

The Gymeric Times

Indian Ocean – Tuesday, 24th April 1900 H.M. Troopship "Gymeric", Lat 29.39S Long
78.23E

For the rights that lack assistance, For the wrongs that need resistance, For the future in
the distance And the good that we can do.

Introductory

In placing the first issue of the "Gymeric Times" before the residents of Gymeric Town, we – the proprietors and staff – hope our feeble efforts to entertain, amuse, and instruct will meet with a full measure of appreciation and encouragement at the hands of our patrons. A great many difficulties have necessarily had to be overcome in the production of this sheet, as ship-board is not the most convenient place to prepare a newspaper, and unfortunately we had put to sea before the idea of running one on board occurred to us. Success, however, has so far attended our efforts; but it may not be out of place to remind subscribers that we cannot continue to exist without the hearty co-operation and support of all on board. We therefore trust that we shall not be permitted to die for want of breath.

The power and utility of the "press" are so generally recognised and appreciated that it would be a superfluous waste of space to dwell upon the subject here – But we would point out the fact that though our "sphere of influence" is somewhat limited, it does not necessarily follow that our voice is weak; indeed our lungs are large and capable of great expansion, and our ability to make a "noise" will be used to the best advantage! Wherever credit be due, credit will be given: on the other hand, we shall not hesitate to give publicity to any case calling for the attention of the powers that be. Our general policy will be of an independent, progressive nature, tempered by a desire to please all and offend none, but no breach of military discipline will be countenanced by this journal.

Without desiring to be egotistic or invidious we can honestly claim the honour of having introduced the first paper issued on board a troopship from New Zealand – and probably from any other part of the World – and although the "Gymeric" will most probably enjoy the distinction of being the last vessel to reach South Africa with troops from New Zealand, - she will undoubtedly be the first to land a newspaper printed and published on board during the voyage. We are aware, of course, that a certain "weakling" calling itself the "Gymerack" – a most appropriate title – and purporting to be a fully developed chicken of savoury constituents, recently intruded itself upon the notice of the inhabitants of "Gymeric Town". But facts speak for themselves, and in view of the evidence before them, we need hardly remind our readers that the "Gymeric Times" had no connection whatever, with the "Rag" in question, but was duly conceived and fully developed being before the "Gymerack" was thought of – However as the poor creature mentioned has frankly acknowledged its own weakness and imbecility, as evidenced by the title it assumed, we may confidently anticipate an early disintegration if its component and allow it to fall to pieces at its leisure.

Gymeric Times, enter thou upon a career of prosperity and usefulness!

'Our Boys'

We feel proud and pleased beyond measure to be able to congratulate Lieut Colonel Sommerville in having under his command the largest and finest body of men that ever left the shores of New Zealand. Indeed, we feel sure that a finer body of men is not to be found throughout the length and breadth of Her Majesty's vast dominions. Brought together from every part of the Colony, undrilled, undisciplined, and used from birth to unlimited liberty and freedom of action, they have in a few weeks, adapted themselves to Military life and discipline in a manner almost beyond conception or credence; and we venture to predict, that within a few months they will be able to hold their own with any Mounted Corps in the World. The fact that they have, with few exceptions, provided all or part of their own equipment has in no way interfered with their sense of duty; and not better proof – if further proof were needed – of their loyalty and patriotism could be desired than the fact that they all left home, comfort, and loved ones voluntarily, and without any other inducement than the hardships, restrictions, and dangers of Military life, and the honour of serving their Country and Queen.

It also gives us much pleasure to pay a well deserved tribute to the sterling work of the Commanding Officer. Lieut Colonel Sommerville is undoubtedly a gentleman of high military attainments, and his courteous manner and thorough knowledge of men eminently fit him for the responsible position he holds. He is trusted by his officers and respected by his men; and we confidently predict some brilliant achievements should ever be called upon to lead them into battle.

Advance New Zealand!

