

This article was downloaded by: [University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign]  
On: 12 March 2015, At: 06:10  
Publisher: Routledge  
Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954  
Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH,  
UK



## The Mariner's Mirror

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rmir20>

### THE TRANSPORT OF TROOPS BY SEA

Evan Fyers

Published online: 22 Mar 2013.

To cite this article: Evan Fyers (1920) THE TRANSPORT OF TROOPS BY SEA, *The Mariner's Mirror*, 6:11, 322-328, DOI: [10.1080/00253359.1920.10654961](https://doi.org/10.1080/00253359.1920.10654961)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00253359.1920.10654961>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is

expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

## THE TRANSPORT OF TROOPS BY SEA.

BY MAJOR EVAN FYERS.

IN the early days of the standing Army, the various overseas expeditions were not sent to any great distance, but mostly to the western ports of Europe. Of the accommodation provided for troops and their experiences on board ship there is very little to be gleaned from naval history.

Fortescue, however, has found among the State Papers (Domestic) occasional references to transports from the time of William III.'s campaigns in Ireland onwards ("History of the British Army," Vol. I.). Thus when Parliament enquired into the conduct of Colonels Cunningham and Richards, at Londonderry, in 1689, it was discovered that the supply of transport ships had been so insufficient that the men had not had space even to lie down, while the biscuit provided for them had been mouldy and uneatable, and the beer so foul and putrid that they had preferred to drink salt water. The sufferers on this occasion were the 9th and 17th Foot, while the Queen's Bays lost every charger and troop horse in their passage.

Likewise during the war of the Spanish succession the transport service had a bad name, and Fortescue shows that the mortality on board the troop ships sent to the Peninsula and the accompanying sickness and misery must have been appalling. A force of 8,000 men, sent to Lisbon, in the summer of 1706, was reduced to little more than half that strength when landed in Valencia, in February, 1707, owing to bad weather and long confinement. Indeed, a private of the First Guards summed up his experience of a month in a transport as "continual destruction in the foretop, the pox above board, the plague between decks, hell in the fore-castle, and the devil at the helm." The practice, too, of trying to avoid desertion by shifting troops from quarter to quarter of England by sea, and of keeping men cooped up in the transports for months was a fruitful source of trouble, as, for instance, in 1705 troops bound for Jamaica remained on board from May till October

suffering from fever and small pox, having exhausted after the first two months all their medical supplies. No wonder that it required the prospect of a considerable amount of plunder on shore to compensate for such chances of never reaching it alive.

The same state of affairs continued through the Seven Years War and the War of American Independence, but it is surprising how very little has come down to us of the personal experiences of soldiers at sea during the eighteenth century.

Writing shortly after his release from captivity in 1814, Major-General Lord Blayney mentions casually that in a voyage from South America to the Cape of Good Hope, after the failure of Whitelock's expedition in 1807, he met with severe gales, and his ship, the *Monarch*, carrying detachments of the 87th and 89th Regiments, was in a sinking state and short of provisions and water; but of further details which would have been interesting to us in these days there are none. The *Monarch* had, of course, parted company with her consort and the *Staunch* gun brig. The impossibility of keeping convoys together during heavy weather was terribly exemplified when the army sailed for home after the battle of Coruña, and the transports were shortly scattered by a gale. Reports of this voyage were still fresh in the mind of Lord Melville, when, in a speech in the House of Lords, in May, 1810, he advocated the employment of armed troop ships in lieu of hired transports. True, there might have been some improvement since the Admiralty, in the last decade of the previous century, instituted the Transport Board, but he considered that the control was not close enough and that the whole ships' companies should have been under naval discipline. As Henry Dundas he had been our earliest Secretary of State for War, and at the beginning of the struggle with revolutionary France had been responsible for a variety of futile and costly expeditions to the West Indies and elsewhere. He proposed to take a number of war ships then lying "in ordinary" and convert them to troop ships by reducing their proper complement of men to one third, limiting their guns to 20 each, and fitting them with reduced masts and yards, the original lower masts only being kept in. He took a 64-gun ship as a specimen, her tonnage being about 1,380, and claimed that on the above basis there would even be a slight annual saving as compared with the 25s. per ton per month which they were then paying for transports, besides the advantage of such a troop ship becoming in a measure her own convoy.

The following record of a disastrous voyage was found by

the writer among the Home Office papers when tracing the career of a distinguished administrator, who was for many years at the head of the Admiralty Office. It may be remarked that it is thanks more to the financial than the personal risk of the regimental officers that the story has been preserved, and as an incident in nautical history it may not be altogether out of place in this journal.

