

A tale of an hour



The cold gray steel of the axe arced one last time through the air, the pick burrowed itself one last time into the frozen blanket of snow, and the hand that held it took a final pull, to ensure a secure placement. After a brief pause, George Mallory took a deep breath, and pulled himself over the crux, and onto the top. Slowly, shakily, he stood up, and took a look around, the first time American eyes had seen the world from this vantage point. This was it. He had done it. He was the first American to ever climb Everest.

The sky was a most crystalline blue, and clear too, except for the small puffy white clouds in the distant East. George had the most incredible view ever seen in all directions; he could see for hundreds, probably even a thousand miles. If only others could see this! he said to himself. If only he had brought a camera, not only would he be able to show the human race the true beauty still found in nature, he could prove that he had actually accomplished the feat. Hopefully his friends down below could see him on the top.

Mallory briefly thought of waving, but the notion quickly passed when he realized the absoluteness of his fatigue. He was exhausted, plain and simple. Even after deciding against bringing a stove or any other nighttime equipment, his pack still weighed in at about 40 lbs, because of the extra oxygen bottles he picked up from a discarded pile. In fact, George just wanted to sit down. He knew though that if he did, he might never again get up. He did however remove the cumbersome pack and sling it to the icy ground.

Digging into the main pouch, George hand unveiled a small American flag attached to an aluminum pole. With the side of his ice axe, he pounded the

pole into the crust, forever designating that he had soloed the highest mountain on the planet. This task had taken nearly ten minutes, since every swing of the makeshift hammer was like wielding a twenty-pound maul. He reached for his next oxygen bottle, changed canisters, and took a few deep breaths of the life giving gas. After completing the task, Mallory once again surveyed his surroundings. He stopped when he go to the East.

The once distant fluffy white clouds were closer. Much closer. And the innocent white had begun to turn an angry gray. No longer an innocent few, the clouds had grown in numbers, and anvil-shaped thunderheads were rapidly forming. This is not good, he thought to himself. This is very not good. I should get back down to camp six. Maybe even five, if possible. George turned back to the way he came up and began the agonizingly slow descent. Step after step was torture. Knowing he had to hurry was only making his heart pump faster, worsening the situation.

Breathing harder and harder, Mallory had to take a few second break after almost every step, until his pulse slowed enough that he could divert a portion of his brain to downward progress. Pick. Step. Breathe. Breathe. Breathe. Repeat. Sensing the world around him darkening, he looked over his shoulder at the peak. The first cloud had breached the western side of the mountain, his side. This could only mean one thing. Don t look back any more. George made that mental note to himself. A few minutes later, he felt the first snowflake gently brush his cheek.

Realizing he had only reached about 27, 000 feet, Mallory now knew that he had to move. He quickened his pace, nearly achieving a slow walk. Step.

Step. Step. Step. Breathe. Step. St- The old frozen leather tying the crampon to his foot snapped, his foot slid forward, and George was on the move, this time at breakneck pace. On May 2, 1999, Eric Simonson radioed into base camp to report that Dave Hahn, Tap Richards, Jake Norton, Andy Politz, and Conrad Anker had located the body of George Mallory on the side of Mt. Everest, where he perished on June 8th, 1924.