

14 July 1947

MEMORANDUM

From: Commander Finn Ronne, USNR, Expedition Leader
To: Mr. Harries-Clichy Peterson, Expedition Physicist
Mr. Robert Dodson, Expedition Surveyor and Asst. Geologist
Subject: Plateau Weather Station, Regulations Governing Duration
of Your Operations There.

1. Peterson is hereby designated as in charge of the Weather Station on the Plateau upon my departure therefrom and until such time as he is replaced by Wood and McLeod, some time during the first part of August, actual date depending upon flying conditions.
2. Peterson shall, as such, be responsible for all radio schedules as set up by Kelsey, and also responsible for the safety of personnel. Any emergencies should be reported to me immediately, either by regular radio schedule or by emergency schedules as set up by Kelsey.
3. Peterson and Dodson will carry out daily weather observations and testing of equipment according to the plans outlined to me.
4. I can not warn you sufficiently to be on guard at all times of the quick changing weather. Both of you are expressly prohibited from moving outside the immediate vicinity of the camp area. Under no condition, do I want either of you to ski away from the Weather Station beyond calling distance. I want this rule strictly adhered to.
5. Good luck to both of you.

FINN RONNE
Expedition Leader

MEMORANDUM

To: Comdr. Fian Renne

Subject: Return of Dodson and Peterson from the plateau.

After the four-man sledge team left us on July 22, we remained on the plateau with approximately ^{sixteen} ~~ten~~ days supply of man food, 3/4 can (1 1/2 gallon) of kerosene, a Pyramidal tent in good condition (a few small rips in the outer shell), among other miscellaneous equipment. We decided to stay until the plane arrived, unless some unforeseen accident should make the risk of remaining seem greater than the risk of returning to base.

Our greatest worry was the kerosene shortage, but it was not too serious since we could borrow from the British cache on a clear day. We intended to ask on the 8:00 P.M. radio schedule Friday night, July 25, for permission to borrow British kerosene, weather permitting. Our sleeping bags were becoming more iced up each day, and we estimated it would take two full days with the primus going full blast to do a complete drying job on clothes and bags. A few gallons of British kerosene would have done the job. Therefore we faced no danger from lack of food or fuel.

However, in the early morning of July 25 an estimated 90 mph wind made a four foot vertical rip near the zipper of the door, and the sides of the tent began to flap violently. The tent pole was lowered, for otherwise it was believed that the tent would have been torn to shreds. Additional tears had appeared in both the inner and outer shells, and new tears developed after the tent was down. Even with the tent down there

was considerable flapping of the cloth. Snow drifted over portions of the tent, and contact of bags with the iced tent cloth caused decreased insulation. The radio had been knocked about badly when the tent pole was lowered. The mike, antenna, and key were out of commission. Conditions were such that we could not ^{air} repair them.

We decided after the tent was down that we could do nothing until the storm abated. It was very difficult to work without gloves, and it was impossible to stand up in the wind. We then had three alternatives, 1) to build another shelter, an igloo, 2) if the first clear day seemed to be excellent flying weather, we would await the plane, 3) if the first clear day promised safe conditions for a retreat, but unsafe conditions for a plane, we would retreat. We considered the last two of these alternatives to be safer than risking another storm in the collapsed tent, and we decided against an igloo for fear that it might be eroded away by a storm.

Late in the morning of July 26 the wind had abated to about 40 mph. Barometer was rising rapidly. We interpreted the rising barometer as a good indication of a coming lull in the wind, but not as a sure indication of excellent weather, because a week before we had seen a rapidly rising barometer precede only a short period of clear sky followed immediately by fog and light snow.

