

P. C. 3210.

CERTIFIED COPY of a Report of the Committee of the Privy Council, approved by His Excellency the Governor General, on the 2nd January, 1919.

The Committee of the Privy Council have had before them a Report, dated 31st December, 1918, from the Acting Prime Minister, stating that there has been brought to his attention statements which have appeared in the public press alleging ill-treatment of the men of the Canadian Expeditionary Force while on board the transport *Northland* on her voyage from Liverpool to Halifax recently completed and reflecting upon conditions generally prevailing upon the said transport during the voyage.

The Minister being of opinion that it is in the public interest that the fullest inquiry should be made into this matter, recommends that, under the provisions of Part 1 of the Inquiries Act, the Honourable Mr. Justice Hodgins of the Supreme Court of Ontario be appointed a Commissioner to inquire into and report as to the treatment of the men of the Canadian Expeditionary Force while on board the transport *Northland* on her voyage from Liverpool to Halifax recently completed and as to conditions generally on the said transport affecting the health and comfort of the men of the Force during the said voyage.

The Minister further recommends that all expenses incurred in connection with the said inquiry be charged to War Appropriation.

The Committee concur in the foregoing recommendation, and submit the same for approval.

RODOLPHE BOUDREAU,  
*Clerk of the Privy Council.*

To His Excellency the Duke of Devonshire, K.G., G.C.M.G., G.C.V.O., P.C.,  
Governor General of Canada.

YOUR EXCELLENCY:

Under the Royal Commission issued to me on the 2nd day of January, 1910, I was directed to—

“Inquire into and report as to the treatment of the men of the Canadian Expeditionary Force while on board the transport *Northland* on her voyage from Liverpool to Halifax recently completed and as to conditions generally on the said transport affecting the health and comfort of the men of the force during the said voyage, with any opinion I might see fit to express thereon.”

I have now the honour to report to Your Excellency that pursuant thereto I entered upon the inquiry above mentioned upon the 2nd day of January, 1910, and completed the taking of evidence upon the afternoon of the 11th of January, 1910, having sat continuously between these two dates.

Mr. John F. Orde, K.C., Counsel representing the Dominion Government.

Mr. A. B. Holden, K.C., for the White Star Dominion Line.

As well as Mr. David Loughlan, Major Tait and Mr. Robert Maxwell representing the Great War Veterans Association, appeared before me and examined the witnesses.

Commander S. N. Morres, R.C.N. and Lieut.-Com. G. W. Williams, R.N., C.V.R., were present in the interest of the British Admiralty.

There came before me as witnesses, Major-General Ashton, Adjutant General of Canada, Major-General Biggar, Quartermaster General, Col. Emmett Clarke, Director of Supply and Transport, V. Major C. H. Westmore, 31st Batt. (age 27), Calgary, V. Capt. R. D. Blandford, London, V. Lieut. E. Vautelet, C.F.A., Lieut. Thos. R. Elliott, C.F.A., London (age 25), Lieut. A. Stacey, C.F.A. (age 21), V. Lieut. Roy Brown, 116th Brantford (age 38), and the following sergeants, corporals and privates who were berthed on the *Northland* on the trip in question:

Name.	Residence.	Rank.	Age.	Arm.	Previous Occupation.
Floyd Higgins	Stratford	Lance Corp.	22		
Jno. D. Flood	Toronto	C. Qm. S.	41		
V Harry Gibbon	"	Adg. Staff Q.M.S.			V
Jas. H. Cunningham	"	Sergt.		Forestry	
Geo. M. Linton	"	Adg. Sergt.			
V H. Dufour	Maniwaki	Sergt.	27		V
Wm. Freeborn	Stratford	Adg. Staff Sergt.			
Geo. E. Corlock	Galt	"	38		
V Charles Smith	Toronto	Sergt.	32		V
V L. R. Cook	"	Lance C.	30		Policeman V
V H. Wolfe	Halifax	Sergt.	32		Reporter V
W. H. Richardson	"	Sergt. M.	38		Soldier
V T. J. Burke	Montreal	Sergt.	42		Fireman V
G. H. Fernyhough	Pembroke	"	62	Forestry	Farmer.
D. McCoshen	"	"	61	"	"
Robt. Wilson	"	"	33	"	Cook.
R. B. Dickson	Ottawa	"	45	"	Culler.
W. T. O'Reilly	"	"	39	"	Laumber.
V F. Reynolds	Hull	"	25	"	Butcher.
V Thos. Aylett	Toronto	Sapper	49		Bookbinder. V
V Joe Hawkes	"	Private		Machine Gun Section.	
Fred Leith	"	"			
Lewis Bevis	"	"	19	C.A.M.C.	
V Wm. A. Head	"	"	43		V
V Joe Laurent	Pembroke	"		Machine Gun	V
A. Blackburn	Toronto	"	27	Forestry	
Fred'k L. Green	"	"	28		Salesman.
V W. H. Press	Stratford	"	35		V
V P. Giles	"	"			V
V L. J. Kelly	Montreal	Private	41		Electrician. V
V C. Botham	Smiths Falls	"	21		Farmer. V

