

Mt. Everest Expedition

Rongbuk Base Camp.

13-6-24.

Dear Mrs Mallory

The news of your husband's death will have reached you long before you get this - firstly, if my arrangements dont miscarry, through the R.G.S. - then with the brief outline of the facts in my Communiqué to the Times of 11th June + finally I think you will have seen the full story in the next Communiqué to be sent off about 5 days hence. I cannot anticipate this method of giving you the full facts by any private letter as the Times Communiqués are wired in Press Code from Simla - + Cross Tibet by special relay post.

As to the facts + circumstances I can add very little without repeating what you will have got from the above sources.

Everything points to the probability of a sudden death - a slip before or after - a purely mountaineering accident. ~~How~~ It is hard to invent any hypothesis which will cover the facts entailing the idea of a lingering death from exposure nor is there any reason to suppose that any defect in the oxygen apparatus could have been the cause.

Whether or not the party reached the top must always remain a mystery. I put it at an even money chance. They were unaccountably late at the point where they were last seen + yet had time to get to the top without serious risk. They had apparently surmounted the

most serious obstacle. on that particular ground the chances of a fall was greater on the way down than when ascending. There was sufficient mist & cloud on the day in question to account for our never seeing them again (despite the close watch by telescope that we kept on the mountain) even if they had made the summit & turned back again.

There must be many points you want to know. I wish I could foresee & answer them now. I shall of course come & see you — if you wish — as soon as I get home — probably in October.

And now I wish I could help you in your great grief — or even express adequately my own sorrow & sympathy.

You know that I was always a friend of that salient gentle soul — but you can hardly know how close this last expedition had drawn us together.

owing to his joining the expedition so late I always felt that I had usurped the place he would otherwise have filled — I was always conscious of the inferiority of my qualifications to do so & guessed that he might feel the same. Yet never once by word or deed or hint did he suggest such a thing — He simply played up to me & backed me up through thick & thin.

In every detail of the mountain campaign we worked in together & his unflinching sound advice, his organizing ability, his bottomless capacity for work & his determination to win were my prop & stay.

You can't share a 16 lb. high altitude tent for days & weeks

with a man without under conditions of some hardship without getting to know his innermost soul & I think I know almost as you do what his was made of — pure gold.

And then — on the mountain — I wish I could describe to you what he was like. Physically he was a wonder — the best of us without the least doubt from start to finish — but this hardly mattered for his great heart carried him on entirely independent of physical considerations. I really believe the struggle between him & the mountain had become a personal matter to him — He simply would not accept defeat & yet (from 10000 talks on the matter) I know how his determination was tempered with discretion; he fully realized his responsibility as leader of the climbing party — he & I saw eye to eye over the question of the absolute necessity of avoiding a single casualty even to conquer the mountain — & he has often told me his views as to the point at which the leader of a party must turn back for safety's sake however near the goal.

He was a great mountaineer.

I have written so far rather from a personal point of view, but I can assure you my sentiments were shared by the whole expedition —

He compelled the admiration of all of us — but he was also a real "pal" to all. I won't say I never heard him say a rude word to anyone — he was too much of a man — & he cursed Somervell & me roundly for lagging or loitering when there was serious business in hand on at least two occasions — but it was worth it for the warm hearted

apology which always followed so quickly.

I am keeping any of his private kit which can be of any use to you & shall send it you & due course.

What a tragedy it is! If only I could help you in some way!

Yours sincerely

E. A. Horton

PS My best address is of course Bombay until Sept 7th & then Wplands, Foreham, Hants - This is the nearest I can say. But please don't answer this unless you have something to ask.