



* 54. Books

SUGGESTIONS

FOR

THE SPEEDY AND SECURE CONVEYANCE

OF OUR

REINFORCEMENTS

TO

CANADA.

By CAPT. BOWLES, R.N.

PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR.

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LONDON, 27th December, 1837.

It will be seen that the following letter was written to the then First Lord of the Admiralty immediately after the embarkation of the army for Lisbon, in the winter of 1826. The weather fortunately proved favourable, and the squadron made a very short passage to the Tagus, but if it had been delayed in the Bay of Biscay, by the S.W. gales, so frequent at that season of the year, the troops must have suffered severely, as they were much crowded in the men-of-war,—the “Wellesley,” of seventy four guns, having 1,300 men on board, and the other ships being almost equally full. As this is the only occurrence of the sort since the peace, the attention of the Admiralty does not appear to have been since drawn to this subject, and with the exception of two ships of war (the Jupiter and Athol) fitted for this purpose, the practice of conveying troops to foreign stations in hired merchant vessels, has been persevered in.

At this moment, however, when according to all present appearances, a great effort must be made early in the spring, to send out a large reinforcement to our army in Canada, and when every practicable precaution

should be taken to provide for their speedy and secure conveyance, and for their disembarking in a perfect state of discipline and efficiency, I hope I may be permitted, without presumption, to urge the consideration of this most important subject on our naval administration, and I have thought I might do so with more propriety in now publishing a letter, written some years since on a nearly similar occasion ; because if the arguments I then urged should not be thought worthy of attention, I have very little to offer in addition to them.

Those who are acquainted with the coast of North America, and more particularly with the entrance of the St. Laurence, when the navigation first becomes practicable, will, I am sure, agree with me in thinking that too many precautions cannot be taken to secure our troops against the various risks they must encounter from fogs, floating ice, inclement weather, &c. &c., and that their security, health, and discipline can only be satisfactorily provided for by embarking them in ships of war, carefully fitted and arranged for their conveyance.

I cannot conclude these observations without very earnestly soliciting the attention of the Ordnance Department to the suggestions I have offered with respect to the conveyance of stores belonging to that Department ; and as it is by no means impossible that piratical privateers may be found cruising at the mouth of the

St. Laurence next summer, I cannot avoid recalling to their recollection, that at one of the most important periods of the war with the United States, and when the armament of our squadron on the Lakes was of vital consequence to our operations, an Ordnance transport, full of guns and artillery stores, bound to Quebec, having lost its convoy in a fog on the banks of Newfoundland, was captured by an American privateer, and having been carried safely into Boston, enabled the enemy to fit out their squadron with the equipment intended for our own.

W. BOWLES.

TO

THE VISCOUNT MELVILLE,

&c. &c. &c.

LONDON, 16th December, 1826.

MY LORD,

THE permission which your Lordship has occasionally been kind enough to give me, to lay before you suggestions on various subjects connected with the public service, encourages me to take the liberty of offering some observations, which, at the present moment your Lordship may not deem unworthy of consideration, and which, indeed, I have been principally induced to submit in consequence of the recent preparations for the embarkation of troops, which happened to fall under my own observation a few days since at Portsmouth.

It has often been a subject of remark amongst professional men, that complete as our naval preparations are in every other branch of service, and thoroughly provided as we are with every other class of ship which would be required at the commencement of hostilities, yet, that by some oversight, we have been always unprepared with the means of rapidly embarking, and transporting to any distant point, such a body of troops as at the breaking out of a war must always be urgently required, either for offensive or defensive purposes,

without resorting to one of two expedients, both of which are liable to strong objections—namely, the employing our line-of-battle ships on this service, or hiring a large number of merchant ships for transports.

Against the first may be urged the great hazard we might incur in the face of an active and enterprising enemy, by disarming and disorganizing a most important part of our naval force, at the very moment when every effort should be made to increase and perfect its efficiency. None but professional men can have an idea of the total subversion of all previous order and arrangement which inevitably follows the embarking a large number of troops on board a regular ship of the line—the crew are driven from the deck they usually occupy, to damp and exposed berths on the main deck, where they have no sufficient accommodation either for messing or sleeping; the officers are turned out of their cabins, and the troops themselves being obliged either to sleep in hammocks which they in general do not understand, or to lie on the deck, usually prefer the latter, and if the voyage is long and stormy, or the weather cold and wet, much sickness will be the inevitable consequence both amongst the seamen and soldiers, much relaxation of order and discipline will follow, and some months may very probably elapse before the former efficiency of the ship is thoroughly restored.