Health

In view of the great importance of health, and the terrible sufferings and misery the loss of it entails, we feel that a few words to our readers would not be out of place under this heading. Health, the potent protector and perpetrator of organic life; the fruitful source of happiness and bliss – the gentle soother of troubled minds, and the kindly healer of the ghastly wounds of battle – Health the most precious privilege within the reach of man, is the one valuable possession of life which is most neglected. It is treated with contempt, abused, and defied by all; respected by none till it is lost! But, like the hand of God, it never fails to inflict just punishment upon those who disregard its simple laws. Then, young men, & 'Soldiers of the Queen' take care of your health – nurse it as you would the most precious gift on earth; for although it is the most powerful factor in the sum total of human happiness, it is governed by the most sensitive laws of nature. Health will help to carry you safely through the fever stricken swamps of Beira to which you are going, or through the most trying ordeals of military life. It is worthy of note in this connection, that, up to the present time, as many soldiers have succumbed to the ravages of disease as to the Mauser bullets in South Africa. And though health will not render 'Tommy Atkins' invulnerable to the letter, it will greatly facilitate convalescence when wounded; and

disease germs, having no taste for the healthy body, will pass on to the one who affords a favourable breeding ground, and according to the fertility of the soil - state of health at the time of attach – the victim will survive or die. If you desire a healthy body; attend to the health of the mind for the mind influences the health of the body just as surely as it controls the movements of the limbs. Eat moderately, drink moderately, get as much sleep as possible, sleep is the great restorer of damaged tissue, and the renewer of energy – take moderate exercise daily, keep the feet dry and warm, the head cool, and avoid chills. Then you will be fit, when called upon, to defend yourselves, and fight for Country and Queen.

A Word of Advice

It having been said - though without foundation, we believe - that certain cargo has been broached within the last few days; we would strongly urge our gallant troopers to abstain from such practices and to immediately report any case of such despicable conduct coming under their notice. It is not only a serious breach of discipline punishable by fine, imprisonment, or dismissal, to tamper with cargo; but such conduct is likely to cast serious reflections on the honour & reputation of the whole Contingent. And on these grounds, if on no other, should be studiously guarded against by every man on board who values his own reputation, and that of the Colony to which he belongs. Soldiers of New Zealand be nicer – be gentlemen: upon you the eyes of the world are cast; and there is honour to be won on ship board, as well as on the field of battle.

Note and Comment

Veterinary Surgeon Lieut Young is about the busiest man on board, he having a very large family to attend to. All the horses on board – over 400 – are in his charge and they require a lot of attention. He is to be seen at all hours of the day & night, regardless of the weather, running up and down the decks and holds attending to his multifarious duties. And notwithstanding his constant attention, the mortality amongst the horses has been heavy, 16 having already been consigned to the deep. This, however, is not surprising in view of the fact that many of the poor creatures have been suffering from pneumonia etc., as a consequence of the treatment they were subjected to before being shipped, and more particularly at Port Chalmers, where they were kept in the rain for about 24 hours, without food or cover, in most cases, the vessel not being ready to receive them at the hour appointed. Eight were thrown overboard in succession on one occasion – on the 5th day out after very severe weather, pneumonia being the primary cause of death.

It would be interesting to know how many letters have been written on board since we left Lyttelton. There must have been a very large mail from Albany – as almost every man on board wrote several, some as many as eighteen letters; and no doubt they would be thoroughly appreciated by the recipients in New Zealand.

In the person of Mr J. Souper, we have a most competent & diligent officer in charge of the Commissariat department, the men being provided with most excellent food & plenty of it. Just before reaching Albany, this gentleman found it necessary to draw the attention of the medical officers to the condition of the pickles beef & pork (supplied by the Gear Meat Coy.) the result being that the whole lot – some 11,000 lbs – were immediately condemned as unfit for food. It is rumoured that someone will have to "pay the piper", and rightly so too. For apart from the great inconvenience & hardships it would have imposed upon the men if the discovery had not been made before we reached Albany, it cost a large sum to replenish the supply, bullocks being ?30 per head & sheep ?2 & corned beef 8/6 per lb in large quantities. In addition to these high prices for meat, we were otherwise inconvenienced, as we had to wait about twenty hours for the arrival of a steamer from Sydney before we could get a full supply.

