

pathe journal
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THE MONT BLANC TRAGEDY

Positive developed 35 m/m film : 435 feet - 130 meters
also covered (separately) by Gaumont and Actualités Françaises.

Any hope of rescuing alive the two mountain climbers marooned 12,000 feet high on the Mont Blanc for the last week and a calf have been abandoned yesterday. The two men, the young frenchman Jen Vincendon 27 and his friend the belgian François Henry, their limbs seriously frostbitten lie muffled in three sleeping bags each in the cabin of a damaged helicopter that crash-landed while attempting to rescue them on Monday. The only practicable way of rescuing them would have been to lift them by helicopter, but an g 80 mile an hour wind ruled out that solution. To take them down by ground would require some 30 men and sleds with avalanche risks and a bitter cold. The two young men, one Vincendon already in a comatose state were left alone in the storm-battered helicopter late Thursday after the six soldiers and mountain guides who had spent New-Year's Eve with them scaled to the Vallot refuge a few hundred yards away, nearly loosing their lives in the short distance. The dramatic decision to go to the refuge was taken after two of the soldiers who had been slightly injured in the crash-landing of the helicopter, developed serious frostbite and began to find it difficult to walk. Their four companions, still fit but suffering from the cold were ordered by radio from Chamonix to help their comrades to the refuge. There they joined two other men who had been parachuted last Monday. A violent snowstorm since then has prevented the men from leaving the refuge. Even all together they would not be enough either to bring the two marooned climbers up to the refuge with them or to carry them down to the valley. They left them enough food and drugs for several days and some hot drinks in vacuum flasks. When they were left alone the frenchman, Vincendon could not move his arms and legs and was being fed by his companion. Both were described as very weak and there were fears they could not survive another night with temperatures in the range of minus 35° centigrade. Helicopters were grounded by the wind and heavy snowfalls on the bases all around the Mont Blanc.

Yesterday however the weather cleared for a few hours, and two "ALOUETTE" small helicopter of the army (specially planed for high mountain, the same which established a record last year) and a bigger Sikorski flew to the Vallot refuge and brought back to the valley in several round trips the six men still there, including Commandant SANTINI (a hero of the Indochina war and great specialist of high mountain helicopter flying), and Adjutant BLANC, the first one suffers from serious frostbites while the other was wounded in the crash-landing and further wounded when he fell in a crevice while trying to reach the refuge.

Even the parents of the two marooned climbers who cannot have survived two more nights and days in the state they were, have asked military authorities and mountain guides to give up further rescue operations for the moment.

This picture shows : air views of the Mont Blanc and Alpine mountains views of the crashed helicopter lying under 50 centimeters of snow high up on the slope, landing at the Vallot refuge of an "Alouette" 'copter, and preparations on the Chamonix skating field which has been turned into an airfield for the three helicopters engaged in the rescue operation. From there all operations are followed by radio with the help of an airplane making a short-wave relay from high up in the air, with a connection with the six men at the Vallot refuge.

The families of the two marooned climbers meanwhile are in Chamonix and the crowd is massed around the military authorities and guides anxious to see the end of this new tragedy/.

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- the Vincendon family is seen here near an ambulance waiting arrival of the first wounded man to be brought back from the Vallot refuge (a young woman hiding behind somebody else, and a man wearing a beret who is Vincendon's father),
- the Henry family is walking in town (a group of four men).
- the rescued mountain guides are interviewed by radio and TV men in Chamonix, on the square fronting the church.