The 34th Regiment had been in America since 1776, but, being employed mainly in the defence of Canada, it had borne but a small share in the war, its flank companies having been involved with Burgoyne in his defeat at Saratoga, and was now returning home in a time of peace. On December 22nd, 1787, the Secretary at War (Sir George Yonge) wrote to the Home Secretary (Lord Sydney) asking that the question of reimbursing Colonel Hastings and the owner of the vessel which saved the troops from the sinking transport, *Lord Shelburne*, for the losses sustained and expenses incurred should be referred to the Navy Board. This was supported by a letter from General Lord Frederick Cavendish, Colonel of the 34th, in which he urged "dispatch," as the "master and owner of the Catherine brig is employing his vessel in a kind of circuitous trade and wants to be fitting her out again, least he should be disappointed in another voyage, the consequence of which may be an increased demand . . . upon the 34th Regiment."

With the letter was forwarded the following narrative of Lt.-Col. Charles Hastings. (P.R.O., H. O. 50, 380.)

"To Rt. Hon. Sir George Yonge, Bart., H.M.S.W.

"SIR,—The application which has been made to you for the liquidation of certain Extraordinary charges entailed by our disaster at sea, makes it requisite that I should furnish you with a particular narration of that event, in order that Government may be enabled fairly to judge whether or not the Expense was unavoidable. I should have presented such a detail upon my first landing, had I not transmitted by the Earl of Burford from Fayal a minute account of the accident; which as unexpectedly it had reached England before us, I had reason to hope would at least before this time have been received by you.

"On the 10th October we sailed from Quebec on board the *L<sup>d</sup>. Shelburne Transport*, which from the report of the Troops who had come out in her from England, we knew to be a weak Ship. Our numbers were 14 officers, 117 soldiers, and 19 women. We were separated in the Gulph from the Agent, and greater part

of the Fleet, by a gale of wind : and on the 24th, having then reached the Banks of Newfoundland, a second gale parted us from the remainder of the Transports. This gale lasted for five days with excessive violence, during which time our main yard broke in two ; and all our sails were shivered to pieces, excepting the fore-topsail, and the fore sail under which we lay to. About four o'clock in the morning of Sunday, the 28th, it was discovered that the Ship made a great deal of water, which from our previous opinion of the vessel gave some uneasiness. In consequence of this we endeavoured to proceed on our course that we might be more in reach of some port ; the wind being fair tho' violent. But we had continued a very short time in that direction, before the mountainous Sea that was running, the Ship received so desperate a blow on her quarter that we thought she must have sunk immediately. The effects of this blow were such, that although the two pumps were kept constantly going, the leake gain'd upon us rapidly : that by five o'clock in the afternoon we had nine feet water in the hold, and the ship was evidently water-logged. I then ordered both the fore and after hatchway to be opened, that the men might be set to bailing, and I directed another pump to be fixed forward, but as the execution of this latter article took up a considerable time, before morning we had Ten feet water in the hold. The men, however, with the assistance of the additional Pump, exerted themselves so strenuously that day (the 29th) that we all flattered ourselves the water was reduced as low as eight feet. I say flattered ourselves because by the Advice of the Captain, I would not sound, lest any discovery of the inefficacy of this Labor at the Pump should dispirit the men ; of whom as many as could be spared from the Pump were employ'd upon another means of relieving the Ship, by throwing overboard Anchors, Cables and all such Stores as were not requisite for an immediate Subsistence. Under these circumstances we discovered a Brig, to which we bore down, throwing out a signal of Distress. She backed her mizen topsail and waited for us. But when we were just come within hail, to our utter astonishment we saw her fill her sails again, and stand away entirely from us. We can only account for this conduct by supposing that her captain was alarmed at the idea of taking aboard such a number as he might from the size of our Transport compute us to be ; and we imagined that the appearance of our Ship, brought down so deep from the water in her hold, and discharging such prodigious quantities from her scuppers (a Ton and a half per minute,

according to our calculation) must have persuaded him we could no longer keep her afloat. At night the wind abated considerably and continued perfectly fair for the Western Islands, towards which we had been scudding under the foresail ever since the Sea had struck us the day before.

“ On Tuesday the wind continued moderate, and having considerably lightened the Ship, we kept the water nearly between eight and nine feet.

“ On Wednesday (the 31st) at five o'clock in the morning, we found that she had gained a foot upon us, which we imputed to the failure in strength of the men. For they now complained of being exhausted; and having been from Sunday morning till this time constantly labouring without relief or rest. To add to their despondency the weather looked black and threatening; and the wind became foul. To encourage the men I now turn'd out all the officers to work; they having been hitherto employed only in regulating or overseeing the duty of the others, and in supplying them with food; and in order to revive exertion, I promised the Men that if they could in the course of the day bring down the foot which the leak had gained upon us, they should by ten at a time have one hour's sleep the following Night. The Wind luckily shifted, bearing again favourable, and the Sky cleared with the change; which added to the other incitements, put the Men into such spirits that they did in fact reduce the foot prescribed, and had the promised rest accordingly.

