

# Avalanche Accident

## The Polish Tatras – 10<sup>th</sup> January 2008

Tatrzańskie Ochotnicze Pogotowie Ratunkowe  
Tatra Mountain Rescue Service  
Zakopane - Polska



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# Avalanche accidents in The Polish Tatras, winter 2007/2008.

- The number of accidents: 5
- The number of people carried by the avalanches: 5
- One climbing related accident - avalanche on approach to a climbing route, the remaining 4 - tourist accidents.
- One casualty (mechanical injuries), one victim with light injuries. The remaining 3 - no significant injuries.
- In 4 cases the victims have managed to resurface on their own or with the help of companions.
- In one accident the assistance of Tatra Mountain Rescue Service (TOPR) was necessary - our presentation concerns this event.

# Topography

Accident area

Mount Kasprowy  
Wierch  
(1987 m AMSL)  
Meteo Station

Mount Giewniak  
(2096 m AMSL)



# Weather conditions

## **Day before accident (09 Jan 2008 5 PM)**

Weather observatory – Mount Kasprowy Wierch (1987 m AMSL)

temp.  $-6,9^{\circ}\text{C}$  max. temp.  $-6,7^{\circ}\text{C}$

Wind: E 2 m/s cloud cover: 0/8

snow: compacted

Avalanche danger level: 2

## **Day of the accident (10 Jan 2008 7 AM)**

Weather observatory – Mount Kasprowy Wierch (1987 m AMSL)

temp.  $-7,6^{\circ}\text{C}$  min temp.  $-7,9^{\circ}\text{C}$

Wind: ESE 2-9 m/s cloud cover 0/8

snow: compacted

Avalanche danger level: 2

# The day of the expedition

The avalanche victims were taking part in an attempt to cover the main ridge of Western Polish Tatras in 24 hrs as a form of training before Himalaya expedition.

- o 11:30 (09 Jan '08) party of five people sets out from Chochołowska mountain hut, among them two renowned Himalaya climbers:
- o **Artur Hajzer** (first winter ascent of Annapurna, ascents of Manaslu, Shisha Pangma, Annapurna east - new route, Dhaulagiri)
- o **Piotr Pustelnik** (ascents of Gasherbrum II, Nanga Parbat, Cho Oyu, Shisha Pangma, Dhaulagiri, Everest, K2, Gasherbrum II, Lhotse, Kangchenjunga, Makalu, Manaslu, Broad Peak)
- o Snow conditions: good – mostly hard, compacted snow, occasionally 'concrete' – like, ultra hard cover, only sometimes soft enough for wading - maximum depth - half calf, on average ankle deep.

## The avalanche

- Early morning sun thaws southern slopes and transforms the outer snow layer into a wet one
- At. 9:30 (10 Jan 08) TOPR headquarters is alarmed: on the ridge between Mt Tomanowy and Mt.Ciemniak Artur Hajzer falls with a cornice.
- His companions, despite outstanding mountain experience, are reluctant to help him – they are afraid to tread in the avalanche endangered area

