

Maybe it was beginner's luck, but this novice climber bounced 1,300 feet down Mount Popo, spent hours nearly buried in volcanic ash—and survived!

crater, we hacked out niches in the thick ice and sat down to eat. After gulping my share, I clambered to my feet and tested the ice with the spiked iron plate (called a crampon) clamped to my right boot. Then I stepped down.

Without warning, two crampon spikes broke from their plate, causing my foot to shoot forward. With a startled yelp, I twisted off balance, toppled backward to the ice, and began to slide!

Through a whirl of images, I saw Hartman and Garza a few yards below, directly in my path. "Look out!" I screamed. "I can't stop!"

But instead of lunging aside, they dug their spikes into the ice and crouched to block me. Instinct told me to spare my friends from plunging with me to the jagged rocks of the lower slopes. A few feet above them, I skidded my 210 pounds to the left. As I shot past, Garza yelled: "Use your pick!"

FRANTICALLY, I did as he said, flailing the ice with the pick, praying for one firm bite that would give me a split second to regain my footing. But each time the tool swooped down, it bobbed lamely along the glazed surface. Horrified, I realized that the pick head had been pulled loose while saving me from minor slides earlier in the day—and that it was now useless.

Suddenly, the ice field dropped into a sheer cliff, and I shot into space. Head over heels, I flipped down toward the giant volcanic rocks below. I closed my eyes.

With a jarring force, I hit the ground inches from a mammoth rock. The impact tossed me back into the air like a rubber doll, catapulting me across the rocks—and over another cliff!

As I smashed to the ground again I bounced up and contorted wildly through space. This time I landed feet first in a patch of volcanic ash nearly 700 feet from where I had first slipped. Then I somersaulted numbly 600 feet more, down a 60-degree decline, stopping face-down in deep, foul-tasting ash.

I had plunged some 1,300 feet! No one else had ever lived to tell about falling even half that distance on Popo.

Hartman and Garza inched their way down the slope. After reaching me, they poured sulphur from our first-aid kit into my gashed forehead and gave me a few codeine pills to kill the pain. But it was obvious that my six feet, five inches of dead weight was too much for two exhausted men to carry down the treacherous mountainside.

"I'll go find help," Garza told me. "Hart-

man will stay here with you. When the wind comes up tonight and starts blowing this volcanic ash, you'll need help to keep from being buried alive."

Garza left and darkness fell. The wind whipped stronger, whirling little tornado funnels of ash around us. As the gusts shifted the gray residue around me, I suddenly began sliding. A few yards ahead was another sheer cliff!

"Stop me!" I yelled.

Instantly, Hartman grabbed my jacket, ground his heels into the ash, and jerked me to a halt. Keeping a firm hold on me, he crept down-mountain and with his other arm swiftly scooped a depression the length of my body in the ash. He packed it thoroughly and rolled me into it.

For two hours we waited with no word from Garza. Then we decided Hartman, too, should descend and seek help. It was imperative that I get to a hospital for examination.

Nature waited for him to leave, then loosed her full torment. A fierce storm raked the mountain, churning dense clouds of snow and ash. I tried to brush the residue away, but it piled up on my legs and chest, steadily covering me. I could manage only to keep my nostrils clear and pray that the shallow trough Hartman had dug to protect me would not become my grave.

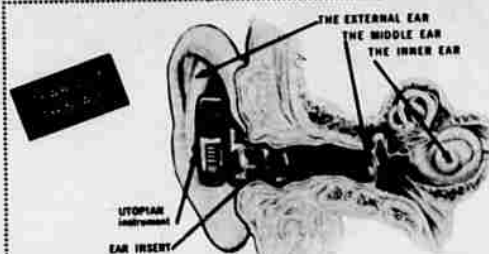
FROM ABOVE, a deafening rumble heralded a new danger. Rocks the size of footballs, loosened by the storm, rained into the ash, barely missing my head. I went rigid with fear. Even if I survived, could I keep my sanity?

Then, as suddenly as it had begun, the avalanche stopped. But the below-zero cold persisted. Frostbite was beginning to numb my feet and legs. And there was nothing I could do except wait.

At about 6 a.m., after a night that seemed like eternity, I heard voices, evidently from a rescue squad. I shouted and heard answering calls, but no one came in sight.

At noon, 17-terror-filled hours after the broken crampon sent me hurtling into space, I saw a three-man rescue party picking their way toward me. On reaching me, they improvised a seat of ropes and used it to drag me down the mountain.

At a hospital in Mexico City, the final miracle of my misadventure was discovered. Despite all I had been through, I suffered only bruises, the forehead gash, and a case of frostbite which caused the loss of part of one toe. But not a bone in my body was broken.



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