

Why didn't they ask Evans?: a response to Karen May

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In 'Why didn't they ask Evans?' (Turney, 2017), I draw together previously unpublished sources and new analyses of published material to cast further light on the circumstances that led to the fatal events surrounding the return of Captain Robert Falcon Scott's Polar Party on the British Antarctic Expedition (BAE, 1911–1913). Of particular importance are the notes on the meeting between the Royal Geographical Society's President Lord Curzon and the widows Kathleen Scott and Oriana Wilson in April 1913, which explicitly identify Lieutenant Edward 'Teddy' Evans as having removed food that exceeded his allocation as a member of the Last Supporting Party (Curzon, 1913), the establishment and almost immediate closure of a 'Committee of Enquiry' chaired by Lord Curzon (Beaumont, 1913a, b, c; Cherry-Garrard, 1913a; Darwin, 1913; Goldie, 1913), the recognition of missing food at key depots by the returning Polar Party on the 7, 24 and 27 February 1912 (Scott, 1913a; Wilson, 1912), Evans' anger at not being selected as a member of the Polar Party and his early departure home (Evans, 1912), the revised timeline of when Evans fell down with scurvy on the Ross Ice Shelf to apparently align with when and where the food was removed (*The Advertiser*, 3 April 1912, Adelaide: 10) (Cherry-Garrard, 1922; Ellis, 1969; Evans, 1912, 1913a, 1943; Lashly, 1912; Scott, 1913a, 1913b), Evans' failure to ensure Scott's orders regarding the return of the dog sledging teams had been acted on (Cherry-Garrard, 1922; Gran, 1961; Hattersley-Smith & McGhie, 1984) and the misunderstanding amongst senior Royal Geographical Society members during Evans' recuperation in the UK that Apsley Cherry-Garrard 'was to meet the South Pole party, with two teams of dogs, at the foot of the [Beardmore] glacier' (Markham, 1913). I would like to thank May (2018) for her comment and acknowledge that Edward Wilson's sketchbooks of the expedition's logistics, scientific priorities, sketches and notes on the BAE comprise entries from 1911–1912 and not solely from 1912, which Turney (2017) used to denote the year of the last entry.

May's (2018) comment raises concern that an inferred (incorrect) date of 1912 for Scott's orders copied in Wilson's sketchbooks might be used to misinterpret Evans' actions. The reproduction of Scott's 1911 orders in Wilson's sketchbook confirms that Scott had originally intended for the dog teams to return as far polewards as 82°30'S to 'help the most advanced Southern party to catch the ship'; a variation of which was published by Evans in *South with Scott* (Evans, 1921). As Turney (2017) clearly states, the orders were the 'original' intention, and

the error not to cite 1911/1912 in no way undermines the conclusions of the paper.

During their outward journey crossing the Ross Ice Shelf (November and mid-December, 1911), the anomalously warm conditions (Fogt, Jones, Solomon, Jones, & Goergens, 2017) and failure of the motorised sledges (a situation exacerbated by Evans' insistence that inventor and engineer Commander Skelton could not join the expedition south; Skelton, 1910, 1911) led to delays (Scott, 1913a). The knock-on effect was that the dog teams were taken down to 83°35'S – far beyond their original expected point of return – resulting in the latter's late arrival back at base by several weeks. Given the substantial delays while crossing the Ross Ice Shelf and the extended use of the dog teams, it is not at all surprising that Scott would have considered modifying his orders *en route*. Indeed, it would have been surprising if this had not been the case.

Evidence that Scott reconsidered his use of the dog teams is based on a number of sources. Trygve Gran's book *Kampen om Sydpolen* was not provided to Turney by Roland Huntford as May's (2018) comment states – although why the source of the book should be a consideration is unclear. Instead Roland Huntford confirmed to Turney that this information was relayed to him by Gran during two interviews. Gran was a close friend of Evans while on the ice – testified by the second-in-command's appeal to the Norwegian to accompany him on his return to New Zealand in March 1912 (Hattersley-Smith & McGhie, 1984). But by the time of Evans' death in 1957, the two were no longer as close, so it seems perfectly reasonable that Gran may have been less circumspect in later years. The contents of *Kampen om Sydpolen* confirm this element of the interviews. Gran described in this same book that after crossing the Ross Ice Shelf, Scott had informed dog driver Cecil Meares that the dogs were not to be risked ascending the Beardmore Glacier, and instead the '[d]ogs should meet me. Time and place for this I shall notify through the returning Support Party' (Gran, 1961). Importantly, other sources do indeed suggest Scott waived on what was to be done with the dogs. On reaching the Plateau, Scott indicated to the leader of the next returning party, medic Edward Atkinson, that the dog team should only 'come as far as you can' (Cherry-Garrard, 1922). Amongst the members of the BAE it appears to have been known that 'We were not to risk the dogs', a remark made by Cherry-Garrard close to the time of events (Cherry-Garrard, 1913b). With their approach on the South Pole and no doubt concerned over Roald Amundsen and the Norwegian team's progress,

