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The Last Mt. Everest Expedition

BY MR. NOEL E. ODELL, A.R.S.M., F.G.S.*

PRESIDENT G. H. SEDGEWICK: Ever since Abraham went out, not knowing whither he went, the world has been full of adventurous spirits who have made our history brighter and our respect for courage and perseverance stronger. Our own country was really started by people of that sort, Champlain, Lasalle, Mackenzie, and our whole history is full of them. The world is getting so much smaller that it is hard to find places now, but those adventurous spirits are still with us.

Our guest today is one of those who were in the last expedition up Mount Everest, and that is a story which I am sure thrills everyone who reads it. I have very much pleasure in introducing to you Mr. Noel E. Odell.

MR. ODELL: Mr. President and gentlemen: I have to thank you first of all for doing me the honor of asking me here today to speak about the last expedition to Mount Everest, the last of three expeditions to climb what, as you know, is the highest mountain in the world.

Mountaineering is looked upon by many as the height of insanity, but fortunately those who partake in it can claim that certain very well known personages are participants—His Holiness the Pope, King Albert of Belgium is an extremely able and keen mountaineer, and the last I might mention is General Mitchell who, unfortunately, is not here today. General Mitchell is an extremely keen mountaineer in the Rockies.

"But I am not here to make an apology for mountaineering, but to tell you a little about this pursuit, carried to its legitimate end, this attempt to climb the highest known summit. The first slide I am showing on the screen shows

the party assembled in March of 1924, where we also gathered at the outset of the expedition. Darjiling is an extremely important hill station in Northern Bengal, and it is a favorite tourist resort situated at 7,000 feet above sea level. This particular group was taken before our departure in the Spring of 1924. Present here are General Bruce, leader at the outset of the expedition. He had been leader of the previous expedition in 1922, and his great experience of management of tribes up here in the Himalayan hill country stood him in very good stead for this job of leadership up as far as the base camp at the foot of Mount Everest. Actually climbing at those altitudes is a little above him at his age, sixty-eight. Unfortunately he developed a bad attack of malaria. Colonel Norton then took on leadership of the expedition. He has had great experience of hunting and shooting in the Himalayas, and of climbing in the Alps. He is a grandson of Sir Albert Wills. Here also is Kingston, a very keen collector of natural history specimens. During the course of the expedition he got about six thousand of various kinds. Also here you see Summerville, George Mallory and Irvine, and these two lost their lives in the last attempt on the summit; myself and Jeffrey Price who acted as adjutant during the expedition and was an extremely useful man. The other European members of the expedition were Captain Merrill, who handled the photographs, and also Shepia, who was from the Indian Forest Service. Then grouped around us there are a corps of mountain porters, and these men had proved their worth in the previous expedition of 1922 by carrying loads on the mountain up to 25,000 feet. We have fifty-five of these specially selected porters and we took them along with us until we reached the mountain and then they had the special job of handling our high camps.

The next slide shows a type of one of those porters. I was going to say these Mongolians are a cheery crowd—splendid men considering the conditions. This one, I think, may be described as the cheeriest of the lot so far as his countenance is concerned. That snapshot was taken by me during one of his cheeriest moments.

This is a map just to show you the route we went to

reach the mountain. We had to go this long roundabout way that carries along here to the East, and then through Southern Tibet, and then turn south to reach the mountain. We are entirely debarred from going direct to the mountain because the independent state has always barred the way. One or two private attempts have been made to reach the mountain from the south, but always permission has been refused. Also Tibet has refused, but political conditions improved and in 1921 the expedition had special permission to pass through the territory.

I have here a view that is rather striking. It is made from maps and photographs. It shows you the wonderful cut up the centre of the country through which we go. You go along the valley up onto the Tibetan plateau and along the base of the mountains. But the principal mountain in that view is that immense summit, Kunchinjinga, which is the wonderful object in the view from Darjiling and which no one who visits there should, by any means, fail to see. They should wait until they get that wonderful view, floating, as it appears to do, above the opalescent mists that rise from the valleys and the glamor of that view is a thing that I think one can never forget.

We have to get along our route, and this is just a glimpse of our party on the way up the main road from Northern India that takes us up to the Tibetan Plateau; and it is up this road that all the trade takes place, exports of wool and salt and imports from India of rice, and other things like that.

