

THE EMBARKATION of the 1st Echelon 2nd, N.Z.E.F.

Some weeks after the declaration of war 4420 New Zealand soldiers embarked at Wellington to serve the Empire overseas, the second such contribution of the nation's manpower to be made within 25 years and the third in the history of a country just celebrating its centenary. They were, in effect, the first of the country's centennial offering to the Motherland. Great liners of an aggregate tonnage of 83,000 that but a few months before had plied their peaceful way on the leading sea routes of the Empire carried them under accommodation conditions that set standards hitherto unknown in the war history of New Zealand. The men embarked as silently as they had come forward when the initial call was made for volunteers for overseas. There were no great, cheering crowds for it was essential in the interests of the men's safety that their departure be kept as secret as possible.

Nature smiled on the city of Wellington this day, when from the camps in the Auckland district and from the Central District mobilization camp, Trentham, the men went aboard ship direct from the trains which deposited them at well-timed intervals on the Glasgow and King's wharves. It was beautifully calm and sunny—there could have been no better day for these thousands of young men setting off on the greatest adventure of their generation to see for the last time in possibly some years the capital of the land for which they were going forth to fight.

Despite the secrecy surrounding their departure there was a reasonably-sized crowd on the adjacent waterfront, no members of the public whatever being allowed on the embarkation wharves. They came early, simultaneous with the arrival of the first troop train on the wharves, and waited four hours and more to wave farewell. A large liner was berthed nearest the waterfront which accommodated this crowd of well-wishers and though most of them probably had friends aboard the three other troopships berthed further along—two of them out of sight—they were content, as it were, when they could not see their own sons and husbands, to wave farewells to those whose parents and wives could not make the journey to Wellington to say au revoir.

It was impossible in the interests of the efficient embarkation of the men to allow the public or even near relatives on to the wharves at which the troopships were berthed but when the first three had got away there was only one ship to cast off, the gate was opened to release on to the wharf at which she was berthed an excited crowd which gave the men on this ship a great and enthusiastic send-off.

The Watching Crowd.

All morning, after they had been embarked and allocated their quarters, the men swarmed on to the after deck of the biggest ship, which commanded the view of the waterfront crowd, and perched themselves on every vantage point that offered. From their oft precarious positions they scanned the watching crowd, trying to locate wives, sweethearts, parents and friends. With almost 700 men massed on the after deck it was a work of ingenuity for either a soldier aboard or a watcher on the waterfront below and some distance away, to make contact. When they did there was mutual waving and shouting of greetings and these over, just the silent watching of both parties—the departing and the remaining.

On the other ships the men gathered on the sides nearest the city end of the wharves, straining into the distance to attempt the impossible of distinguishing those on the waterfront.

Some enterprising watchers took up positions on small coastal steamers, there to exchange cheery greetings with the soldiers.

The waiting hours were not without incident. One middle-aged man ventured too close to the water's edge and fell into the harbour. He staged a short harbour swim for the amusement of the troops and was finally rescued by means of lifebelts and hauled out by a ship's officer, a police constable and two harbour employees. By this

time he was fairly well exhausted but he had held the stage for a quarter of an hour. This was too long for some of the soldiers, who called out to the crowd: "Hey there, you came to see us, not him!"

Leader Sails With Men.

The commander of the Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force, Major-General B. C. Freyberg, V.C., sailed aboard the largest of the ships. She took the headquarters of the division (70), the Fourth Field Regiment, New Zealand Artillery (622), base depot details (45), headquarters, Fourth Infantry Brigade (60), and cast off for the stream at 12.30 p.m., the scheduled time.

Another ship took the 19th Wellington (Rifle) Battalion (790), Sixth Field Company of Engineers (250), Fifth Field Park Company of Engineers (160), and other small units consisting of the provost company, postal detail, employment platoon, base pay and post office details.

Other vessels took the 18th Auckland Battalion (790), Fourth Reserve Motor Transport Company (300), Second New Zealand Divisional Petrol Company (171), Second New Zealand Divisional Ammunition Company (166).

Here were also the Second New Zealand Divisional Light Cavalry Regiment (370) and some of the overseas base details.

One ship embarked the Second New Zealand Divisional Signals Company (300) and then proceeded to Lyttelton where she picked up the 20th Canterbury and Otago Battalion (790), the Fourth Field Ambulance (240), and the Fourth Field Hygiene Section (30).

