllritter

Our gallant porters returned from Camp VIII. Da Thundu, Kikuli, Kitar and Pasang



Müllritter

Primitive bridges across mountain torrents



Bechtold

The mud huts of Dashkin, like a robber's lair against the rock



Mullritter

Lewa, the admirable sirdar of the Darjeeling porters



Mullritter

Angtensing, Alfred Drexel's orderly



Native of the Rakhiot valley



Palten, Bechtold's second orderly



Camp in the Buldar mullah (return journey)



Birch-trees on the Buldar ridge



Mullritter

Birch-trees under heavy snow at 13,000 ft. In the background, Nanga Parbat

On the moraine, the marvel of green meadows and flowering plants overcame us. How beautiful this late mountain springtime after the days of blizzard in ice and snow! The tents lay below us in ordered line. The whole camp was decorated to receive the victors. And now they had sighted us, and were waving joyfully, in the belief that we came with the summit won. I could not shout in answer.

All came out to meet us: Hieronimus, Kuhn, Sangster and Frier; the scientists also, Finsterwalder, Raechl and Misch, now back from camp after their great tour round Nanga Parbat. When they caught sight of the exhausted and frostbitten porters, they were at once all understanding and readiness to help. Hieronimus brought out the bandage-case and immediately took charge of the sick men. Kuhn busied himself with a meal to welcome them. How good it would all be, if only I had not my story to tell! This was not the kind of reunion with my friends that I had pictured to myself.

Late in the evening food and fuel-loads were packed again. The same night Raechl and Misch went up to Camp IV to help.

At supper-time on July 13th, Peter Müllritter and the sick Pasang arrived unexpectedly at the Base Camp. After they had both been provided for, Peter had his story to relate. This is his tale.

“Yesterday morning in Camp IV, the weather had somewhat improved and the blizzard decreased. Aschenbrenner, Schneider, Nurbu, Angtenjing, Lobsang and myself set out again for Camp V. We all went without loads, merely to make the track in the bottomless snow. After a very severe six hours' struggle with alternating reliefs in making the track, we got up at last. We found the unfortunate Pinzo Nurbu lying head downward in the snow, still roped, just as he had fallen in his exhausted state, two or three yards in front of the tent containing sleeping-sacks and provisions! I shovelled a grave for him in the snow, without help from the porters. For them it was all Kismet, he should lie as the gods had laid him. Up among the ropes

on the Rakhiot Peak the two dead men, Nima Tashi and Nima Dorje, were still hanging. Aschenbrenner and Schneider went some way towards the steep slope, in order to recover their dead porter friends. A severe onset of blizzard drove them back. Late in the evening we reached Camp IV, quite worn out. Nobody believes that anyone can still be living above, it is absolutely impossible! Camp IV will be evacuated to-morrow or in the days following."

Nevertheless, once more the situation changed. On July 13th, three men were sighted from Camp IV, descending along the ridge from Camp VII. Half-way to Camp VI, in the gap below the rise to the 'Moor's Head,' a man stepped forward and signalled. Now and then the gale brought down a distant cry for help. Aschenbrenner, Bernard and Schneider passed a long night of anxious uncertainty. It was not until the next evening, when a man came down from Camp V through the blizzard, that they knew the truth. They went out to meet him with tea and rum, and brought him down to the camp. It was Angtsering, Merkl's second orderly, completely exhausted and severely frostbitten. By an incredible effort he had struggled down to Camp IV, through gale and snow. He brought with him no card or letter from Willy Merkl and Gay-Lay, who were still alive in an ice-cave. His simple description is therefore the last news of the heroic struggle of our friends and their brave porters on the ridge. Here is Angtsering's story.

"On the morning of July 9th, when the sahibs and porters left the bivouac below the Silbersattel, Gay-Lay, Dakshi and I remained behind, because we were too exhausted and partially snow-blind. We had two sleeping-sacks. During the night of the 10th-11th, Dakshi died in this bivouac. In the morning Gay-Lay and I went down to Camp VII, and found Wieland Sahib dead behind a mound of snow, thirty yards from the tent. In Camp VII we found Merkl and Welzenbach Sahibs. The tent was full of snow, and I had to clear it at the Bara Sahib's request. Our joint sleeping-sack was so plastered up with

snow and ice that only Gay-Lay could sleep in it. The sahibs slept just on rubber ground-sheets. As we had nothing left to eat, I wanted to get down as quickly as possible next day, but the Bara Sahib preferred to wait until the men whom we could see between Camps IV and V should come up with provisions. Welzenbach Sahib died during the night of the 12th-13th. We left the dead Welzenbach Sahib lying in the tent, and went down towards Camp VI that morning, Merkl painfully supported on two ice-axes. But as we could not manage to overcome the rise to the 'Moor's Head', we constructed an ice-cave on the flat saddle. Bara Sahib and Gay-Lay slept together on a rubber ground-sheet which we had brought along, and under one common porter's blanket. I myself had a blanket also, but no ground-sheet. On the morning of the 14th, I went outside the cave and called loudly for help. As there was nobody visible at Camp IV, I proposed to Merkl that I should go down. He agreed. When I set out, Merkl and Gay-Lay were so weak that they could get no further than two or three yards from the cave."