We are getting on up into the mountains, and here is the way across into Tibet, about 15,000 feet, and at this time of the year it was pretty cold in early Spring, and when we got down to the other side we dropped down into the Southern Valley of Tibet where conditions are particularly genial, and our first town on the plateau is Fari. This town is situated at an altitude of over 14,000 ft., and it has got the reputation of being the dirtiest town in the world. It is difficult to know, because all these Tibetan towns and villages were equally dirty. They never indulge in the luxury of washing. They live in such a cold climate that they take every advantage of nature. It is

always advisable, when speaking to Tibetans, to keep on the windward side. We had to change our transport here and change our mules and ponies for yak, which is the main transport animal of the country.

Soon after we left Fari and in the background here is a very sacred mountain in the eyes of the Tibetans. The name actually means "The Mountain of the Goddess." Mount Everest also has a Tibetan name which has the very poetic meaning of "The Goddess Mother of the Mountain Snows." That name was discovered by the first expedition. The name was translated by one of the directors of the Survey of India, and that name is being retained by the whole group.

That is a painting done by Col. Norton of the same mountain from near the south frontier. He was one of the two amateur artists on the expedition, the other being Summerville. It must be 60 miles away.

There is a breakfast scene in Tibet. When you first reach this high altitude 15,000 to 18,000 feet reached in going over some of the low passes in Tibet, before you get used to it you lose your appetite and altogether you don't feel a bit happy, and I think this picture of Summerville sitting with his hands in his pockets and doing nothing is indicative of the rest of our feelings since reaching Tibet.

That picture shows a camp scene in which Sandy Irvine is doing observation. He was very useful to me in doing oxygen work necessary high up in the mountain. During the last attempt, in which Mallory and Irvine disappeared, they were using oxygen pretty freely. The last time we tried to do entirely without oxygen, and I think we supplied physiologists with data they cannot explain at all.

We had visits from various communities, and this is a cheery fellow who might be called the Harry Lauder of Southern Tibet. He came to our camp and danced around, but Summerville, who was a musician of sorts, wanted to take down some of his music and reproduce it. He actually did that, and called the weird stuff music.

That is a Tibetan lady with a very extraordinary head-dress that is prevalent in Southern Tibet. It is such a complicated affair that they are said to retain it for a lifetime.

We had a number as porters, and they seemed to be able to carry as much as the men. Some of them are credited with carrying a hundred pounds at an altitude of over 19,000 feet.

That is a view we had of Everest from 18,000 feet, away to the north of the mountain, and you see it here rising head and shoulders above all the other mountains, with its ever-prevalent cloud showing the high wind sweeping across its north face; and the condensation and ice crystals that collect on the lower side are carried away for something like 20 miles.

We make our way on and pass our last village six miles from the base camp which we established at the foot of the immense glacier that comes down from the north face. This village is well known in Southern Tibet as the headquarters of a very holy lama, a priest who is supposed to be the incarnation of a God, and he blessed our porters and sent them on their way rejoicing.

Then we reached our base camp situated about 12 miles from the foot of the mountain. This immense north face here is something like 11,000 or 12,000 feet in altitude, and the way to reach the mountain to climb it is in up here. We make our way up the side glacier that comes in behind this point and come out at the foot of the north ridge, and it is from the north camp established on the north face that we made our attempt to reach the highest point at rather over 29,000 feet.

This map shows you, here, our base camp. We came by this dotted line. We established camps one, two, three and four and then two more on the mountain side. It will interest you to know that that map was made largely from the survey executed during the first expedition of 1921 by a member of the survey of India, who is a Canadian. His father, Mr. A. Wheeler, has been director of the Alpine Club of Canada up to last year. He is serving with the Indian Trigonometrical Survey, and he executed a survey from which this map was made.

Now, we have our porters all loaded up ready to establish our string of camps on our way up the mountain. All these mountain porters have to be more or less trained.

During the journey we have to give them practise in rock climbing. Although they are mountain people, yet they have no idea of what mountaineering is, so we have to train them up, and many of them appeared never to have worn boots in their lives before. All these men had to be trained up. Here you see them all loaded up and ready for establishing our camps above the base camp. As we go up we have very beautiful views of the mountain group. The big peak here is the west peak of Everest. A big peak here we call the Grove Peak. And we come up higher, and here is one of our camps that we call Camp 2, situated in a little recess in the glacier with immense ice floes extending along on the northern side and giving us very good protection from the north winds.

We make our way up further and we soon reach a remarkable feature in the glacier known as a trough, and here are some of our men going up a causeway and on the other side this high ice crevice.

The next few views will show you the kind of ice scenery we have as we go up this remarkable place. These pinnacles are typical of many we saw about 100 feet in height. They are peculiar to these regions and the tropics. It is a mixture of arctic conditions and tropical. You have a tropical scene, but the ice makes the temperature very low.

