

Two pages of Xavier Mertz's missing Antarctic diary: a contextualization and reconstruction

Anna Lucas and Elizabeth Leane

School of English, Journalism and European Languages, Private Bag 82, University of Tasmania, Hobart, Tasmania, 7001, Australia (anna.lucas@utas.edu.au)

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ABSTRACT. Douglas Mawson's Australasian Antarctic Expedition (1911–1914) has been portrayed in various narratives, usually with a focus on the Far-Eastern Sledging Journey from which Mawson made the epic trek back to the main base at Cape Denison alone, after the deaths of his companions, Xavier Mertz and Belgrave Ninnis. His is the sole eyewitness account of that sledging journey in 1912–1913, except for two handwritten pages of Mertz's diary, reproduced in Mawson's *The home of the blizzard*; two typed, imperfect copies of the diary, transcribed before it disappeared; and another transcript of the two pages published in the German edition of Mawson's book. This article traces the early journey of that missing diary and, drawing also on the available transcripts, re-interprets the content of those two pages. The content is compared with corresponding passages in associated documents and the subjectivity and limitations of these documents, when consulted for research purposes, are discussed.

Introduction

Until recently, the only published diaries of members of the Australasian Antarctic Expedition (AAE) (1911–1914) were those of its leader, Douglas Mawson (Jacka and Jacka 1988 and 2008), and of John King Davis, captain of the expedition's vessel *S.Y. Aurora* (Crossley 1997). The centenary of the AAE's departure has seen the publication of several other diaries (edited and sometimes abridged) including those of Frank Hurley (Dixon and Lee 2011), John Hunter (Hunter 2011), Charles Harrisson (Rossiter 2011), Stanley Taylor (Gale 2011) and Frank Stillwell (Hince 2012). Still more are in preparation: the diaries of Cecil Madigan, Archibald McLean and Belgrave Ninnis could be published over the next few years. Amongst this welcome flurry of interest, one key diary that is missing is that of Xavier Mertz.

A lawyer, Swiss ski champion and mountaineer, Mertz was, with Ninnis, a dog handler for the expedition. He was one of Mawson's companions on the exploratory Far-Eastern Sledging Journey, from which only Mawson returned. Mertz was the AAE's sole member from continental Europe and the only member whose first language was not English, and his diary has particular value as a record of his unique perspective. (Ninnis, Bickerton, and Wild were from England; others were residents of Australia or New Zealand.) In addition, his diary provides an eyewitness account of one of the best known 'heroic era' tragedies: Ninnis's plunge to his death in a deep crevasse on 14 December 1912. A snow bridge over the crevasse held as Mertz, calling a warning to Mawson, skied across it. Mawson rode across on his sledge, calling back in turn to Ninnis. As Ninnis, walking beside his heavily laden sledge drawn by the six strongest dogs, attempted to cross, his tread broke through the cover of soft snow. He fell to the unknown depths of that crevasse, taking with him the dogs and the sledge loaded with essential supplies, food, equipment, tent and clothing.

The men were about 300 miles (480 km) from their base, the Winter Quarters at Cape Denison, and the accident left them with pathetically inadequate rations. The irretrievable loss of his windproof clothing was to be particularly significant for Mertz: the ensuing exposure to cold, wet and windy conditions undoubtedly contributed to his death 25 days later (Jacka and Jacka 2008: 158), though it is now generally accepted that a significant causal factor was the ingestion of toxic levels of vitamin A after eating the livers of the group's slaughtered sledge dogs (Cleland and Southcott 1969).

Mawson took his dead companion's diary and carried it with him on the long, arduous, solo trek back to the AAE's hut at Commonwealth Bay. Eventually, in 1914, Mertz's sledging diary and his larger diary, kept on the voyage from London to the Antarctic and at the expedition's hut during 1912, were returned to his family in Switzerland. That sledging diary provided the only account, apart from Mawson's, of the outward leg of the Far-Eastern Sledging Journey, of the death of Ninnis and of the beginning of the return journey. There are now no surviving members of the immediate family (Mangold 1975), and the original diaries, handwritten in German, have disappeared. The only extant fragmentary evidence of Mertz's handwritten sledging diary is the photograph of two of its pages published in *The home of the blizzard*, an official account of the AAE written for a general readership (Mawson 1915). These two pages are an extract from the sledging diary entry for 14 December: an important component in the AAE narrative. Mertz records the tragedy in poignant detail; his entry describes the desperation and helplessness he felt after the sudden, devastating loss of his friend and some of his favourite dogs.

While the original diary is missing, various versions, in German and in English, are held in the Australian Polar Collection at the South Australian Museum. This

Table 1. List of the documents compared (*sigla*).

