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"Two Years Below the Horn: Operation Tabarin, Field Science, and Antarctic Sovereignty, 1944–1946 (Book Review)" by Andrew Taylor, edited by Daniel Heidt and P. Whitney Lackenbauer

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Andrew Taylor. *Two Years Below the Horn: Operation Tabarin, Field Science, and Antarctic Sovereignty, 1944–1946*. Eds. Daniel Heidt and P. Whitney Lackenbauer. Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba Press, 2017. Pp. 496.

Two Years Below the Horn is the first release of an unpublished memoir written by military engineer Andrew Taylor, a major who served in the Canadian Army during the Second World War. Taylor documented his wartime experience as commander of Operation Tabarin, a secret scientific expedition meant to assert British sovereignty in Antarctica. Tabarin took place during the final two years of the war. Taylor assumed command of the field team when anxiety and fatigue forced the operation's first commander, Britain's James W.S. Marr, to resign. As commander of the operation, Taylor became the first Canadian to lead an expedition in Antarctica. He relied on his pre-war surveying experience to command the expedition, overseeing the construction of the first permanent base on the continent at Hope Bay and leading two dog-sledging journeys around James Ross Island. Taylor documented his experience in full, but was unable to publish his memoir prior to his death in 1993. On the advice of John Gilbert, a former Joint Arctic Weather Station radio operator, Daniel Heidt and P. Whitney Lackenbauer recovered Taylor's memoir from the late engineer's papers in the University of Manitoba Archives and Special Collections. Fortunately, we now have the published account that Taylor had intended.

Do not pick up this book expecting to read about military conflict in or near Antarctica. Operation Tabarin served to fortify and promote British sovereignty over the region, not through brute force but through scientific advancement. In November 1940, Chile laid claim to a sector of territory that overlapped with Britain's Falkland Island Dependencies. Shortly thereafter, the leaders of the Argentine and Chilean Antarctic Commission met to discuss territorial sovereignty over Antarctica. The meeting ended without a formal boundary agreement for portions of the southernmost continent, but the representatives of both countries agreed that the Antarctic Peninsula belonged to South America. Concurrently, German surface ships and U-boats operating in the region threatened commercial shipping routes that supplied Argentinian beef to wartime Britain. Concerned about control over the Falkland Islands and the sea lanes of the South Atlantic Ocean, British officials took steps to safeguard their

territorial interests in the Antarctic Peninsula. By 1943, the British War Cabinet had committed to a top-secret military expedition designed to establish bases of “effective occupation” in Antarctica (p. xxxvi). Planning for the expedition so frequently occurred through the night that the operation received the designation Tabarin, named after the Bal Tabarin nightclub in Paris.

Whereas Britain had relied on exploration and cartography to claim Antarctic territory prior to the Second World War, modern science became a tool for exercising sovereignty in the southern polar region. The British government saw its contribution to international environmental knowledge as justification for increasing its influence in Antarctica. At the same time, wartime advancements in transportation and communication gave military engineers such as Taylor the confidence to “believe that they could overcome harsh polar environments and undertake systematic studies” (p. 406). Indeed, the field team of Operation Tabarin endured arduous Antarctic conditions during the two-year expedition. They lived through bitter cold and fierce winds, hostile terrain and vast emptiness. Dire circumstances on one of the two sledging journeys forced the men to kill one dog and feed it to the other animals for survival. Yet a saga of deadly risk is not how Taylor described his experience. For him, the operation was a measure of scientific ingenuity and careful work. Ironically, this mindset worked against Taylor when he attempted to publish his memoir.

Taylor’s determination to write truthfully about his scientific experience in Antarctica clashed with contemporary publishers who preferred traditional polar sagas. A descriptive account of wartime field science on the southernmost continent was no match for a heroic tale of polar exploration, or so publishing houses told Taylor. “Although there was an abiding public interest in tales of polar adventures,” Heidt and Lackenbauer conclude in an insightful afterword, “[Taylor’s] manuscript focussed on professionalism, surveying, and scientific observations” (p. 406). Canada’s fascination in the north polar region also worked against Taylor, whose Antarctic exploits paled in popular imagination to accounts of Arctic exploration and heroism. Facing rejection at each turn, a dejected Taylor set his memoir aside. Other accounts of Operation Tabarin appeared over time, but published histories did not have

the advantage of Taylor's perspective.¹ As Heidt and Lackenbauer state in the introduction, "[t]he Canadian narrative, published here for the first time, offers an important corrective" (p. xvi).