A very worthy attempt was made by Lieutenant to get up a concert in return for the very enjoyable evening provided by men on the 11th inst; but we regret to state that he was obliged to abandon the idea as some of the Officers considered it would be opposed to military rules to entertain the men. We do not propose to be an authority on military etiquette & we may be wrong; but we are certainly of the opinion that a good opportunity to gain the goodwill and confidence of the men has been lost.

It is the general opinion on board that if some of the men charge the Boers with the same regularity & promptitude that they charge the table at mealtimes, the Boers will have a very lively time when our soldiers reach the fighting line. Activity & promptitude are generally admired but there are occasions when the exercise of these virtues cause much inconvenience & annoyance!

By a strange concatenation of circumstances the figures 1 & 3 have been rather conspicuous in connection with this contingent & voyage. We left Lyttelton on the 31st; took 13 days to reach Albany; arrived on the 13th & lost 13 horses during the voyage to that port. Every man who had anything to do with tent No. 13 was rejected!

The trials of a sea voyage are not without virtue, even if they only engender greater respect for land & life ashore. One victim to mal de mer declared, as we passed Wilson's Promontory, the first land sighted after leaving New Zealand, that he "would give all he was worth to place his feet for five minutes on one square foot of rock"! – Another was heard to say that after his experience, he "would do anything for a sick man". Sea sickness is undoubtedly a most distressing ailment, but victims rarely get the full measure of sympathy due to them.

Cleanliness being next to Godliness we hope we shall not give offense if we draw attention to the fact that there is room for improvement in some quarters, both personally & otherwise.

The stewards & cooks deserve a word of praise for the expeditious manner in which they get through the enormous amount of work which they have to do. In comparison with the large numbers they have to cater for, the facilities at their command are very limited indeed; & if they were not made of real good metal, they certainly could not perform their duties with such regularity. In rough weather they must have a particularly rough and trying experience. Most of the cooks have been either burned or scalded.

Local and General

Owing to serious Cable interruptions there will be no war news published in this issue.

Sunday March 25th – Gymeric sailed from Port Chalmers; arrived Lyttelton on Monday 26th

Saturday March 31st – Sailed for South Africa at 8 p.m.

Tuesday 5th April – First horse died

Thursday 10th – One of our bullocks broke away from the butchers today & provided a few exciting moments for some of our brave troopers, who – judging by the alacrity with which they moved – evidently considered the sight suggestive of bloodshed, & were determined not to be parties to such a proceeding. However, one brave soldier in search of distinction soon appeared on the scene & changed the aspect of affairs. Rushing up to Mr Bullock in splendid style, he caught him by the nose and threw him on his back. And there was bloodshed for in a few minutes Mr Bullock was converted into beef!

Eight horses were thrown overboard today, as a result of last night's storm.

Thursday 12th – The ship stopped for about ten minutes today, and many were the anxious enquiries made concerning the cause that of, many being afraid were about to repeat the history of the "Perthshire"; & great was the relief when she slowly began to forge ahead again.

Friday 13th – Arrived at Albany at 8 A.M. – Four more horses were thrown overboard today.

Sunday 15th – Sailed for Durban at 4 p.m. today.

Wednesday 18th – We lost our sixteenth horse this morning. Shot by order of the Vet., being the verdict. Squads under Lieut. Elder were exercised at shooting practice today – The fire alarm was sounded this afternoon, & the men turned out in good time under their respective divisional officers; but many forgot that they had been provided with life belts.

Thursday 19th – Today the Colonel dealt with a number of defaulters, who were fined & otherwise punished for being absent without leave at Albany & otherwise transgressing against military rules. The men, to their credit, in no way tried to evade punishment, the answer to the charge invariably being, - Yes Sir, I did it!

Friday 20th – A large shark was seen this morning but a couple of shots from a carbine warned him that his company was not appreciated & he accordingly disappeared.

The other day one of our reporters noticed a pair of trousers flying at the masthead. The sight of same made him feel a bit inquisitive, & on making enquiries, he was informed that it was "the radio signal for washing day"! And sure enough it was so.