Name.	Residence.	Rank.	Age.	Arm.	Previous Occupation.
V S. St. Jean	Pembroke	Private	21		Farmer. V
V A. Childerpose	"	"	25		Cheesemaker. V
V A. Hamilton	"	"	20		Farmer. V
J. Abbott	Ottawa	"	48		Labourer. V
E. Chemier	Buckingham	"	18		Student. V
V H. Higgins	Ottawa	"	20		Carpenter apprentice. V
V S. H. Davis	"	"	25		Student. V
V H. Sherman	"	"	30		Labourer. V
L. Lavine	"	"	43	Forestry	Car repairer.
T. Kearney	"	"			Clerk
T. Laviolette	"	"	48		General Hotel man.
R. H. Fabran	"	"	44	Forestry	Baker.
T. F. Burgess	"	"	44	"	Printer.
G. R. Wington	Cumberland	"		"	Farmer.
V J. Forsyth	Aylmer	"	19		Florist. V
A. Fletcher	Ottawa	"	14		Clerk.
V P. Rose	"	"	22		Cheesemaker. V
V H. Gravelle	"	"	24		Electrician. V
V W. J. Hill	Toronto	"	35		Painter. V
V H. A. Brooks	Dover	"	27		Farmer. V
V G. Brown	Toronto	"	18		Student. V
Jas. A. Montgomery	"	"	42	Forestry	Civil Employee.
V J. McLarnor	"	Sapper	45		Trainman. V
V D. Ewart	Hamilton	Private	25		Labourer. V
V W. Donoghue	Toronto	"	34		Furniture Pack-er. V
V G. Hopkins	Chesley	"	42		Brickyard Foreman. V
V E. Cummings	Carleton Place	Pte.	32		Millhand. V
Geo. H. Smith	Ottawa	Corp.	44	Forestry	Meat Carver.
G. Drudhomme	"	Sgt.	18	"	Student.
V C. W. Parker	"	Reg. S. M.			

The following newspaper reporters were also called as witnesses: George C. Green, *Ottawa Citizen*, F. J. O'Malley, *Ottawa Journal-Press*, Arthur J. Chambers, *Toronto Telegram*.

The officers of the SS. *Northland* also testified and their names and positions are: Henry J. Learmouth, Master; John Hutchison, 1st Officer; R. S. Richards, Purser; Oliver Monks, Chief Engineer; James Reed, Chief Steward; H. Kelly, Ships' Carpenter; Wm. Clare, Chief 3rd Class Steward; Thos. R. Morris, Asst. 3rd Class Steward; Wm. E. Green, 2nd Steward; John Martin, Chief Cook; John Roxborough, Asst. Steward.

John Torrance, Manager, and Leo F. Tobin, General Passenger Agent, both of Montreal, of the White Star Line were also called.

In all there were 86 witnesses examined, of which 80, including the ships company, crossed in the SS. *Northland* on the trip in question.

From among the troops on board there were 6 officers, 22 non-commissioned officers and 39 men who gave evidence. Of these, four of the officers had seen active service at the front, and among the non-commissioned officers 8 had done the same, while out of the 39 privates called 25 had been in the trenches and had fought through some of the hardest battles of the war. I have indicated all those who went to France and came in for fighting with the letter V, so that it will be easy to identify them on the list given above.

As to the men who appeared before me I can say that, with few exceptions, they were temperate in their language and intelligent in their comments. The exceptions were those who either from their experience at the front or from their temperament were not in the best condition to be fair in their comments or just in their appreciation of undoubted difficulties.

This moderation is in contrast to many of the reports published in the papers, to which I shall refer later. I am satisfied that what was sworn to before me represented generally the matured opinion of those who spoke, freed from the excitement of home-coming and the recollection of a most aggravating experience on Xmas day.

There is considerable variety in the previous occupations of the witnesses, many of them having knowledge of the management of messes for officers, n.c.o.'s and cadets in England. The experience gained in transports in which individual men had crossed to England ranged from larger ships such as the *Olympic*, *Justicia*, *Caronia*, *Metagama*, *Baltic*, *Empress of Britain* and *Megantic* to the smaller or older *Saxonia*, *Pannonia*, *Corinthian*, *Grampian*, *Scotian*, *Scandinavian* and *Carpathian*.

The SS. *Northland*, formerly the *Zeeland* of the Red Star Line, length 580 feet, breadth 60 feet, registered tonnage 12,017, was originally a first, second and third class ship, built in 1901, and ran between Antwerp and New York as a Red Star Liner.

Apparently later she became a two class ship, first (which included the former 2nd class cabins) and third. Her accommodation on that basis is 348 first and second class and 1,412 third class. On this voyage she carried 1st and 2nd class 209, including civilians, (women and children), 3rd class 882. The sergeants, numbering 111, were berthed in the second class cabins and the 882 troops in the third class accommodation in sections C. D. E. F. H. J. K. & M.

She sailed from Liverpool on Sunday the 15th day of December, 1918, at 5 p.m., arrived in Halifax harbour on Christmas Day, 1918, and finished disembarking troops at 7.15 p.m. on the next day. The log shows that at noon on Monday the 16th December, 1918, it became squally and rough, resulting on Tuesday, 17th, in a high head sea, causing the ship to pitch heavily and ship water forward. The moderate gale developed into a strong gale and then a fresh gale, the unpleasant pitching lasting till Thursday, 19th of December, at midnight. On Saturday 21st the sea, which had been moderate, with rain during Friday, again roughened, lasting almost all Sunday the 22nd December. From Monday morning early, 23rd December, the weather was better and the sea calmer and on Christmas morning the ship arrived in Halifax harbour and was ready to land her passengers before noon.

In connection with the voyage one experience stands out as having a great influence on the recollection and temper of the men. After a rough and unpleasant voyage the ship made Halifax harbour on Christmas morning and the men were ordered to get out their bedding and mattresses. This was done and they were piled on the mess tables in the various sections between 10 and 11 a.m., in the full expectation of landing in time to get the good Christmas dinner awaiting them on shore. The quarantine officer arrived on board at 11.50 a.m. and, suspecting a case on board to be smallpox, directed the captain to anchor. He then communicated with Ottawa and the ship remained in sight of the dock during the whole of Christmas and until half-past twelve on the following day, when she received pratique, the case proving to be one of chicken pox. The dock was reached at 2 p.m. and all the troops landed by 7.15 a.m.

