Echoes of the Past.

A VOYAGE IN A TRANSPORT IN 1812.
RECEIVED FROM MAJOR-GENERAL ROBERT PRIEST, K.H.P.

EARLY one morning not many months ago the most modern of British troopships—H.M.T. "Dilwara"—steamed smoothly and silently out of the Suez Canal to continue her homeward journey. As she passed, her graceful lines and her beauty reminded me of a story in contrast I had read about a voyage in a transport a hundred or more years ago.

This story appeared in The Monthly Panorama or Officers' Companion for February 1813, which reads as follows:—

Advice to Officers proceeding overseas.

Off the Lizard, May 4, 1812.

Being at this moment sailing with a fair wind and smooth sea, although about half-way between Ushant and Cape Finistere, and enjoying all the advantages of a well-regulated society; I cannot resist a wish to describe the source from which we derive these comforts, for the advantage of all who may hereafter find themselves in a similar situation.

Our party consists of officers, surgeons, and commissaries. By a mutual inclination to accommodate each other, the four and twenty hours are so regulated that every thing passes as in a family:—we rise at seven,—breakfast at eight,—dine at two,—drink tea at six,—sup at nine, and retire to bed at ten. A time is allowed for washing out the cabin, and arranging births,—and, although we have two separate messes, yet the general anxiety for mutual accommodation prevents that confusion which would otherwise occur. Cards, back-gammon, and books amuse us alternately, and as the two former are confined to small stakes, there is nothing but an adverse wind and bad weather that can obstruct our harmony.

I subjoin a scale of ship allowances, etc., and a list of such articles of provisions it seems necessary an individual should take on board. Sea stock for one person, calculating the voyage at fourteen days, exclusive of the ship allowance:—fresh meat 10 lb., 3 couple of fowls, 1 lb. of tea, 4 lb. of sugar, 3 gallons of potatoes. In regard to wine and liquors, as the ship's allowance of spirits is ample, any provisions of that quality must be left to choice. Annexed is the ship's allowance; it being understood that officers draw exactly the same allowance as the private soldiers.
The above articles are in general good of their kind. I recommend a supply of soda water and chocolate to be laid in. The candles they allow on board for the officers are 12 to the lb. but they are generally broken and filthy; as for candlestick, unless the passengers have one, an old bottle must be the substitute. One inch of candle per night is all that is allowed for each passenger to drink his tea, eat his supper, and turn into his birth,—this requires no comment. I will give you a further idea of the liability with which unfortunate passengers are treated. Our master, like many other boisterous bullying heroes, is a married man,—and as the lady rules the roast, her commands when she is present, are indisputable. We have on board three surgeons and two commissaries, and, neither of them having a man-servant, they were much inconvenienced; this, I conceive, was a matter of delight to the woman, and, when parting from her literally better half, she strictly and clamorously enjoined in his two cabin boys, "on no account whatever to do anything for the cabin passengers." But the boisterous Son of the Elements did fortunately consider, that as she was not present, there existed no immediate necessity for obeying her orders and having some faint sparks of humanity in his composition, winked at the little claims now and then made on the good temper of the boys; indeed I will do the man the justice to say, and I am supported by the general sentiment of those on board, that the woman seems to have taken with her the greatest share of the family ferocity. But I must observe that the Officers of government can possess but little feeling, when in giving gentlemen an order for a passage in a transport they launch them into a situation uncomfortable, cheerless, disgusting, and totally dependent on the rough and savage urbanity of a master of a transport,—a fellow who unfortunately has it in his power to make every thing uncomfortable, and who certainly never loses sight of that power. The man who is master of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bread</th>
<th>Beer, gallons, or half pints of spirits or pints of wine</th>
<th>Beef, pieces of</th>
<th>Pork, pieces of</th>
<th>Peas</th>
<th>Oatmeal</th>
<th>Butter</th>
<th>Cheese</th>
<th>Vinegar</th>
<th>Water</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>4 lb.</td>
<td>4 lb.</td>
<td>1 lb.</td>
<td>2 lb.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>4 lb.</td>
<td>4 lb.</td>
<td>1 or 6 lb. of</td>
<td>flour, 1 lb.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>4 lb.</td>
<td>4 lb.</td>
<td>suet, and</td>
<td>1 lb. raisins</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>4 lb.</td>
<td>4 lb.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>4 lb.</td>
<td>4 lb.</td>
<td>1 lb. raisins</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>4 lb.</td>
<td>4 lb.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>4 lb.</td>
<td>4 lb.</td>
<td>1 or as above</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A sufficient quantity for the time they may be on board.
this ship, for instance, was civilly solicited by the senior officer in the cabin, on account of a lady being one of the passengers, to lend a couple of flags or colours to be hung before the birth;—he at first acquiesced, but, repent­ing soon after, came into the cabin, and with great roughness and insolence, took one away;—the consequence of which is, that the lady, an invalid, is confined to a hole called the state room,—hot, noisome, close and unwhole­some.

