

In the Royal navy the hospital accommodation or sick-bay is usually constructed in definite relation to the number of the crew on any given vessel. The usual proportion in battleships is 3 per cent of the total ship's complement, the floor-area allowed being from 20 to 30 square feet per man.

As soon as the question of overcrowding was raised your Commissioners requested Captain Rich, R.N., to cable to the head of the Transport Department in South Africa for an official statement of the number of men which the "Britannic" was fitted for, and in course of time received from Captain Rich the following cablegram:—

" 'Ringarooma,' Wellington.

" August 25.—Your cipher message: 'Britannic' now fitted carry 1,084 men; originally carried 1,100; greatest number carried, 1,090. New Zealand troops were under Imperial Transport Regulations, and rationed on superior scale, same as Yeomanry. Transports [officer], Durban, where ship embarked the troops, has been instructed answer your other queries.

" Naval Transports, Capetown."

The duties of your Commissioners would have been far simpler had they had the opportunity of inspecting the transport "Britannic" and examining as witnesses the master and officers of the transport. Unfortunately, she had left Australasian waters before their first meeting, and the memories of the various witnesses as to details of fittings have to be relied on; but facts stated by responsible officials and actual observation would have been more satisfactory.

Your Commissioners at the outset were face to face with the difficulty of being without specific charges or statements to inquire into, and the complainants, though vigorous in denunciation, were usually vague in statement, and few apparently knew to what accommodation or food they were entitled. In consequence it became necessary to lead witnesses, though, as they appeared at their own request, it was their duty to assert and substantiate their assertions.

The actual cubic measurement of the space available on the troop decks could not be ascertained, but, notwithstanding the allegations by many witnesses that they were overcrowded, the fact cannot be overlooked that the official information shows that the transport was fitted for 1,084 men, and the actual disembarkation "state" shows only 1,005 non-commissioned officers and troopers on board, or almost exactly 8 per cent. fewer men than might, under Transport Regulations, have been embarked, and less by 10 per cent. than she has carried on a previous occasion. It became perfectly evident that many men preferred lying on the upper deck, or on tables, or on the troop deck to sleeping in hammocks. No doubt the limited space made the sleeping in narrow hammocks irksome to men whose method of life had previously been unconventional and latterly entirely in the open air. The width between the hammock-hooks, apparently, was 18 in., and regular troops are liable to have to accommodate themselves to 16 in. of space.

It was alleged by a few that there was not sufficient room for proper exercise on the upper deck, and some complained that the troopers were not allowed to make use of the deck reserved for their officers. It was, however, proved that parts of the upper decks which were available were not made use of by the men, and that there was little inclination amongst most of them to participate in sports promoted for their exercise and amusement; further, that part of the space allotted to the officers was by them assigned to the non-commissioned officers, thus limiting considerably their own decks. To admit that on board a troopship there should be no space for the officers separate from the men would be to agree that an important factor in maintaining discipline is unnecessary.

Your Commissioners are of opinion that the number of men on board the "Britannic" was not in excess of Transport Regulations, and consequently that, whatever inconvenience may have been experienced by some of the men, she was not overcrowded. Paragraph 1575 of the King's Regulations and Orders for the Army explains that it is the special duty of the troop-deck sergeants to see, *inter alia*, that hammocks are properly hung and cleared off decks at the proper hour in the morning. It is evident that that duty was not sufficiently attended to, nor was the rule enforced that at evening rounds the men on the troop decks were "in or on their hammocks." Had the men been compelled to sling their hammocks properly, and to sleep in them, there would have been greater comfort and fewer complaints of lack of accommodation, and probably less disease, as the sleeping on the troop deck on which men suffering from catarrh had been constantly spitting may have had a tendency to accelerate the spread of pneumonia. The ventilation of troop decks is always a difficulty, and there is reason to fear that the air did not freely circulate, and they were close. On the lower deck never, and on the upper deck only occasionally, could the portholes be opened. Windsails, about four in number, were rigged, and electric-fans were constantly at work causing some movement in the air. but the evidence points to the fact that the mouths of the windsails were not infrequently tied, probably by the men sleeping near them, and the air-shoot blocked, thus preventing such ventilation as was provided from having its full effect, and it appears to your Commissioners that it would have been desirable that the transport should have been provided with better artificial ventilation by propulsion and extraction of the air, as the natural supply of fresh air on troop decks cannot be sufficient during heavy weather, or in particularly calm latitudes, notwithstanding all the use that may be made of windsails or air-scoops.

#### WASHING ACCOMMODATION.

In Transport Regulations and specifications for fitting a ship for the convenience of men, it is laid down under the heading of "Wash-place for Men," as follows: "Five troughs to be provided for each 200, fitted for," and then details of the method of their construction follow. Apparently, therefore, twenty-six troughs are all that were required on board the "Britannic" to fulfil the requirements of Transport Regulations. Basins were fitted instead of troughs, but no complaints were made on that score; and, having personally examined the transport "Montrose," and seen