The men were bitterly disappointed on Christmas morning. A hurried dinner was prepared and eaten in great discomfort owing to the fact that all the tables were encumbered with bedding, etc.

It is unnecessary to discuss this meal, full details of which were in evidence, but it and the night on board, owing to the disorder of the sections, left a feeling of great chagrin and resentment which was fully reflected in the interviews subsequently published. But for this experience I believe much less publicity would have been given to the recollection of the voyage. They were related with a bitterness which a pleasant and comfortable reception would have largely prevented.

I now have to deal with the conditions which prevailed during the 10 days at sea, and do so under separate headings.

ACCOMMODATION.

I find that when the Admiralty authorities on 6th December, 1918, notified the owners of the *Northland* that the vessel was to be used for the conveyance of Canadian troops they mentioned the number to be carried as 200 officers and 900 men. The officers were to be accommodated in first class cabins and the men in the third class open berths. The Admiralty authorities state in that letter that this will leave for private bookings up to 148 first class and 144 in the "third class closed accommodation".

It appears that the allocation of the space for troops was done by Captain Courtney, an experienced Canadian Embarkation Officer at Liverpool, after consultation on board with the Purser of the *Northland*.

In the result the following troops were put on the ship:

C Section	145 men (filled)
D "	100 " (capacity 124)
E "	144 " (filled)
F "	42 " (capacity 145)
H "	118 " (filled)
J "	136 " (capacity 144)
K "	126 " (filled)
M "	62 " (capacity 131)

Sections C and E were forward on the middle deck. D and F were on the deck below immediately under C and E; H and K were on the middle deck in the stern, while M and T were also on the lower deck but astern. There were 14 privates who

spoke of conditions in C section, 13 who spoke of E and 11 of D. Only 1 or 2 privates were called from F and H sections, though some of the non-commissioned officers spoke of E. The latter section was just below E, but had only 42 men in it, with a capacity of 148, while H was filled. H was aft. Both of the witnesses who spoke of it, one formerly a reporter, who had been captured in action, and the other, injured before Amiens on 20th June, 1917, had no complaints to make except that the accommodation was too crowded. As to F, only one witness testified about it and said there was room for all to be seated but that the food was short and more had to be sent for.

The bulk of the evidence is therefore confined to sections C, E and D, the last named being below the other two. Both C and E were filled to capacity and D was four-fifths full. The evidence regarding these two sections is given both by non-commissioned officers, who were not berthed there, and by the men who occupied them.

I find practically complete unanimity upon several points: First, the crowding of the men into bunks very awkwardly placed and so close together as to render the occupants most uncomfortable.

They were built on each side of a 2-ft. passage, six upper and six lower, facing each other. The foot of each bunk was on the passage way, so that men had to get in over the foot and shove themselves up the length of the bunk. They adjoined each other and had a wooden partition between and when men were seasick their discomfort and that of their neighbours may be well imagined. Dressing in a 2-ft. passage or stowing away the kit was most difficult.

It appears that the wooden bunks spoken of replaced iron ones that had been taken out to provide space for cargo on previous trips. In other words, the bunking accommodation was exactly what it had been originally and may have been a relic of the days when the Zeeland was carrying foreign emigrants from Antwerp. I should add that 1,100 American troops going over occupied these same quarters in August, 1918, and the wooden bunks were put in to accommodate them.

Second, absolute want of ventilation during rough weather, which lasted for the first five days out and recurred again, aggravated by the fact that seasick men in the bunks were close to the tables where the men sat and ate--the bunks not being divided off from the rest of the section.

Third, insufficient tables to seat the men bunked in the section, necessitating delay while waiting for food, which was most trying under the conditions caused by the heavy sea and the want of air.

These complaints are not made by men unaccustomed to the hardships of war: I have gone through the records as given by the men who testified and find that out of the 14 men testifying to conditions in C section 9 had been at the front in combatant battalions; that out of 14 men and 6 non-commissioned officers who spoke as to E there were 10 men and 2 sergeants who had been at the front also in combatant battalions. As to D out of 11 witnesses among the men 5 had been in action and of 6 non-commissioned officers, 3 had done likewise. I may add that those officers and men from forestry battalions who gave evidence numbered only 14 out of a total of 67, and that sections C, D and E were not filled by forestry troops.

I find that these complaints are fully justified. It is said that there is pressure to bring troops out. The acting Adjutant-General of Canada stated before me that the movement is initiated from Canada, the Canadian Military authorities here informing the overseas ministry how many troops can be dealt with per month and that the number of troops so given is sent out as soon as the overseas ministry can secure the ships. It so happened that the December troops were, as it was expressed, "bunched" in the last of the month. No soldiers arrived between the 1st and 14th December, 1918, except one small shipload, while in the last two weeks approximately 20,000 returned. Owing apparently to this pressure on space the regular trained conducting parties were all occupied and one for the S.S. *Northland* had to be hurriedly made up. In consequence only two of its members had any experience, and that only in clerical and pay department work. As a result of this pressure, too, the various Military District officers and no opportunity to make acquaintance with the personnel of their units before sailing.

To these two causes much of the consequent confusion and want of discipline was due.