O1	Dr Xavier Mertz's original Antarctic diaries handwritten in German. Diary 1 was kept from 28 July 1911 to 9 November 1912. Diary 2, the sledging diary, was kept from 10 November 1912 to 1 January 1913. The whereabouts of these diaries is unknown.
O2	A photograph of two pages of Diary 2, the original handwritten notes of the Far-Eastern Sledging Journey (extract from 14 December 1912) published in Douglas Mawson's <i>The home of the blizzard</i> (London: Heinemann, 1915). Image supplied by the Mawson Centre, Polar Collection, South Australian Museum. Note: the photographed pages are printed in reverse reading order.
TR1	Transcript 1, typewritten in German with handwritten corrections and insertions, is believed to be a copy of O1 with diary entries from 28 July 1911 to 1 January 1913. The typeface, with umlauts on vowels, indicates the use of a German typewriter and suggests that this transcript was made from O1 between 1914 and 1969 in Switzerland. The transcriber does not appear to have referred to <i>Leben und Tod am Südpol</i> (1921). Further discussion is in the body of this article. Provenance unknown. Deposited in 1996 in Staatsarchiv Basel by Josef Rennhard, a former editor of <i>Der Schweizerische Beobachter</i> , Zürich. A copy is held in Adelaide at the Mawson Centre, Australia Polar Collection, South Australian Museum, deposited there in 1983 by Dr R.V. Southcott.
TR2	Transcript 2, typewritten in German with handwritten corrections and insertions, is believed to be a copy of O1 with diary entries from 10 November 1912 to 1 January 1913. The typeface indicates the use of an English language typewriter; all umlauts are added by hand. TR2 was possibly made prior to O1 being returned to the Mertz family in 1914. This transcriber also does not appear to have referred to <i>Leben und Tod am Südpol</i> (1921). Provenance unknown, but is discussed in the body of the article. Transcript held in Adelaide at the Mawson Centre, Australia Polar Collection, South Australian Museum, 70AAE.
TR3	Transcript 3, typewritten in German (2012). TR3 was transcribed by the authors from O2, the photographed two pages of the diary entry for 14 December 1912, and is included in this article.
TR4	Transcript 4, a printed version of the two handwritten pages, O2, was published in <i>Leben und Tod am Südpol</i> (Mawson 1921), the German edition of <i>The home of the blizzard</i> , facing page 201.
PB1	Publication 1, of heavily edited diary entries published as a serial in a Swiss magazine, <i>Der Schweizerische Beobachter</i> (Josef Rennhard (editor)) in 1969–1970, was sourced from TR1.
TL1	Translation 1 of the diaries from 28 July 1911 to 1 January 1913. © Robyn Mundy, 2004. TL1 is typewritten in English and was translated from TR1 by Gabrielle Eisner (Switzerland) for use by Robyn Mundy in her creative writing doctorate and in her novel <i>The nature of ice</i> (2009). TL1 differs from TL2 in the translation of the sledging diary. A copy of TL1 is held in Adelaide at the Mawson Centre, Australia Polar Collection, South Australian Museum.
TL2	Translation 2 of the sledging diary, 10 November 1912 to 1 January 1913. TL2 is typewritten in English and translated from TR1 by Marian Hill (1997). This document was a supplementary reference used in the preparation of the biography <i>Mawson, a life</i> (Ayres 1999). A copy of TL2 is held in Adelaide at the Mawson Centre, Australia Polar Collection, South Australian Museum.
TL3	Translation 3 is of the complete diary entry for 14 December 1912. It is the authors' interpretation of Mertz's account of that day, translated into English in collaboration with German scholars. It is sourced from TR3 for the sentences that correspond to O2 and draws on both TR1 and TR2 to construct a version of the sentences in the day's diary entry written before and after the sentences found in O2.

article provides a new transcription and translation of the two handwritten pages photographed for Mawson, reconstructing this significant day in Antarctic history, and juxtaposing Mertz's account with Mawson's version. Drawing on established methods of textual editing, the two pages are compared to the existing transcriptions and translations, and some limitations of these documents as sources for researchers are pointed out, as well as the difficulties involved in reconstructing the diary in the absence of the holograph manuscript. A summary of the fragmented history of the diaries before they disappeared from known records is also provided.

Versions of Mertz's diaries

Prior to the disappearance of Mertz's handwritten diaries, two undated German transcripts had been made by anonymous typists (Table 1). One transcript (TR1) incorporates both diaries (July 1911–January 1913); the other (TR2) deals with the sledging diary only (Novem-

ber 1912–January 1913). Both therefore include the text examined in this article: the two photographed handwritten pages (O2), which represent an excerpt from Mertz's sledging diary entry of 14 December 1912. While the content is similar, the two typed transcripts, believed to be taken from the same source – the original holograph manuscript (O1) – differ slightly from the photographic copy (O2) and from each other. The authors re-examined O2 and made a third transcript (TR3) from the photograph of the two pages (Fig. 1). A transcript of the two pages printed in *Leben und Tod am Südpol* (TR4), the 1921 German edition of *The home of the blizzard*, provided another reference. Some words in TR4, a slightly edited version of O2, differ from TR1, TR2 and TR3.

There are also two dated translations of TR1: a near-complete translation, TL1, by Gabrielle Eisner (2004), produced primarily as a reference for the novelist Robyn Mundy in her creative writing doctoral research, and a translation of the sledging diary component only, TL2, by Marian Hill (1997), which was available as a

