

1902.  
NEW ZEALAND.

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# S.S. "BRITANNIC":

REPORTS OF OFFICER COMMANDING TROOPS ON THE TRANSPORT; ALSO REPORT OF MEDICAL OFFICER.

*Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.*

The OFFICER COMMANDING TROOPS, H.M. Transport "Britannic," to the GENERAL OFFICER COMMANDING New Zealand.

SIR,—

Wellington, 5th August, 1902.

I have the honour to report, for your information, on the voyage of the troopship "Britannic" from Durban to Wellington.

The troops embarked at Durban on the 5th July, and the ship sailed on the following morning. The total numbers embarked at Durban were 83 officers and 1,005 other ranks, of which 38 officers and 25 other ranks were Australians and were disembarked at Albany and Melbourne.

There was not much sickness on board until we left Melbourne, on the 27th July, when measles broke out. The sickness previously had been pneumonia and colds, which, in my experience, every one who has lived in a dry climate like Africa gets immediately they come down to the damp latitudes.

I personally inspected the hospital very frequently and questioned the patients as to their treatment, and never on any occasion received a single complaint.

I attach a report to me from Surgeon-Major Pearlless, Senior Medical Officer on board.

The ship was full, but not overcrowded in any sense. She had a greater number of men on board when taking the Imperial Representative Corps round the colonies, and had them on board for, I believe, about five months, and in much warmer climates. Being an old ship, she is rather low from deck to deck, and naturally men coming from life in tents feel the stuffy atmosphere at first, but after the first two or three days out from Durban they did not complain, mostly owing, I think, to the cold weather we had.

With regard to the food, I am satisfied that it was good and ample throughout. The ship supplied me with a bill of fare for every day in the week, and it was greatly in excess of the Admiralty transport scale. The galley accommodation I consider rather small, and I stated so to the captain of the ship, but it was impossible to alter it, and I am sure that very slight inconvenience was experienced in consequence. There were a few complaints about the food, principally the quality of the meat and fish. These complaints did not amount to more than six during the voyage, and other food was immediately substituted by the ship's people at my request, though only about three of the complaints could be called reasonable. The meat was frozen, and was the same as that supplied to the officers.

In addition to the usual officers of the day, I ordered Lieut.-Colonel Chaytor, Captain Polson, and Major Hayter (the officers commanding regiments and detachments on board) to detail their own captains and subalterns of the day, and all these officers, together with a medical officer, the quartermasters, and subsequently Veterinary Captain Young, an expert on frozen meat, inspected every issue of food daily. These officers were ordered to report immediately to my staff officer if there were any complaints, and on the few occasions above mentioned when complaints were made they were at once cheerfully rectified by the ship.

The whole ship was inspected every day, nearly always by me personally (except for a few days when I was suffering from a severe cold), and at other times by the officers commanding regiments, who reported to me immediately after inspection. At every daily inspection I asked in every mess on the ship if the men had any complaints, and I feel sure that they made any they felt justified in making. They were very few indeed, and were immediately dealt with.

The discipline on the ship amongst the New-Zealanders was excellent. Only on one occasion had I to complain of that, and it occurred as follows: Two Australians came up on to the upper deck with a dish of fish, and about fifty men, some New-Zealanders and some Australians, followed them. I was told they wished to see me, and I went out to see them, as, although it was contrary to discipline, I felt sure that the rest had only followed to see what was going on. I met the men and inquired into their complaint, and examined the food, which appeared wholesome but salt, and I could understand their not liking it. I requested the ship's authorities to supply meat (tinned) instead, which was at once done, and no more salt fish was issued during the voyage. I then told

the men that I was prepared to see that any just complaints were dealt with, but that they well knew that that was not the way to behave, and told them to go down off that deck, which they immediately did, after a small attempt at a cheer. The officer commanding the Australians said he was sorry for what had happened, and the next morning, on my inspection, the two Australian men came to me voluntarily and begged my pardon, saying they had not intended to come to me, but they were looking for their own officer, &c., and that the other men followed "for a lark," on which I freely forgave them and asked if they were satisfied now. They said they were quite satisfied, and I never had to complain again.

In conclusion, I beg to inform you that all the Eighth Contingent were fully paid up before arrival in Wellington, and cheques prepared on board for the war gratuities and leave pay. Also discharges and railway and steamer passes were prepared on board, so that there need be no delay on arrival.

I have, &c.,

R. H. DAVIES, Colonel,  
O.C. Troops, H.M. Transport "Britannic."

The PRINCIPAL MEDICAL OFFICER to the OFFICER COMMANDING, H.M. Transport "Britannic."  
SIR,— 5th August, 1902.

I have the honour to report as follows on the hospital and sick men on board the troopship "Britannic":—

As regards the hospital staff, it was thoroughly efficient, and the men were well attended to. They consisted of three medical officers in addition to myself, four dispensers, a hospital sergeant, and three hospital orderlies. In addition to this, two orderlies were told off as mess orderlies, and three men attended alternately from each regiment to clean up the wards.

There were thirty-two beds, some of them swing-cots, and as soon as these became full additional accommodation was made in the adjoining troop-deck: part of it was barricaded off and ten more cots erected. The accommodation in hospital was ample till the day before we landed, when I had to place some of the men in hammocks for one night.

The food was good, and plenty of it; and I had not the slightest trouble in obtaining anything extra. The chief steward did everything in his power to assist me.

The night we came alongside the wharf Surgeon-Captain Eccles took charge, and I went down the following morning early to personally attend to the disembarkation of the men. The Hospital authorities would only admit ten, so I picked out the worst cases and put them in cabs and the only available ambulance-van. Every man had a glass of brandy given to him before leaving the boat. The remaining cases were then put on the tug alongside and taken over to Somes Island, attended by Dr. Purdy.

The average daily number of men in hospital till we arrived at Melbourne was about fifteen. After that measles rapidly spread, and in two days every bed was full; and I then had the ten additional cots erected. Two Australian nurses came with us as far as Melbourne, but not on duty, though they offered to assist me at any time. However, the illness was easily coped with by the ordinary hospital staff as far as Melbourne, so that I did not consider it necessary to call in their services. The chief illness on board at first was pneumonia, this being due, in my opinion, to men leaving a dry climate and open-air life and then coming rather suddenly into a damp and cold latitude. The measles were contracted in South Africa, but till I arrived in Melbourne only about three cases were treated.

In conclusion, I may say that I am perfectly satisfied with the way the whole of the medical and hospital staff worked for the good of the patients.

I am, &c.,

WALTER R. PEARLESS, P.M.O.,  
Major, 8th N.Z.M.R.

Officer Commanding, Eighth New Zealand Mounted Rifles.

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