The second mode of conveying troops in hired merchant ships is equally objectionable—the publicity which is unavoidable when the ships are contracted for, defeats all hope of secrecy as to the force or destination of the expedition; and the innumerable evils which have resulted

from the ignorance and misconduct of the masters, the bad sailing and imperfect equipment of the ships, added to their total want of force to resist even a common privateer, all combine to render this the most unsafe manner of conveying troops which can be devised.

A great maritime nation should always be prepared with the means of embarking a considerable force rapidly and secretly, and this can only be done by previous system and arrangement, and by providing such a number of ships of war adapted to this particular purpose as may ensure its accomplishment with the least possible delay. I believe that the experience of the last war fully proved that either the smaller class of ships of the line, or frigates fitted as troop ships, were the most economical, as well as the most efficient classes of ships which could be employed for this service. They will carry with ease from four to six hundred men, to the greatest distance for which they can be required, and of course more for shorter voyages.

They are respectively navigated by an establishment of officers and men little exceeding in number that of a frigate or a sloop of war. They are fast sailers, very sufficiently armed, and their appearance is so warlike, as to deter an enemy, not very superior in force, from approaching them.

Contrast the situation of a battalion embarked on board a ship of this class with that of another crowded into four or five miserable transports, creeping slowly along, and (if they have the misfortune to lose their convoy) a prey to the first enemy's cruizer they fall in with.

I have been led by a strong feeling of the importance of the subject, to dwell longer than I had intended on these preliminary observations, and I will now briefly state the proposition which I take the liberty of submitting for your Lordship's consideration. It is that a certain proportion of troop ships should in future be considered as an indispensable part of the establishment of His Majesty's navy ;—that the whole of these should be perfectly complete, as far as respects their internal fitting, and readiness for service, and that such a proportion of them as would carry five or six thousand men, (about twelve or fourteen) should be kept in commission, with a commander, and a small establishment of officers on board, so that in the event of any sudden emergency requiring secrecy and dispatch, troops might be silently moved to the coast, and embarked on the shortest notice on board ships in all respects perfectly prepared for their accommodation, and ready to proceed instantly, and without convoy, to their destination : from fifteen hundred to two thousand seamen are all which would be required to complete these ships, supposing them to be totally unmanned when the order was given, while our regular naval force need be in no way interfered with or disorganized, but might proceed in its equipment with all possible celerity.

I would only beg leave to add one further suggestion. During the late war, ships of war fitted for the purpose were very frequently employed for the conveyance of infantry, but cavalry and artillery continued to be transported as formerly, in hired merchant ships, and the delays and misfortunes which resulted were frequent,

and highly injurious to our operations. There can be no difficulty whatever in fitting a proper number of our smaller and half-worn-out frigates for these purposes, and then any expedition which sails will be a complete army, fully equipped for immediate service, and divested of every incumbrance which might impede or retard it.

Those officers who remember the delays and disasters of Admiral Christian's ill-fated expeditions will, I am sure, agree with me in asserting, that the misfortunes which befell it could not have occurred to an army embarked on board ships of the description I propose, and I confidently appeal to those who were present at the landing in Egypt to decide whether that brilliant and remarkable operation was not most materially facilitated by the number of ships of war fitted for the conveyance of troops, which accompanied the fleet on that occasion.

If at some future period we commence hostilities, without any previous preparation of this sort, it is easy to foresee the confusion, disappointment, and enormous increase of expense which would immediately ensue.

The reduced state of all our establishments leaves our foreign garrisons on the lowest possible scale, and immediate reinforcements to all our colonies would become matter of the most urgent necessity. Contracts for transports of every description must then be hastily entered into, on such terms as the owners might think fit to impose, and with but little time to examine into the condition and equipment of the vessels so engaged. At such a moment, every advantage would be taken by

those interested, of the necessities of Government; and the imperfections and inefficiency of many of the vessels would only be discovered when it was too late to remedy them.

Two other most serious objections present themselves immediately to the mind of any one who will seriously consider this subject.

The first is the competition for seamen which would inevitably be excited between the transport service and the Royal navy, (the former giving much higher wages and offering many superior inducements,) at a moment when every exertion would necessarily be making to prepare a large fleet for sea.

The second, that a very great proportion of the vessels hired would be fitted out in the Thames or in the eastern ports to which they belonged, and that in addition to the delays inseparable from their preparations for this new service, they must be convoyed separately round to the western ports, from which the embarkation of troops would in all probability take place.