The question is therefore pointedly raised by the existence of the conditions which I find prevailed, whether the pressure to bring troops back, originating in Canada, is of so serious a character as to justify the overcrowding and discomfort caused by filling the space below full of bunks and leaving practically no room for movement, coupled with want of ventilation lasting for several days at a time.

For my part, I am strongly of the opinion that under no circumstances should returning Canadian troops be so closely packed as they were in these sections nor should there be accepted quarters so confined as to render the air foul without any

means, in rough weather, of allowing fresh air to enter. Furthermore I think that sufficient seating accommodation should be provided for every man carried, so that no second sitting should be necessary. A second sitting in such narrow and close quarters is not really possible nor would it be needed under such conditions as ought to prevail. The tables for meals should be shut off from sleeping quarters so as to obviate entirely the nauseating experience gone through on this trip, of eating in the same room with men suffering from seasickness in its acute form.

In short, I have a decided view that conditions of space for eating, sleeping and dressing which prevailed during the days when foreign immigrants were crowding to get over, and which might be cheerfully endured by troops on their way to the seat of war, eager to get at the enemy, are not conditions which the Canadian soldiers should be either asked or permitted to put up with when returning to their homes.

The outlook of the men has now completely changed and they no doubt complain of much that in itself is far better than they have had to put up with during the war. But it is a matter of national pride to ensure that they should have ample sleeping, seating and eating accommodation and such provision for ventilation as will enable them to make the voyage in comparative comfort.

I am fortified in this opinion by the fact that in App. No. 1 of the Regulations for H. M. Transport Service, 1917, I find the following:—

~~“Every man must have a seat at a mess table, therefore the maximum number of men a deck will accommodate is governed by the number of mess tables that can be fitted.”~~

In App. No. 26 in the same book is found a fixed system of ventilation to supplement windsails, etc., and in App. No. 23 a regulation provides that,

“Each deck is to be separately ventilated. Air trunks, ventilators, shafts, etc., to be fitted wherever it may be found necessary to place them.”

I do not wish to be understood as condemning the accommodation on the *Northland* in any general or sweeping way. If one-half the bunks had been taken out or sufficient to equalize the number berthed with that which could be served at the tables and if the tiers of bunks had been partitioned off and some permanent ventilating apparatus installed, I do not think much complaint would have been found with the quarters thus provided.

It is because this was not done that the sections were entirely too crowded, too public and inadequate. In other words, rearrangement of the space or putting less men into the sections and ventilating them would solve the whole difficulty. It is misleading to say that the ship was not full without at the same time recognizing the fact that Sections C and E were filled to capacity and that no relief from their unpleasant conditions was gained because in some other sections there was no crowding.

#### FOOD.

I find that there was sufficient food on the ship and that any temporary shortage was not due to lack of stores. As to its quality I see no reason to doubt that it was good. Some definite exceptions were sworn to, chiefly eggs. Seven separate instances were given where men got eggs unfit to eat. Salmon, too, was said to be unentable in some cases and jam was watered once at least. But with these occasional lapses the quality was not impeached. The word “rotten” when used by the men, in the published interviews in reference to food, did not mean “decayed” but was a compact expression denoting their dissatisfaction with messing methods generally. This was sworn to by each one who used the word. The fact that it might be misunderstood did not seem to have occurred to them or to the reporters.

#### MESSING.

The construction of the *Northland* was such that the third class space was on the two lower decks, the ports of which could not be opened in rough weather. As the engine space on these decks separated the fore and aft sections it was necessary to go up to the decks above to get from the bow to the stern. These decks were divided into sections, each of which had its entrance from the deck above. There was only one galley for cooking, the main galley on the middle or saloon deck and all the food had to be brought from it to the sections where the men were both bunked and fed. Owing to the division by the engine space, which I have mentioned, a long journey was required to get the cooked food. That journey necessitated going to the deck above, (and for sections F & D to two decks above) along that deck and down again to where

the main galley was situated. In coming back with the food the return trip along the deck and down again had to be taken, so that when the food got to the serving pantries and tables it had become cooled. Each section had its own serving pantry or serving table to which the food was brought from the galley by a fatigue party in tins and then served out from the pantry or table to the men at the tables. This latter operation was the one instituted and favored by the Chief Steward and the Chief 3rd Class Steward but it fell down in most cases under the circumstances I shall mention and the men thereafter lined up in a queue at the serving pantry where the ship's stewards put on each man's plate what he thought was his share until what had come from the galley was exhausted.

In the galley, where the Chief Steward stood superintending the output of food, there were two things that had a considerable influence on the men's comfort. One was the belief that some men would be seasick, so reducing the number expecting a meal, and the other was that a fatigue party was not sent away with enough for all the section but with a less quantity because otherwise it was thought that other fatigue parties from different sections would be kept waiting. These factors caused a reduction in the amount of food sent down to the pantry and a shortage resulted. When therefore the men went to the pantry, those at the head of the queue could only be served as far as the supply would go. A fatigue party would have to go back out along the upper deck to the galley for more. When there they had to wait again and when they got back it was to find some hungry and discontented men waiting, while others, tired of the delay, or unable to stay in the ill-ventilated quarters, had gone away unsatisfied. Those who had not been served with the earlier supply remained in the queue and were joined by others who, although served, had not received enough to feel satisfied and wanted more. No wonder that messing was difficult and unsatisfactory. It is said that as it was necessary to have two sittings in certain sections the wait was, in any case, inevitable as to some at least. That is so, but two sittings would not have been needed at all if there had been sufficient table accommodation in all the section. In the typed Daily Routines supplied to the non-commissioned officers in charge of mess duties only one sitting is provided for. If the necessity for two sittings was clear then to properly feed men on a troopship under the serious handicaps I have mentioned, system and organization was vital, but no one appears to have taken that view of the situation. I therefore find it necessary to discuss the arrangements actually in force. On the *Northland* the ship's standing order No. 23, sec. (b) is "Any one having complaints to make in regard to messing must lodge them with the Orderly officer" and the section concludes with the instruction "Any complaints against the ship's staff are to be made to the orderly room."

