

'MERTZ AND I' ... THE ANTARCTIC DIARY OF BELGRAVE EDWARD SUTTON NINNIS. Allan Mornement and Beau Riffenburgh (editors). 2014. Norwich: The Erskine Press. vii + 448 p, illustrated, hardcover. ISBN 978-1-85297-116-8. £35.
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It is to be hoped that there are few readers of this journal to whom the name of Belgrave Edward Sutton Ninnis, or at least his surname, is unknown. 'Ah! Yes.' they would say, 'He was the man who went down the crevasse on Douglas Mawson's great journey.' If challenged further one might expect some remarks to the effect that by having had the terrible misfortune to do this, which he did with several valuable dogs and much of the party's rations, his death necessitated the survival march of Mawson back to base during which the other member of that group, Xavier Mertz, also died leaving Mawson to struggle through on his own. And that, one suspects, would be that. Certainly readers of Riffenburgh's excellent book on the Australasian Antarctic Expedition, the expedition during which the events noted above took place (Riffenburgh 2011), or a recent biography of Mawson (for example Ayres 1999) might well know more but there are, unfortunately, several persons who think that they are *au fait* with the history of Antarctic exploration who would run out of facts at the descent into the abyss.

This is a pity because Ninnis is a very interesting character and one who deserves to be much better known. Certainly his diary covering the period from 17 March 1908 when he was commissioned into the Royal Fusiliers to 9 November 1912, the day before the departure of Mawson's 'far eastern' party upon which he died, reveals the development of his character from that of a somewhat conceited 'schoolboyish' subaltern in a rather fashionable regiment to that of a valuable, mature and popular member of an Antarctic expedition. One might characterise this as being a transition from the ridiculous to the sublime, the reversal of the usual adage. Indeed the development of personality is more clearly revealed in Ninnis' writing than is the case of any other explorer's diary, at least one known to this reviewer.

So this is a very valuable book indeed. The title derives from his association and friendship with Mertz. They were the dog 'experts' on the expedition, although they very much learned 'on the job' so to speak, and frequently worked together resulting in the many references in the diary to 'Mertz and I...'

It covers his period of regimental service in South Africa and Mauritius during which he devoted much effort to being taken on any of the Antarctic expeditions that were being planned at the time and devoted equal effort to criticising the War Office for, as he saw it, being difficult and frustrating his plans. He would not, of course, be the only junior officer who took this view about Whitehall. This reviewer has to admit that he was one himself decades ago.

Ninnis came from a distinguished and reasonably 'well off' family. His father had been a naval medical officer on George Strong Nares' expedition to the Arctic in 1875–1876 and so it seems that remote regions were in his blood so to speak. By the time of Ninnis' youth his father held a very senior position in the naval medical service and they seem to have been excellent friends. Ninnis appears to have decided at an early stage to get south if he could. A possible stimulation in this regard might have been that he went to the same school, Dulwich College,

as did a certain Ernest Shackleton. Ninnis seems to have had a reasonable education at Dulwich and while the syntax in the diary is certainly idiosyncratic and capable of improvement, his style becomes quite lyrical at times as for example when he contemplates having to do the correct thing if he was injured thus preventing his companions reaching safety, hoping 'I should not funk it'. Later, and in a real presentiment, he contemplates going 'over a crevasse and being badly smashed up... the same course would be right' (page 106).

Quite why he joined the army is not evident but it seems that he specifically wanted to have a commission in an Indian regiment. Emoluments were higher in the Indian army at the time as were the prospects for action and hence promotion. But a riding accident prevented this and he was commissioned, without any choice according to the first Editor (page 19), although this reviewer ventures to doubt this, into the 7th Foot, the Royal Fusiliers, a fashionable and senior London infantry regiment. One must take issue with the Editors since they have, no doubt for reasons of economy on the part of the publishers, had to reduce that part of the diary relating to Ninnis' military career in order to print that concerning the Antarctic *in toto*. Sufficient has been retained so that the evolution of Ninnis' personality might be observed but... regular army subalterns never did, and certainly do not now, as a group, have literary persuasions during peace time and there can only ever have been very few who wrote quite so much (the whole diary comprises several substantial volumes) and with so much point and so it is a pity that there have been any omissions at all. Indeed this reviewer suggests that the Editors might reverse the process for a further volume aimed at old soldiers in which the military part is fully retained with the Antarctic part becoming a footnote in effect. It is an interesting speculation concerning which would command the better sales! But one point is indisputable: there should, must, be a full transcription of the whole diary in the library of the Scott Polar Research Institute, other selected polar libraries and a selection of military museums including that of the Royal Fusiliers itself.

Eventually, and to his relief, Ninnis secured a place on Mawson's Australasian Antarctic Expedition. This he did partly through the agency of Shackleton who had many senior contacts and who appears to have appreciated the potential in Ninnis. From then on he devoted himself to acquiring as much knowledge of the polar regions as possible together with as many relevant and practical skills as he could. At this time he was a busy 'man about London' and, unlikely as it seems, he became a 'friend', to what extent is unstated, of none other than Anna Pavlova, the great ballerina, 'useful in the likely event of my ever wanting to be attached to the Russian army' (page 110). On 21 July 1911, Xavier Mertz arrived in London having been appointed to the expedition partly due to his skills as a skier and the two seem to have established good relations more or less immediately. The expedition vessel, *Aurora*, departed from London on 27 July and from this point Ninnis seems to have changed, immediately becoming an important member of the expedition. Quite how much of this was due to Mertz, or John King Davis, the captain of *Aurora* is not apparent but it is possible that their influences might not have been insubstantial. Ninnis simply got on with the job and seems to have been willing, indeed keen, to undertake any task however menial that would push the expedition forward. For example, at the Cape Denison base he frequently had to undertake the duties of cook, which it is hard to believe had ever before occupied his attention, with enthusiasm and improving skill.