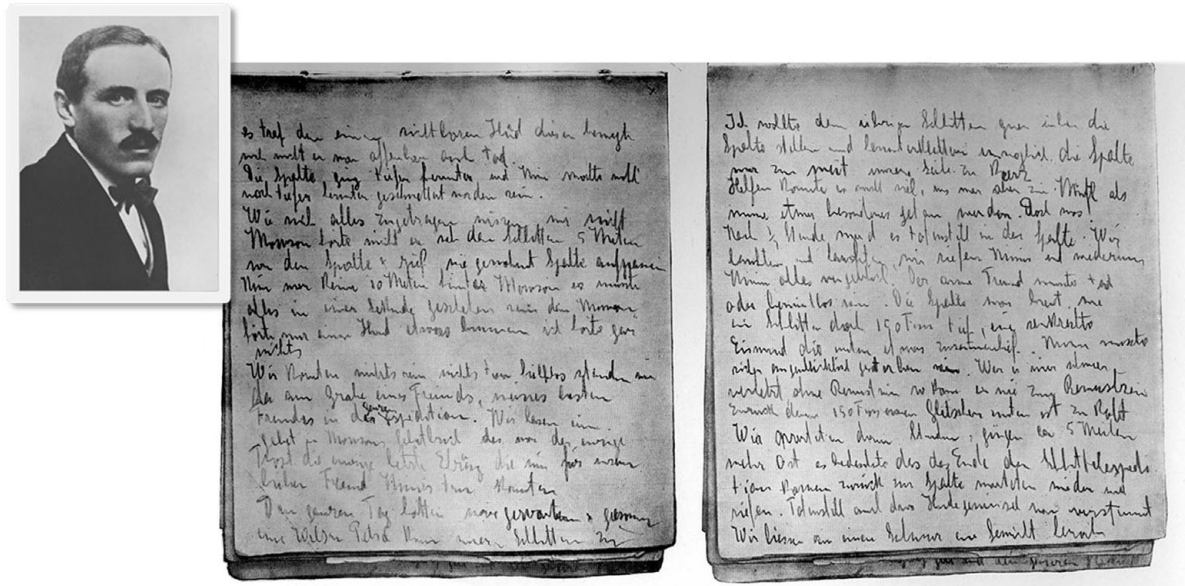


Fig. 1. Document O2. The two pages from the 14 December entry in Xavier Mertz's sledging diary, photographed for inclusion in *The home of the blizzard* (1915 edition: facing page 260). Note that page A is on the right, page B on the left. However, in the German edition, *Leben und Tod am Südpol* (Mawson 1921), page A is on the left. Inset: Dr Xavier Mertz (1882–1913). Permission to reproduce images given by the Mawson Centre, Australia Polar Collection, South Australian Museum, Adelaide.

supplementary reference for Philip Ayres's 1999 biography, *Mawson: a life* (Table 1). There is evidence of previous partial translations (Southcott 1983), but both translations referred to in this paper were made for specific purposes and were generously deposited in the archives of the Mawson Centre, Australian Polar Collection, South Australian Museum, for use by other researchers. As the only English-language sources for those interested in Mertz's personal account of the AAE, these translations are important references, but it is important to establish their limitations.

Apart from these transcripts and translations, the only eyewitness accounts of the events of 14 December are provided by Mawson, most prominently in his diary and in *The home of the blizzard* (where he provides some additional details). Ninnis's sledging diary, which would add to any account of the preceding days, has disappeared. In a letter to Ninnis's father, Mawson wrote:

In the meantime all Lieutenant Ninnis's effects have been well packed and are being forwarded to you. The only articles that I was able to save on the Sledging Journey as remembrance of your son are his Sledging Diary and a small Sledging Flag, I believe, The St. Johns Ambulance flag, these things I knew you would be anxious to keep. (Mawson 1914a)

To Mertz's father Mawson wrote:

it is very important that statements from the diaries of Lieut. Ninnis and Dr. Mertz, as well as from my own diary, should be made public in order to make more clear the nature and particulars of the catastrophe. (Mawson 1914c)

Mawson's words suggest that 'his Sledging Diary' refers to the diary Ninnis kept on the Far-Eastern Sledging Journey.¹ Some support for this interpretation is given by Mawson's description of contents of the 'instrument box' the men carried with them. These included 'navigating instruments, hypsometer, thermometers, photographic gear, medical outfit, notebooks, etc' (Mawson 1942: 139). After the death of Ninnis, Mawson clearly had access to these instruments, as he mentions abandoning some. It is possible that the 'notebooks' in the surviving instrument box included Ninnis's sledging diary. In the above extract, Mawson stresses that he was anxious to include Ninnis's account of events leading up to 'the catastrophe'. The salvage of diaries is also referred to in a brief wireless communication to Prime Minister Andrew Fisher of Australia from Mawson, after he returned to the Winter Quarters, where 'diaries saved' is included in the message (Mawson 1913).

Whether or not Ninnis's sledging diary survived the Far-Eastern Sledging Journey, it is no longer available; there is no known record of its return, apart from the intent expressed in Mawson's correspondence. If the transaction took place between Mawson and the Ninnis family in London, there would not necessarily be any document acknowledging its return and it may, like the diary of Mertz, have been subsequently lost. According to Hannah Mornement, a family member, Ninnis's last extant diary entry was made on 9 November 1912, just before leaving the main base hut on the fatal journey (Mornement 2004). His sledging diary would have ended on the evening of 13 December or possibly at the lunchtime stop on 14 December. The disappearance of both Mertz's and Ninnis's sledging diaries leaves only

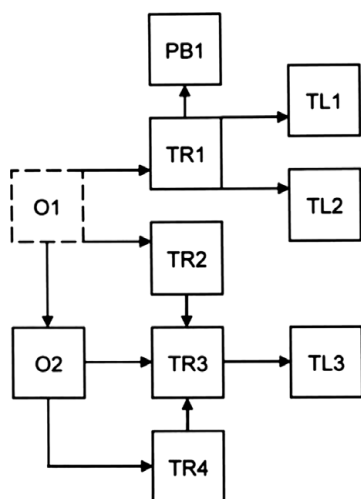


Fig. 2. Flowchart (*stemma*) illustrating the derivation of transcripts and translations from original documents. O1, O2, TR1, TR2, TR3, TR4 and PB1 are in German; TL1, TL2 and TL3 are in English. TR3 referred to TR4 for its interpretation of a hard-to-decipher word in O2, and to TR2 for the final sentence that is incomplete in O2.

Mawson's diary as an original record of the Far-Eastern Sledging Journey, except for the two photographed pages discussed here.