The orderly officer referred to is the day orderly officer, who was changed every day. The orderly room was on the promenade deck, two decks above the men's quarters and three decks above sections M and J.

The duty of the day orderly officer was to visit the mess at all meals and to make rounds with the captain of the ship daily.

In practice this seems to have been followed by the orderly officers, three of whom were called, but personal presence during the whole meal has not always been shown, nor is it perhaps necessary if properly instructed non-commissioned officers were put in charge.

So far as the evidence relates to this branch of the subject, I find that no efficient dealing with the situation either by the non-commissioned officers or the orderly officers was displayed. There is not any appreciable contradiction between the statements of the men and that of the officers called as to the frequency of the complaints. One officer said he received "dozens" and another that they were "numerous." But in the extremely sketchy daily reports made by orderly officers there is hardly any mention of complaints. My observation, based on many of the incidents related both by the officers, non-commissioned officers and men, leads to a very definite conclusion that the "visits" to the mess did not accomplish any results except in individual cases occurring at the moment. But the complaints, which I find were frequent and continuous, were in the majority of instances addressed to the non-commissioned officers or to the ship's stewards and were not by them brought to the notice of the day orderly officers in any effective way. There seems to be a curious but well defined reluctance on the part of Canadians to take up and adjust any grievance for fear of being regarded as kickers, and these soldiers were no exception to this rule. The root trouble was not one that could be corrected on the spot, when some particular man complaining was short of food or served with badly cooked meat or vegetables. It lay a long way off—at the galley—and the orderly officer on some occasions went there to try and remedy the complaint he had just received.

Feeding troops properly is not, in my judgment, accomplished if it takes so long to get a substitute for the food objected to or to get more food, that the meal is practically over before the cause of complaint is removed.

In short, on this head I am compelled to find that there were well-founded complaints both of temporary shortage of food and sometimes of badly cooked food, and that there were only spasmodic attempts to find a cure, the effort depending upon the persistence of the complainant or the presence of the orderly officer or the willingness of the ship's stewards to assist.

The real weakness was the total absence of any systematic effort to understand and to cope with the difficulties of distance, restricted space for eating and short supplies to the pantries and serving tables. Speaking generally, the Chief Steward's department, the orderly officer in charge of each military district and his non-commissioned officers, and the officer conducting troops with his conducting staff would seem to afford sufficient force to tackle these difficulties.

None of them managed to do so. The Steward's department had arranged for second tables in some sections. But this proved, as it was bound to do, most unsatisfactory for the reason that there was only one fixed hour for each meal on the daily routine and a second sitting resolved itself into a long wait, with nowhere to wait in, and too long a time between breakfast and dinner. However that may be, no practical attempt was made by that department to put the plan in force and the soldiers were left to try another way, that of standing in a queue at the pantry wicket. In one section, four different methods were tried in succession. This queue gave no better results; it involved a long wait for those beyond the middle of the queue and it was changed back by the men in some cases to the old system, which again broke down.

In the face of all this there is no trace of any realization, either by the orderly officers in charge of the Military District parties or by the conducting staff, that anything was wrong. The Military District orderly officer was charged with the discipline of his party and its proper and cleanly accommodation. He consequently had no responsibility as to meals. This developed on the day orderly officer who had 12 hours on duty and then was off for the rest of the voyage. If, at his visit to the mess on his day of duty, he heard a complaint or saw anything wrong, he would probably try and put it right but his responsibility was only for a very limited period and did not extend to dealing with a defective system or bad methods of serving food nor was it more than a temporary one over ten other parties from other Military Districts.

So far, therefore, as each section was concerned, in perhaps the most important item from a soldier's standpoint in the voyage there was, in this particular, no permanent head made responsible or required to deal with it. Complaints might be made to an officer not known to the men and who only visited it during the meal and went off duty that night.

The conducting staff is, it must be remembered, put on board primarily for clerical work. Its executive officer, the adjutant, has an orderly room to which he must stick unless replaced by another member of the staff, for there are very important matters to be dealt with in preparing the soldiers' papers and reports and information dealing with the distribution, transport and demobilization of the troops on board.

I have set out the foregoing somewhat in detail, for it forms the ground work of my conclusions.

There seems throughout the voyage, on the question of messing, to have reigned the most complete confusion and lack of system resulting in short rationing, long waits and cold food.

The proper handling of this difficult duty, which must be done partly by the Stewards Department and partly by the fatigue parties from the different Military Districts, could only be acceptably performed by the most careful organization, considering the handicaps of long journeys to the galley and the restricted space for messing. Instead of this neither of the departments which could have usefully intervened did so. And the Stewards' department seems to have acquiesced in the confusion instead of bringing it to the attention of the Officer Conducting Troops.

A body of men, returning home after most arduous work, many of them after unexampled and strenuous endeavour, needed, and indeed demanded, some special effort to make them comfortable and to satisfy them. No one appears to have gone below, studied conditions and devised a system. The men were allowed to do as best they could without there being any one responsible or especially and continuously charged with looking after their comfort in the two most vital needs, food and quarters. Instead of this the plan of changing the day orderly officer every morning and then putting on him the duty of visiting the messes, might almost seem to have been devised to ensure failure in this regard. I am quite aware that this is in accordance with the King's regulations on board ship and where well organized military units are travelling may work well.

