

TUESDAY, 13TH AUGUST, 1901.

Lieutenant JOHN WILLIAM THURSTON examined. (No. 33.)

1. *The Chairman*] What corps do you belong to?—I am on the Unattached Active List.
2. How long have you been in the Volunteers?—Some thirty odd years.
3. What is the name of your corps?—The Wairoa Light Horse.
4. You attended camp at Newtown Park in June last?—Yes.
5. In what capacity?—I came down holding the capacity I had, but as soon as I got on the ground Colonel Sommerville appointed me quartermaster. That was on the Saturday morning.
6. What instructions did he give you?—To attend to the fodder for the horses. I asked him if there was anything else, and he said, "No; nothing but the horses, because arrangements had been made for the men." Those were his first instructions.
7. What did you do about fodder for the horses?—I had to order all the fodder necessary, and to find out the number of horses likely to come down. It was rather hard to do that, because the companies were coming in at irregular times. At the same time, whenever they came in I got word of it, and tried to get the fodder in advance.
8. You requisitioned it from the contractor?—Yes.
9. Did you purchase any fodder at any time?—No.
10. Where was the fodder kept?—In two marquees in the far end of the camp. The marquees were about 2 chains apart.
11. What staff had you with you at the marquees?—Colonel Sommerville told me to get a quartermaster-sergeant from each battalion, and they were to attend to the fodder. I had them appointed—one from each battalion.
12. Were any men told off from the companies to assist?—They were told off to act on the third day.
13. How many?—There were supposed to be three from each battalion.
14. How many were told off?—Unfortunately there were only three there all the time.
15. Did you report that to Colonel Sommerville?—Yes.
16. Was it remedied?—No.
17. Was the fodder always brought to the marquees?—No; the weather and road being so bad, it was left on the top of the hill 3 chains away. On the second day I declined to sign for it. I used to get some of the Volunteers to carry it up.
18. Did the men get any fodder before it got to your custody?—On a number of occasions they helped themselves.
19. You said your instructions were that you had nothing to do except to look after the fodder. Were these orders altered?—Yes. I went in on the Saturday morning first thing. On the Sunday the orders were altered. There happened to be a great row about rations that were being served out, and Colonel Sommerville told me I was to attend at the kitchens and see them served out.
20. Did you?—Yes; from that time onward I always attended.
21. Were any other officers told off to attend?—The colonel gave instructions for an officer to be told off from each company, but there was only one officer from each battalion.
22. What number of officers did attend after that?—I do not think there were more than two officers there at any time. The officers of the day came round several times, but I did not consider they were the men required.
23. Did you report that to Colonel Sommerville?—I mentioned that they had not come, and that it was impossible for me to manage the affair myself.
24. Just describe to us shortly how the rations were issued from the cook-house. The mess orderlies, I suppose, came up?—Yes; each tent had a non-commissioned officer in charge of it. The mess orderlies would arrive there in the morning for the breakfast, and the non-commissioned officer would give the number belonging to each tent, and the rations would be served out for eight, ten, or whatever the number was; but, unfortunately, they would report for twelve men sometimes, instead of a smaller number. I told Colonel Sommerville that some of these men were drawing rations for twelve men when they were only entitled to draw for eight or nine, and he stopped them. The trouble was this: that there would be a great quantity of rations at a quarter to 8 for the men who were there, and if it was raining they would not wait their turn. I might have been blamed for allowing the rations to be served out before 8 o'clock, but in that weather it was difficult to keep the men waiting.
25. What were the conveniences for cooking like?—They were very bad. In the place of having a good number of ovens for cooking, we only had about half of what were wanted.
26. You say they were not proper ones?—No; they could have been made much better if placed where the fires could have been of more use to them.
27. And if they had been covered in?—Yes. Of course they did not know that they were going to have such weather as they had, but a cook always wants shelter from the rain. We always have a fly in our camps.
28. Did you report that the cooking-place was not covered in?—I spoke to Colonel Sommerville, and he said he could not help that. He said Mr. McParland was the contractor, and he had spoken to him about it.
29. Were there enough cooks?—No, not more than half the number there should have been.
30. How many did you see there?—I have seen four in the morning. There was supposed to be one for the officers, but I never troubled about him.
31. Were four the largest number you saw there cooking for the men?—No; six was the greatest number I saw.
32. Did the men complain on any occasion about the meat not being properly cooked?—On several occasions. I used to mention it myself, but I found that some of the men who complained had taken it too soon.