

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
71st AEROSPACE RESCUE AND RECOVERY SQUADRON (MAC)
APO SEATTLE 98742



REPLY TO
ATTN OF: SSgt Robert L. LaPointe/752-4888

26 Feb. 76

SUBJECT: Mt. McKinley Post Trip Report

TO: CC/NCOIC Pararescue

1. The following post trip report of the Mt. McKinley trip on 09 Feb thru 18 Feb 76 is submitted for your inspection.
2. All objectives of the exercise were safely and successfully completed. It is noteworthy that no problems were encountered during this training on Mt. McKinley during it's harshest season. (see attachment 1 for a detailed list of objectives)
3. Also noteworthy was the fact that we were within 48 hours of the summit of McKinley at the highest point we obtained. Had we had 3 to 4 more personnel with us during this trip a summit attempt would have had an extreemly high chance of success.
4. The report which follows is from my personnal diary. I am going to write it in diary form to expedite the completion of this report.

Robert L. LaPointe

ROBERT L. LAPOINTE, SSgt, USAF
Pararescue Team Leader

Mt. McKinley Log
Feb. 76

09 FEB 76

0800 Depart Elmendorf AFB for Talkeetna, Alaska

1030 Arrive Talkeetna. Weather is superb: Temp. -10°F Wind calm
Visability unlimited. The weather around Mt. McKinley appears
ideal for insertion to CAMP 1.

1140 Depart Talkeetna via C-180 flown by Cliff Hudson a local bush
pilot who specializes in landing on Mt. McKinley. All our equip-
ment and ourself's were transported to the mountain in one load.

1240 We land on the S.E. Fork of the Kahiltna Glacier. Proceed to set
up CAMP 1. One snow cave constructed. Areas were tramped out with
snowshoes for a latrine and tent site. We then cut blocks and
constructed a 3-wall windbreak to surround our latrine area.
Temp. -25°F Wind 15knots Chill factor - 65°F Elev. 8000'

1645 Boiling water for hot drinks. I've noticed that after a moderate
amount of work I begin to lose my breath and become slightly
dizzy. My pulse is 96 while resting, 150 while working

The view from here is breathtaking. We are surrounded on three
sides by mountain peaks. Directly to our west in full view is
Mt. Foraker 17,400'. To our SSE is Mt. Hunter 14,570' and to the
east is Ruth Gap. We can also see to the NNE the summit of
Mt. McKinley 20,320'. All around us are unnamed and unclimbed
peaks. We are in a cold world of wind, snow, ice and rock. It is
completely devoid of all life except for us.

1720 Latrine completed. Walls 6' high
2nd snow cave which is going to be our big one is coming along
fine. Owens has superficial frostbite on his right hand 5th digit.
The area affected was this size

He is thawing it out in his arm pit. Owens is the least experienced
member of our group and has little experience in sub-arctic tempera-
tures. I cautioned him to be real careful and to wear gloves all
the time. I also explained the effects of cold and reminded him
that in the event he were to come down with a case of deep frost-
bite he would have to be evacuated from the mountain. He agreed to
be more careful and cold conscious in the future.

1830 Boiling water for chow in tent. My pulse is now 88 while resting.
Water at this altitude takes considerably more time to boil.
We are using a lightweight pressure cooker to expedite boiling
time and save fuel.

Outside temp. -33°F Wind 10knots Wind Chill -65°F approx

2200 Retire for the evening.

10 FEB 76 (Tuesday)

0900 We wake up. My pulse while resting in my sleeping bag is 76.
Temp. -25°F Wind 7 knots Chill factor - 50°F approx

1000 Making breakfast

1130 Working on snow cave. Owens notices that I have superficial
frostbite on my nose. I go inside cave and thaw my nose with the
palm of my hand. It is becoming obvious that frequent buddy checks
of each other are going to have to be completed frequently if we
are going to avoid serious problems with the cold. I tighten my
scarf up around my face.

1500 We finish the cave. It is big enough for 3 people, gear and cook-
ing space. You can bet that it's crowded with all that going on.
It is however exceedingly comfortable with a luxuriously high
temp. of + 34°F inside.

1600 Depart CAMP 1 with a load to put in CACHE 1. Lapointe leads, Owens
2 and Williamson #3

1740 Cache gear. It is too dark to continue safely. There are numerous
large crevasses on the right side at the mouth of the S.E. Fork
of the Kahiltna Glacier. We were forced to the middle to skirt
these crevasses to get on to the main Kahiltna Glacier. The weather
is good but all the peaks above 14,000' are socked in with clouds.
We had a fair view up glacier from cache 1.

