



Il Soccorso Alpino d'Irlanda sarebbe lieto di nominare l'alpinista irlandese Ger

Mountain Rescue Ireland would like to nominate the late Irish Mountaineer, Ger McDonnell, for the prestigious Gold Medal Award of the Targa D'Argento.

Name: Gerard 'Ger' McDonnell

Date of Birth: 20th January, 1971

Passed away: 2nd August, 2008 (K2)

Family Address: c/o Margaret McDonnell (mother), Killeen, Kilcornan, Co. Limerick, IRELAND

Although Ger was not a member of one of our teams, we believe that due to the reported accounts of Ger's concern for his fellow climbers on numerous occasions that he demonstrated the highest qualities that embodies the type of person who is a "Mountain Rescuer":

1999: Southern Celtic Expedition – Denali (20,320FT), Alaska – Summited on 2nd Attempt (13-JUN-1999). On the descent, Mike Mays and Ger came across two parties in serious trouble. The first party were 2 Korean women with the older suffering from exhaustion and the second party of 3 South Africans with one of them suffering from snow blindness. Conditions deteriorated rapidly into 'whiteout' conditions. Ger broke trail and led them safely to the high camp at 17,000 ft. Mike and Ger were awarded the 1999 Denali Pro Pin and nominated for the 1999 Denali Pro Mountaineer of the Year. [1, 2]

2003: Irish Everest 2003 (29,021FT), Nepal – Successful summit on 2nd attempt from Camp 3 (22-MAY-2003, 11:11AM). Bad weather hampered first attempt. Spent 3 nights above 8000m. Rescued Team Leader Pat Falvey down from South Summit suffering from cerebral edema. [1]

2005: Denali (20,320FT), Alaska – Ger, along with others, helped the Denali rescue team with a climber suffering from high altitude pulmonary edema (HAPE) about 16,000 ft. They brought him down to the lower camp at 14,200 ft. This rescue took place in early June 2005 but was never recorded in the Annual Mountaineering Summary released by Denali National Park and Preserve. [3]

2006: Broadpeak (26,394FT) – "...Ger went round all the tents begging climbers to climb with him and help rescue a pair of stranded climbers who had been advised not to go up further, but

who nevertheless were now helpless and in need of serious assistance. Mark Sheen, who was on that expedition, testified that not one person would go up with Ger as they were too tired, an experience which tore at the fundamental principles which Ger held dearly." [1]

2008: Joined the Dutch Norit Team to attempt K2 (28, 244FT) with friend Wilco Van Rooijen as Team Leader. [1,4]

On the Sunday before they would make the summit, Ger approached the different climbing teams to seek co-operation for a mutual summit bid. He was looking to ensure that they would work together to facilitate a successful summit bid for all concerned. He was acting as the 'Peace Broker' so that nothing would ruin what they had all worked and strived so valiantly to achieve.

On 31-JUL-08, at Camp 3, a guy was calling out furiously, having lost his tent in a sudden horrific storm. He was seeking refuge and shelter, and as no one else would give him any, Pemba, a Sherpa with the Dutch Norit Team and Ger obliged the young Serbian climber. Finally on 01-AUG-08 at 19:00, Ger became the FIRST IRISHMAN to summit K2.

At approximately 05:00 on 02-AUG-08, having bivouaced for the night, Ger began a search for the anchor for the descent rope. The rope had been dislodged or broken, resulting in two members of a Korean team and their Sherpa tragically being trapped, suspended upside down on ropes below the over-night camp. With climbing partner, Italian Marco Confortola, they spent 3.5 hours trying to assist the Korean climbers while in the death zone and eventually Marco was forced to descend as he felt that he could do no more as the climbers were like 'puppets on a string'.

Marco confirms that he witnessed Ger climbing back up but did not at the time understand Ger's reasoning...that reasoning soon became evident. Ger went back up to release the tension on the ropes and eventually, some 3 to 4 hours later, the only remaining climber, Ger, remarkably managed to free the three members of the Korean team.

The three members of the Korean team were met by two Sherpas sent up by their own team to help with their descent. A serac gave way above where they had been suspended and tragically swept Ger McDonnell away. Although freed by Ger, a second subsequent avalanche hit and claimed the three freed Korean members and their two Sherpa guides."

When members of Ger's family travelled to Pakistan after the tragedy, they were met by the head of the mountain rescue team in Islamabad, Brigadier Khan, who talked to them about Ger's respect for the Pakistani and Nepalese Porters and Cooks:

Ger recognised that one porter was inexperienced on the mountain and Ger had shown him how to use the ropes which would assist him. The porter was amazed that a mountaineer would take the time and effort to demonstrate these skills to him.

One of the cooks in the Norit's team's base camp became extremely ill. Ger made numerous phone calls on his way to camp 3 to enquire about the cook. Ger was concerned at the fact that he had to walk out and was not going to be airlifted. Ger gave him one of his insulated sleeping bags for his trip out, to ensure that he would at least be warm at night on the trek out."

These incidents account that Ger, not once, but on numerous occasions put aside his own personal comfort, goals and fulfilment to ensure the safety of others. He was not only concerned about his fellow mountaineers but the locals that the mountaineers depended upon. In the accounts on the k2climb website [4], Ger is described by fellow climbers as "Jesus". In fact, the

k2climb website gave Ger their “Best of ExplorersWeb 2008 Award”.

It is for these repeated demonstrations of solidarity in the mountains to all he came in contact with, that Mountain Rescue Ireland would like to nominate, Ger McDonnell, for the Gold Medal Award of the Targa d'Argento after making the ultimate sacrifice for his fellow man.

‘Sin é anois a chaired. Ta an t-am eg teacht...’

‘Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends’