Methodology

In keeping with conventions of textual criticism, a list (*sigla*) of coded documents ('witnesses') explains the references within this paper (Table 1) and a flowchart (*stemma*) shows the source and lineage of coded documents being compared (Fig. 2). Sentences within documents are numbered to facilitate comparison between documents. Comparative details include omissions, insertions, substitutions, phonetic spelling, transcription errors and translation errors.

As is indicated in the flowchart, the authors believe that the German transcripts (TR1 and TR2) were made from Mertz's original, handwritten diary (O1). From TR1, excerpts from both his sledging diary and his larger expedition diary were published as a serial in a Swiss magazine, *Der Schweizerische Beobachter* (PB1). These passages, illustrated with some of Mertz's photography and giving a succinct account of his experiences, are heavily edited to meet spatial constraints and therefore cannot be used for direct comparison with the more expansive, and sometimes repetitive, personal notes within his diaries. It is clear that the two available English translations (TL1 and TL2) were produced from TR1: they both note the same missing words, and they both omit a sentence recorded in TR2 but not in TR1. The second transcript has not produced any further documents of

which we are aware, but is at times a helpful comparative source. Its divergence from TR1 points to the difficulty of using either transcription as an entirely reliable version of the missing sledging diary.

In the following, we note where our own transcript TR3 (from O2) differs significantly from transcripts TR1 and TR2. We also provide our own English translation, TL3 (from TR3), made in collaboration with German scholars. This is likewise different in places from the previous translations, TL1 and TL2 (which, based on TR1, are one step removed from O1 and O2). For contextual purposes, TL3 includes a version of the sentences in Mertz's diary entry for 14 December before and after the two photographed pages. This is based on TR1, supplemented where necessary by TR2. Square brackets denote our own comments within the text.

Transcript of the two photographed diary pages

The following is a transcript (TR3) of about 20 numbered sentences (depending on punctuation) of the German text which appears in the two photographed pages of Mertz's sledging diary (O2). TR3 follows as closely as possible the words and punctuation of O2. The full stop at the end of some sentences in O2 is indistinct, but has been inserted if implied by the use of a capital letter to start the next sentence. The transcription process involved consultation with academics and others whose first language was German to verify our interpretation of uncertain or indecipherable script.

Page A

01. *Ich wollte den übrigen Schlitten quer über die Spalte stellen und herunterklettern unmöglich die Spalte war zu weit unsere Seile zu kurz.*
02. *Helfen konnte es nicht viel, uns war aber zu Mute als müsse etwas besonderes getan werden.*
03. *Doch was!*
04. *Nach ½ Stunde ward es totenstill in der Spalte.*
05. *Wir lauschten und lauschten, wir riefen Ninnis und wiederum Ninnis, alles vergeblich.*
06. *Der arme Freund musste tot oder bewusstlos sein.*
07. *Die Spalte war breit wie ein Schlitten doch 150 Fuss tief, eine senkrechte Eiswand die unten etwas zusammenlief.*
08. *Ninnis musste sicher augenblicklich gestorben sein.*
09. *War er nur schwer verletzt, ohne Bewusstsein so kam er nie zum Bewusstsein zurück denn 150 Fuss in einem Gletscher unten ist zu kalt.*
10. *Wir warteten dann Stunden; gingen ca. 5 Meilen mehr Ost es bedeutete das das Ende der Schlittexpedition.*
11. *Kamen zurück zur Spalte warteten wieder und riefen.*
12. *Totenstill auch das Hundegewinsel war verstummt.*
13. *Wir liessen an einer Schnur ein Gewicht herunter*

Page B

- es traf den einen sichtbaren Hund dieser bewegte sich nicht er war offenbar auch tot.*
14. *Die Spalte ging tiefer herunter und Ninn mochte wohl noch tiefer herunter geschmettert worden sein.*

15. *Wie sich alles zugetragen wissen wir nicht.*
 16. *Mawson hörte nicht er sah den Schlitten 5 Meter von der Spalte & rief wie gewohnt Spalte aufpassen.*
 17. *Ninn war keine 10 Meter hinter Mawson es musste alles in einer Sekunde geschehen sein denn Mawson hörte nur einen Hund etwas brummen ich hörte gar nichts.*
 18. *Wir konnten nichts rein nichts tun, hilflos standen wir da am Grabe eines Freundes, meines besten Freundes in der ganzen Expedition.*
 19. *Wir lasen ein Gebet in Mawsons Gebetbuch das war der einzige Trost die einzige letzte Ehrung die wir für unseren lieben Freund Ninnis tun konnten.*
 20. *Den ganzen Tag hatten wir gewartet & gesonnen eine Wilson Petrel kam unseren Schlitten zu [end O2.]*

**Translation (TL3) of Mertz's diary entry for
14 December 1912**

In this translation (TL3) we added minimal punctuation to enhance the readability of the 20 sentences from TR3. Translation of the text leading up to and after the two photographed pages was made after a combined version of TR1 and TR2 was produced by the authors. TL3 is, as far as possible, a literal translation, but where necessary, we have given an idiomatic interpretation.