“ On Thursday, however, we found that the depth of water in the hold had got beyond ten feet; having so far gained upon our labour during the Night, the men were now so wasted with fatigue, that it was obvious the exertion could not be continued much longer. The trifling rest of the preceding night having been entirely inadequate to refresh them; and the event proving that we could not afford even so minute a deduction from our Labor. To save a part of our number was the only hope that could be indulged; and that also was to be precarious in the highest degree. Our Boats were sufficient to hold eighty-one Persons; and as we supposed Coroo to be distant not above forty leagues, there was a chance that such a part of us might reach that island in the Boats, when we should be obliged to relinquish all farther efforts to keep the Ship afloat.

“ It was determined that Lots should be drawn indiscriminately by every person in the Vessel for the advantage of this last chance; and the Blanks and Prizes were accordingly made out.

“ Happily that day the Katherine Brig hove in sight, and we soon got close to her. The singular desertion which we had before experienced made us think it necessary to send Lieut: Arden (the Adjutant) with four men aboard the Brig to force her to accompany us to the nearest port. The men could not help murmuring that their toil was to continue when relief was alongside them. But upon the representation from their Officers of the probability of immediately reaching Coroo (where we then thought we could find shelter) and of the apparent incapacity of so small a Brig to receive our whole crew, they consented still to stand to their work. The Brig kept close on our quarter all night, hailing us every five minutes.

“ On Friday morning (November 2nd) Capt. Corbet, Master of the Brig, came on board us, declaring that he had observed our marks and perceived us to be considerably lower in the water than we were the preceding day; adding that from the quantity of water we took in, it must have been a Butt that had started, a trifling enlargement of which by any strain would carry us to the Bottom in an instant. He therefore asserted it would be madness to remain any longer on board the Lord Shelburne.

“ We had at that time eleven feet water in the hold. I assembled the Major and Captains and demanded their opinion upon the propriety of quitting the Ship; they unanimously gave it under their hands that it was impossible the efforts of the men could be any longer maintained. I therefore sent Capt. Earl of Burford with a party aboard the Brig to seize her in the King's name. I further ordered his Lordship to throw overboard a part of the Wheat with which the Brig was loaded, not only to make room for the men, but because she was so deeply laden that she would not have borne the addition of Our Crew and the provisions we were of course obliged to bring with us. I dispatched our Women and Children to the Brig; but as both vessels were holding on their course; about twelve o'clock we made Coroo, distant about ten leagues; and the Captain of the Transport, thinking that as we had a fair breeze, we might manage to reach it, I countermanded the removal of the Soldiers.

“ At four in the afternoon, it fell a dead Calm, the water being at the height of twelve feet in the hold. A further protraction of Labor it was, in our condition impossible to answer. I therefore immediately began to shift the men into the Brig, which took up so much time, that it was nine o'clock before I



quitted the Transport with the last division. The Lord Shelburne had then fifteen feet of water in her hold, and went down in our sight at seven the next morning. We were then forty Leagues from Fayal, to which we steered, learning from Capt. Corbet that Coroo was an uninhabited Rock, with a reef around it that forbade all approach from such a vessel. On our arrival at Fayal, the remainder of the wheat which form'd the Cargo of the Katherine was thrown upon my hands, as having been intercepted by me from its destined Market. I ordered it to be sold on account of Government in four parcels to the highest bidder, having invited competition at the sale by a variety of advertisements. The testimony of the Consul will, I trust, be satisfactory that it was disposed of as advantageously for the Public as the conjuncture would admit.

“Whatsoever irregularity there may have been in the procedure, or in any other which accompanied it must, I hope, appear to have arisen inevitably from the excess of our distress and danger.

“The Length of time for which the men were kept to the severest Labor without other relief, than hourly shifting the parties from the pump to the Bailing duty, exceeds any supposition that could have been made of men's powers: and so unremitting was this Labor that even for their nourishment the men were not permitted to leave the pumps or the Hatch way, but were in that situation obliged to receive from the Boys, the provisions which the women were incessantly employed in cooking for them. In fine if it shall appear that every exertion was made before we sought extraneous assistance; If it shall be granted that no alternative remained to us, but to avail ourselves of that resource, which has entailed the present application; I must rest confident that all Expenses which were the necessary consequences of adopting that resource will be favorably regarded by Government.

“I have, &c.,

“CHARLES HASTINGS,

“Lt.-Colo. 34th Regt.”