Here is a little glacier lake, and many of these scenes, as you may imagine, were extraordinarily beautiful. Beautiful blues and grays are reflected, of course, in the surface of these lakes.

This picture was taken near the top, and is one I took of Sandy Irvine and his porters all roped up ready for hidden crevices, consequently we had to take this precaution. And then we reach Camp 3, at 21,250 feet. That camp is situated at the foot of the northeast shoulder of Everest, and this camp here was a very frigid spot indeed, with very low temperatures. The lowest actually recorded was twenty-five degrees below, but that was with a very high wind and that temperature at 25,000 feet is very different from sea level. Most of our thermometers got broken on the way up, and we think that probably we had temperatures of 40 degrees below and with a very strong wind.

We ultimately made our way up this northern ridge. The next step was to negotiate this immense wall of ice cliff and steep slopes and establish a camp at the top here. This party of men have got another three quarters of a mile to go before they reach the top of these slopes. It was here that in 1922 seven porters lost their lives and Mallory and Irvine nearly lost theirs. We were very anxious to avoid any recurrence of this on the last expedition, and we made our way until we came to a tremendous ice cliff which appeared to cut us off entirely from the top slopes, but eventually we got up by means of a steep ice chimney. We had a rope ladder and suspended it for the benefit of our porters. We first of all had to climb up 150 feet, which was a magnificent bit of icecraft by Mallory who led us up.

The next will show you a camp situated on an ice ledge at 23,000 feet, and it was from that advance base that our attacks on the summit were launched. After the establishment of that camp we had a very bad spell of weather and we were beaten back to our base camp right at the foot of the glacier. So many of our porters were knocked out, many frostbitten, many down with mountain sickness, and the European members quite worn out.

That is a picture of one of our porters who was badly frostbitten, showing you the kind of thing you get at these high altitudes. Look at the immense blisters on his hands and face. We thought he would have to lose his hands and feet, but fortunately he recovered. These severe cases of frostbite are not fatal. One can recover from them where it was considered previously one could not recover. Our doctors, Summerville and Kingston, left some of these cases to see if they would actually get better, and they did. It does seem premature to amputate in some of these cases.

That little fellow in this picture is not a human being, but he is a mythical monster that all the Indians thoroughly believe in in the mountains along the Himalayas. That is not an actual photograph, but a sketch made by General Bruce from the description given him. This particular monster Sukpa appears to have made a raid on our base camp and carried off a pair of porters and even boots.

These monsters are thoroughly believed in. Indians say they are constantly making raids on the villages and carrying off their wives. Sukpa is Tibetan, I must tell you, for good luck man. It is a kind of polite way the Tibetan has of describing what he really thinks of the devil.

We had to recuperate down there at the base camp, and after we had been there for a week or so, there seemed to be a spell of fine weather coming on, although the monsoon seemed to be coming on. We made our way back with fifteen porters and reoccupied camp 3 and then Number 4, and then we made our attempt up this north ridge on the summit.

The first party that made the attack on the summit was Norton and Summerville. This is a view looking up that north ridge, and Mallory and Bruce had been turned back but had established a camp up there. Norton and Summerville went up with three porters, and just short of 27,000 feet they established camp 6. They sent the porters down and next day they made their attempt on the summit. This is a picture taken by Summerville of Norton making his way up, and climbing at these altitudes, 27,000 feet, where owing to the rarity of the air, one can only go very slowly. Summerville was choking up large clots of blood, and Norton was feeling very low. Notwithstanding, they struggled on and at twelve o'clock they had reached the top of that mass of rocks, 28,000 feet. At that point Summerville broke down, but he was able to take some very remarkable photographs. This view shows you peaks that you saw from the base camp. That big one there is one of the highest in the world. Yet you can see how dwarfed it is. And then he took a photograph of Norton who decided to make an attempt to reach the summit alone, and that is a picture of Norton proceeding alone for the slopes which, as you see, cannot be described as really difficult from a technical mountaineering point of view, but at these altitudes this kind of going is very hard; but here and there you get steeper bits than that rock face, and all that kind of going at these great altitudes is particularly trying.

At that point Norton had to decide to turn back. He saw the way ahead, I may say, quite clear, but if he pro-

ceeded he knew he could not get back to Summerville before nightfall. He got back, found him somewhat recovered, and then they both started down on their long descent. We were looking out for their return, and it was about nine o'clock that night that we saw a light high up on the northern slope. We both started out to meet them. I carried the oxygen apparatus. We shouted as we approached in the dark, but could not get a reply. As we got near Norton, I shouted I had the oxygen, and he said, "I don't want oxygen, I want a drink." Unfortunately, we had not brought drink. Summerville was suffering intensely from his bad throat. Norton could say very little. He also had this extremely bad throat that all of us suffered more or less from in these high altitudes. And it was only with difficulty that we could get them down that night. Then, after large quantities of hot soup, they were able to tell us about this record attempt on the summit of Everest. The actual point Norton reached was here, an altitude of about 28,100 feet. There was only about 900 feet or so to the top above them.

