

Acting Sergeant-Major HERBERT COLLINS sworn and examined. (No. 8.)

385. *The Chairman.*] Your name, please?—Herbert Collins.

386. You belonged to which contingent?—The Eighth, sir.

387. What rank did you hold?—Acting sergeant-major.

388. Are you willing to give evidence before the Commission?—Yes, sir.

389. Will you make a statement of what you wish to tell us about?—Well, as regards the hospital, I know nothing about it, with the exception of the case of two men who had measles, and they were paraded in front of the doctor, marked on the sick report as having measles, and marked for hospital. They did not go into the hospital, and they mixed up with the men in the mess-room, and remained there all that day, and one of them slept there that night.

390. When was this?—I could not tell you the date.

391. Did you complain about it?—I went to my own officer about it, Captain Fookes. He went to the medical authorities, and he got them to take the men to the hospital. I would prefer you to question me, if it makes no difference. Well, as to the sleeping-accommodation of the men, I do not think there was anything like sufficient room down below for the men; also the food was bad, and of a very poor quality; and also, as regards the promenade accommodation, there was not sufficient room.

392. Anything about the blankets?—The blankets, as far as I know, were lousy when they were issued, but I could not swear to it. I think the men had a fair amount of water; it was good. I consider the latrines were too small; the ventilation was bad. There was a fair quantity of food. Every man was allowed a pint of beer, drawn about 11 o'clock. I have no fault to find with it. It was not good beer by any means, but if they did not like it they need not take it.

393. You say the sleeping-accommodation was not sufficient?—No, sir; it was not sufficient.

394. What do you mean by "not sufficient"? Was there less than the transport regulations required, or less than you would have chosen to have?—Less than I would have chosen to have. There was no room for the men to sleep. They were closely packed in the hammocks, and they were sleeping on the floors and in the passages where we had to walk to the staircase.

395. Did each man have a hammock?—Every man was issued a hammock.

396. Why did they not hang them?—There was not room.

397. Were there sufficient hooks to hang the hammocks on?—Yes; there were hooks, but not sufficient to hang all the hammocks on.

398. Had you anything to do with the issue of the blankets?—No, sir.

399. You were regimental sergeant-major?—No; acting squadron sergeant-major.

400. Take your own blankets as an illustration: What did they look like when they were issued to you?—One looked clean, and the other the reverse—it looked soiled.

401. Bad in colour, or what?—Yes, sir.

402. Did any of the men make any complaint to you?—No.

403. When did you first discover lice on your blankets?—I never discovered any.

404. Were your blankets free all the time?—Yes.

405. To what do you attribute that yours were clean and others were not?—Luck, I suppose.

406. Did you take any trouble to get them cleaned, or were they cleaned without trouble?—We simply rolled them up in the hammocks before breakfast each morning, and they were then stacked in racks, and we got them again after tea.

407. I understand you to say that, although one of your blankets did not look clean, as far as you can guess it was free from lice?—Yes, sir.

408. How many suffered from lice on the way across?—About a third of the men.

409. Do you imagine that the other two-thirds of the blankets were free of lice then?—That I could not say, sir.

410. You think that two-thirds of the men were without lice?—I think so.

411. Do you think it reasonable to suppose that their blankets had no lice?—I suppose it is, sir.

412. How soon were complaints made about the blankets being lousy?—I suppose it would be a week after we embarked.

413. You did not hear of it before?—No, sir.

414. Is it probable that the men brought lice down with them from the veldt?—It is possible that some did, sir. I remember that plenty of the men were free when they came on board, and they complained of being lousy about a week after they got on board, and said they got it from the blankets.

415. Were the men commonly lousy on the veldt?—No, sir, not this time.

416. Did you bring the question of the blankets before anybody in your capacity as senior non-commissioned officer?—No, sir.

417. Was there official complaint made about them?—I do not know; I could not say.

418. You say the latrines were small?—Yes; after breakfast you would have to wait perhaps for an hour.

419. Do you know how many latrines there were—how many seats?—I should say there were about a dozen seats—that is, on our end of the ship. I do not know how many they had for the North Island section, but they used to come up and use ours.

420. Was there any complaint made to the officers about the latrines being insufficient?—Not that I know of.

421. Were they kept in fair condition?—Yes, sir.

422. In regard to the ventilation, which deck were you on?—I was on the first deck.

423. What means of ventilation had you?—No means of ventilation except what came down the companion-way. There were portholes, but we could not use them very often, as we had to keep them closed both sides.