It would defy all calculation to predict when a large number of merchant vessels under these circumstances could be assembled at Plymouth or Cork, especially during the winter half-year, while with our regular troop ships no delay whatever need take place,—each might proceed separately (and secretly if it was wished) to the appointed destination; and it is, perhaps, not too much to say, that the ships conveying reinforcements in this manner to the West Indies, Mediterranean, or North America, might have performed the service they were dispatched on and returned to England, before an un-

wieldy convoy of hired transports, fitted out under the circumstances I have described, would have cleared the channel.

To bring this system to perfection, it will only be necessary instead of too rapidly breaking up or selling ships which may from age become unequal to the weight of their heavy masts and guns, to give them such a repair as may render them equal to this lighter species of service, and completing all their internal fittings, preserve them in equal readiness with the rest of our navy for immediate service, employing such as it may be deemed advisable to keep in commission on those various services for which a very considerable expense in the hire of transports is now continually incurred.

I have the honor to be,

MY LORD,

Your Lordship's

Most obedient Servant,

W. BOWLES.

FOR PRIVATE DISTRIBUTION.

A

SECOND LETTER

ON THE

CONVEYANCE OF TROOPS

TO

CANADA.

By CAPT. BOWLES, R.N.

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TO

CAPTAIN SIR W. SYMONDS, R.N.

§c. §c. §c.

LONDON, *21st April*, 1838.

MY DEAR SIR,

YOU are aware that some months since I published a few suggestions on the speedy and secure conveyance of our reinforcements to Canada; and as the arrangements are now nearly completed, it will be neither uninteresting or uninstrucive to take a short review of all that has occurred since the receipt of the first intelligence of the insurrection in those Provinces. But before I commence my observations, I am anxious to declare distinctly that it is not my intention to impute the slightest blame to any department or individual, but merely to call the attention of our naval administration to a part of our system which has long been defective; to which may be attributed many of the difficulties and disasters which have befallen us at the commencement of former wars, and which those who first take measures to guard against in future will justly entitle themselves to the thanks of their country.

I need hardly remind you that my proposition is, to consider a certain number of troop ships an indispensable

part of the establishment of Her Majesty's navy; that the whole of these ships should be kept perfectly complete, as far as respects their internal fitting and readiness for service; and that such as it may be deemed advisable to keep in commission, should be employed on those various services for which a very considerable expense in the hire of transports is now continually incurred; and I endeavoured to point out the strong objections which exist against employing either ships regularly fitted for war or merchant vessels on this service.

The first intelligence of the revolt in Lower Canada reached London the latter end of December, and nothing could appear more urgent than the necessity of instantly dispatching reinforcements to Halifax and New Brunswick, from whence the whole garrisons had been marched to join Sir J. Colborne.

According to all appearances at the moment, expedition was of vital importance, and the troops were ready for embarkation at Cork; but what were our means of conveyance? Our *two* troop ships, the *Jupiter* and *Athol*, were somewhere abroad;—and such is the reduced state of our naval establishment, that we had actually only one ship of war in England—the *Inconstant*, of 36 guns—manned and ready for sea.

After some little delay in fitting her for the conveyance of troops at that inclement season of the year, and in weather so unusually severe, she sailed with 260 of the 93rd Regiment, and 40 women and children, on the 7th January, for Halifax.

The *Pique*, a frigate of the same class as the

Inconstant, was ordered home from the north coast of Spain to take the remainder of the 93rd, and she sailed from Cork on the 23rd January, with 336 officers and men.

The Hercules, of 74 guns, was at the same time recalled from Lisbon for this service; but arriving at Plymouth with her mainmast sprung, and requiring some further refitment, she did not leave Cork for Halifax until the 27th February; she carried 436 officers and men, belonging to different regiments; and the Vestal, of 26 guns, sailed on the 3rd March with 160, being the remainder, which the Hercules could not accommodate.

It will thus be seen, that from our want of preparation for any sudden emergency of this description, (an event which, from the vast extent of our foreign possessions, ought never to be considered improbable, or unnecessary to provide against,) nearly two months elapsed before even two regiments could be dispatched to Halifax, although I believe no exertion was spared, or time lost, in preparing our only disposable ships for this purpose.

I have remarked in my former letter on the strong objections which exist against employing our regular ships of war on a service of this description, for the reasons there stated—namely, the imperfect accommodation they afford, and the serious risk we should incur, in the event of impending or commencing hostilities, by disarming and disorganizing a part of our force, which ought at such a moment to be kept in the most perfect state of order and efficiency; and I will now proceed to

shew the arrangements which became indispensable in the four ships in question.