The supply of reading matter on board is rather limited, but the men seem to make the most of it. Kind friends in New Zealand were numerous; otherwise there would have been nothing at all to read.

Target practice & manual exercises are carried out daily by sections under their respective divisional officers, the men taking a great interest in their work.

The piano kindly placed on board by the Christchurch Committee has helped to a very large degree to break the monotony of the voyage. There are some good singers & players [?] and no opportunity is lost to make use of them, many pleasant evenings being spent at the shrine of "musicus".

We were most fortunate in having fine weather to negotiate Cape Leeuwin, the junction of the South Pacific & Indian Oceans. Bad weather generally prevails in that quarter & and if we had not been [?], we would certainly have lost a number of horses.

The "Corp" in the forehold, having no piano to thump, put the gloves on & thump each other; some very good work being done. The combatants are encouraged with expressions & epithets appropriate to the Colour of the hair, occupations etc., such as – "Go it browny"; "stay in Carrots"; "Keep up your pecker Grease"; "Steady Ginger"; "good man Chips"; "let him have it baldy"; "short straight darkey"; "Keep him going dough" and many other equally significant expressions, roars of laughter frequently punctuating the proceedings, which are generally of a decidedly lively & amusing nature.

Signalling squads, under Signalling Sergeant Gardiner, daily practice the "dot and dash" art, which has "taken on" immensely with all ranks; & there are some very promising pupils amongst them "Sammie" being well to the fore.

Baibus Spearmope & his competitor are kept pretty busy keeping the bristles of their respective divisions down.

A young kangaroo present to the "Boys" at Albabt appears to be a great pet, & receives a large share of attention. Some mischievous individual gave him some [whole line missing

here] performance under its influence, jumping over everything that came in his way, & otherwise showing great activity.

We have five stowaways on board – one from Lyttelton & four from Albany.... [?] but one informed our staff reporter that he was "sorry he could not go over the side & walk back". Asked the reason why, he stated that he was "full of the sea"; he thought it would have been alright but it made him feel very queer!

Poor old "Bully" – one of our canine beauties – has been rather "down in the mouth" lately. He probably feels a bit "queer" about the "innards", not being used to continuous earthquakes!

We have now lost seventeen horses, several having been shot to enhance their comfort & save others from infection.

After many wild & disconcerting rumours regarding the stability of their quarters & the duration of their tenure, the inhabitants of the "Horse Box" last Monday found themselves unceremoniously ejected from their happy home; & are now wandering about at large seeking in vain for a vacant corner wherever to lay their weary bones. We heartily sympathise with them.

"Diana Rawbones" gave birth to a half developed quadruped the other day. Veal has been plentiful ever since!

The recent rough weather frustrated quite a number of the residents of "Gymerictown" & upset the equilibrium of our Editor.

Our printing apparatus had a most miraculous escape last week. Some industrious troopers in search of a "target" came across a case where weight suggested that it was empty; & accordingly our much prized instrument was on the point of being consigned to the deep to provide a "Boer" for some of our enthusiastic shootists, when one of our staff, who recognised the case, happened to be close by and thus the Gymeric Times was saved from annihilation!

Trooper Alfred Aldred was discharged at Albab as medically unfit, & placed on board H.M.S. Diana en route to Sydney. It has been decided, we understand, to allow one of the stowaways to fill the vacancy. Fortunate fellow!

Our super cargo, Mr J. I. Sullivan – has had a great many difficulties to contend with, but he has proved himself equal to every emergency.

It is very gratifying to note the care with which many of troopers attend to their horses. For many of them pay infinitely more attention to their charges than to themselves, even under the very trying ordeal of seasickness.