Early on the morning of 15 December, Mertz recorded the events of the previous day:

14 December:

4.00 a.m. We are on the return journey but without [my] friend Ninnis. Dear old Ninnis, he is dead. This change is so sudden that I almost cannot believe it. Ninnis's finger was better in the morning, he slept during the night (the first time in 3 nights) and was happy and cheerful. About 1.00 p.m. I crossed a crevasse like hundreds we have crossed in the last weeks. I called 'crevasse', crossed at a right angle and kept going. After about 5 minutes I looked back. Mawson's sledge was following, he was lying on the sledge looking ahead. But I could not see Ninnis. I stopped to see better. Mawson turned around to see why I had stopped.² At once he jumped from the sledge and ran back. I followed him, dragging his sledge back when he nodded a moment later. Only then did I think that Ninnis must be in a crevasse; before that I thought he had only lagged a bit behind. The following hours were [an] unpleasant reality. 150 feet down a crevasse we spied the back part of Ninnis's sledge. A faint dog whimper reached the surface, where we lay and listened and conferred.³ No other sound was to be heard.

Our new translation (TL3) of the two pages (O2) with our punctuation is as follows.

01. *I wanted to place the remaining sledge crosswise over the crevasse and climb down; impossible, the crevasse was too wide, our ropes too short.*
 02. *It could not be of much help, but we felt at least something had to be done.*
 03. *But what!*

04. *After an hour it was deathly silent in the crevasse.*
 05 *We listened and listened, we called Ninnis and again Ninnis, all in vain.*
 06. *My poor friend had to be dead or unconscious.*
 07. *The crevasse was as wide as a sledge, but 150 feet deep, a vertical wall of ice which converged a little lower down.*
 08. *Ninnis must have surely died immediately.*
 09. *If he were only badly injured and unconscious, he would never return to consciousness, because 150 feet down a glacier is too cold.*
 10. *We waited for hours; we went about 5 miles more east; it meant the end of the sledging expedition.⁴*
 11. *We came back to the crevasse, we waited again and called.*
 12. *Deathly silent, the dog's whimpering also had become silent.*
 13. *We let down a line with a weight attached, it hit the one dog that was in view, this did not move, it was obviously also dead.*
 14. *The crevasse went deeper down and Ninn would have surely crashed even deeper down. [This abbreviation, Ninn for Ninnis, is used throughout the diary.]*
 15. *How it all happened, we don't know.*
 16. *Mawson heard nothing, he saw the sledge 5 metres from the crevasse and called as usual: Crevasse, look out.*
 17. *Ninn was less than 10 metres behind Mawson, everything must have happened in one second because Mawson heard only one dog moaning a little, I heard nothing at all.*
 18. *We could do nothing, absolutely nothing, helpless we stood there at the grave of a friend, my best friend in the whole expedition.*
 19. *We read a prayer in Mawson's prayerbook; that was the only consolation, the only final tribute we could pay to our dear friend Ninnis.*
 20. *The whole day we had waited & thought things over; a Wilson Petrel came to [fly around] our sledge, [end O2]*

The final sentences of O2 are adjoined and flow over to the next (missing) page. The remainder of this day's diary entry, that is, text following the two pages of O2, was constructed from TR1 and TR2:

that was life, a living creature, the only one since leaving the Winter Quarters now at the grave of my friend in ice and snow. We found comfort only in the thought that his death was instantaneous after a cheery, happy life. God's ways are often difficult to fathom, but to Him everything must evidently be for the best. The whole night our journey was homewards, i.e. to search for shelter and food from the snow all around us. We only now realized, that almost all the food, tent, pick, shovel [and] Burberry, had gone into the crevasse with the sledge. We will have to stick close together, Mawson and I, and do our best with the few things remaining to us to find the winter quarters.

Ninn, may he rest peacefully, my dear friend!

Two different interpretations of the last sentence were possible. TR1: *Nun möge sanft ruhen der liebe Freund!* TR2: *Ninnis möge sanft ruhen, der liebe Freund.* We suggest that *Nun* (meaning ‘now’ in German) was actually *Ninn* in O1.

Mawson’s diary entry for 14 December 1912

The only other eyewitness version of events is provided by Mawson. The following extract from Mawson’s diary (taken from his published diary and slightly abbreviated here) agrees with Mertz’s account:

14 December

Up 9 am. Temp. + 15°, 10 mph breeze from ESE . . .

Took latitude at noon . . .

A terrible catastrophe happened soon after taking latitude. My sledge crossed a crevasse obliquely & I called back to Ninnis, who had rear sledge, to watch it, then went on, not thinking to look back again as it had no specially dangerous features. After $\frac{1}{4}$ mile I noted Mertz halt ahead and look enquiringly back. I looked behind & saw no sign of Ninnis & his team. I stopped & wondered, then bethought myself of the crevasse and hurried back to find a great gaping hole in the ground. I called down but could get no answer. I signalled Mertz who was on skis ahead & he brought my team up to the scene. We hung over the edge but could see nothing nor get any answer. It was about 11 ft wide where broken through & straight ice-walled. From the other side, by hanging over on an alpine rope, we caught a glimpse of what appeared to be a food bag and one dog partially alive moaning, and part of another dog & dark object, apparently the tent, caught on a ledge. We sounded to the ledge with furlong⁵ [*sic*] line – 150 ft sheer, ice ledge. No sign of Ninnis – must have struck it & been killed instantly, then gone on down. Our ropes not long enough to go down, or the sledge to span crevasse. Dog ceased to moan shortly. We called and sounded for three hours, then went on a few miles to a hill and took position observations. Came back, called & sounded for an hour.

Read the Burial Service.

Reviewed our position: practically all the food had gone down – spade, pick, tent, Mertz’s burberry trousers & helmet, cups, spoons, mast, sail etc. We had our sleeping bags, a week and a half food, the spare tent without poles, & our private bags & cooker & kerosene. The dogs in my team were very poorly & the worst, & no feed for them – the other team comprised the picked dogs, all dog food, & almost all man food. We considered it a possibility to get through to Winter Quarters by eating dogs, so 9 hours after the accident started back, but terribly handicapped.