I am not competent to say whose duty this very necessary and, I should say, outstanding work was or should be. That is for the Military authorities to decide. But the absence of any one who was charged with making a real business-like effort to compel conditions of proper feeding and serving and the want of recognition of the



fact that such an effort was necessary and indispensable cannot be disregarded. The personal touch is such a potent factor in happy relations and in straightening out difficulties that I cannot help thinking that unless such a duty can properly be imposed on an O. C. troops or unless he can, regardless of military etiquette, make it his own, then there should be added to the Conducting Staff a quartermaster or some such officer charged with this duty, who should be instructed to do it with tact, kindness and firmness, and should be possessed of such authority as would enable him to have his wishes carried out.

Due weight in considering the relative responsibilities of the Conducting Staff and the orderly officers must be given to the fact that, in this instance, the Conducting Staff, relying upon its military system, was left largely in the dark by the orderly officers, who either overlooked or were ignorant of the existence of the conditions which now appear to have caused most of the discomfort. Their excuse is the reticence of the men, to which I have already adverted.

One other matter. The Chief Steward, who watched in the galley the handing out to fatigue parties, knew nothing of the rationing scale. This scale has been in force since October 1918 and consists of articles weighing 52½ oz. as against the Canadian Field ration of 65½ oz. While of less weight it has greater variety. In fact the scale of rations was not the standard at all—the troops were, the Chief Steward said, to be treated as 3rd class passengers, although the Admiralty instructions by letter to this Company said: "Victualling should be arranged on the scale hitherto in force for Canadian troops."

I am not convinced that full rations upon the agreed scale were in each case handed out. But there was no attempt to do so; they were not the standard at all. I am, however, bound to say that the want of knowledge of the scale of rations was not put forward by either the stewards or the company as any excuse for any shortage in such a case. The company's rule is not to stint in food. But with a soldier his ration is an important standard.

A military cook, accustomed to army rations and their bulk and appearance, attached to the conducting party and stationed in the galley would reduce to a minimum any chance of food shortage.

#### WATER.

The want of fresh water for drinking and washing was the subject of very general complaint before me. Its cause was very clearly indicated as being due to the turning it off at 4 p.m. until next morning (7 a.m.) as part of the ship's routine in order to prevent the pipes freezing. The ship arrived with one tank out of six still unused and with 1,000 tons of fresh water in her double bottom.

This is one of the things which proper organization would have easily dealt with. No effort was made to ascertain the cause of the shortage though it is mentioned in some of the officers' reports. If a card had been hung on the taps notifying the hours when the water was cut off and advising the men to fill their water bottles before 4 p.m. or if this information had been put in orders and read out at the daily parade, not the slightest difficulty would have been experienced.

#### DECK ACCOMMODATION.

The deck accommodation gave some nasty trouble in the early days of the voyage. It was clearly proved that after the ship sailed on Sunday evening the 15th and until the morning of the 18th day of December, 1918, the troops were not allowed on the promenade deck. This caused great dissatisfaction among them as the weather was wet and the sea rough, while the forward and aft decks below the promenade deck afforded no protection from the weather, and were somewhat cramped owing to ships' gear on them.

One of the orderly officers on the third day out admits having told a sentry, whom he had posted, that if the sentries could not enforce the order to keep the men off the deck, the ship's crew would have to be called up to do so with arms, i.e. with rifles. This information, he said, he got either from the O. C. Troops or the adjutant, not as a joke but as a serious matter. Fifteen minutes, or shortly after, the order was changed, and the men were given the right to use one side of the promenade deck. They had, in fact, that side and the space right across both the ship forward and aft for use thereafter. During the rest of the trip the men had ample accommodation and have therefore no ground for complaint. The early restriction as to deck space was much resented during the first couple of days and the sentries did not seem desirous of enforcing it; hence the unwise threat above spoken of. There seems to

have been no reason why the permission subsequently given could not have been issued on the first day if some one had taken the trouble to inspect the men's quarters or to look after their comfort in this respect.

I may add that this incident draws attention to the inadvisability of carrying women and children on a ship carrying troops unless in case of married parties. Had it not been for that fact the trouble would not have arisen and there would have been no necessity to exclude the men from part of the deck in the first instance.

#### UNUSED ACCOMMODATION.

It came out during the inquiry that part of the first class accommodation containing 29 closed cabins was unused save by 6 women and children. This space had not been booked but in order to give these parties additional room they were allowed to use the cabins.

It was said that to allot them to the troops would have created dissatisfaction among those not favoured? I think this would be so unless the Medical Officer had selected from among the troops those suffering from any disability and had ordered them in. This course was suggested during the inquiry by the representative of the Great War Veterans' Association.

But, save one man whose shoulder was not quite right, I have no evidence to show that there were any invalids of any kind on board, so that it is unnecessary to pursue the subject further.

#### WANT OF DISCIPLINE.

This prevailed more or less during the voyage. It was manifest to the Officer Commanding troops on his first and second inspection and displayed itself in various ways. One section was left without non-commissioned officers for two or three days, the quarters and latrines were not kept clean, the sentries did not seem to want to keep the men off the reserved portion of the deck, and the men were indifferent on parade, etc. The non-commissioned officers were not those to whom the men were accustomed, their officers were strange and slackness in a military sense seems to have characterized the trip. I have already indicated some matters which, if remedied, would have prevented much of this. But I cannot find any trace of ill-feeling between the officers and men or any ill-treatment of the men as would be inferred from the newspaper reports. Nor do I find the statements correct that the 3rd class stewards had no control over their assistants. The latter were admittedly of an inferior class, young, and not as competent as pre-war stewards but as a whole the Steward's Department on the steamer was well staffed and was efficient except in its handling of the particular situation which developed.

