

University of Lapland, PO Box 122, 96101 Rovaniemi, Finland
(nikolas.sellheim@ulapland.fi).

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The man who found Captain Scott. Antarctic explorer and war hero. Surgeon Captain Edward Leicester Atkinson (1881–1929) DSO AM MRCS LRCP, Royal Navy. Michael C. Tarver. 2015. Brixham: Pen-dragon Maritime Publications. 200 p, hardcover, illustrated. ISBN 978-09552208-1-4. £17.80.
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Dr. Edward Leicester Atkinson was chief medical officer on Captain Scott's British Antarctic Expedition 1910–1913, held command of the base at Cape Evans in the final year of the expedition, and led the search party which found the remains of Scott, Wilson, and Bowers, enabling their records to be brought back to civilisation. Despite having such a prominent role in such a famous expedition, the self-effacing Atkinson has largely remained a character in other people's stories. Michael Tarver has at last sought to redress the balance and bring us a dedicated biography.

Antarctic Explorer and War Hero collates information from a wide range of sources to tell the story of a man whose life spanned the globe and several disciplines. As one would expect, Atkinson's role and actions in the Antarctic are described in some detail, but welcome attention is also paid to his pre-Antarctic life, and even more to his years of relentless service in the First World War, culminating in the heroism which saved five lives on the doomed HMS *Glutton*, nearly at the expense of his own. Readers who think of Atkinson as imperturbably puffing a pipe while dissecting fish at the bottom of the world may be surprised and interested to learn of his high-octane career of getting shot at in Gallipoli and shelled at the Somme, or supporting the White Army after the Russian Revolution. Atkinson won the Albert Medal in Gold and was the youngest man to achieve the rank of Surgeon-Captain in the Royal Navy: as this book amply shows, he deserved every ounce of it.

That the information gathered here can be so extensive is especially admirable in the face of how fragmentary the source material apparently was. Tarver tells us that 'research has presented many difficulties in seeking to establish important details, some of which for unexplained reasons, have been deleted from the national records.' Perhaps to compensate for this, or simply to paint a fuller picture, Tarver provides us with extensive background information for various aspects of Atkinson's life, which puts his experiences in context and allows the reader to appreciate his situation more fully. The book's generous illustrations assist in this; although quite a few of them

do not involve Atkinson personally, they are directly relevant to his experiences, and serve as a useful visual counterpoint to the text.

Unfortunately, this bounty of information is often weakly organised, and the frequent digressions into exposition and analysis, while interesting, further disrupt a thread of narrative causality already frayed by advances and backtracks in the timeline. This is not helped by the prose, which is not artfully written, and is sometimes difficult to parse. Tarver contests some of the criticism directed at Atkinson by Antarctic historians (principally that in Karen May's first article), and has a point, but for how much time is spent on his arguments they are not presented as clearly as he might wish.

Adding to the confusion of the text is an inconsistency of format. Sometimes quotes are in inverted commas, sometimes they're italicised, and sometimes they aren't delineated at all. Titles of publications range from simple italics to bold all-caps. A few random facts get a direct citation, but the rest of the book is left to be covered nebulously by the bibliography. Together with a number of images which are blurry, awkwardly framed, or obviously scanned from print, one is left feeling a want of adequate care. Overall, Tarver would have benefited greatly from an objective editor with a critical eye, who could have suggested reorganisation and rewording (and a certain amount of proofreading) to make the book more readable, and ensured the best presentation of the material.

Antarctic Explorer and War Hero is an impressive assemblage of facts, but they don't really convey a sense of the man they are describing. Atkinson himself seems to take a back seat to the data and analysis, and as a result feels more like a recurring incidental character in his own life than a person one gets to know over the course of the book. It could be argued this is a matter of personal taste, but if Tarver's aim is to raise his subject above reproof, his purpose would be served more fully by communicating what a warm, selfless, and honourable man Atkinson was, rather than simply running through his exploits. Atkinson didn't keep a journal, but others' accounts of him, and his own correspondence, give a picture of that admirable character which is missing here. With the exception of Cherry-Garrard's 1937 eulogy, printed nearly in full at the end, very little space is given to the sort of quotes that would bring the man to life in the reader's mind.

Despite its flaws, *Antarctic Explorer and War Hero* is still an achievement of research, the more so for the digging it entailed.

It is both satisfying and useful to have all this information in one place, and I for one am grateful to Mr Tarver for having done the heavy lifting. Without the benefit of a journal or direct descendants, Atkinson has missed out on the biographical treatment afforded so many other of Scott's men, but it's an undeserved oversight; at last that gap has been filled. I hope this book will serve to inspire readers with the bigger picture

of a remarkable man who has been too long in the shadows. (Sarah Airriess, (twirlynoodle@gmail.com))

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