

# CREWS IN ALTA DIG FOR BODIES IN SNOWSLIDE

Winter's Wrath Hurled Tragedy Into Midst of Happy New Year's Outing

## Searchers Battle Intense Cold To Press Hunt

By Staff Correspondent  
ALTA, Jan. 2—Undaunted by intense cold and deep snow, more than 200 searchers Thursday were digging systematically into a vast snowslide that took the life of at least one skier.

Officials were hopeful not more than one life was lost, although first reports said four persons may have been engulfed in a pillar of snow that rushed down Rustler's peak here Wednesday afternoon.

Missing was Kenneth C. Wright Jr., 21, 5069 Cottonwood lane. A shattered pair of skis, identified as Mr. Wright's, was dug from the slide late Wednesday.

It was the first such skiing tragedy since this historic old mining camp a few years ago began growing into the widely known winter sports center it is today.

### Believe Only One Victim

Stories of two eyewitnesses Wednesday indicated that four men may have been lost, but officials in charge of the search Thursday said they believed Mr. Wright was the only victim.

A check of automobiles was made by a Telegram reporter and occupants of all save one machine were accounted for. That car is owned by John Irving Johnson, 58, Pleasant Grove, operator of the upper ski lift, who was reported all right.

The slide, a quarter of a mile long, split over a hogback and most of it came down the gully of Little Cottonwood creek.

It carried rocks and small trees with it to the bottom of the gulch, piling up snow at least 50 feet deep that became the chief handicap in the search for body, or bodies.

The searchers today were recruited from the Bountiful and Big Cottonwood C C C camps and the Salt Lake air base at Fort Douglas.

Work began at 8 a. m. in zero weather, but the temperature began to turn upward slightly later in the morning.

### Cold Forces Halt

The weather was so cold that crews working Wednesday night had to give up at 4 a. m., many of them suffering from sheer exhaustion and exposure.

A C C C enrollee identified only by the last name of Carrington collapsed over his shovel and was taken out of the gully unconscious on a toboggan. He was taken by truck to the Big Cottonwood camp. His condition was not believed serious.

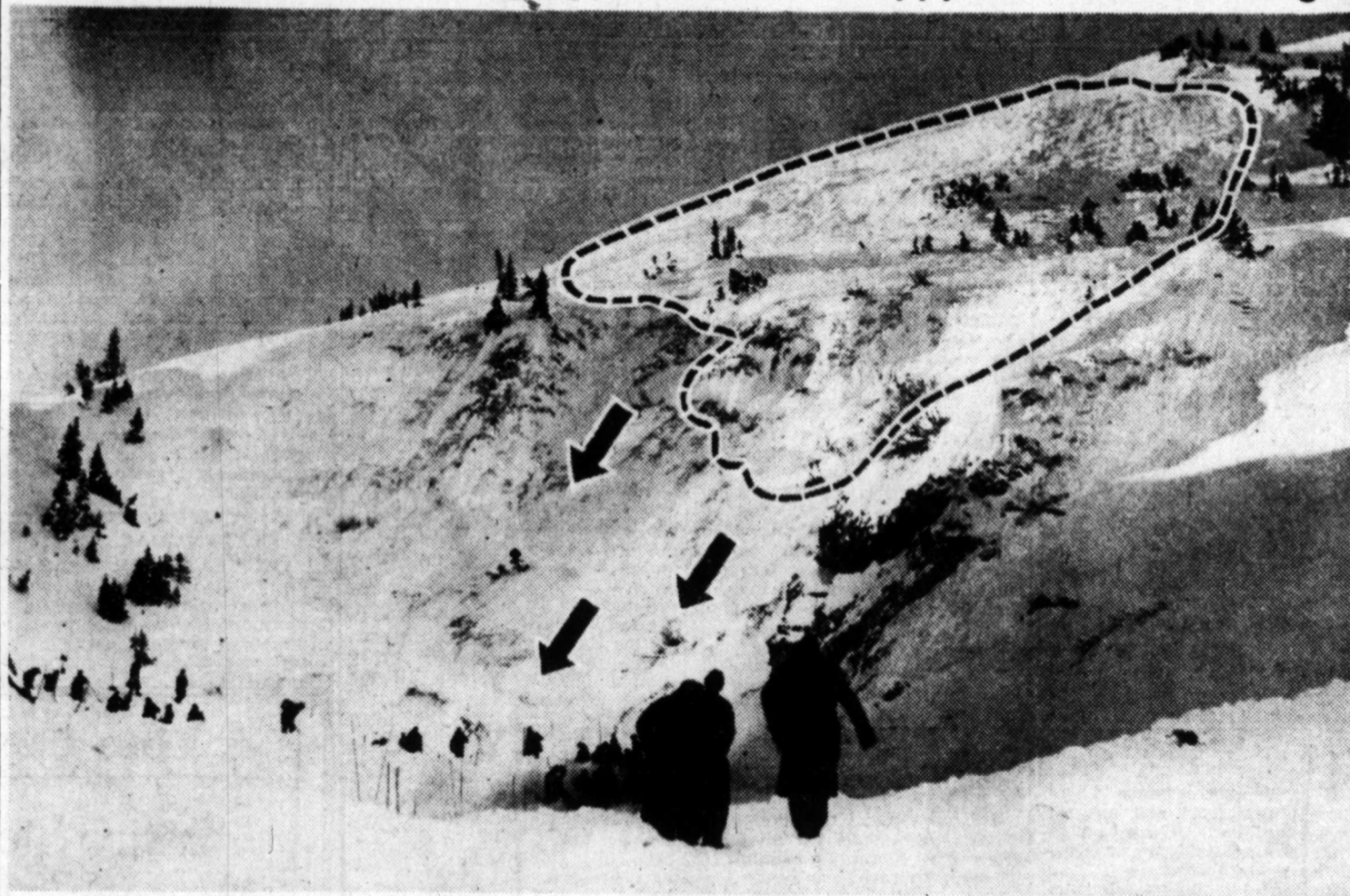
Officials said that had more than one man been lost, some evidence of their death doubtless would have been found, such as skis or poles. They pointed out that, after more than 12 hours of widespread digging in the snow, only the one pair of skis was uncovered.

