

In regard to the sleeping-accommodation, the cables from the Naval Transport Department, Sydney, disclose the fact that the Regulations limit the number of men by the sitting-accommodation at the tables. Thus, while the "Orient" was fitted for 1,254 men, there was only hammock-accommodation for 1,000. In view of medical evidence of the effect of sleeping on the deck, your Commissioners are of opinion that transports should provide hammock-space for all men on board.

But the subject which caused your Commissioners most thought was the discipline. They beg respectfully to report to Your Excellency there was lax, if not an almost entire absence of, discipline on board the transport. It was evident from the evidence of the officer commanding (Lieutenant-Colonel Abbott) that few of the King's Regulations relating to the discipline and conduct of the troops on board a transport were attended to.

Apparently there was no inspection of the men's quarters until a day or two after sailing. It was unknown whether the men were medically examined prior to embarkation; or whether the squadron officers saw to the issue of bedding. Nobody was ordered to inspect the meat prior to issue, or to see it weighed. The 'tween decks were defiled on occasions, and nobody was punished for the offence; a portion of the 'tween deck was used as, and stank like, a urinal. There were no written reports by the officers of the day, and the officers for duty required by the King's Regulations were not appointed. No parades for exercise or personal inspection were ordered.

The misunderstanding between the Health Officers and the officers commanding on board the "Orient" in Wellington Harbour resulted in a lamentable display of incompetency, or unwillingness to maintain discipline, on the part of the regimental officers. The precise moment at which a fatigue party ordered to prepare camp on Somes Island for the remainder of the troopers should have been landed, is difficult to decide; but that passive, if not active, insubordination in connection with the landing existed on board is unquestionable, and was no doubt fomented and aggravated by a letter written by Major O'Brien, commanding the North Island Battalion, to Lieutenant-Colonel Abbott protesting against the disembarkation on Somes Island on the ground of the men's health. Your Commissioners visited Somes Island, examined its suitability for a camp, and came to the conclusion that it was suitable.

The charge that troopers used disgusting and insulting language with intent that it should reach the ears of their officers, your Commissioners fear was too true, and not merely of an occasional character; and as such conduct was allowed to go unnoticed and unpunished, the moral influence of the majority of the non-commissioned officers must have been of the weakest character. Major O'Brien, in the course of his evidence, states that "many men would not get up till 7 or 7.30 a.m.," and plenty did not get up in time to wash; that men going out were on their best behaviour, but coming back they got lax in their discipline; that it was not possible to enforce more discipline, and if an attempt had been made the men would have taken no notice; and that it was impossible to enforce proper discipline among colonial troops. Major O'Brien was in command of the regiment from which a fatigue party was detailed to land and prepare the camp on Somes Island. He states that the men were paraded at 9.30 a.m., and remained ready to disembark until 1 p.m. The fact remains that the tug came alongside the transport, that people got on board her and the fatigue party did not—the reason alleged being that the sea was too rough. As Major O'Brien had written protesting against the Auckland men being landed on Somes Island, which letter Lieutenant-Colonel Abbott forwarded to the Commandant, your Commissioners do not believe that these officers made proper efforts to disembark the fatigue party. The evidence of Doctors Mason and Purdy compels the opinion that the disembarkation of the troops on Somes Island was passively obstructed by the two senior officers on board the "Orient." The evidence of the cleanness or dirtiness of the ship is not convincing either way, although Dr. Purdy stated that she was clean when he saw her. It is interesting to notice that the transport "Orient," on which discipline was slack, lost no men by death on the voyage, and disease was less virulent in character, a result highly commendatory to the medical staff.

Reviewing the circumstances which may have conduced to the absence of proper discipline on board the "Orient," your Commissioners are immediately confronted with the fact that the conditions under which the Ninth Contingent was embodied, employed, and embarked at Durban for New Zealand made proper discipline a practical impossibility. Embodied about 1st February, 1902, it was employed only three days on trek and three days returning to standing camp, and its whole period of service practically concluded on embarkation at Durban on 9th July. Many of the officers were new to their duties, strange to one another, unaccustomed to command and the habit of discipline, and unable to instruct their non-commissioned officers, because they did not and could not know even their own duties, and most of the non-commissioned officers were inexperienced, and unqualified by previous training for their responsible positions. These circumstances, and the disappointment of the men at having to return to New Zealand with fewer laurels than their more fortunate comrades, all combine to produce the result which your Commissioners regret to have to report for Your Excellency's information. It takes twenty years to prepare an Imperial soldier for the position of officer commanding a regiment; New Zealand must not be disappointed if some of her officers were not disciplinarians at the end of twenty weeks.

All which is, with great respect, submitted to Your Excellency.

As witness our hands and seals, at Wellington, this twenty-third day of September, 1902.

W. R. RUSSELL.  
R. McNAB.  
J. A. MILLAR.