



Flight to the Top of the World: The Adventures of Walter Wellman

David L. Bristow

University of Nebraska Press (Jul 1, 2018)

Hardcover \$29.95 (392pp)

978-0-8032-9678-7

David L. Bristow's *Flight to the Top of the World* captures an era of wonder in which incredibly deadly endeavors pushed the boundaries of human possibility.

The nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century adventures of Walter Wellman are the focus. A high-profile journalist and newspaper man, he daringly explored the Arctic and the possibilities of transatlantic flight. The book combines relationship-driven details from Wellman's daily life with broader historical records for an entertaining look at a rarely-remembered explorer.

Wellman's story is more than a unidirectional tale of exploration. His journalism career saw him jump from being a local writer to representing presidential administrations in the press. His ability to marshal capital for dangerous and uncertain missions like dogsled trips to the North Pole or dirigible flights across the Atlantic evinces both daring and cunning. His successes are ultimately most evident in his captured ability to bounce back from disappointments and in his influence in the early stages of modern media, covering stories such as the early labor movement.

With amusing details of how Wellman was seen by his compatriots, family, and friends, the book's character development moves like a novel's while relying on the historical record. Supporting characters, especially those who joined in on Wellman's global trips, round out the cast. Quotes from diaries and documents function like dialogue.

The stakes remain high; Wellman faces the constant possibility of financial ruin or an icy death. Nonexpedition details, like Wellman's daughter Rita's quest for independence and life as a writer, show how women were also seeking societal change at the time.

Flight to the Top of the World is a riveting account of turn-of-the-century America and the vibrant personalities that fueled its discoveries.

LAURA LEAVITT (July/August 2018)

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