

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

TUESDAY, 19TH AUGUST, 1902.

The Chairman (to Major-General Babington).] I understand, General Babington, that you are here to represent the Imperial authorities, not to take any part in the proceedings?—Yes, sir.

The Chairman, addressing those present, said: The course the Commissioners propose to take in the inquiry is to examine first of all Colonel Davies, Surgeon-Major Pearlless, and Captain Lewin; and, as it is possible in the course of the inquiry that there might be implication of laxity of duty and want of attention on the part of these officers, they will be allowed to remain in the room throughout the proceedings and cross-examine any witnesses touching their own departments. The Commissioners know that by taking a shorthand report of all the evidence given an entirely accurate report will be arrived at and published. They believe that the daily publication of evidence of impressions as well as facts is not so likely to lead to absolutely separate and independent statements as evidence given without knowledge of what previous witnesses have stated, and where charges are made during the course of the investigations the Commissioners believe that such charges should not be made public before being dealt with by them. The Press will not therefore be admitted.

Colonel DAVIES, C.B., sworn and examined. (No. 1.)

1. *The Chairman*.] Will you tell me your name and rank?—Richard Hutton Davies, Lieutenant-Colonel, and Brevet-Colonel New Zealand Militia, and Companion of the Bath.

2. You served in South Africa?—Yes.

3. In which contingents?—First, Third, Fourth, and Eighth.

4. Were you on board the troopship “Britannic” on her last trip to New Zealand?—Yes; I was in command of the troops.

5. Were you employed and paid by the Imperial Government or by the New Zealand Government?—We were paid by the Imperial Government.

6. In whose employ were you and the contingents?—In the employ of the Imperial Government, so I understood.

7. What port in South Africa did you sail from?—Durban.

8. Did you touch anywhere *en route*?—At Albany, and we went into Melbourne Harbour.

9. Where did the men on board the troopship march from to embark?—They came down by train from Newcastle.

10. What contingents did they belong to?—The whole of the Eighth came back, with the exception of the men who had permission to stay; and eighty-two of the Tenth came back, and a few Australian details.

11. Did they have notice before leaving Newcastle that they were to embark?—They were only notified the morning before they were actually entrained.

12. Did they know that they were likely to re-embark?—Oh, yes; they knew they might get orders at any time.

13. Did they have time to prepare for embarkation?—Oh, certainly.

14. They were not hurried straight from Newcastle without preparing?—No; they were preparing for days before.

15. How long were they in Durban?—They were run straight on to the boat out of the train.

16. How long was the steamer in Durban after embarkation before starting?—They embarked on Saturday morning, and she sailed about daylight on Sunday morning. She was waiting for something that was coming up from Cape Town.

17. What was the health of the men on embarkation?—Very good. There were no invalids embarked.

18. Were they medically examined?—If they were it was before I went on board the ship. I had some details to attend to. As far as I know, there was no necessity to examine them, as there were no sick men on board.

19. In what condition would their clothes be in on leaving Newcastle—clean or lousy?—Clean, I should say. But it depended entirely on the men themselves. There was no reason why the men should not be clean.

20. Were there any lice in South Africa?—In certain men. Of course, certain men start this, and other men have practically to live with these men; but I have no reason to suppose they were not clean. They had ample time to wash all their clothes.

21. Will you give us the number of men?—One thousand and five.

22. Do you know all about the cubic space on board the troopship?—No.

23. You are not able to give us any evidence on that?—No; I did not measure it.

24. Do you know what space is required by transport regulations?—No, I do not.

25. Did any question arise on embarkation about being overcrowded?—No. There were one or two complaints about its being stuffy, for the first day or two out from Durban, when I inspected, which I think was perfectly natural. The ship was full, and it was natural that complaints should come from men who had just come from the fresh air on the veldt. The growling was not confined