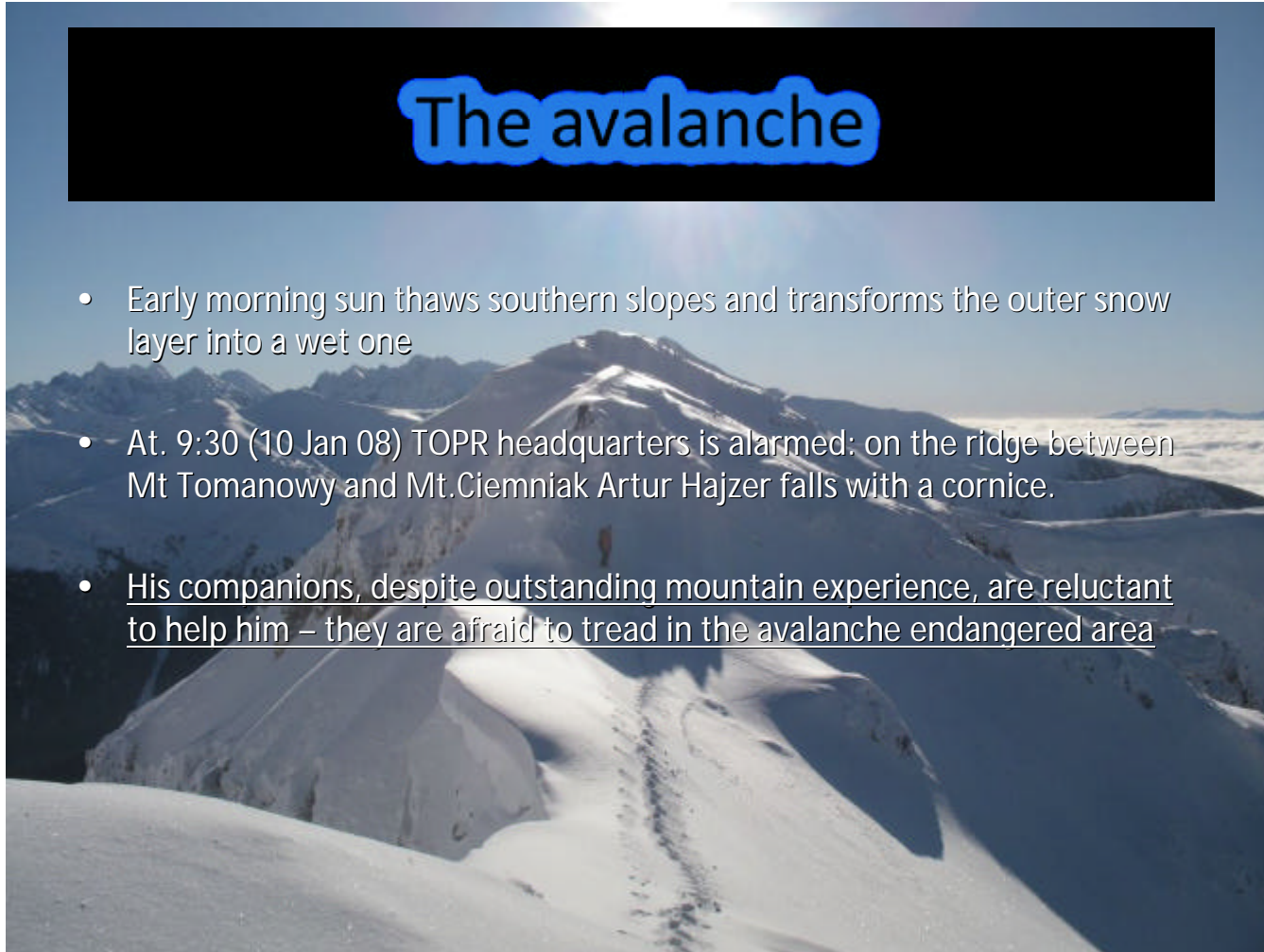
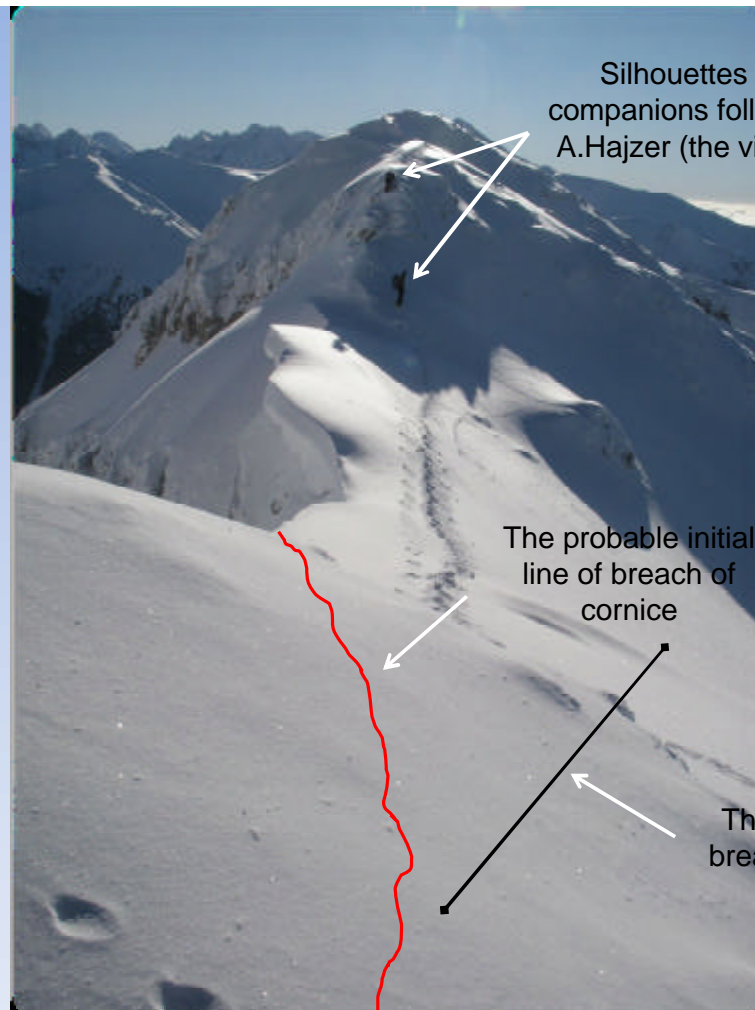




