

CHARLES HOLMES SEWELL sworn and examined. (No. 13.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your position?—I am in charge of the Expeditionary Underclothing Department of the Defence Stores, which includes blankets.

2. There is a certain matter in connection with some blankets that were to have gone out to Trentham Camp on the 29th May: there were not sufficient blankets there, and some were sent out on Sunday. The Commission desires to know why they were not there?—I will endeavour to explain. I have been in charge of my department since the Trentham Camp started. Orders required for Trentham Camp are issued to me, sometimes verbally and sometimes in writing. I have kept a record of all lines sent by me to the Trentham Camp. On this date in question an order came through for 6,000 blankets.

3. What date did the order come through?—It was dated the 24th May. Owing to inadequate storage accommodation with the big stocks coming to hand from time to time, loads of blankets had been sent out to relieve our stock. Those blankets were sent out without any written order, and when this order for 6,000 blankets was issued to me I immediately made up my list of blankets that had been delivered at Trentham and communicated with the Accountant's Office and put the matter before them.

4. You made up a list of all blankets you had sent out without orders?—No; I made out a list of all blankets that had gone out there with and without orders. I drew the attention of the Accountant's Office to this matter and explained about the blankets that had been sent out to relieve our stock. I told them the number of blankets that had been sent out there, and I considered they were quite sufficient for requirements.

5. What number did you make up had gone out?—The total number of blankets forwarded to Trentham up to the 29th May, 1915, was 34,979. Those are the approximate figures, and they are almost correct. That is from the commencement of the camp up to the 29th May. My reason for querying the order for 6,000 blankets was that the blankets required for the total number of men who had been called into camp to that date was 33,170 blankets. That is the actual number required according to the number of men who had gone.

6. Where did you get your figures as to the number of men who had gone in?—I got my figures from time to time, and I have since verified them.

7. Were you supplied with figures from time to time?—I could get the figures, and I made a point of getting them.

8. That is on the assumption of three blankets to each man?—The second, third, and fourth, and Samoan bodies, approximately comprising 6,700 men, two blankets per man, comes to 13,400 blankets.

9. Then it was increased to three blankets?—That is two blankets for those bodies; and then the fifth, sixth, seventh, Stationary Hospital, and Trentham Regiment, approximately 6,590 men, at three blankets per man, worked out at 19,770 blankets. Those two amounts added together came to 33,170 blankets required for the body of men in camp and those coming to camp up to the date we were accused of a shortage.

10. What I understand, then, is that you queried the order for 6,000?—On account of goods sent out without written orders.

11. It would appear, then, they ought to have had a surplus of 1,800 blankets?—Yes, 1,800 blankets over, instead of a shortage.

12. Has that 1,800-odd blankets ever been cleared up?—No, it has not been. It was nothing to do with me; I simply issue the goods, and I keep the records.

13. Then, as to the troops that were going in—what about blankets for them?—Those figures included the troops that were going in. There were only 2,000-odd men, which comprised the Seventh Reinforcements, which were not in camp at that time. We have since supplied 8,561 blankets.

14. Is that since that Sunday when they went out?—Yes; since then we have supplied 8,561, approximately. Only 2,000-odd men have gone in since then, and according to my figures there should be 4,000-odd blankets as a surplus in Trentham Camp, and not a shortage to date.

15. Is there a shortage there now?—I am not aware.

16. According to your figures there are now at Trentham Camp—what?—A substantial surplus. The bales vary from 54 to 120.

17. If they have gone out of your store and are not at Trentham Camp most of them have been lost on the road?—If they have left my store they have gone to Trentham Camp. They are all sent out per motor-lorry, and I get a receipt from the man on the lorry. Immediately any goods are issued by me I enter them in an issue-book, which is handed over to the office. The office makes out a voucher in duplicate or triplicate, which is forwarded to the Quartermaster at Trentham Camp, and he keeps one copy and returns one signed to the office, and that is our receipt.

18. Do you suggest that the blankets that ought to be there are not there?—According to my figures and my way of working it out there should be a surplus there.

19. I have not yet understood why the blankets did not go out on the Saturday: you said they ought to have 1,800-odd over?—I immediately drew the attention of the Accountant's Office to it. I explained to them what had been sent out and not ordered, and they said if I was satisfied there was ample at the camp it was all right, and I was quite satisfied there were ample supplies there.

20. You did not telephone to the camp to ask them if they had what you thought they had?—No, I did not.

21. Possibly that might have been a good business step to take?—That rests with the office, not with me. I have never had any communication direct by telephone. I had occasion to go out there when pressed for room. I went out at my own expense and in my own time, more in the interests of the Department, and I had an interview there with Captain McCristell and Major Mounsey, and I explained to them at the time what my mission was.