1800 Depart CACHE 1 for CAMP 1. Williamson leading, Owens 2, LaPointe 3
Owens is having a lot of trouble with his Bearpaw snowshoes. He
lost the clevis pin from the long pin that holds the binding in
place. LaPointe is using Trail shoes with good results and William-
son is using Sherpa shoes with satisfactory results.

Temp. - 20°F Wind 8 knots Wind Chill -35°F approx.
Pulse while working 110

1830 Arrive at CAMP 1. Stow all climbing gear. Temp. -25°F

2000 Supper in snow cave. Spirits are high as we are warm and eating.

2200 Retire for evening. LaPointe & Owens in snow cave. Willi in tent.

NOTES: I noticed this morning that it was extremely difficult to get
motivated to get initially moving about and even do simple chores
(like boiling water) that you know that your very survival depends upon.
We had to psychologically force our bodies into action. Once we got
moving we warmed up and life became bearable once again.

Once I found myself standing behind our windbreak trying to escape the
cold. The temp. was - 30°F wind 20 knots Wind chill - 90°F
While I was standing there the following thoughts were passing through
my brain:

Cont.

10 FEB 76 (Cont.)

- 1: Boy it's cold
- 2: Yep, I am really cold
- 1: The only way to get warmed up is to get some hot fluids in me
- 2: Yep, I've better get the stove going and boil some water
- 1: Yep, I really should

This went on 3 or 4 times and then I finally forced myself into gear. I remember thinking how ludicrous it was that I knew what had to be done, but that my body did not want to do it. The cold weather just seemed to sap your motivation to do anything away from you.

11 FEB 76 (Wednesday)

0815 Wake up

0900 Start breakfast and packing gear. The weather is good: clear and cold. Snow conditions are fair and we sink in about 9" while on snowshoes. You can see the mair's tails up on the high summits denoting that the wind is really whipping up there.

1000 Eating breakfast. Temp. -22°F wind 15knots wind chill -60° My pulse while resting 84

1150 DEPART CAMP 1 for CACHE 1 and CAMP 2. Owens is having problems with his snowshoes again.

1250 For the first time in 2 days we are in the sun again. Camp 1 was surrounded on three sides by mountains and the winter sun never rose high enough in the sky to shine in on our camp. The sunlight seems to put new life into all of us and definitely affects us in an emotional way. It is really amazing how things you take for granted become so important while out here on the mountain.

We came into the sun as we departed the S.E. Fork of the Kahiltna Glacier for the main glacier. There were quite a few crevasses to the right of our route and we were careful to avoid them.

1300 Arrive at CACHE 1. Williamson is helping Owens fix his snowshoes. LaPointe is examining the map and the glacier to try and find the best route to CAMP 2. We all eat some GORP and have some kool-aid.

1330 Depart CACHE 1

1430 We stop and take a break. Owens finger is frostnipped again and we thaw it out. Eat some more GORP. Temp. -10°F but in the sun with all the reflected light it is a real joy to walk.

1600 Arrive CAMP 2. Owens starts on a snow cave. LaPointe and Williamson return to CACHE 1 to pick up gear.

1630 LaPointe and Williamson arrive at CACHE 1

1640 Williamson and LaPointe depart CACHE 1

1730 Williamson and LaPointe arrive back at CAMP 2. Owens has the tent set up and is working on the snow cave. Stow climbing gear and load from CACHE 1.

1800 Williamson starts on supper water. LaPointe helps Owens with snow cave.

1940 The snow cave is finished. It is a roomy two-man and a tight three-man. If a storm hits we can always enlarge it while we occupy it. Williamson thinks that I am putting too much emphasis on emergency snow shelters. I tell him that I can only wonder how long this good weather can last. Besides it gets up to +34°F in our caves and in the tent it gets as low as the outside temp.

2000 Still no water. All the MSR stoves are giving us problems or are inoperative. We break out the Optimus 111B's. We have 3 MSR stoves and 2 Optimus 111B's. We are all tired from the days work and probably very dehydrated also.

11 FEB 76 (Wednesday Cont.)

2030 Hot water at last. We drink large amounts of hot Kool-aid, Tang, Hot-Cocoa and Tea. It is amazing how much water your body requires while climbing in the cold and at altitude.

2100 We start on our LURP's and have some instant soup at the same time. Willi and I devoured ours. Owens has an upset stomach and couldn't eat his.

2200 Willi goes to bed in the tent. Owens and LaPointe stay in snow cave. Owens goes to bed immediately as he isn't feeling well. LaPointe studying the map and cleaning the snow off his clothing.