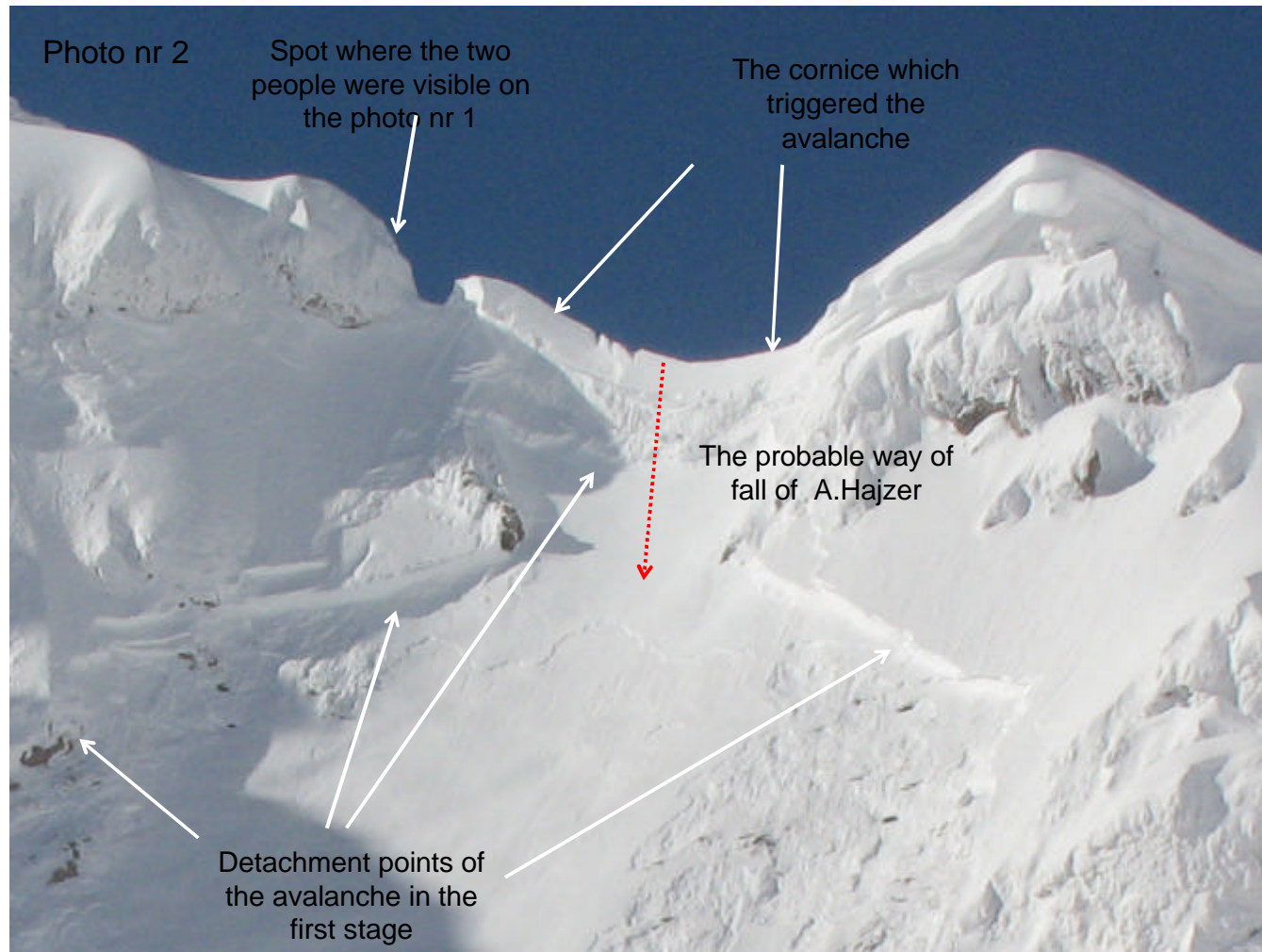
Photo nr 1



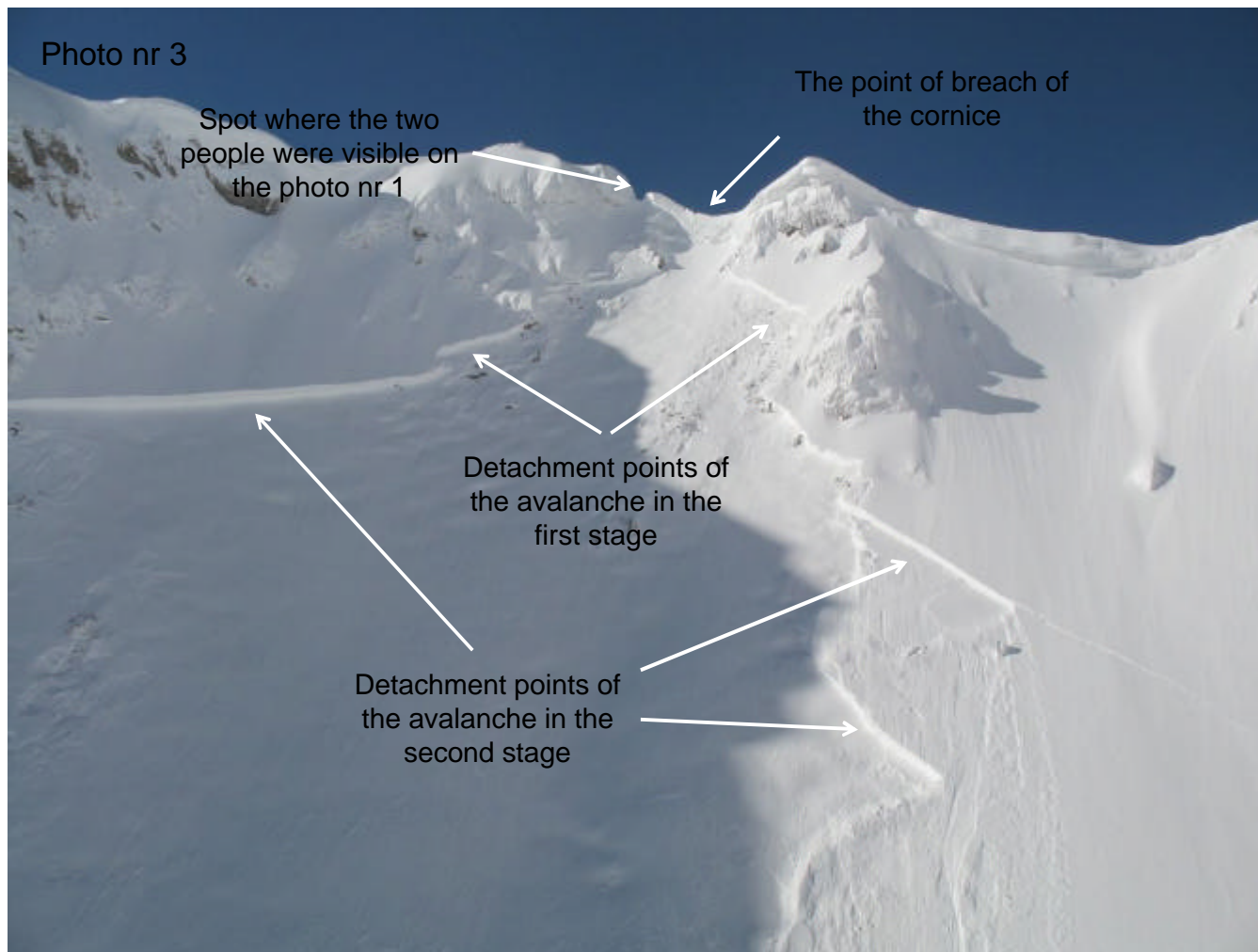
Silhouettes of  
companions following  
A.Hajzer (the victim)