The accident happened 15 miles to ESE of the spot recorded for 12th December on the chart & about 300 miles from the Winter Quarters –

May God Help us. (Jacka and Jacka 2008: 147–148)

• Few people understand how one can ever go again and again to the mountains. Danger, cold and hardship seem to them to have little attraction. But could they ever feel the contentment with life and the beauties of nature in the mountains of the Alps, then would they understand. They would realise that it is just work and hardship which create enjoyment. As the weather-beaten sailor loves the sea with its mind and moods, as the polar explorer loves the lonely, inhospitable ice regions so does the true mountain climber love his mountains above all things.

Fig. 3. The last paragraph of the essay ‘Memories of the Alps’, written by Mertz for submission to the *Adelie Blizzard* (1912) and included here for comparison to the handwriting in his sledging diary (Fig. 2), also gives some insight to his personal philosophy. Permission to reproduce image given by the Mawson Centre, Australia Polar Collection, South Australian Museum, Adelaide.

Unsurprisingly, Mawson’s tone is less emotional than Mertz’s. The two men ostensibly had much in common. Both were thirty years old, held doctorates (in geology and law respectively) and were accomplished and capable. However, Mertz had travelled from London with Ninnis and the sledge dogs on S.Y. *Aurora* and had worked closely with his 25-year-old friend and the dogs for 11 months in Antarctica. Mawson, as leader, maintained a certain distance from the expedition members (Ayres 1999: 65). Moreover, as leader he would have known that his diary might, in the not unlikely event of his death, become the official account of the expedition (as Robert F. Scott’s was to do for the British Antarctic Expedition). The account he provides in his official AAE narrative, *The home of the blizzard*, is much the same, although he adds a tribute to Ninnis and notes that, after the reading of the burial service, ‘Mertz shook me by the hand with a short “Thank you!” and we turned away to harness the dogs’ (Mawson 1915: 241–242).

Discussion

These two pages in Mertz’s handwriting are not easily read. His diary entry, written in extreme conditions immediately after this intensely stressful period, reflects his struggle to document the day’s events. The sentences are short, almost in note form. His handwriting becomes harder to decipher, and his punctuation more erratic, as the entry continues, making the transcriber’s task, and consequently the translator’s interpretation, more difficult. Some sentences are adjoined in the hurriedly composed, raw text. The style of these scrawled notes differs markedly, but understandably, from his more legible script (Fig. 3) in (for example) his essay ‘Memories of the Alps’, written in comparatively comfortable conditions in the main base hut (Mertz 1912a).

A typist given the apparently simple brief of transcribing the content of the original diaries must actually have

been confronted with a daunting and perhaps frustrating assignment. Throughout the transcripts of the diary there are examples of abbreviations, such as *Ninn* for Ninnis, and phonetic spelling, such as *Crevers* for crevasse, probably as written by Mertz. However, the transcripts also include omissions, substitutions, spelling errors, corrections, insertions and annotations either by the transcribers or by others. Inaccuracies in the transcripts were probably the result of several factors: handwriting that was difficult to decipher; the unfamiliar, sometimes phonetically spelt, English words inserted in the German text; and the typists' limited knowledge of AAE personnel, procedures and the idiosyncratic language developed by the explorers. While many errors are minor or inconsequential, at some points in the transcripts there are significant inaccurate passages, which led to confusion for those translating, decades later, from the German transcript into English. Moreover, both transcribers and translators understandably assumed an editing role, punctuating where they considered necessary and approximating unfamiliar or indecipherable words. In addition, subsequent handwritten corrections and annotations have been made throughout the typed transcripts.

The following are several examples from the text of O2 that show the kinds of discrepancies that can arise between the manuscript, transcripts and translations. Although 14 December was a particularly stressful day for Mertz, and the rest of his original diary is not available for comparison, inconsistencies between the transcripts for a single day's entry indicate that similar problems beset the documents as a whole.

Sentences 02 and 03. For the entry of 14 December, TL1 combines Sentences 02 and 03 into one sentence: 'We absolutely wanted to do something, but what could we do?' This does not significantly alter the meaning, but it is not expressed in Mertz's style. His choppy handwritten sentences suggest a distressed state of mind, a nuance that is lost when his expression is smoothed over. Mertz's exclamation mark is replaced by a more logical, but less frantic, question mark.

Sentence 06. TR1 has *bewusstlos* for unconscious; TR2 has the misspelt *besinnunglos* (should be *besinnungslos*). Both words can mean unconscious but *besinnungslos* can also mean mindless (for example, mindless with anger or overwhelmed by emotion), which does not apply here. In TR3 we have selected *bewusstlos* as the word written by Mertz in O2.

Sentence 11. TR1 omits this sentence which was included in TR2: *Kamen zurück zur Spalte, warteten wieder und riefen.* (We came back to the crevasse, we waited again and called.) Consequently, this complete sentence does not appear in translations TL1 or TL2, but in TL1 *Later we came back* has been included. This could have been an addition by the translator (Eisner 2004) to clarify the narrative, and could have been sourced from *The home of the blizzard* (Mawson 1915: 241) or from *Mawson's Antarctic diaries* (Jacka and Jacka 1988: 148).