A Novel Experience

Trooper – [?] had rather a novel experience recently. It appears that clean linen is at a premium on board; consequently there is a strong tendency to arrange, or "commandeer", as the Boers say, anything coming under this category. And the said trooper, determined that he would have the pleasure of using his two carefully washed towels, hung them out to dry half way up the rigging & then comfortably seated himself on the deck, intending to watch them till they dried! But he was soon overcome with an irresistible desire to sleep. He was not, however, long permitted to "rest in the arms of Morpheus", for even in his sleep, strange visions haunted him, & springing to his feet like a man conscious of impending danger, he looked about as though intent on striking at the invisible foe. But when he beheld two towels still fluttering in the breeze, he smiled, & with an air of satisfaction resumed his sea. He patiently watched the objects of his care for over an hour; then mounting the rigging like a brave Briton ascending the heights of Spion Kop, he proceeded to take his precious belongings down, when, lo & behold, he discovered that someone had been there before him & made an exchange. For two dirty towels saluted him!

At Albany - Ashore

Soon after arrival, about half of the men were given leave of absence, & they lost no time in getting ashore in the launch. On the following day (Saturday) the balance of the men were allowed the same privilege. All appeared to enjoy themselves thoroughly, every bicycle, horse, & conveyance in the place being "commandeered". The hotels & business people generally must have done good business, as Albany is only a very small place, & every man had more or less money to spend & spent it freely. But we are glad to record the fact that the men, without exception, behaved in a most exemplary manner, though one or two "turned the tap off" none too soon. All the preceding New Zealand Contingents were spoken of in most glowing terms by the Albany people; & we feel sure that the last one to honour them would also leave a good impression behind, though the Monowai's Company spread some very alarming reports concerning the condition generally of the Gymeric & her troops – mutiny, starvation, filth & disease illuminating the description! It is needless to state that the Albany folk were soon undeceived.

In company with the Officers of H.M.S. "Diana", the Officers of H.M. Troopship "Gymeric" were generously -

Entertained

by the members of the "Albany Club", the usual toasts being honoured & washed down with Champagne which flowed most freely. The Hon. J. A. Wright presided. In responding to the toast of "the New Zealanders", with which the health of Lieutenant Col. Sommerville was coupled, this gentleman, in a most brilliant & appropriate speech, referred to the fact that two of his sons were already at the front fighting for Queen & Country; & he stated that, even in his advanced years, he himself would always be found ready to do his duty. The courtesy & kindly attention shown by the members of the Club was much appreciated by all; and the singing of the National Anthem brought a most interesting & enjoyable function to a close.

A Tennis Match

was afterwards arranged between the Officers of the "Diana" & the "Gymeric", & was played at the "Residency", the latter represented by Lieutenants Elder & Arthur, being victorious. During the afternoon refreshments were provided, & all enjoyed the outing immensely.

Church Parade

Was held this morning - Sunday 8th April - in the aft hold, when Lieut. Colonel Sommerville delivered a very neat & appropriate address, his text being - "show yourselves men"; Isaiah Chap.46, Verse 8. He urged his men to emulate the gallantry & heroism of General White, who, though he had made one mistake ((Nicholsons Neck) was not demoralised or disheartened, but had fought on in the face of many difficulties; & by his gallant defence of Ladysmith had atoned for past errors & earned the applause & admiration of the whole civilised world. The singing was very good, and the men undoubtedly enjoyed the service, one trooper remarking to a companion, at the conclusion, that he "could have stood some more of it".

Concerts

Tuesday 10th April - A most successful concert, got up by the Wellington section, was held last evening. The ships flags were kindly lent for the occasion, & the Wellingtonians' quarters presented quite an animated appearance. Lieu-Col. Sommerville & all the Officers were present. The proceedings opened with "Soldiers of the Queen", by all hands; & the following programme was rendered in first class style: "Running up & down our Stairs", Sergt. Black; "Only to see her face again", Pvte. Wallace; "Juanita", Corpl. Russell; "Wreck of the Birkenhead", Sergt. Maj. Powles, "Marching to the front", Pvte. Horman; "Midnight Son" (comic) Pvte Osborne; "The Diver", Pvte. Bell. Recitations - "At Sea", Pvte. Harland; "Absent Minded Beggar", Bugler McDonald. [?] Speeches - Pvte. Samuels (2). At the conclusion, refreshments (provided by Mr Souper were handed round & the proceedings closed with "God Save the Queen". [No space for comment.]