#### BATH ACCOMMODATION.

There is no provision on H.M. transports during short engagements for baths except in hospital. There was one on the *Northland* but no evidence that any man ever used or sought to use it. There were 3 others which could have been made available if there had been any outcry on the subject but I have heard of none.

#### PUBLICITY.

Before the inquiry began I asked that the reporters of the newspapers who had published what purported to be statements made by the returned men should be summoned. I did so because, while it is very much in the public interest, if complaints are justified, that they should have been given publicity in the press, it is essential that they should be accurately and fairly reported. As the witnesses were called in this inquiry it became apparent that the statements appearing in the newspapers which had brought about the inquiry were not, in all cases, borne out by those who had been interviewed.

As I desired to ascertain whether the complaints were actually those made by the men or whether the reporter was giving his version of the matter after having heard what the men said, I had the reporters called. They proved to be young and intelligent, gave their evidence fairly and produced their rough notes. The mistakes which undoubtedly occurred seemed to be chiefly in those cases where the published report was most "newsy" and striking. In only one case, however, can it be said that there was any conscious misrepresentation. One newspaper, after dealing with the incident

of finding a chicken in an egg, said, "Rose waxed so wroth when he attempted to tell his troubles that he broke down." The original story was produced by the reporter and contained nothing about breaking down, that being an unauthorized addition made in the report by some one in the newspaper office before publication. But in justice to the reporters I should say I have examined their rough notes which, in many cases, bear out their recollection as against that of the soldiers. They also explained that frequently many of the men spoke at once and they might have attributed remarks to the wrong man.

I went into this matter and I am satisfied that while in what was published many incidents were exaggerated, the reports were honestly made and were published as being in the public interest. While great care should be taken to ensure accuracy, the work of the press can be of the greatest assistance in the critical task of repatriating our gallant men both safely and happily.

#### THE ADMIRALTY.

I have heard nothing in this inquiry which in any way reflects upon the British Admiralty.

I am in entire agreement with their expressed opinions upon 3 points. These were communicated by cable and are as follows:

"1. If troops refuse to clean their quarters and carry out the usual fatigue duty on board no ship can continue to be sanitary.

"2. If complaints as to quantity and quality (of food) arose they should have been immediately investigated on board by the Officer Commanding Troops and the Conducting Officer together with the Master of the ship and every possible step taken to remedy any faults.

"3. It is of the first importance that proper discipline be maintained on board and that all complaints be reported to the O.C. Troops and Conducting Officer and action taken immediately.

"It has been shown by experience that possibilities for complaints exist but when they are made in general terms after troops are landed matters cannot be properly sifted and those persons guilty of neglect or unjustified grumbling cannot be brought to book."

Before the inquiry closed I asked that special information should be asked from the Admiralty as to the right of the Canadian Overseas Ministry to refuse ships with the accommodation offered. The answer is that the Canadian Overseas Ministry can refuse and have in some cases actually done so.

This matter is not of such importance as I thought at one time it might be, for here it is not a question of the ship being entirely unsuitable but that of minor alterations, i.e. the taking out of the 2nd stack of bunks and reducing the number berthed to that which the tables in the section can afford places for, and making the customary provision for proper ventilation through permanent fixtures.

The difficulty of getting ships was no doubt the reason for the congestion which occurred during the last 2 weeks of December, 1918. This seems to me to afford some excuse in this particular instance for the acceptance of the *Northland* as she stood. It was only notified to the White Star Line that she would be used for troops on the 6th December and the purser learned of it on the 9th December, 1918. She sailed on the 15th of that month. The embarkation officer had little time afforded him for alterations if he had thought them necessary. I am not at present informed whether he or the Overseas Ministry was the authority to require or ask for alterations. It is, I am afraid, impossible to say that if these changes had been asked for they would have been made in the short time allowed—not because they involved so much work as because of the enormous pressure on the Admiralty for all sorts of services in coping with their wide responsibilities. I have no information whether, if the ship had been refused, it might not have caused great disappointment to the troops expecting to be home for Xmas and warned to be ready. The disadvantage of using unsuitable accommodation or unduly cramping troops on their way home will no doubt be apparent to those having the final decision as to the acceptance of ships and the despatching of the troops.

#### CONCLUSIONS.

1. I find that there was more than sufficient food on board for all requirements.
2. I find that the *Northland* was properly manned and staffed.
3. I find that the cooking was as a whole good, but on several occasions eggs were uncatable and that vegetables, porridge, etc., were occasionally badly cooked, but those were, I am satisfied, exceptions and might happen in any mess or eating-house.

4. I find that while the ss. *Northland* can be made suitable for the transport of troops, if certain simple but essential alterations are made on the troop decks, yet on the voyage in question the berthing and messing accommodation for the troops carried was unsuitable, in that it was too confined and crowded and the bunks uncomfortably placed for individual access and open to the rest of the section. I find that in the weather which might be expected to prevail in December the conditions which naturally followed were not only decidedly unpleasant but unhealthy, owing to the effects of seasickness, crowded quarters and a total absence of ventilation until the weather moderated.

5. I find that the necessary accommodation in sections C and E was inadequate to seat or accommodate the troops quartered therein, necessitating long and trying waits, short rations and cold food and that this condition was aggravated by the necessity of going to the galley by way of the upper deck for each tin full of food, and that even where all were able to be seated, the other conditions were present to the same degree as in C and E.