2230 LaPointe goes to bed.

NOTES: We are right on schedule and have camp 22 right where we wanted it. Today we saw two avalanches which came off the slopes to our right. We saw our first sign of life other than ourselves. A lone raven flew over some distant mountain peaks.

I am finding that all my research is paying off. All the major landmarks and camps are right where I thought they would be. It is as if I've stepped back into history and am reliving the trekking and climbing of those who have gone before us.

12 FEB 76 (Thursday)

0900 Wake up. My pulse while resting inside my sleeping bag is 72. The temp in the snowcave is 34°F.

0930 We get out of our sleeping bags into our clothes. Owens commented on what a comfortable night he spent and how warm it is in the cave. We start to boil water for breakfast.

1030 We are all dressed and have stowed all the sleeping gear. My pulse is 79 resting. Owens is 76 resting. We are still melting snow and waiting for the water to boil. The outside temp is -14°F.

1130 Eating breakfast and lunch

1300 Depart CAMP 2 for CAMP 3

1430 We take a break and eat some GORP. Temp -6°F Wind 20knots Wind chill -45°F

1530 Arrive at our site for CAMP 3. It is about 1/2 mile short of the normal CAMP 3. We stop here to take advantage of a good natural windbreak. We found a crevasse that was filled in with snow. LaPointe probed it and it was solid. It will make a good place to dig in.

LaPointe starts on snow cave. Williamson and Owens return to CAMP 2 for loads.

1730 Williamson and Owens arrive back at CAMP 3. It is such a pain to break the initial trail and take so long to make any discernable progress. It is really amazing how fast we can return for our second load and return over the packed trail we make with our snowshoes.

1815 Snow cave finished. The weather outside is crystal clear. Temp -9°F. The view outside is really fantastic.

1900 Water is ready and we eat supper. These Optimus 111B stoves work so much better than the MSR ones. It is the only way to go in the future.

2030 Williamson goes to bed in the tent. Owens and LaPointe stay in the cave.

2130 Owens is in his sleeping bag. LaPointe is up filling out this log.

NOTES: Today we had a fairly straight forward route except for a crevasse field which we had to zig-zag through and find a route. We are thoroughly wanding the route and I can see now that we are going to be short on wands. The park service recommends that you carry 350 wands to climb all the way to the summit. We brought 300 wands with us. We are using two types of wands. Willi made 150 using scotchguard reflective tape as the binding tape on the top and the bottom of the flags. This tape gets brittle when it gets cold and the flags then fall off. The other type were made by LaPointe. He used masking tape on the top and bottom and then put the reflective tape over the top of it. This combination worked out well. Recommend that in the future we use these type of wands but make the flags longer. This would allow greater visibility and a distance.

2230 LaPointe in his sleeping bag writing. Pulse 88 Outside temp -24°F Inside temp +34°F Owens is feeling better and stated that this was his best day yet.

13 FEB 76 (Friday)

0815 Owens wakes me up. Pulse resting 76. Outside temp -6°F

0830 We get dressed. Inside cave the temperature is nice and warm. Outside the cave it is -6°F which isn't too bad either.

0900 We take the sleeping bags outside and air them out. They are all in good need of an airing and drying out.

0915 Working on the breakfast water. It was a very comfortable night in the snowcave again. The water in our pots did not even freeze. These caves are the only way to go in this cold environment.

McKinley looks so close now that it is tempting to make a try for the summit. I know that both Williamson and Owens would like to give it a try on this trip. Even I had to admit that we are making very good progress and I would like to give it a try except that we do not have enough personnel to get a person down if he got altitude sickness at 17,200'. But as long as no one got ill we could probably pull it off. My heart says let's give it a try but alas my common sense and knowledge of the past history of this mountain and the people who made mistakes and paid for them with their life gives me my answer. We won't try it this trip. Besides we had to promise SMSgt Fischer four times that we would not go above 14,300'. The summit will have to remain a goal of the future.

1200 DEPART CAMP 3 for CAMP 4

1600 Arrived at CAMP 4. We located CAMP 4 approximately 1/4 the way up the slope at the base of the incline leading up to Kahiltna Pass. We put CAMP 4 on the right hand side of this incline (40 to 60 degrees).

1620 LaPointe and Williamson depart CAMP 4 for CAMP 3 and loads. Owens is going to dig the snowcave. Williamson leads.

2000 Williamson and LaPointe arrive at CAMP 3.

2030 Williamson and LaPointe depart CAMP 3 for CAMP 4 with loads. Williamson leads. The weather outside here is really strange. Clouds are on all four sides of us except directly overhead the bowl which we are in. The moon is on the edge of these clouds and is illuminating our route up ahead.