Thus the brave Angtsering told his simple and straightforward tale, just the bare essentials, with unspeakable difficulty and often interrupted by exhaustion. What suffering this loyal man had endured, and what a superhuman achievement!

In the morning hours of the 15th, when the wind came from the ridge, cries were distinctly audible, but no beckoning man could be seen on the saddle.

Poor Willy Merkl and his brave Gay-Lay were waiting up on the ridge, till their friends should arrive with tea and food and medicine to lead them down. Against all reasonable calculation Schneider and Aschenbrenner made a dash for Camp V on the 15th and 16th July, with their last remaining strength, but without prospect of success. It was all to no purpose, for in the unfathomed snowdrifts they were repulsed again and again.

The porters were reluctant to go up again, not wishing to pass by the dead man in Camp V. On July 16th they descended with Lewa to the Base Camp, taking with them Angtsering, who was still in an exhausted state. Nurbu Sonam and Ramona, faithful to the end, alone stayed up in Camp IV. Raechl and Misch had arrived, anxious with their fresh strength to make another attempt on the morrow to reach Camp V. A fine thing, this spirit of sacrifice, this defiant refusal to submit. But Aschenbrenner and Schneider knew just how far they would get. And they were right.

On July 17th, Raechl and Misch made the last attempt at rescue. Slowly, toilsomly they ploughed their way through deep snow towards Camp V, just as far as the séracs, where the blizzard had piled the drifted snow more than three feet deep. Then, their strength exhausted, they had to turn back.

The weather continued bad. The last cry from above was stilled. Willy Merkl and his porter companion Gay-Lay were dead.

Nature had marked out Willy Merkl as a born leader of men, endowing him with physical powers to endure extreme cold and blizzard to the utmost. Beyond doubt, it was his fate to drain the bitter cup of disaster to the dregs. On July 9th, he witnessed the death of our gentle-hearted Uli Wieland; four days later Willi Welzenbach, his friend and tried companion on the rope, died beside him in the tent. What tragedy! That Willy Merkl, who planned and created the giant task of fitting out the expedition, should in his last hours have no more than one porter's blanket in common with Gay-Lay; that he who in every circumstance throughout his whole life was the best of companions, should at length find another proof of companionship unknown in Himalayan history! Gay-Lay could perhaps have saved himself with Angtsering; he remained with his Bara Sahib, faithful unto death.

The news that Willy Merkl and Gay-Lay were still alive reached us in the Base Camp on the evening of July 16th. Lewa, who brought down the news, considered it impossible that they could yet be rescued. But we thrust such thoughts aside; so long as there was breath in us, we must endeavour to save them. We planned to set out once more that very night with eleven more or less sick porters. The whole camp was at work collecting provisions and fuel for the final rally.

In the midst of the work we read our mail: letters full of faith in our victory, of happiness at the thought of a speedy reunion. Among them was one which I had to read thrice and again, to grasp its contents. Willi Schmid, our beloved, cheerful, gifted friend, head of our press bureau in Munich, who with his wife was doing all the immense work at home, who knew how to inspire us with renewed ardour—that he should now be dead! We sat there stricken before the sheet of paper, unable to comprehend it. The good fortune which befriended our expedition almost to the very summit, had now forsaken us. A tragic destiny had pierced our whole front, here on the mountain and at home.

Two days later we met the others beyond Camp II; in the meantime they had evacuated the camps. They arrived at wide intervals from each other, exhausted and bearing the marks of the mountain's icy breath. Aschenbrenner was wearing broad felt-shoes, for his feet had been frostbitten in the attempts at rescue. Bernard's hair had grown grey in his deep anxiety for his friends. It was high time for him to descend.

We sat on our rucksacks in the snow; Peter Müllritter divided the mail, which we had brought up with us, that the others might have a moment's happiness once more. Then we took off our helmets and looked upward in heaviness of spirit. Though we had failed to give them burial, yet deep in our hearts they lie, these best of friends, who died for a great ideal and for our country.

The last of the men were leaving the mountain; and as a symbol of loyalty, Ramona, the Nanga Parbat cook, was their rearguard. The

descent was slow; never have I come down from Nanga Parbat so slowly. On the big moraine each man plucked a bunch of gay flowers and stuck it in his hat. Life was claiming us back, and we went on our way. Everybody came out to meet us, and their good understanding and willing help eased the burden of our entry.