Sentence 20. This sentence required the most reconstruction. TR1–20 omitted 21 words, with *etc. etc.* substituted after *Den ganzen Tag*. Twelve of these words (*hatten wir gewartet & gesonnen eine Wilson Petrel kam unseren Schlitten zu*) can be seen in O2 and the remainder (*umfliegen, das war Leben, lebendes Wesen, das einzige seit Verlassen der Winterquartiere jetzt am Grabe des Freundes im Eis und Schnee*) appear in TR2. Punctuation is indeterminate. Is the smudge after *gewartet* an ampersand, a semi-colon or a word begun and crossed out? Sentence 20 was omitted in documents PB1 and TL1 but, taking the words from TR2, can be divided into two or three sentences. The translator who produced TL2, confronted with the partial sentence in TR1, made an attempt at translation, but had to resort to an annotation stating that it was 'difficult to understand the meaning of this sentence'. One word in O2–20 was indecipherable and is missing in both TR1 and TR2. The authors considered several options (such as *gewarten, gewartet, genau*, or perhaps even *gelassen* if referring to the petrel) and consulted a number of German speaking scholars, but no consensus was reached. However, closer examination of Mertz's handwriting and further consultation favoured *wir gewartet und gesonnen* (we had waited and thought things over) as our final choice.⁶

TR2 records that a *wilde Petrel* came to fly around their sledge. Since all petrels are wild, we argue, in constructing TR3, that it is more likely that Mertz wrote *Wilson Petrel*, an Antarctic species (Wilson's Storm Petrel, *Oceanites oceanicus*), often seen in the region (Mawson 1915 II: 306). Mawson's diary does not record the sighting of a bird on 14 December but on 9 December he notes, 'a Snow Petrel visited us during march' (Jacka and Jacka 2008: 143) and on 25 December, 'During today a prion, tern or whale-bird flew around us and then away to the north' (Jacka and Jacka 2008: 153). However, in *The home of the blizzard* (referring to the events of 14 December), the petrel is mentioned. 'As we stood looking north a Wilson petrel suddenly appeared and after flitting about for a short time departed' (Mawson 1915: 241). Archibald McLean helped to collate and edit Mawson's book. This is presumably his slightly less florid, edited version of Mawson's draft in which, squeezed into available space between paragraphs and in Mawson's handwriting, is an annotation: 'A Wilson petrel suddenly appeared above us and flitted about from one object to another for several minutes ere it departed.' This indicates an afterthought, perhaps prompted by referral to Mertz's sledging diary (Mawson n.d.). Although Mertz writes of this bird, *lebendes Wesen, das einzige seit verlassen der Winterquartiere* (a living creature, the only one since leaving the Winter Quarters), he had previously recorded the appearance of a *Schnee-Vogel* (snow-bird) (TR1) or a *Skua (Vogel)* (TR2) on 18 November and a *Snow Petrel* (TR1 and TR2) on 9 December. He may have meant that it was the first Wilson's Petrel he had seen on that journey. Mawson added the 14 December sighting to his official narrative, leaving readers to draw their own

conclusions about any symbolic connection between the death of Ninnis and the sudden appearance of the bird. Mertz was not especially superstitious; he had attempted to understand the superstitious sailors on his outward voyage and to explain their beliefs in a more rational way (Mertz 1912b: 22 August 1911). Perhaps the appearance of a live creature just after the conclusion of the burial service for his dead friend gave this particular sighting added significance for him.

The omission of sentence 11 and most of sentence 20 in one of the German transcripts (TR1), and consequently in both available English translations, and the difference (albeit minor) in the description of the previous bird sightings point to the limitations of these documents as faithful renditions of the holograph manuscript. The methodology of comparison between documents for sentence 20 is representative of analysis of all sentences in this project. The difficulty that the authors encountered with one indecipherable word in sentence 20 reflects the problem that transcribers often must have had with the original.

The subsequent history of Mertz's diaries

The last entry in Mertz's diary was on 1 January 1913. He died seven days later on the return trek to AAE's Winter Quarters. Mawson took his companion's sledging diary back, but was obliged to winter in the hut for a second year until the expedition's ship, *S.Y. Aurora*, could return in December 1913. A full account of the circumstances that necessitated this arrangement is given in *The home of the blizzard* (Mawson 1915). It is unclear what access the six other expedition members living in the hut had to Mertz's diary. Mawson knew a little German and a book entitled *German Self-Taught* was amongst his personal library ([Mawson] 1912). In a letter to Mertz's father, he states that he did not read through his dead companion's diary (Mawson 1914c). He must, however, have had enough familiarity with it to approve the reproduction of the two pages from 14 December relating to the significant description of the death of Ninnis. In addition, given that the detail about the Wilson's Petrel is not recorded in his own diary (despite the recording of other sightings of birds), it is possible that he took this incident from Mertz's sledging diary (or the photographed pages) while writing *The home of the blizzard*.

Most of Mertz's effects were returned to his family in Switzerland after Mawson arrived in Australia in February 1914 (Stillwell 1914). He had proposed taking the sledging diary – minus the back cover and some blank pages which he had torn away to reduce weight on his solo trek (Mawson 1914e), to Switzerland, to hand to the family in person (Mawson 1914b), but it was sent instead from London (Mawson 1914d) after a photograph had been made of the two pages. Mertz's father acknowledged the receipt of his son's diaries and other effects (Mertz, E 1914). Mawson and his wife made

a brief visit in 1914 to the Mertz home in Basel on 22 July 1914 (Mawson 1914e); the parents were welcoming but inconsolable (Mawson 1964: 117). Neither Mertz nor any of his five surviving siblings had descendants, and the last member of the immediate family died in 1969. In 1975 the researcher and author Lennard Bickel travelled to Basel to seek local information and the original diaries. A journalist there, Urs Weber, wrote about Bickel's mission in an attempt to facilitate his search (*National Zeitung* Basel, 19 September 1975). Few contacts were made initially, family solicitors maintained professional confidences, and the whereabouts of the diaries was not discovered.

