



Title: A Wretched and Precarious Situation

Author: David Welky

Description:

A remarkable true story of adventure, betrayal, and survival set in one of the worlds most inhospitable places.

In 1906, from atop a snow-swept hill in the ice fields northwest of Greenland, Commander Robert E. Peary spotted a heretofore unknown land looming in the distance. He called it Crocker Land. Scientists and explorers agreed that Peary had found a new continent. Several years later, two of Pearys disciples, George Borup and Donald MacMillan with the sponsorship of the American Museum of Natural History assembled a team of amateurs to investigate. They pitched their two-year mission as a scientific tour de force that would fill in the last blank space on the globe. Instead, the Crocker Land Expedition became a five-year ordeal that endured Arctic blizzards, dwindling supplies, a fatal boating accident, a drunken sea captain, a shipwreck, marooned rescue parties, disease, dissension, and a crewman-turned-murderer. Based on a trove of unpublished letters, diaries, and field notes, *A Wretched and Precarious Situation* is a harrowing Arctic adventure unlike any other.

Reviews

[The New York Times](#)

Captures the details of life in a polar camp, conjuring its yowling dogs and bottles of wine exploding from the cold, even the way an Inuit hunter kills an auk by squeezing its heart before eating it raw. Polar historians will be grateful to have the Crocker Land expedition properly documented.

[Kirkus](#) (starred review)

Making magnificent use of documents and recreating the yearslong Arctic sojourn with the drama and immediacy of a tension-filled adventure novel, the author conjures a romantic quest emblematic of the rugged manliness of the time. Long, leisurely, and vastly entertaining.

[Booklist](#) (starred review)

For reasons that polar epics always attract readers the hero confronting nature, the pitiless extremities of that nature, and the psychological warping polar regions seem to induce Welkys well-judged and well-written revival of this obscure expedition augurs to be as popular as any in the polar-exploration genre.

[Publishers Weekly](#) (starred review)

Drawing on extensive expedition diaries, Welkys absorbing narrative highlights the perils of polar travel, including ice that piled up in impassable ridges or broke beneath ones feet, fractious sled-dogs, lethal weather, frostbite, disease, starvation, and exhaustion. This is a classic explorers narrative, pitting ambition against the limits of endurance.

Library Journal

Welky provides an evenhanded and thoroughly researched portrayal of team leader and explorer MacMillan. This book fills in a significant and often overlooked piece of the Arctic exploration puzzle. Arctic enthusiasts, armchair adventurers, and dreamers of lost worlds will find much to appreciate.

The Dallas Morning News

A book to make you say, 'Wow! Who knew Arctic misery could be this much fun' It combines excellent writing with in-depth, detailed research and puts Arctic exploration in the context of its time, offering insights on the far north and pre-World War I America's hunger for stories of adventure and discovery. It is also about leadership, both good and bad. Welky manages to see inside the human psyche in ways that help readers understand the challenges of extreme isolation, physical trials and nagging uncertainties. *A Wretched and Precarious Situation* shows Arctic exploration for what it is and is not, and in so doing destroys the stereotypes pervading northern literature. It falls squarely in the genre of literary historical nonfiction, with excellent writing that combines some of the serious novelists techniques with information that can only come from hundreds of hours with long-forgotten diaries, letters and newspaper accounts -- many of them tracked down in small collections at scattered locations.

Natural History Magazine

A WRETCHED AND PRECARIOUS SITUATION is the most complete and insightful book on the expedition since MacMillan's 1918 memoir, *FOUR YEARS IN THE WHITE NORTH*. Historian David Welky, a professor at the University of Central Arkansas, has fashioned a penetrating study of human character in a challenging environment from what might have been a tale of folly and disappointment. His seamless narrative, chilling at times and always thought-provoking, transports the reader to a time when the Arctic was virtually as harsh and inaccessible a place as the Moon or Mars.

The Explorers Journal

Welky's fast-moving, evocative narrative paints a vivid portrait of the men who, along with their Inuit companions, risked their lives for "dreams of lost continents awaiting discovery." [*The Literary Review*](#)

"What seems real is often not," writes Welky. "Our brains fool us all the time. We see things from the corners of our eyes that aren't there...in the high latitudes...what you see is not necessarily what *is*." Such is the burden of this book. On one level it is an essay on the nature of reality; at another an account of the last, tragicomic chapter in the so-called heroic age of polar exploration.