6. I find that neither in regard to the berthing nor messing was any systematic attempt made to grapple with the actual conditions throughout the voyage so as to ensure the best results that could be obtained under those conditions. Transferring some of the men into unfilled sections so as to relieve the overcrowding in C, D and E and arranging a different time for meals on the different decks might have greatly helped. The Conducting Staff and the Military District units seemed to revolve in different orbits, never coming into real contact and each expecting some action from the other. I find that no one in the Conducting Staff took personal, direct and continuous control or oversight of the men's comfort and discipline and that there was no one in the galley who was familiar with the proper scale of rations, and that the result was confusion and dissatisfaction which might have been remedied if taken in hand at once and in a practical way.

7. I find that while the Conducting Staff are properly informed by the Adjutant-General's office in Ottawa that "the success of delivering troops in England and the returning of troops to Canada depends on the completeness with which the conducting staffs carry out their work," there prevailed on the trip in question no idea of how to carry out the work in an effective way or other than in a purely military fashion as if the force was an organized unit—a method quite unworkable under present changed conditions, unless reinforced by the practical and active efforts of the Conducting Staff. It is necessary to give special thought as to how to make the best of the discomforts of a voyage and to organize for the unusual and unaccustomed strain of bad weather.

8. I find that discipline was lax on board the *Northland* and that its slackness was noticed and not dealt with. It was due to several causes. *First*, slackness in the officers as noted by the O.C. Troops and the Adjutant. *Second* their want of acquaintance with the members of the unit they took charge of. *Third*, dissatisfaction among the men with quarters and food and the arrangements for messing and the trouble about deck accommodation. *Fourth* the want of initial organization so as to prevent the soldiers being forced to interfere with the Stewards' arrangements and thus creating want of order during the most important times of the day, i.e. meal times. *Fifth* the presence on board of a large number of men from non-combatant battalions, where discipline is not so strictly observed as in the infantry. *Sixth*, absence of proper supervision over and contact with the men by the Conducting Staff. *Seventh*, the fact that men of the same Military District were unnecessarily allotted to 2 or 3 sections (This last fact is taken from the O.C. Troops official report.)

9. I find the water supply was ample and that the want of it was caused by the absence of proper notice to the men as to when it would be available and when shut off. I find that a bath was provided for the troops and was never used nor were any baths asked for.

10. I find that food was sold on the ship contrary to orders and in spite of reasonable efforts to stop it. It is usual on all troopships, and on this trip it has not been established that there was anything abnormal on what occurred during the voyage. I see no great objection to the supplying of a light supper say of bread and cheese to the men who want it just before "lights out" is sounded. Nothing would deprive the stewards of customers quicker than a free meal at that hour.

11. I find that it was the duty of the men to clean their quarters and that this was not efficiently done by them. The deck space in the sections was not properly washed. The latrines were not kept in the right state for use and they overflowed into the sections below. It is said that this last is something that should be attended to by troops. If so, it was not attended to by them, with the result that there was water upon the floor most of the way across. One closet was stopped up by a cigarette tin and was shut off from use altogether.

Here as in other matters there was direct evidence from non-commissioned officers that they had seen the conditions referred to, but from some idea that it was not their business deliberately neglected to call anybody's attention to it. The Sanitary squad was appointed by the orderly Sergeants but does not appear to have done any effective work.

12. I draw attention to the extremely fragmentary reports made daily by the orderly officer of the day and by the orderly officers of the Military Districts. They are on all kinds of scraps of paper and bear indications of haste and impatience of detail, thus reflecting the want of smartness which prevailed and which was apparent to both the O.C. Troops and his Adjutant.

13. In reaching these conclusions I acknowledge the candour and sincerity of the O.C. Troops, who has served for over 24 years through campaigns which included St. Eloi, Courclette, Regina Trench, Vimy Ridge, Hill 70 and Passchendale—and also of his staff. And it is a question whether, after the war experiences I have referred to, it would be fair to ask any officer to take the position if it is to be other than as he viewed it, and as needing much activity and concentration. I differ, however, from the view that application can be made, of the ordinary discipline and routine of a battalion organized for war, with its own officers and filled with *Esprit du corps* or even in time of peace under ordered conditions, to a sea voyage with disjointed units who have never seen the officers or n.c.o.'s put in charge of them; where the messing is done by civilian stewards and not on the basis of military rationing. The expressed idea that the conducting of troops is a matter of discipline and routine and not of business, and hence that a complaint once remedied ceases to be a complaint and needs no following up, and that an order given will be assumed to have been obeyed, is not in my judgment correct.

I am therefore bound to state my opinion that special conditions demand special attention and appropriate organization and that no military etiquette should be allowed to stand in the way of a thorough understanding at the beginning of the voyage of the difficulties and discomforts already patent or to be anticipated so that a proper remedy can be applied.

And I further think that the trouble as to want of discipline on board returning troops ships would be more easily overcome if the O.C. Troops or his Adjutant were to be frequently seen among and evidently sympathetic with those they are conducting.

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In concluding this report I may remark that it touches only a fragment of a much greater and complicated subject, that of the world wide transportation of troops.

The benefit to be gained is not so much from a report on any particular trip as in the publicity and the fact that investigation promptly made into the circumstances. The value of any such Inquiry rests entirely in ascertaining whether the imperfect conditions disclosed, or the methods wrongly employed, are likely to persist and in thus drawing attention to possible improvement.

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I transmit herewith the evidence given before me and the exhibits referred to therein.

All of which is respectfully submitted.

Dated at Toronto this  
25th day of January, 1919.

FRANK E. HODGINS.