

Bradford Washburn Mountain Photography

Antony Decaneas, editor, compiler
 Seattle, WA: The Mountaineers, 2000
 US \$29.95, 144 pages, softcover

The old adage of not judging a book by its cover clearly does not apply to *Bradford Washburn Mountain Photography*. The back cover quotes Ansel Adams' description of Washburn as a "roving genius of mind and mountains," which further intrigues one to open the spectacular cover.

Inside, one finds a fascinating introduction by the curator of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Bradford Washburn is a renowned mountaineer, scientist, and cartographer who used aerial photography in his scientific studies. He was also a pilot, as well as a pioneer in the fields of aerial photography, wireless communication, cold-weather search-and-rescue, and cold-weather survival. He produced award-winning maps, including those of Mount Everest, Mount McKinley, and the Grand Canyon.

The editor and compiler, Antony Decaneas, provides us with insightful interviews from conversations with Bradford Washburn conducted over a 4-year period. This enhances our appreciation of the 100 large-format photographs that follow. Amazingly, Bradford Washburn has numerically filed and catalogued more than 15 000 large-format negatives, as well as collecting countless color slides.

The selected collection of black-and-white photographs is an indescribable sensory treat. Washburn captures the near mystical interplay of clouds and mountains again and again. He also exposes the abstract art expressions of glaciers and moraines. Light and shadow are delicately used to dramatically highlight the magnificent beauty found in and around the special world of mountains. He is obviously an artist as well as a scientist. The book concludes with an 11-page illustrated chronology of his legendary career.

All those who love mountains or art will enjoy this book. From this reviewer's perspective, the only thing lacking is more extensive biographical information about this unique photographer. Alas, my curiosity about the historical significance and scientific implications portrayed by the photographs was not sated. An expanded or supplemented edition would be an additional treat that could only enhance one's appreciation of both Bradford Washburn and his photographic material.

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High Achiever: The Life and Climbs of Chris Bonington

Jim Curran
 Seattle, WA: The Mountaineers, 1999
 US \$26.95, 256 pages, hardcover

As mountaineering writer Mike Thompson quipped about Chris Bonington's first book, *I Chose to Climb*, it should have perhaps been more aptly titled *He Chose Not to Sell Margarine*. Jim Curran's account of the life of legendary British mountaineer Sir Christian Bonington (more commonly known as "Chris") is a fascinating story of an amazing man who is still hard at it today.

Chris Bonington grew up during the Second World War in Britain and fancied a career as an Army officer, to the point of going to the well-respected officer training school at Sandhurst. After several years in a tank division and training soldiers in the British Army's equivalent of Outward Bound, Bonington realized that the military wasn't quite for him. He then took a job with a multinational margarine corporation as a management trainee, but was dissatisfied. As a passionate climber and mountaineer, Bonington then set out to be one of Britain's first professional mountaineers, making a living solely through his mountaineering prowess. Rather than take the more commonly traveled path of professional guiding and instruction, Chris Bonington trained himself to be a mountaineering journalist, photographer, and professional adventurer. He has canvassed and pleaded for sponsorship, written for magazines and journals, sold photographs, and lectured. He has written numerous books on his expeditions, both successes and failures. What seems to many of us to be an exciting and romantic life is actually a tough way to make a living and support a family, but amazingly and admirably, he has succeeded. This book tells his inspiring tale.

This is not to downplay Bonington's considerable achievements, including the first British ascent of the North Face of the Eiger, first ascent of the Central Tower of Paine, leader of the successful Annapurna South Face Expedition, leader of the first successful Southwest Face of Everest Expedition, first ascent of The Ogre, first ascent of Kongur, his own successful ascent of Mount Everest, and the first British ascent of Mount Vinson. These are only a scant few of his accomplishments and to detail all of the first ascents, ascents, and climbs of Bonington's life until now surely takes an entire volume, if not several. Many of his expeditions have been failures. He has been turned back by weather and dangerous conditions. He has suffered the death of many friends and yet still climbs to an impressively high standard, carrying

on as they would have. He has floated the Blue Nile and sailed to Greenland to climb. He has trekked to the fabled land of Hunza and climbed on Sepu Kangri, Tibet's "secret mountain." Somehow he has also managed to maintain a viable marriage and raise 2 sons.

