

57/66

ALPINE RESCUE:

This is the Eiger - the 13,000-ft Alpine peak on which the world's eyes have been focused. High on the grim North Face, four climbers are stranded - where hundreds can see them, but where they are almost impossible to reach. Swiss mountain rescue planes patrol the face, which is notorious as a climb of no return - once a man has started on it, he must continue upwards, or stay where he is - helpless and slowly freezing.. till the rescue teams arrive. Spotters below must give the rescuers radio help for the stranded men are invisible from a few yards away on the face itself.

Back and forth go the radio reports as the spotters, the planes, and the climbers work together. And it's bad news - one of the four stranded men has fallen from a narrow ledge and is dangling at the end of his safety rope. He is Italian Stefano Longhi. Two of his companions, the observer plane reports, have managed to add a second rope - but whether he is alive or dead the rescuers cannot tell.

For Longhi's sister there will be nothing but tragedy. Ninety volunteers from seven nations, working day and night, have only managed to bring down one man - 32-year-old Claudio Corti: bruised, frostbitten, but alive. The others, Longhi and two Germans - must be given up as dead. The rescue parties have worked at great risk; for the North face is a killer. Foolhardy climbers must expect no help in future, the experts warn, if they hazard their lives on it.