

It is important to note that S.U. attributes the training he had received in avalanche procedure with saving his life.

No. 64-5

ALTA, UTAH, (WEST RUSTLER)

7 March 1964

WEATHER FACTORS

During the week preceding the accident on 7 March, 48 inches of snow fell in a series of small storms. The most severe storm occurred the night of 5-6 March, depositing 14 inches of new snow. The storm on 5 March was the only one accompanied by extensive high winds. Intensive avalanche control work showed the general snow conditions to be reasonably stable. The main hazard seemed to occur in patches of deep drift on steep slopes. Temperatures were unusually low throughout the week.

ACCIDENT SUMMARY

At approximately 12:40 p.m. on 7 March, J.R., a guest at Alta Lodge from Los Angeles, skied into one of the narrow, steep chutes on West Rustler. As he did so, he dislodged a small avalanche with a fracture line 18 to 24 inches high, which carried him about 400 feet down the face of West Rustler. Snow deposition was very shallow on the open slopes below, and he was not buried or injured. Ski patrolmen and other skiers hastened to his aid, helping him recover his equipment.

AVALANCHE DATA

The avalanche released by J.R. was classified as HS-AS-2. The chute on which the slide occurred had been shot with a 75 mm recoilless rifle at 9:30 a.m. the morning of the slide. The adjacent chute to the north had also been shot, releasing a slab avalanche similar to the one released by J.R., but somewhat larger. Several skiers had evidently preceded J.R. in the chute without releasing a slide. It is interesting to note that this accident, though minor in consequence, occurred on a slope which had been both shot and skied.

COMMENTS

Accidents like this are rare, but they are not completely unknown. Even the most exacting avalanche control program may fail to remove one last pocket of slab somewhere. Such incidents are part of a growing body of evidence that the explosive charge in a 75 mm artillery shell is close to the marginally effective size. No case has yet been reported of an avalanche falling on a slope shot with 105 mm artillery.