2100 We arrive back at CAMP 4. We start boiling water and eat supper.

2200 All three of us retire in the snow cave. The slope that we are camping on is too steep for the tent without cutting a platform. Not much danger of an avalanche because we are camped at the edge of an icefall.

NOTES: We may have pushed ourselves too far today. Our supply lines became awfully stretched out between camps. We left our sleeping bags at CAMP 3 so that the sun would dry them out. By the time that we got our final loads to CAMP 4 I was really exhausted.

On the other side of the coin we made good time and covered a great deal of distance today. Looking back on the day as a whole I think that we should have stopped earlier.

14 FEB 76 (Saturday)

0800 Owens and Williamson wake me up

0830 We start water and breakfast

0900 We lay the sleeping bags outside to dry

1200 Depart CAMP 4 for CAMP 5

The terrain up to 5 is mostly climbing on 60° snow. The snow conditions are getting better and we are able to walk on the surface of the snow on our snowshoes quite often. We let Owens lead for a while. He experimented with a new system of navigation called following the waves. I won't bother to try and explain it as we only let him try it for a while as his route was killing me while I was carrying a load and dragging a sled. Williamson and I soon pointed out where we wanted to go and after that we all got along quite fine.

1700 Arrived at CAMP 5. LaPointe stays behind to construct a shelter. Williamson and Owens depart to pick up the loads at CAMP 4.

2100 Shelter finished. I am becoming a little concerned as to the amount of time the guys are taking in getting back here.

2200 Williamson and Owens are back. Boy was I glad to see them. Both are exhausted from the long trek. I already have the water ready so I meet them with hot Kool-aid. They put down 3 quarts in a matter of minutes. We all eat a large supper.

0000 We go to bed. It has been a long hard day.

15 FEB 76 (Sunday)

1000 We all get up and make breakfast

1100 Take all the wet gear outside to leave it in the sun while we climb today. These bags really get wet from perspiration after long use.

1130 Sorting out gear for the days climbing

1200 Depart CAMP 5 for Windy Corner and 14,300'

The route ascends up 40° slope to the east for about one-mile. You then come to a sheltered spot that would be ideal for a camp. At this spot we left our snowshoes and put on out crampons. It was really nice to be walking on crampons. You could compare it to walking all day in heavy climbing boots and then putting on tennis shoes.

Next the slope turns into 75 to 80 degree for some interesting and exciting climbing. There is then mixed climbing on snow and ice between 40 and 80 degrees which continues for about three miles and you then approach a very heavily crevassed area. After crossing this crevassed area you come to a small bowl just below the final slope heading up to Windy Corner. In this bowl there is numerous pieces of garbage left from previous expeditions. It is really quite amazing as this bowl looks just the same as it must be in the summer with no new snow. You could see in the old snow where people urinated last year and occasionally you could see the garbage that was left behind and froze into the snow. The reason that it stays perpetually the same up there is that the wind blows so hard and so often that nothing has time to accumulate up there, especially snow.

The final slope up to Windy Corner is on 70° snow. Windy Corner has well earned it's name and reputation. The wind when we reached the corner was howling at least 40knots and I believe that to be a conservative figure. The wind physically blew me off my feet twice. The outside air temp. was -40°F for an equivalent wind chill factor of approximately -115°F. After reaching 14,300' we took some pictures and started back. We stayed up there for about 15 minutes. Needless to say that with these temperature extremes we did not care to loiter around least we freeze and become permanent fixtures of the landscape.

The only reason that we were able to continue in this weather condition was the excellent equipment such as the McKinley Down Jackets which we had with us. The weather was crystal clear outside, it was just cold and windy. We arrived at our high spot at 1700.

1720 Depart high point for CAMP 5

1830 LaPointe fell into 4 crevasses. All were not serious and he extricated himself with no problem. We swapped leads and Williamson led for a while. He then took a good fall into a crevasse but was arrested by Owens and LaPointe. He extricated himself without any problem. The rest of the descent was uneventful and we returned to CAMP 5 at 1900 throughly tired and hungry.

1930 Boiling water for supper.

2130 Bed

Monday 16 FEB 76

Descend to CAMP 3

Tuesday 17 FEB 76

Descend to CAMP 1

Wednesday 18 FEB 76

1400 Cliff Hudson arrives to pick us up. We encountered no problems on the descent of the mountain. The trail was already broken so we were able to make very good time. When Cliff arrived he was greeted by three pararescuemen who having achieved all their objectives were ready to go home to the land of hot baths, showers and even chow hall food.