Taylor's wartime service adds another layer to our understanding of the role of science in the Second World War. His descriptive account of Operation Tabarin reveals the importance of polar exploration to British efforts internationally, and his story sheds light on the Canadian contribution in Antarctica. Under Taylor's command, the Tabarin field team corrected surveying mistakes made by previous explorers and established a permanent presence in a region of strategic importance. Taylor's memoir covers this history in full, detailing firsthand precisely how field science functioned diplomatically and on the ground. *Two Years Below the Horn* is also a visually appealing book to read. Distributed equally throughout, illustrations chosen by the editors breathe life into an already-compelling narrative. Survey photographs show the seemingly daunting yet rewarding work of the expedition set against the backdrop of Antarctica's snowy expanse and mountainous landscape. Twenty individual maps also add to the book's appeal, helping orient the reader to the Antarctic terrain encountered by Taylor and the men under his command. Collectively, these visual materials provide a rare glimpse into an unfamiliar theatre of the Second World War.

Despite an impressive breadth and quality of historical analysis, historians may take issue with some of the editorial liberties exercised by Heidt and Lackenbauer. To be clear, this book is not a mere publication of Taylor's memoir. The editors chose to edit rather than simply transcribe the original work. "To become a book," Heidt and Lackenbauer wrote, explaining their decision, "the narrative would require a deep edit: some narrative would have to be reduced, other sections expanded, and material re-arranged to reduce repetition and enhance coherence" (p. xiii). In addition to editing the original

¹ According to Heidt and Lackenbauer, Taylor either withheld his records from the following authors or allowed them only limited access to his papers: David James, *That Frozen Land: The Story of a Year in the Antarctic* (Toronto: Falcon Press, 1949); Sir Vivian Fuchs, *Of Ice and Men: The Story of the British Antarctic Survey, 1943-73* (Oswestry, UK: Anthony Nelson, 1982); and Dean Beeby, *In a Crystal Land: Canadian Explorers in Antarctica* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994). In addition to *Two Years Below the Horn*, only one other recent history of Tabarin draws from Taylor's papers: Stephen Haddelsey and Alan Carroll, *Operation Tabarin: Britain's Secret Wartime Expedition to Antarctica 1944-46* (Stroud, UK: History Press, 2014).

text, Heidt and Lackenbauer also took editorial liberties with the illustrations chosen to accompany the memoir. Taylor had picked photographs that, in the editors' words, "were not well selected in either quality, topic, or placement" (p. xiv). Heidt and Lackenbauer replaced the images Taylor chose with a selection of photographs digitised from Taylor's archival collection at the University of Manitoba. The editors also used archival sources to draw the twenty maps, imposing dog-sledging routes and place names onto pre-existing documents.

Heidt and Lackenbauer secured the approval and support of the Taylor family for the editorial changes deemed necessary, but the editors provide little indication throughout the book of changes to the original text. Aside from a two-page "Editors' Note" (pp. xiii-xiv), only a small selection of internal footnotes allow the reader to see editorial changes. While full transparency is an unrealistic ask, the result is a quasi-primary source polished to the editors' liking. "In the end," wrote Heidt and Lackenbauer, "we believe that the book that you have before you is a version of *Two Years Below the Horn* that, while heavily edited, is an accurate reflection of Taylor's voice and message" (p. xiii). If the alternative meant not having Taylor's memoir published, readers can be thankful for the efforts of Heidt and Lackenbauer. The editors clearly devoted substantial time, effort, and resources to bring the manuscript into the light.

Minor quibbles aside, *Two Years Below the Horn* makes an important contribution to the history of sovereignty and polar science. Not only do Heidt and Lackenbauer bring awareness to Taylor's story, they also contextualise his accomplishments in a manner that explains much about Canada's understudied role in the development of modern polar exploration. While warfare historians might be tempted to pass up this book in favour of a traditional combat narrative, the history of Operation Tabarin will intrigue readers with an appetite for the wider picture of Canada and the Second World War. Major Andrew Taylor received accolades and awards for his contributions to polar science later in life, including an appointment to the Order of Canada. His now-published memoir further cements his legacy as a Canadian worthy of both remembrance and study.

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