The five frostbitten porters were carefully nursed, and with Hieronimus they were in the best of hands. Bernard was well content with his first inspection. Angtsering alone was still unable to stand without help, and had to be carried in front of the tent.

The same evening Hieronimus and I wrote the sad telegrams for home. Our hearts went out to those whose dearest now lie on Nanga Parbat.

It was our wish to leave the mountain head erect and ranks closed, even as our struggle had been. The evacuation of the lower glacier-camps was still awaiting us. It was intelligible that none of the battle-worn Darjeeling porters were prepared to go up again; but the stout-hearted Baltis, who had steadily improved during the transport of loads in the last weeks, were still at hand. The best among them had accomplished the long difficult journey to Camp IV (20,300 ft.) thirty times and more. An incredible feat! They were delighted at the chance of displaying their capability to the Darjeeling men, who had not always been quite patient with them. By July 22nd, all the lower glacier-camps had been regularly evacuated.

* * * * *

Flowers are in bloom before our tents, and one can reach out a hand from the sleeping-sack to pick them. In the brilliant morning sunshine, the dark memory of blizzard-days on the mountain fades for brief periods from our minds. As evening falls, we gather round the glimmer of the blazing camp-fire. Conversation flickers up within the circle of light. And now they are again with us: Willy, Uli, Willo, Alfred, in their gentleness and purity of heart, stern of will, rejoicing in

battle, pressing toward the mark. Faces grave and gay, even as they had lived as men and as mountaineers, rise from our remembrance; and in the midst of our talk comes the groping, ever-recurrent question: wherefore then these things?

Over there, beside the camp-fire of our Darjeeling porters, we might learn the answer. Deep-rooted in their primitive Asiatic souls rests the idea of destiny, the desire for light and consummation, a firm belief in the immutability of Kismet, untroubled by harassing questions of the causality of events. We town-bred Europeans, with our practical minds, our gift for mechanising thought, are strangers to their outlook upon the world.

One man after another gets up from beside the glimmering firelight and gropes his way from the illumined circle towards the tent. High on the crest of the mountain, the moon breaks through the whirling banners of snow. The picture of our dead friends rises like a vision to the stars.

* * * * * * *

During these days Sangster and Frier left us, their leave being up. For the last time, we sat together in the mess-tent on our boxes at the home-made table; whatever the lack of outward splendour in our farewell feast, we made up for it by that spirit which lives only among those whom a common struggle brings together. It was with the greatest reluctance that we parted from such admirable companions, and they took with them our gratitude for their valuable aid in joyful days and in the hour of adversity.

Work continued in the camp. Everything was ordered and stacked for transport. We had too few porters for our 150 loads, and the combined columns of Baltis and Darjeeling men had twice to undertake the long, arduous journey to Doian. The men were played out, and it was not surprising that they refused work. Thereupon Kuhn came to our rescue, an ever-present help, as so often in moments of difficulty.

As Finsterwalder, Raechl and Misch had not yet concluded their scientific labours, they went down the valley for survey-work on the Jalipur Peak, taking thirteen porters, whose help in transport was much missed in the days to come.

Before the departure of the scientists, we gathered beside the mountaineer's grave of Alfred Drexel for a simple memorial service to our dead. Finsterwalder spoke, an epic of battle and heroism and national self-sacrifice. We went down, deep in thought, from the moraine hillock back to our work.

We lost a few more strong porters owing to transportation of the sick men, who were to take the more comfortable way by Bunji. Bernard worked for a whole day, to remove the peeling skin from frostbitten limbs and to put on fresh bandages. Some of the patients had already recovered their spirits; they strutted up and down through our tent-city, in their heavy black railwaymen's cloaks, blowing themselves out with pride. Angtsering was still incapable of walking. At last we discovered a way out, hoisting him on the horse which our cook had brought up to the Base Camp. We were to meet again in Astor.

The porters engaged at Doian dribbled in slowly; but everything was already packed, including our own tents. Finally, one fresh August morning, the hour struck for our departure from the mountain. Alfred Drexel's grave was draped in flowering edelweiss. Each man brought his farewell greeting of shining flowers to that corner of earth now grown dear to us, and a spirit of peace and harmony encompassed this quiet place.

As we looked upward once more to Nanga Parbat, to the glittering crest high above us, all sense of bitterness against fate was loosed from within us, in the presence of a deeper understanding. Splendid as it must be to return home with the prize of this mighty mountain, it is yet nobler that a man lay down his life for such a goal, to be a way and a light for the young hearts of those that come after.

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