Joby Ogwyn recounts watching the deadly Mount Everest avalanche that killed 16 Sherpa guides. The April 18th, 2014 avalanche is the single deadliest event in the mountain's recorded history. The harrowing aftermath is captured in a new documentary, "Everest Avalanche Tragedy."

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Climber Joby Ogwyn Talks About the Avalanche Tragedy on Mount Everest

SAVANNAH GUTHRIE, reporting:

We are back at 7:41 with the latest on that tragic avalanche on Mount Everest. Sixteen guides were killed on April 18th. It was the deadliest disaster ever on the world's highest peak. Now we're getting an exclusive look at some of the video that was shot of the frantic rescue efforts that day. It's part of the new documentary Everest Avalanche Tragedy produced by NBC News's Peacock Productions. It airs Sunday on the Discovery Channel.

MAN #1: Any other live patient found?

MAN #2: Next patient is coming in here. I need people who are used to working with helicopters.

GUTHRIE: These were the desperate moments as captured by NBC News cameras after a cascade of snow and ice buried a team of Sherpas carrying supplies up the mountain ahead of the busy climbing season.

MAN #3: As much oxygen as you can.

GUTHRIE: Rescue helicopters airlifting victims one by one from the treacherous Khumbu Icefall, 18,000 feet up Everest.

MAN #4: One patient is 20 meters from this helipad. The other patient is 200 meters. Now we have three patients heading towards the football field.

GARRETT MADISON (Everest Expedition Leader): We kept calling their names on the radio. No response. And we-- we asked our Sherpas that we were in contact with, where's Dorje, where's Pasang? Where is-- where is Calden? And they said we think they're gone.

GUTHRIE: Just a day before, the Sherpas and other climbers had taken part in this Buddhist ceremony called a puja asking the mountain for permission to climb and safe passage. NBC News crews were there to shoot a Discovery Channel special about this man, daredevil Joby Ogwyn, who was preparing to become the first person ever to leap off Everest in a wing suit. After the tragedy, the jump was cancelled.
out of respect for those lost.

JOBY OGWYN (Adventurer): All the Sherpas are calling down to base camp saying that there's been an accident, a massive avalanche and they're digging their friends out.

WOMAN: We need them taken to the Kathmandu Teaching Hospital.

GUTHRIE: The avalanche claimed 16 lives that day and effectively ended the climbing season this year, a stark reminder of the forbidding nature of the world's tallest peak. And Joby Ogwyn is with us now. Good morning to you.

OGWYN (Adventurer): Thanks.

GUTHRIE: Hard to watch those images? It hasn't even been two weeks.

OGWYN: It is. It was hard watching and it's something I'll never forget. It's probably the worst day of my life.

GUTHRIE: You were at Everest base camp. This group of guides, Sherpas, were hauling equipment up the mountain to camp one, and a spot more distant up the mountain. What did you see and hear? You were in your tent, it was the morning, right?

OGWYN: That's right. It was about 6:45 in the morning. I was awake and I heard the avalanche from my tent. It didn't sound like one of the biggest ones I have ever heard, but I heard it coming from the icefall. So I unzipped and kind of looked and I actually saw the-- the avalanche come down and cover up everybody.

GUTHRIE: And let-- and let's be clear. This is an incredibly treacherous part of Everest, the Khumbu Icefall. Avalanches are common. How did you know this one was different?

OGWYN: Well, at first, I didn't know it was different. It's something, like you said, avalanches happen every day, all the time. And I just knew that it was different because it was coming from the icefall and it sounded big enough to do some damage.

GUTHRIE: You said it looked like a snake going down the mountain.

OGWYN: It did. It was actually a little slower. Some of these things come from so high up, they build up a lot of speed. And when I saw it cover up my guys and people that I knew up there, I thought maybe, maybe they just got kind of the tail end of it, got dusted. But unfortunately, it was worse than I thought.

GUTHRIE: And to be clear, this is not soft snow. This is hard rock ice coming off a glacier.

OGWYN: That's right. It's not like an avalanche in Colorado, for example, where it's that soft snow, kind of flaky snow. This is massive ton blocks of ice that when they hit, you know, they explode like shrapnel. And when it buries somebody, it's like burying them in concrete.

GUTHRIE: And all of you at base camp sprung into action. Tell me about the rescue efforts. What you did and also what your climbing partner did that day?

OGWYN: Well, the first thing we needed to do is try to figure out what had happened and try to get some communication with our Sherpa. And very quickly, you know, the radios lit up and we could hear that there was chaos on the mountain. But after about an hour, we didn't hear anything from our guys. And so my climbing partner Garrett Madison and I decided we would go up into the icefall. We knew that there were some guys that had survived and we wanted to go up and kind of-- you know, we wanted to shake hands and hug every guy. We wanted to bring them food and water and just feel like they felt supported.
when they came down. And Garrett actually was my hero. He went up into the area where the avalanche happened and assisted and I kind of watched from below and tried to spot in case there were any other avalanches coming down.

GUTHRIE: Yeah, not knowing whether there would be another that day. And you were almost there. You had plans to go up with these Sherpas, but at the last minute decided to stay back and do some shooting. You-- you have to be thinking about that.

OGWYN: I do. I was very lucky. We-- I really wanted to go up with my guys. That's how I normally do it, establish the camp and, you know, make everything right for the jump. And one of the producers just said, why don't we shoot a couple things with the equipment, and at the last second, I said yeah, let's-- let's do it. It saved my life and Garrett's life.

GUTHRIE: Joby Ogwyn, what an ordeal you have been through and certainly all the people on Everest. Our best wishes are with them. Thanks for being here.

OGWYN: Thank you.

GUTHRIE: And we want to remind everybody that Everest Avalanche Tragedy is Sunday night nine Eastern and Pacific on the Discovery Channel.