Curran, despite being a friend and climbing companion of Bonington, has produced a balanced volume. He portrays Bonington not as an invincible superhero, but rather as a human being, fraught with insecurities and legendary indecisiveness, but driven by an unrelenting love of remote and mountainous places and a desire to stand atop unclimbed summits and to try the harder route on peaks that have already been climbed.

This is the first work I have read of the many Bonington biographies and autobiographies that exist, but surely not the last. It kept me spellbound in admiration for a man who has done what many only dream of. Recently, I checked Bonington's Web site (www.bonington.com). At 66 years old, he has just accomplished first ascents on the rocky crags of Morocco (March 2001) and has several expeditions to remote areas planned for the next couple of years—truly a life well lived and still living well. Viva Chris Bonington!

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We Die Alone: A WWII Epic of Escape and Endurance

David Howarth

New York, NY: Lyons Press, 1999

(Originally Published by The Macmillan Company, 1955)

US \$14.95, 231 pages, softcover

March 29, 1943; occupied Norway. It was a small mission in a large war: infiltrate a 4-man team of expatriate Norwegian commandos and their equipment into Norway. They had spent 6 days at sea in a small fishing boat, carefully making their way from the Shetland Islands to the far north coast of Norway. In sight of their homeland for the first time in years, the mission went terribly wrong. The commandos and the boat crew were betrayed to the occupying German forces, and in a short but vicious firefight, 1 commando was killed and 2 others plus the 8-man boat crew were captured. The German occupying forces tortured 2 of the men to death and stood the others in front of a firing squad. The fourth commando, a former instrument maker from Oslo named Jan Baalsrud, evaded capture, and on June 1, 1943, escaped from occupied Norway into Sweden.

First published in 1955, this new edition of *We Die Alone* features an introduction by historian Steven E. Ambrose. It is the remarkable story of the escape of Jan Baalsrud, an epic of endurance and heroism. If this were a work of fiction, it would be considered outlandish. However, 10 years after the incident, historian David Howarth carefully reconstructed and verified the story, interviewing not only Baalsrud himself, but many of the Norwegians who aided in his escape. In simple, but elegant language, without histrionics, he portrays the stark realities of a failed unconventional warfare mission: sudden unexpected firefight, prisoners of war executed, local civilian resistance workers deported to death camps, and a headlong flight into the cold of the far north spring. Yet, this is much more than a war story. It is the story of an ordinary man placed into an extraordinary situation, and the many other ordinary people who when called on rose to the occasion and risked their lives to save a single man.

Much of the time, the environment was as much the enemy as the Germans. Avalanches, storms, cold, and darkness should have killed Baalsrud several times over, yet he survived. I must confess to having to suppress shudders when at one point a Norwegian farm family treats the badly frostbitten and probably hypothermic Baalsrud by rubbing his feet with snow. Crippled, Baalsrud became entirely dependent on the courage and self-sacrifice of the inhabitants of several remote villages. At one point, he was hidden in a snow trench for several weeks, crippled and unable to move. Villagers had to climb several miles up the walls of a fjord to bring him supplies every few days, usually at night to avoid detection by the Germans.

The full story of Baalsrud's escape I will leave for readers to discover. I will say that it is a measure of the quiet heroism of Jan Baalsrud that the end of the war found him once again in occupied Norway, on another mission behind enemy lines, fighting to free his country from occupation.

We Die Alone is a book that simply but elegantly tells of a small incident that took place in an almost forgotten theater of a huge war. It is a story of cruelty, courage, humanity, and almost unbelievable endurance. More importantly, it is the story of a man surviving the worst elements that his fellow man could throw at him and yet he prevailed. It is a story of quiet heroism that is more gripping than a dozen technothrillers. Don't start reading this book unless you have time to finish it.

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