James S. McKay, 1150 Downington avenue, Salt Lake City, said he saw the snowslide from the valley floor.

### Snow Began to Slip

"The snow seemed to begin slipping from the top of the peak," Mr. McKay said. "I saw four men on the slope.

"One was away off to himself. He tried to outski the snowslide and came down the slope at high speed. I believe he saw the gulch ahead of him and tried to turn but fell, and the slide caught up with him and took him over the gulch.



WHERE ONE SKIER APPARENTLY MET DEATH IN AVALANCHE AT ALTA, UTAH WINTER SPORTS CENTER  
Dotted area shows where slide began, most of snow pile going over into gulch, as shown by arrows

# Members of Fair Sex Gamely Aid Search in Snowslide



THEY PITCHED IN BESIDE MEN IN SEARCHING PARTY AT ALTA SNOWSLIDE  
Mary J. Johnson, left, and Virginia Gurnsey wielded shovels

## Searchers Press Hunt For Snow Victims

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It looked to me like he was taken right into the gulch. This apparently was the Wright boy, from what I could learn.

"Of the other three, one was off to one side of the slide and probably could have been able to get away. The other two were together, but were in a position where they might have been able to get out.

"I was watching the skier who was caught by the slide and concentrating my attention on him. And flying powdered snow sort of blotted out the others, so I could not tell whether they were caught by the slide.

"I did not see the other three after the slide began. But there was no doubt that the one skier I was watching was caught. He was right in the path of the slide and couldn't possibly have gotten out of the way."

Officials pointed out that the three skiers Mr. McKay said he saw were on the upper side of the gulley, where the snow is lightest in depth. Scores of persons have been searching there, but have uncovered nothing.

Coupled with this was the fact that no skiers have been reported missing, save Mr. Wright.

### Worked Against Odds

The searchers worked with dogged determination, against odds of cold and snow so deep that 25-foot probing rods sunk from trenches 10 feet deep did not touch bottom.

Shovelers were working in 15-minute shifts. They were trenching along a line horizontal to the floor of the slide, the trench varying in width with the contours of the gully.

Working straight up the slide, the workers had as their objective turning over all the snow from the creek bottom up, working from one large, main trench.

It is a job that will take several days.

A frosty wind that came up after midnight kept the workers shivering.

Progress was slow, tortuous. By 10 a. m., nearly 50 feet had been covered on a line parallel to the slide floor, with about 200 feet remaining to be covered in the deepest part of the slide.

### Floodlights Used

Floodlights were turned on Wednesday night and early Thursday, giving the scene a weird aspect as winds came howling down the gulch and whipped the fires made by workers into dancing flames.

Directing the work Thursday were County Roads Superintendent George B. Catmull, Chief Deputy Sheriff George Beckstead, James E. Gurr, supervisor, Wasatch national forest; Alf and Sverre Engen, noted skiers.

All joined in expressing a belief not more than one life was lost.



KENNETH C. WRIGHT JR.  
Skier missing in snowslide.

"Our first report was that four skiers were caught. Up until now, however, no one has been reported missing except the Wright youth," Deputy Beckstead said Thursday afternoon.

"It is logical that if anyone else was missing we would have heard about it by now," Mr. Gurr said. "Consequently, we are concentrating our work where the Wright youth last was seen. However, we are not overlooking any possibility that other skiers were up there."

Should the frenzied shoveling not uncover a body, or bodies, it was feared that no discovery will be made before the snow melts next summer, so deep was the slide in parts.

The slide was on a slope seldom used by skiers. On the opposite side of the peak, more than 1500 New Year's day skiers were scampering on the slopes.

Each year slides occur at the scene of Wednesday's slide, Alta residents said.

It was believed Mr. Wright was traversing the slope on a cross-country ski trek. Veteran skiers blamed the slide on 14 inches of fresh snow that fell the last two days. They said skiers usually avoid such areas until new snow has had time to pack.

Officials were handicapped in checking on the possibility of other victims having been trapped because of the large crowd of skiers scattered over the winter sports arena.

To aid the search, they closed the road at the mouth of Little Cottonwood canyon, pointing out the rescue work was of emergency nature and that canyon traffic had to be kept at a minimum.

When darkness fell Wednesday and the search still was under way, County Commissioner J. B. Mullins ordered a portable power plant and floodlights into use. He also had a caterpillar tractor and 75 county workers sent to the scene.

With Mr. Wright missing, tragedy apparently had struck the Wright home the second time within two weeks. His father, Kenneth C. Wright, prominent Utah engineer and former chief engineer of the state road commission, died December 21.

The slide scene is half a mile east of the Alta lodge and a quarter mile south of the road to the upper basin.

Women skiers pitched in Wednesday afternoon and night and worked with shovels alongside men in search parties. Among them were Virginia Gurnsey, 1135 East South Temple street, and Mary J. Johnson, 1389 Military way, who refused to quit their posts and worked until nearly midnight.

The entire staff and commissary of the Alta lodge was called upon to feed the army of searchers. More than 200 sandwiches and 20 gallons of coffee were taken to the workers.

Young Wright had gone to Alta with a party including Rulon and Wayne Nichol, Robert Livingston Jay Olsen and Max L. Putnam of Holladay, all of whom were accounted for, said reports here.

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