Government should consider that, as officers are not overburthened with money, every possible allowance should be made for their convenience. How much it is otherwise, the following narrative will disclose. An officer having embarked at Portsmouth, and purchased the utensils he unavoidably required, which, on his arrival at Lisbon, he found too cumbersome to take with him, was obliged to leave them at that place. After marching in the country for some time he was reembarked at another port, and had no alternative than either to supply himself with a fresh stock of utensils, or submit to the inconvenience and difficulties the want of them would subject him to. His finances would not admit of the former, and, in taking possession of his scanty and uncomfortable birth, the master of the ship described the mattress and blanket to have been often previously occupied by persons who had fallen victims to disease of various kinds, and gave it as his opinion, that the officer ran a great risk in sleeping on bedding which he had often reported as unwholesome, and should have been thrown into the sea. Why should not the government transport the troops in ships of war, and study a little the comforts of those who are to fight her battles? I assert as a fact, that masters are frequently put into these vessels who know not how to keep a reckoning, and who are very unfit persons to entrust the lives of our brave soldiers with. What can be said of the fellow who last November, coming from Lisbon under convoy, with near 400 soldiers on board, quitted the convoy,—and, ignorant where he was, cast anchor within a quarter of a mile at the back of the Isle of Wight,—and when fortunately getting a pilot on board, could hardly be persuaded he was not close to the Lizard; he could not believe he was in the channel;—and finally acknowledged that he had never in his life sailed there.

If the Transport Board would be more particular on this subject, and less indifferent to the accommodation of passengers, it would be more creditable to them. Conceive the forlorn situation of two young lads going out as clerks to the Commissariat: I had the following information from their own mouths. They got an order for a passage on board this ship, and came on board with their baggage about eight o'clock in the morning. The master, in the first instance, refused to let a sailor aid in taking their trunks on board;—the soldiers, however, good humouredly assisted them. As these young men were perfectly ignorant of the usage and comforts of
transports, and had conceived everything would have been furnished them, it was a matter of very great disappointment to find not one article of provisions was given them, nor did any means offer for their obtaining any until eight o'clock in the evening, when with difficulty they procured some biscuits from the steward: indeed the same savage disregard to the situation of these young men was manifested in every thing. The miserable poverty-struck mattress and blanket were withheld until asked for; in short, one cannot but feel disgust that gentlemen should be subject to such brutality. All the ship allowances should be detailed on a sheet of paper, fixed in the cabin, and as little left as possible to the urbanity of a master of a transport;—I might almost as well say the humanity of a wild hog. One fire-place is allowed for the soldiers, which is so placed and so occupied, that a passenger has little chance of ever boiling a kettle. In boisterous weather it is impracticable and, whether male or female, must go without a dressed dinner, etc., etc.

I would wish to call the attention of the worthy gentlemen presiding at the Transport Board, to the situation of females, who, from affection, interest, or some other cause, are fated to be passengers on board a transport. A case in point will best explain. Two ladies, wives to officers, were accommodated with the state cabin, which obliged them to go through the great cabin whenever they wished to go on deck for fresh air. As some passengers were sick it was not always consistent with delicacy that the ladies should pass through the cabin:—to remedy this inconvenience it was requested as a favour that a sort of curtain might be put up before the birth,—this was refused. I wish those gentlemen who regulate the transport, would enquire into these matters, and, for the sake of humanity, place things on a better footing.

Another, and a most unpleasant evil, arises from the indiscriminate manner of packing people together in these transports. One would hope that every man, who has received a liberal education, and who is found competent to fill a station in a profession which introduces a young man into good society, would understand that difference of manners which draws the line between the society of gentlemen and vulgar people. I found myself much disappointed in this particular instance in the little community on board the Mariner, by overhearing the following conversation between a young gentleman in the Commissariat, and a surgeon or hospital-mate.