The sections of the diary relating to the establishment of the expedition's main base in Antarctica are simply fascinating and the book is very difficult to put down beyond this point. Despite what has been portrayed as Mawson's rather difficult character, the group seems to have got on well even in the claustrophobic hut in the extremely windy conditions during the winter that prevented even going for a short walk for long periods of time. There are almost no allusions to differences between the British and Australian members although Ninnis noted that it had taken a long time for him to engage in 'intimate confidences' with Francis Bickerton, another Englishman, while the Australians 'get on intimate terms and Christian names after about a week. I noticed it particularly' (page 358). Ninnis' main responsibility was, with Mertz, for the dogs and he appears to have mastered the tricky techniques of dog driving reasonably easily. The welfare of these animals was his main priority and he seems to have fulfilled it well. Of course one knows what is going to happen and in reading the diary this builds up suspense to a level certainly above that achieved by any mere novel.

To pass on to the volume itself; there is no doubt that the Editors have done a first class job with regard to the text but it is obvious that they had serious constraints of space and the selection of what to remove from the military part must have been difficult. Perhaps a little tougher screening of some of the slightly more extraneous material might have helped in this context. Also the critical apparatus has obviously been under the same pressure on space and there are places where many points worthy of comment fail to receive it. For example in the note on Cecil Rawling (pages 95, 436) no definition is given of the C.I.E. that he was awarded. It is the initials for a Companion of the Indian Empire. The book includes several very interesting contemporary photographs, photographs of a selection of letters

relating to Ninnis' attempts to secure a place on an Antarctic expedition and an uncaptioned picture of what are, presumably, the diaries themselves. The bulk of these volumes indicates what a formidable proposition the whole endeavour was. There is, unfortunately, no index.

To sum up; this is most valuable addition to the available primary sources for what was one of the major expeditions of the 'heroic' era. It has the effect of elevating Ninnis from a mere 'walk on' role in Mawson's expedition to that of an important part of it. Future Antarctic historians have much to thank the Editors for. Ninnis comes across as an excellent 'chap' and being from the class of society that he was, and with the background that he had, he would probably have desired no higher praise than that. Of course the obvious question begs itself. If he had not died in the crevasse and he, and Mertz, had returned successfully from Mawson's expedition, what would he have done? During the expedition he was contemplating the future and it is difficult to believe that he would not have found himself south again in due time. But, of course, World War I was looming and he was certainly the sort of person who would have stepped forward at the call

This is an excellent book and required reading for all those with interests in the Antarctic. Ninnis was certainly not *just* the man who went down the crevasse. (Ian R. Stone, Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, Lensfield Rd., Cambridge CB2 1ER (irs30@cam.ac.uk))

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INDIGENE VÖLKER IN DER WELTGESELLSCHAFT. DIE KULTURELLE IDENTITÄT DER GRÖNLÄNDISCHEN INUIT IM SPANNUNGSFELD VON NATUR UND KULTUR [INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN THE GLOBAL SOCIETY. THE CULTURAL IDENTITY OF GREENLANDIC INUIT IN THE AREA OF CONFLICT OF NATURE AND CULTURE]. Sowa, Frank. 2014. Bielefeld: transcript. 435 p, illustrated, softcover. ISBN 978-3-8376-2678-0. 39.99€.

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Much has been published about the role of indigenous peoples in the global society, most recently by Marjo Lindroth on indigenous peoples in the United Nations (Lindroth 2015). Frank Sowa's doctoral dissertation, which is written in German, contributes to this discourse with a Greenlandic case study that focuses on the self- and externally perceived relationship between Greenlanders and their natural environment. The result is a highly enlightening approach towards the contradictory perception of Inuit as guardians and destructors of nature. As Sowa rightly points out, 'the presented depictions tell more about the inner-European (and later American) discourses of

the respective time rather than about the people in Greenland' (page 134). This is underlined on numerous occasions in this work and constitutes a crucial element in outside depiction of Greenlandic Inuit.

Sowa builds his work on fieldwork experience in the early 2000s and presents not only ethnographic data on rather contemporary Greenlandic society, but at the same time delves deeply into theoretical aspects of his topic, taking into account political, philosophical and sociological conceptions of 'nature', 'culture' and 'identity'. Moreover, Sowa is very self-critical with regard to the interpretation of his fieldwork data. These aspects taken together, Sowa's work could certainly serve as an important theoretical and practical tool for students of globalisation and cultural studies and especially those aiming at or having conducted ethnographic studies.

Sowa presents the different elements in the nine chapters of his dissertation. For example in *Indigeneity: historic representation of Greenlanders* he provides a highly enlightening historical overview of six different, clearly discernible stages, also existing at the same time, in the perception of Greenlanders since their first encounters with Europeans: 'barbaric savage', 'noble savage', the 'Eskimo as the counter-people' as being the opposite to the western urbanised culture, 'environmental