We were daily expecting the arrival of the monsoon, and we knew this would entirely prevent any further attempts. That is a view of Norton and Summerville and the top camp.

On June 6 Mallory and Irvine started off on their last attempt. We had got sufficient oxygen supplies. Here you see Irvine with the oxygen apparatus on his back, and they started off and reached Camp 5 with their porters and slept the night there, and made their way on the next day with three porters. I followed them to Camp 5 and reached it just as Mallory's porters were returning. They brought news that they had used very little oxygen and had made the trip faster than they expected. I slept at Camp 5 and next day I started out alone. A porter that I had was ill, and I had to send him back, and I made my way up to Camp 6. I saw two small specks away up on the slopes leading up to the little rock step in the same ridge which was the particular road we knew they would climb the mountain by. I was making my way up this north ridge and I reached Camp 6 here just as a very bad blizzard came on. I took shelter in the tent there for a short while,

and then I realized that owing to the weather Mallory and Irvine might be returning and they would have difficulty in finding their way back to the tent.

So I started out above this camp and shouted and whistled as I went in the blizzard in order to give them some direction. And then I had to decide that probably they were well away past this particular place and above this particular spell of weather I was experiencing. I made my way back to Camp 6. Mallory particularly requested me not to remain up there. We were always anxious for it was down this north slope that the avalanches are very liable to occur. We were anxious to get away before the monsoon should render those particular slopes highly dangerous. The tent would only hold two, and one of us would have had to sleep in the open. So I made my way down to Camp 4 and I waited for some signs of the returning party. No signs at all. Next day I started up in search with one porter. Very shortly after starting he broke down and I had to send him back. I went on to Camp 5, and tried to sleep, but it was too cold. There was a bad gale on that night, and next morning I started out. The gale was still pretty bad. Late in the afternoon I reached Camp 6 and found it exactly as I had left it two days previously. Mallory and Irvine had obviously not returned. I made a search over that mountain face, and found it was impossible to go further. I found no signs of the party and so I had to turn back.

I got back to Camp 4, and owing to the state of the rest of the members of the party it was quite impossible to launch any further search party. The rest of the members were down and out. Norton was practically blind for a week. Summerville was completely out of it. So we could launch no further search party.

Actually what happened to Mallory and Irvine will never be known. Any further party that goes out may conceivably come across their remains, but it is difficult to know what could have happened to them. I think it is very possible that late in the afternoon they might have reached the summit. We know they were near there, because Mallory told us he had been reaching certain points

at various times. Having reached that point they would, I think, make their way on and probably reached the summit late in the afternoon, start down and find it impossible to reach either of the higher camps before nightfall. They would take refuge, and probably fall asleep and freeze to death. It is very difficult to believe that Mallory and Irvine should have met their death by slipping on such an easy face as that north face of Everest is, and as to the other suggestion that the oxygen apparatus may have failed, I cannot believe that that was the case because I have used oxygen and was able to switch it off at 26,000 feet and was able to get down entirely without its aid.

Just to end on a rather brighter note, I have two slides which show you the district we visited to the west of Everest, lying about fifty miles to the west, where one of these monster gorges plunges down from the main chain of the Himalayas. We visited this region, entirely unknown to Europeans, where we recuperated before our long trip back to India. All manner of flowering shrubs and trees, beautiful wild roses and rhododendrons growing, and the dominating peak of that region is a beautiful mountain; and that is a painting made by Norton of that peak that rises to an altitude of about 24,000 feet. Yet for many years it was confused with Mount Everest by a German traveller who said he saw Mount Everest, but actually that peak is 5,000 feet less than Everest. Notwithstanding this, it is probably one of the most beautiful peaks in the world, and that is the dominating feature of this wonderful district we visited on our return journey.

It is hoped that another expedition will be launched to definitely make certain of reaching the summit of Everest. The Mount Everest Committee in England is experiencing difficulty in getting permission from Tibet. The objections are not merely political. Now they are raising religious objections. They think Mount Everest, being a sacred mountain, the Goddess of the mountain will not only wreak her vengeance on those who come to climb the mountains, but on the native Tibetans themselves, and so our difficulties for getting permission for another expedition are considerable. Thank you.