There was a lively, good-humored freedom in the Commissary, that at once indicated his wish to render himself agreeable. It appeared that the hospital-mate had got up in the night, and was fumbling in the dark at the cupboard; this gave rise to some little good-tempered jokes from the other young men and amongst the rest the Commissary observed that Mr.—was certainly taking a quiet sup;—to which the other replied "it was a damned lie." The Commissary, I have no doubt felt a proper resentment
at this vulgar, rude insult, but satisfied himself with observing that no gentleman would make use of such low language, and as he could not consider him but as a vulgar brute, he should treat him with the contempt he deserved. Now, worthy Captain Paten, permit me to recommend your attention to the point of selecting the company for the different transports; consider that the passengers in each are to be associated for some time, and when even the most mild disposition may be ruffled by the disgusting treatment on board the vessels, added to which, perhaps, a long, rough, and boisterous passage; do, my dear Sir, let us at least be only subject to the hasty expressions of gentlemanlike language, and as it is very practicable to discern the gentleman from a man's appearance, conduct, or character, and particularly in a profession where education, we must suppose, is easily to be discovered, there can be no difficulty in classing the different ranks and disposing them in separate vessels—and not subject gentlemen to have their ears offended by language disgraceful to the lowest dregs of society. Allow me further to remark that as many of the officers of Government, employed in this service, are so perfectly careless in regard to the convenience of the officers in the Army, etc. it behoves you and each gentleman in like employments, to do all in your power to smooth the difficulties, and lighten the distresses of those whom you may have to dispose of in transports.

With regard to the embarkation of detachments of cavalry, I will point out what appears to me a very great error, and which may be done by my detailing the particular transactions of the little fleet in which I am a passenger. It is now scarcely one month since the horses of a detachment of cavalry were embarked. A convoy was appointed a few days after the embarkation had taken place, but the fleet did not sail for three weeks after. Having at length got into the Channel, it was found that different other vessels were in the convoy, traders, etc., and it so happened that most of the trading-vessels were bad sailors, the consequence was, to protect them the fleet was inconceivably delayed on the voyage, and many of the horses died. Surely it would be a better plan to send the detachments of cavalry together under a separate convoy, and, the moment after being embarked, take advantage of the first fair wind, and without delay, proceed to their destination. It is evident in this particular instance, the cavalry ships have been delayed more than fourteen days unnecessarily.

Masters of transports make much difficulty in delivering out the rations to the passengers, and in consequence, not half the allowance on a voyage is drawn by them. That which is undrawn goes into the pockets of these men, it amounts to a large quantity, and is a robbery on the Government. I should recommend that the passenger, on leaving the ship, should give the master a receipt for what rations he has drawn, who should be obliged to account for the residue. The masters certainly merit no sort of advantage, for they take all they can on every occasion. Adieu.
Those who, before reading the above, would have found it difficult to refrain from complaining that only an orange was supplied with their early morning tea brought to them by the cabin personnel, or perhaps that the 11 o'clock morning soup was not very hot when it reached them as they sat in the deck chairs supplied by the State, that the "iron-cow" behaved atrociously, or again, that the food was monotonous, should, after reading the account, find it more easy to sit quietly counting their blessings and thanking heaven that they have not to endure the shortcomings and discomforts of our predecessors, when proceeding on a tour of service abroad.

Current Literature

J. Roy. Nav. M. Serv. 1938, v. 24, 16–32, 2 figs. Can an Extended Employment of Radiology be used to reduce the Incidence of Tuberculosis in the Navy?

This article is divided into two parts (1) dealing with the statistics of tuberculosis in the Royal Navy, and (2) the possible practical application of X-rays for the detection and prevention of the disease.

In part (1) tables are given showing the numbers of recorded cases, numbers of ratings finally invalided out of the Navy and number of deaths for the pre-War period 1900-1913 and the post-War period 1921-1934.

![Graph showing case-rate and death-rate per 100,000 as recorded since 1890.](http://militaryhealth.bmj.com/)

Rates for officers and ratings (excluding Marines at Headquarters) finally invalided out of the Royal Navy on account of tuberculosis (all infections) since 1900. [Reproduced from the Journal of the Royal Naval Medical Service.]

Only 10 per cent of tuberculosis in the Navy is non-pulmonary. A graph is shown of the case-rate and death-rate per 100,000 as recorded since 1890. The early figures are regarded as open to error prior to 1906. The fall in death-rate is due to the speeding up in the procedure of getting cases of tuberculosis into sanatoria ashore as soon as possible after their discovery and perhaps partly also to the early discovery of cases. The invaliding rate is regarded as the most accurate index to the prevalence of tuberculosis.