On the rest of the ships the men were given the accommodation available to passengers and they were very happy about this. The men considered their quarters for the most part to be luxurious when compared with camp life.

Generally speaking they did not have a great deal to say. The outstanding impression they gave on being spoken to aboard ship was that they were thrilled and tremendously pleased that their great ambition to serve overseas was now, with the embarkation, a reality. The fact of such fine ships being at their disposal was another matter in which they were not silent. Whatever lay ahead would not rob them of the thrill they experienced when they stepped aboard these great liners.

Bull Terrier Mascot.

Mascots are inseparable from soldiering and the bull terrier, "Major," sailed aboard one ship with his master, Lieutenant Errol Williams, of

the Rifle Battalion. "Major" has lived at Trentham, spelled at Waiouru training camp, paraded with the troops in the grounds of Parliament House on their farewell public appearance and generally had a full but leisurely part in soldiering before and since the war. He was recently in attendance at his master's wedding in Christchurch, a trifle upset by the large white ribbon with which he was bedecked. He was given to Lieutenant Williams during his training days at Duntroon Military College, Australia.

Seven Special Trains.

Seven special trains brought the troops right on to the wharves and alongside their ships on the morning of embarkation. The first arrived at 8 a.m., the next at 8.30 a.m., and the third at 9.8 a.m. These were all from the Auckland camps. Then at 9.55 a.m., 10.40 a.m. and 11.15 a.m. trains arrived from Trentham camp. The last train, at noon, was from Auckland.

The arrival of the trains and the embarkation of the men was so well arranged that there was always a few minutes between the finalizing of the arrangements for one train load and the arrival of the next train.

The men who arrived on the early trains after all-night travelling were each given tea and a snack to eat on arrival on board the ships. This was arranged by the embarkation officer with the co-operation of the ships' staffs. Lunch was also served at midday and from what the men had to say afterward, they will have no complaints if this meal was a sample of the fare for the rest of the trip.

As each ship drew out there were the usual farewell songs, principally the touching Maori farewell melody, Hare Ra ("Now is the Hour when We must say Goodbye"), and cheers.

Embarkation Arrangements.

The embarkation arrangements were in charge of Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Alexander Roberts, Chief Embarkation Staff Officer, who held a similar position during the Great War. Beginning with the Seventh Reinforcement, he continued till the end of the Great War and altogether 101,000 men taken overseas by 76 transports, were embarked under his supervision. At the same time as he was occupying this responsible position during the Great War Sir Alexander was supervising the training of artillery units.

His staff on the occasion of the embarkation of the first echelon of the Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force was seven in number, including himself, and the entire work was done on a voluntary basis. Work on the embarkation details had been proceeding intensively for three weeks prior to the actual departure. Lieutenant-Colonel Roberts beginning it and utilizing his staff as their services were needed.

Each ship had its embarkation officer. There were two senior officers for embarkation work, Captain D. A. Ewen, in charge of Glasgow Wharf and Captain G. Prictor, King's Wharf. The job of Lieut.-Col. Roberts was to supervise this staff.

The ship's embarkation officers and senior officers had to arrange the details of accommodation for all troop units, warrant officers, sergeants and officers on each ship. They had also to work out the messing arrangements for each ship. Then, on arrival of the trains on embarkation day, they had to check every man off on the unit roll to which he belonged. One of the big tasks of the job was for these officers to make themselves thoroughly acquainted in a short period with all the accommodation offering on these large ships and allocate it to the best advantage.

The "Outer Defences."

Part of Lieut.-Colonel Roberts's job was also to co-operate with the shipping companies and with the Transport Board regarding the fitting of the ships, the Director of Sea Transport, Mr. L. B. Campbell (secretary of the Marine Dept.) being responsible for handing over the ships to the Chief Staff Embarkation Officer properly fitted for the transport of troops. On embarkation day it was also Lieut.-Col. Roberts's duty to be responsible for

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the "outer defences," that is the vision of the wharves and the public.

Lieut.-Col. Roberts specially arranged the help and co-operation from the ships' staffs, who he did and did everything they could help, the police, Wellington Harbour Board, Customs Department, the Boy Scouts of the Fifth Upper Hutt Troop who acted as messengers. For four days before the transport sailed an armed guard was stationed at the Army School of Instruction, Trentham camp. For the previous four days the troops were in Wellington prior to the sailing. The public could get near the wharves but not out being on business and under an authority.

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