Scott settled on a decision: the dogs should indeed meet the Polar Party and could be required to go as far as the southern end of the Ross Ice Shelf (Evans, 1913b; Gran, 1961). But as second-in-command, Evans did not confirm this order was acted on when he reached Cape Evans. Suffering scurvy or not, he was articulate enough during numerous conversations to seek Gran's return with him to New Zealand – as detailed in Gran's original diary (Hattersley-Smith & McGhie, 1984). Evans may have failed to relay the final orders or, as second-in-command, he failed to make sure the orders were understood and acted on.

May's (2018) comment suggests that the distortion in the timeline over when Evans fell down with scurvy on the Ross Ice Shelf was an attempt by the second-in-command to hide his condition from his companions. This is manifestly wrong. Firstly, during expeditions where colleagues are working, eating and sleeping in close proximity for weeks to months on end, it is nigh on impossible to keep much in confidence, certainly not something that impacted the physical condition of one of a three-person team man-hauling from the Polar Plateau; a weakening of an individual in such a small team would have been immediately apparent. Arguably more importantly, the dates regarding the deterioration of Evans were not recorded by the second-in-command himself (Evans' diary sadly no longer exists) but were instead noted by Seaman William 'Bill' Lashly, reproduced in full in the publication *Under Scott's Command* (Ellis, 1969) and a heavily modified (and extended) version provided to Cherry-Garrard in *The Worst Journey in the World* (Cherry-Garrard, 1922). Neither of these versions of the return journey were (supposedly) penned by Evans and yet key events in the latter are approximately one week earlier, aligning with what had become the public narrative. And yet in a letter to a former shipmate, Evans describes how he fell down with scurvy 300 miles from base, placing him near the Mount Hooper Depot, approximately half way across the Ross Ice Shelf (Evans, 1912), supporting the original entries made by Lashly (Ellis, 1969). The point is made all the more clear when one recognises that on his return to civilisation, Evans' own public narrative shifted from 'in latitude 80.043, Lieutenant Evans was found to be suffering from scurvy' (*The Advertiser*, 3 April 1912, Adelaide: 10) to 'I developed scurvy about January 17, when we had 500 miles to go', the latter stated in the lecture on the accomplishments of the BAE (Evans, 1913a). Over the years, even Evans himself appears to have forgotten where he fell down with scurvy. In the book *British Polar Explorers*, he remarked 'It is true I developed scurvy when well Northward on the Barrier...' (Evans, 1943), and not the bottom of the Beardmore Glacier as stated in Scott (1913a) and the reproduced Lashly narrative in Cherry-Garrard (1922). The revised timeline places Evans' falling sick considerably further south than appears to have been the case, close to where the food went missing and perhaps providing some justification for their removal given the second-in-command's subsequent poor health.

May's (2018) comment on Turney (2017) accepts that Evans did indeed take more than his share of food on the return to base (Curzon, 1913) but appears to condone his actions. It should never be forgotten that removing supplies not allocated to you and on which others are reliant is an inherently dangerous course of action during expeditionary work. Putting aside the effect on team morale, the idea that an individual – least of all the second-in-command – may decide to act in a manner that best suits them in such a hazardous environment, disregarding the safety of the rest of the team, is fraught with risk. Such actions can all too easily result in fatal consequences.

Whilst it seems unlikely Evans intended for serious harm to befall Scott and his Polar Party men, his actions made their return less likely. Evans' actions and obfuscation during subsequent years sadly only demonstrates that his actions were far from transparent. In such a remote and extreme environment, the decisions of an individual over the good of the team can lead to tragedy, however inadvertent; something that sadly appears to have been the case on the BAE. In addition to the loss of life, Captain Robert Falcon Scott's reputation and those of other team members, including Apsley Cherry-Gerrard, unfairly suffered over the intervening century. I hope this study will encourage further investigation of the original texts, particularly those remaining in private ownership.

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