The probable initial  
line of breach of  
cornice

The actual angle of  
breach of the cornice





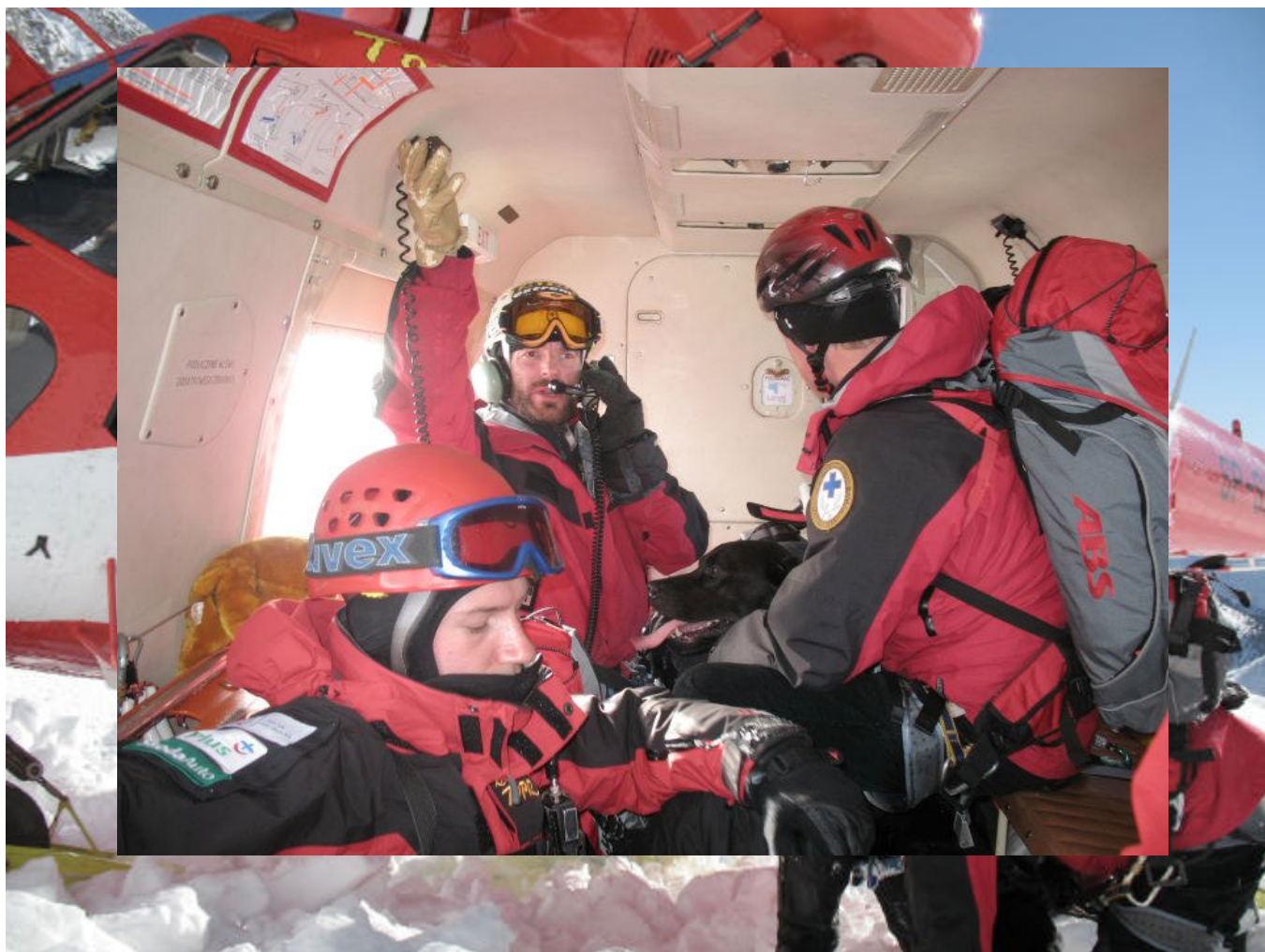


## Rescue action

- The northern parts of Tatra range are cloud covered; in spite of that SAR-TOPR rescue helicopter with crew on board is started. Two more rescuers and an avalanche dog join the crew as well.
- After the arrival onto the avalanche area the dog and its handler are deployed
- The helicopter crew on board notice an ice axe protruding from the snow –this allows quick finding of the buried victim.
- Within 45 minutes from the alarm the victim is in the local hospital
- The victim did not suffer any injuries due to being carried by the avalanche, was slightly hypothermic and after a few hour stay at the hospital was let go.







## Summary

- Thanks to favorable conditions, use of mobile phones, helicopter availability and immense luck of the buried victim (protruding ice axe) total time of TOPR rescue action was 45 minutes from the moment of alarm.
- The victim's companions, though mountain experienced and properly equipped (probes, snow shovels, LVS) did not undertake companion rescue action.