It is not known when or by whom the German transcripts were made. As noted earlier, TR1 was probably made from O1 between 1914, after the diaries were returned to Switzerland, and prior to, or just after, the family home was cleared in 1969. This transcript and some photographs of Mertz and the AAE were offered for sale in the same year by an unnamed source to Josef Rennhard, then editor of the Swiss magazine *Der Schweizerische Beobachter* in Zürich. Rennhard contacted Weber to explain that he had bought the transcript and that selected diary entries, edited for publication (PB1), had been serialised in the magazine from 1969 to 1970 (Bickel n.d.). Rennhard also contacted the director of the (then) Mawson Institute for Antarctic Research in South Australia (Rennhard 1975) and later deposited TR1 in the Staatsarchiv, Basel, in 1996 (*personal communication*, Staatsarchiv Basel, 29 June 2012). A copy was deposited in the Mawson Institute in Adelaide (Southcott 1983). It is obvious when reading the transcript that whoever typed TR1 was unfamiliar with the vernacular of the explorers, their names and the names of the dogs.

The other transcript, TR2, was made with an English typewriter; the umlauts have been added by hand. This raises the question of whether it might have been produced during the winter of 1913, in the hut in Antarctica after Mawson had carried it back. Madigan, a close friend of Mertz, had studied German (Madigan 2000: 235) and helped him to translate his essay 'Erinnerungen aus den Alpen' ('Memories of the Alps' – see Fig. 3), written for the expedition's newspaper the *Adelie Blizzard* (Madigan 1914). There was a typewriter in the hut and it is feasible that Madigan would have attempted to transcribe and translate the diary. However, the typeface of other articles produced by that typewriter and reproduced in a facsimile copy of the *Adelie Blizzard* (Mawson and McLean 1913) does not match that of TR2; moreover, whoever produced TR2 also shows little familiarity with AAE terms, which discounts the theory that Madigan, or any other AAE main-base member, made the transcript. The annotations on TR2 are handwritten, but a match could not be found. TR2 could have been made when the sledging diary was held at the publisher William Heinemann's London office, but since Mawson and McLean were available for consultation, obvious inaccurate AAE references make this unlikely. Its provenance remains undetermined.

Neither the transcriber of TR1 nor of TR2 appears to have referred to the 1921 German edition of *The home of the blizzard* [*Leben und Tod am Südpol*], which would have clarified several terms, as well as names of personnel and dogs and, for the two pages discussed here, some indecipherable words. This suggests that it is most likely that these transcripts were made prior to the publication of this edition, although there can be no certainty about this.

Conclusion

Xavier Mertz was one of the main protagonists in the AAE narrative. This article demonstrates some of the challenges encountered when attempting to make the most credible reconstruction of his world and his thoughts from fragmented and sometimes imprecise records. In the small sample on which this article focuses – his diary entry for 14 December 1912 – there are discrepancies in both tone and content between the handwritten text, the transcripts and the translations. We are fortunate to have the latter documents; without them, we would have no knowledge at all of Mertz's most personal observations except two pages of his diary. However, the problems identified in the limited sample available, when extrapolated to the entire sledging diary and the longer diary Mertz left at the base hut, show the need to treat the existing German transcripts and English translations with caution. Moreover, both translations, and very possibly the transcripts, were made for specific reasons (Table 1), and almost certainly with time constraints, rather than as closely examined documents reproduced primarily for general research. These limiting factors, coupled with the inaccuracies of the source documents and the subjective nature of translations, must be considered by researchers when quoting from them.

With the original diaries missing, any attempt at their reconstruction involves an element of speculation; even with a copy of two pages of the original to consult, transcription is challenging, as this article shows. Careful scholarship, involving examination of both transcripts, is required to reduce evident errors of translation and interpretation to a minimum. Translators can now be informed, where the transcribers could not, by more recent publications featuring the AAE, such as the published diaries mentioned at the beginning of this article, as well as ongoing scholarship relating to the expedition. As more AAE diaries are digitized and published, it is imperative to produce a hybrid document closer to Mertz's original diary than either of the existing transcripts – a process that we are currently undertaking. We plan to make the resulting document available during the AAE centenary. The possibility remains, of course, that the missing diaries will one day be found.

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Notes

- 1 Ninnis also kept a sledging diary on the spring sledging journey that he led in September 1912, transferring those notes to his main diary when he returned. The Ninnis diary referred to by Mawson could have contained the notes from both sledging journeys.
- 2 Lit. *Mawson kehrte sich, um die Ursache meines Halte[n]s zu sehen* (TR1 Haltes, TR2 Haltens).
- 3 Lit. *berieten* (inf.: *beraten*, to confer, to deliberate, to discuss) (TR1 and TR2).
- 4 The purpose of this short journey was to find an elevated spot from which to survey the surroundings and take observations to determine their position (see Mawson's diary entry for 14 December 1912 in this paper).
- 5 In the original diary, 'furlong line', a transcription error in Jacka and Jacka (1988 and 2008), was written as 'fishing line' (personal communication, Curator of the Mawson Centre, Australian Polar Collection, South Australian Museum, Adelaide, 12 April 2012).
- 6 In *Leben und Tod am Südpol* (TR4), the word we found indecipherable in O2 was transcribed as *gesonnen* (inf.: *sinnen*: to cogitate, to reflect). We thank the reviewer who drew our attention to this. In applying this to Sentence 20, we chose an idiomatic interpretation: 'we thought things over'.

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