April 21st - Last evening a splendid programme was submitted to a large & appreciative audience at the "Gymeric Hall", the following gentlemen assisting; - Captain Jackson, Lieutenants Arthur, Ross, Marshall, McMillan, Elder; Sergt. Maj. Batger, Sergt. Black, Far Sergt. Wilkinson, Sergt. Crib, Quarter Master Sergt. Mason, Troopers Gannon, Nightingale, Martin, Varman, Samuels, Sharp & Thorne. Chief Engineer Hind also assisted. Messrs. Woodward, Varman & Monk presided at the piano The Banjo Duet by Lieu. Elder & Mason was undoubtedly the item of the evening, though all acquitted themselves creditably.

Congratulations

To the Editor, Gymeric Times

Sir – I understand the first Edition of the above appears on Monday & this after the usual almost insuperable difficulties that first publications generally have, & which you have manfully mastered. I desire to offer you my hearty congratulations. And as this is a congratulatory letter, I take the opportunity of conveying the same to Lieut. Colonel Sommerville on the excellent manner in which he controls the Officers attached to the different Companies under his charge: To the Officers themselves, both commissioned and non-commissioned, for the painstaking, tactful & careful way in which they treat the men under their control; & to the Officers of the ship who have done & are doing all in their province to minimise the monotony of a long voyage – the manly & charming manner of each reflects the greatest credit on himself & the owners of the "Gymeric".

Congratulations to the men of each Company. They show by their soldierly way their [?] at work & their obedience, that they are competent of better things when it comes to real right down duty. Our medical men & veterinary, with their staff must also be congratulated, the work of each department being done with that vim that one expects from such alphabetical celebrities. In my congratulations (being a Wellingtonian) I cannot overlook those who selected the horses for No.7 Coy. It is a subject of much favourable comment, the stamp & excellence of the horses selected by Messrs Wilford, Townsend & Young (Vets) – the fact that only one out of sixteen shuffled off this coil, is in itself evidence. I must include Mr Souper & his Staff both stewards & cooks. They assuredly are discussed in complimentary terms many times during the day. They are most obliging & in obliging one, they are extremely courteous. I'm afraid that I am taking up too much of your precious space. Again congratulating you, & wishing "The Gymeric Times" all the success it deserves, I am, etc., "Snoozer", with an eye to a captaincy. Indian Ocean March 21st 1900.

Accidents

Trooper York met with rather serious accident on the 17th instant. It appears that the men on duty down the lower forehold have been in the habit of sliding down a rope instead of using the ladder placed in position for their use; & by some means, the upper end of the rope became detached, the consequence being that when Trooper York threw his weight on to it, it ran through the block to which it was attached, & he was instantly precipitated to the bottom of the hold, a distance of about 16 feet. Luckily there was no obstruction in the way, or Trooper York, would not have escaped with only a severe shaking. We are glad to report that he is doing well under the care of the medical staff & it is hoped he will be able to resume his duties in a week or two.

Trooper Hathaway (Auckland) fell on the deck & fractured his skull, but is now almost recovered.

A horse fell on Trooper Armstrong (Wellington) with the result that he received a nasty cut on the head & and sprained wrist.

Troopers Bennett, Pile, Atkins, & Corlet (all of Auckland) were more or less injured by kicks & cuts from horses. A few other minor accidents also occurred. No space for details in this issue.

To Subscribers

Our supply of paper & ink having run out, we regret to state that we are obliged to hold over an interesting article by "Slobbery Mick", "The Voyage of the Gymeric", an abstract of the Chief Officer's "log book" – giving latitude, longitude, distance travelled, the state of the sea & weather, etc., each day; a list of the names of all the Officers & men on board, including appointments, promotions etc; a chart showing course of vessel from N.Z. to final destination, & much other interesting matter which will appear in next or complete issue.

We respectfully ask our readers to overlook the superfluous ink etc attached to these pages as we have had no end of difficulties to contend with, and we make no extra charge for superfluities of any kind. We are preparing 205 copies of this issue, & 205 multiplied by 15 – the number of pages – gives a total of 3075 pages to be printed. The amount of labour may be imagined, but not the difficulties.