Visibility on July 26 permitted a retreat. Because of high plateau winds and stratus clouds over the sea, we did not believe that the plane would attempt a flight and considered a landing very improbable due to the danger of recently formed bad sastrugi. We abandoned the camp at noon, leaving behind radio, sleeping equipment, some clothes, and taking with

us skis, ropes, crampons, packs with personal gear, also some canned heat, a primus, and food. We were forced to remove skis after travelling a few hundred feet. High winds and bad sastrugi, plus a steep slope further on, made skiing very difficult. We proceeded, roped together and on crampons, to above the steep slope on the glacier. We removed the rope above the slope. The area seemed safe from crevasses. The rope itself had slowed our progress by catching on sastrugi. Low clouds out to sea, the failing light, and appearance of a fog drifting down from the plateau made us very anxious to get bearings on Nenya and Millerand before they should disappear from view. We removed crampons at 3:00 P.M. at the foot of the steep slope. We proceeded on skis for about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile, then removed them because we thought ourselves to be in a relatively safe area and because ice and sastrugi made ski travel very slow. Peterson stopped shortly afterwards to change from ski boots to mukluks. At the same time we started to drag our skis instead of carrying them. Both of these things helped to speed our travel.

About 6:00 P.M. we discovered that we had cut too near to a crevassed area. We then proceeded more cautiously with flashlights, prodding with ski poles, but still remained on foot and unroped. We headed northwest for about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile until most of the irregularities in the ice disappeared. We decided that we were now clear of the bad area, so turned south. Shortly after this, at 6:30 P.M., Peterson fell into a crevasse. He was ahead at the time. Dodson was about three feet behind and had stopped to adjust his pack. Peterson walked from ice onto a patch of snow which appeared safe to both of us in the light of the partly obscured moon. The snow bridge gave way.

I (Dodson) heard no sound for about five minutes, although I was calling to him. I could not see the bottom of the crevasse. When I heard him, he asked for a knife, to cut the pack from his back; said something about being choked. He spelled the word knife several times, said that he could not understand what I was saying. I lowered a knife on the end of the rope. It did not reach him, so I then dropped it wrapped in a shirt. I decided there was nothing I could do except to go for help. I tied loops in the rope at six foot intervals, and suspended it in the crevasse, anchored to a pair of skis laid over the hole. I took bearings on two mountains. This was at 6:50 P.M. I then went west for another $\frac{1}{4}$ mile on skis, then turned south and headed for the triangular mountain face which bears northeast about four miles distant from base. By this time the overcast had cleared away and the moon was shining brightly. When I reached the landmark I headed for the west tip of Neny Island and reached base about 9:30 P.M.

This account has been furnished for your information by
Peterson and Dodson.

Robert H. Dodson

Main points of failure by Peterson and Dodson

1. Leaving tent camp against orders ✓
2. Tent ripping should have been sewed up in some way, with parka etc.
3. Not making use of available equipment, building snow wall.
4. Not taken from British Cache what they needed.
5. Not made full use of pemmican by not eating it, to stay warm in bag.
6. Not familiarizing themselves with proper use of radio, which they assured me they were fully competent before departure.
7. Not turned into same sleeping bags, if needed.
8. Not taken into account sudden change in weather before leaving camp.
9. Not marked an arrow at tent with trail flags, to indicate the direction of their departing.
10. Not having eaten anything before departure.
11. Not having taken sufficient food along for the trip, inspite of many days ration still at the tent camp.
12. Not having returned to tent camp when they saw airplane was in the air, and they were only 40 min walk away.
13. Walking without safety through crevasses, without skies, crampons, or roped together.
14. Walking only a couple of steps apart through crevassed area.
15. By Dodson, poor identification of Peterson's crevasse in not placing flags 100 ft. apart, right angle to the direction of any rescue party.
16. In leaving Peterson's skies across the crevasse, instead of upright.
17. General disorder of all equipment in their tent, and lack of judgement.
18. Given me assurance of their confidence that they were fully competent and had all equipment needed to stay until airplane or dogteam could come up and reach them, bringing equipment over to the permanent site.
19. In ~~the~~ not informing the base on the last radio schedule (Thursday nite) that Peterson had not slept for two nights due to wet sleeping bag.
20. Poor judgement by Dodson in leaving the rescue sled close to the base on the return journey from the crevasses. He started running through the crevasses without skiboats alone without roped together with the British rescuers. He was stopped by Major Butler.