

BYRD'S LITTLE AMERICA

[Review by H. G. R. King* of Paul A. Carter's *Little America; town at the end of the world*. New York, Columbia University Press, 1979, xii, 301 p, illus, US\$ 19.95.]

Little America is the author's personal tribute to the 50th anniversary of the first flight to the South Pole on 29 November 1929, and to the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Antarctic Treaty on 1 December 1959. The 30 years separating these events witnessed the return of the United States to Antarctica for the first time since Lt Charles Wilkes' exploring expedition of 1838–42. During these 30 years, the Antarctic scene was dominated by one man—Admiral Richard Evelyn Byrd, leader of five scientific expeditions based at Little America, a station established on the Ross Ice Shelf, near the Bay of Whales and the site of Amundsen's historic Framheim. Byrd was not only first to fly over the South Pole, but was responsible for the discovery and scientific investigation of Marie Byrd Land, establishing it as a distinctly American sphere of influence, though the US Government never made a formal claim.

Mr Carter's book is a non-academic history of these years with an emphasis on the human side. He has made good use of the unique collection of diaries and papers relating to the Byrd expeditions in the Center for Polar Archives, Washington, DC, a collection which, incidentally, still awaits Admiral Byrd's own archives. Mr Carter has, in particular, benefited from the cooperation of Professor Laurence McKinley Gould, second-in-command and chief scientist on the first Byrd expedition. Using this collection and other original material the author traces the history of five Little Americas which Byrd established on his expeditions. The result is a well-produced and illustrated book which gives us interesting glimpses of personalities who, in later years, were to achieve pre-eminence in the polar world—Larry Gould himself; Paul Siple, the young boy scout who in 1956–57 was to be commander at Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station; Martin Ronne (a former Amundsen man) and his son Finn; Bernt Balchen who, with Byrd, named the first Little America, and who, during the war, helped sustain the resistance movement in Norway; and many others. We are also reminded of Byrd's singular contribution to the modernization of exploration techniques—the use of aircraft for reconnaissance and supply, the deployment of powerful motor transport and the introduction to Antarctica of radio communication. Byrd was probably the first explorer to learn how to handle the media, taking professional journalists into the field and broadcasting regularly from Antarctica to listeners at home. Byrd expeditions were seldom out of the news. He lived long enough to preside over the establishment of the International Geophysical Year bases, and the last of the Little America stations, as leader of Operation Deep Freeze I in 1955–56. From then on the US was to be established permanently in Antarctica 'with a legitimate long-term interest'. From here it was but a short step to the negotiation of the Antarctic Treaty whose regime, to quote Mr Carter's hopefully prophetic words 'could serve as the pilot model for a more comprehensive world social order'.

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AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF FINN RONNE

[Review by Sir Vivian Fuchs* of Captain Finn Ronne's *Antarctica, my destiny*. New York, Hastings House Inc, 1979, ix, 278 p, illus. Hardcover US\$ 12.95.]

Son of Martin Ronne who accompanied Amundsen to both polar regions, Finn Ronne was determined to follow in his father's footsteps. His chance came in 1933–35, when he went with Admiral Richard Byrd to Little America as dog handler. From 1939 to 1941, he served under Richard Black of the US Antarctic Service Expedition at East Base on Stonington Island. In 1947–48 he led his own private expedition from the old East Base, and nine years later was in

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charge of the US Ellsworth Station at the head of the Weddell Sea during the International Geophysical Year.

All these expeditions are treated in some detail, particularly in respect of personalities and their relationships. It is sad that the opportunity has been taken to denigrate both Admiral Byrd and Richard Black. The latter is not mentioned by name, but constant reference to an anonymous surveyor both clearly and intentionally leaves no doubt.

The book is well illustrated with black-and-white pictures and there are five maps. For the general reader it is a lively account of successive polar ventures, rather liberally scattered with 'firsts' and 'greatests'. For the knowledgeable there is little new, and many inaccuracies or mis-statements are calculated to irritate those with a humbler sense of their own experiences.

There is no doubt that Ronne was imbued with a dedicated love of the polar regions. Unhappily it becomes clear that he had difficulty in his personal relations with his men, a trait which leads to self-justification when writing about his work. At the end we read, 'Up to this time probably no other man had sledged as many miles on Antarctic ice as I, nor had anyone spent as many nights there. Indeed, of all the explorers who had visited these frozen shores, undoubtedly none could claim to have seen as much of the unknown as I had beheld'.

Proud words revealing an ambition to join the great hierarchy of the past. He did much, he endured a lot, but this autobiography does not provide the pedestal on which to stand in such company. A pity.

IN BRIEF

SCOTT'S DRAMA

Scarcely a week seems to pass these days without the appearance of Captain Scott in the news. Hard on the heels of Roland Huntford's highly controversial book, *Scott and Amundsen*, comes the first British production of a play about Scott, *Terra Nova*, written by the young American dramatist Ted Tally in 1976. *Terra Nova*, was written as Tally's Master's thesis at Yale University's drama school and was first staged as a student production. It was then performed at Yale Repertory Theatre in 1977, then later, almost simultaneously, in Los Angeles and in Anchorage, Alaska, during 1979; and a Swedish production opened in Stockholm early in 1980. The British director, Peter Dews, has been trying to get hold of the play for some three years and now, having finally succeeded, will be staging 40 performances at the Chichester Festival Theatre between 20 May and 26 July 1980.

The play, which begins, as it ends, with Scott at the point of death, poised over the last entries in his journal, is a dramatic exploration of the state of Scott's mind as he struggled to and from the pole in 1911-12. It is far from a documentary portrayal of Scott's last journey: flashbacks to earlier, happier days bring Kathleen Scott onto the stage in the midst of the Antarctic action, and Amundsen, too, appears, sometimes gently urging his rival onward, sometimes taunting him with the contrast between his noble vision of exploration and the reality. Yet, for all its striking dramatic effects and disordered chronology, the play nevertheless faithfully charts the progress of Scott's journey to the pole and back to the last camp as it is portrayed in Scott's own journal. Also, as the director and his cast are anxious to stress, Tally does not, like Huntford, attempt to pass judgement on Scott; the play is full of questioning and self-examination, but in the end the audience is left to make its own judgement.