

Very quickly he came to a stop, shallowly but totally buried. Franklin recalled, "I banged my head back and forth a few times to clear the snow, then it wasn't too hard to breathe. I was on my stomach in a push-up position. The snow was like cement. My fear was that I forgot to turn my beacon on. I always turn it on, but yet I was thinking, 'Did I really? Maybe this time I forgot!'"

Knowing that he had gone over a cliff, Franklin feared that his friends would have trouble reaching him. "It seemed like forever. I was very cognizant that I only had about half an hour. I'd read statistics of people's chances when they're buried. The tendency to panic was really great," he remembered. He had lost his hat and glove in the avalanche, and he soon became very cold. Now and then he shouted.

## Rescue

The other four men tried to watch for Franklin as the avalanche accelerated down the chute. Garrett said, "I looked over the edge and couldn't see him at all. It was just a big cloud. I kept watching until it formed a tongue and came to a stop." Garrett was the only one of the four rescuers who wore a beacon, and he switched his to "receive." Also he had left his skis higher on the ridge than the others and was able to retrieve them quickly.

Garrett told Weber to ski out for help. Then he prepared to ski down the avalanche path. Garrett told Coburn and Bervegan to watch him as he started down. He remembered, "I was worried it might slide again. I started down the shoulder on the right side of the couloir looking down, then got into the couloir. I was able to make some turns, then approached a cliff and traversed."

Further down Garrett heard a faint yell. Again he recalled, "I thought that must be Michael. I shouted up to John and Nick to come on down. I came to the fracture line and then to another cliff, the 50-foot one Michael flew over. I traversed again then got into the runout."

The debris area was about 100 yards wide and long. Once on the debris he picked up the beacon signal. "I kept skiing on the debris, following the signal. It kept getting louder. I stopped once to turn down the volume. When I was right on top of him, I could see his hair sticking out of the snow. We started talking. He said, 'I'm glad to see you. Get me out of here!'"

From Franklin's position buried in the snow, he remembered, "I heard a voice, then I heard his beacon picking me up. I heard his footsteps coming right above me; he homed right in on me.

"He had a really hard time digging me out. The snow was like ice; he had to chop it. Without a shovel, there's no way I'd have gotten out. He literally had to dig every limb of my body out separately."

Franklin had been carried 1,500 feet down the slope and over a cliff. He had been buried 20 minutes, without hat or gloves, but luckily had had an airway to the surface. He was hurting from multiple bruises, especially one shoulder, and he was very cold, but he had amazingly escaped without serious injury.

The other two rescuers arrived to help dig Franklin out. Bervegan had skied down, but Coburn had left his skis on the ridge and scrambled down the avalanche slope on foot. When Franklin was out of the snow, he put on extra clothes from the rescuers' packs to get warm. The group decided that Franklin and Coburn would walk out, Garrett would travel with them, and Bervegan would ski out as fast as possible to call off the rescue. They traveled a short way, and then they heard the helicopter.

Weber had made it out to the road, flagged down a passing car, and gotten a ride to the nearest phone. His call to the sheriff mobilized the search and rescue team and the Wasatch Powderbird helicopter. He gave over the phone the exact location of the avalanche so the rescuers could fly directly to that spot.

The helicopter landed and airlifted Franklin and Coburn out.

## Avalanche Data

The cornice collapsed near an elevation of 10,000 feet and fell, with its victim, down a west-facing gully that was estimated to have a 50° angle at the top. Part way down, this mass of snow triggered an avalanche that was classified as an SS-AC-2 (a small soft slab triggered by a falling cornice.) This avalanche was 1 foot deep and about 60 feet wide. From top to bottom, the snow and victim fell 1,000 vertical feet and 1,500 feet slope distance.

## Comments

This is an amazing survival story; falls of this magnitude seldom return their victims without serious injury. Beacons worn by two of these