In the *Hercules*, of 74 guns, all except two on the fore-castle were dismantled; those belonging to the lower deck left at Devonport, and the remainder lashed amidships on the lower deck. The ship's company were removed from their usual quarters to the main deck, and the main deck ports caulked in. This ship, therefore, was completely disarmed, and incapable of the slightest defence.

In the *Pique* the whole of the troops were berthed on the main deck, the guns being housed, and the ports caulked in; the crew remaining in their usual berths on the lower deck. This ship may therefore also be considered entirely disabled for fighting.

The *Inconstant* kept her main deck clear; the soldiers had one side of the lower deck, and the ship's company the other; they were much crowded, and one half both of the soldiers and seamen were obliged to bring their hammocks up with them when they came on deck, to make room for the remainder.

The women and children slept under the half-deck and fore-castle, on gratings without bedding, and only such covering as they could provide themselves with, no provision of any sort having been allowed for them.

The *Inconstant* had a very good passage of twenty-three days, but fourteen of the 93rd landed sick on her arrival at Halifax, and one woman died in childbed.

The *Vestal* was fitted in all respects like the *Pique*.

I think these statements completely prove the assertions to which I have referred, and I shall therefore only

remark farther on this part of the subject, that if the disposition of the American Government had been uncertain or menacing, even this small reinforcement could not have been dispatched in this manner without very considerable risk; and yet we had no other means at our disposal.

But if a certain number of troop ships was always kept either in commission or in readiness for fitting out, it is obvious all these dangers and inconveniences would be entirely obviated.

Those which were kept in commission would naturally be almost constantly employed in the conveyance of reliefs to our numerous colonies, and might, I should think, assist very materially in furthering an object which it is generally understood the Government have in view,—the more frequent exchange of regiments stationed in unhealthy climates; carrying at the same time to our foreign dockyards and depôts all Government stores of every description, naval, ordnance, and victualing, for which so large an expense in the hire of transports is now continually incurred.

If this system was adopted, a considerable proportion of these ships would be always within reach, either fitting for or returning from their various voyages; and consequently, supposing that six of our smallest 74's and six or eight 46-gun frigates were appropriated for this service, a proportion of the frigates would probably be kept in commission during peace, and the larger ships divided between the three great arsenals (or at Portsmouth and Plymouth, as might be thought most convenient), for the purpose of rapid equipment and

manning; and with this arrangement once complete, no emergency could find us in our late unprepared state. A fortnight ought to be sufficient for fitting out and dispatching all these ships, which would require no convoy or protection, but, on the contrary, if it was found advisable to unite them (at all events as far as their courses laid together), might form a very respectable squadron fully armed for all purposes of defence.

As the expense of the proposed force will perhaps be urged as an objection against it, I wish to explain, that in my opinion, no increase whatever need be incurred beyond the internal fittings, which must be very inconsiderable.

I should propose, that the two-decked ships, when in commission, be placed on the smallest class of fifth rate as to officers and men (250), and carrying about 32 guns, their proper lower masts, frigate's topmasts, &c.

The frigates on the establishment of a sloop of war (120), carrying 18 guns on the quarter-deck and fore-castle, and fitted with a poop, for the purpose of increased accommodation for officers, with their proper lower masts, and 28 gunship's topmasts, &c.

To keep six frigate troop ships in commission during peace, it would therefore only be necessary to diminish our establishment by the same number of sloops of war, and on some foreign stations, particularly in the East and West Indies, where sudden emergencies requiring the embarkation and concentration of troops may be expected to occur, it would extremely facilitate the arrangements of the officers commanding the forces, to know that they

had within reach such ample means for transporting a considerable body of men at a very short notice, and the public service would therefore be very much benefited by such a change in the classes of the ships composing the squadron on these stations.

An extension of this system might also obviate the necessity for a dangerous practice, which appears to be gaining ground, of sending our ships of war to foreign stations, with a reduced establishment of guns and men, and which in the event of any sudden collision with an antagonist, in all respects as perfectly prepared for hostilities as all French, Americans, and Russians are well known to be, might most seriously endanger the national honor.

The flag-ships in the East and West Indies, and at the Cape and African Station, are now equipped in this manner, without lower-deck guns, and with a crew little exceeding in strength that of a frigate, but standing nevertheless on our own official navy list as 74-gun ships, and they would undoubtedly be so represented in the event of capture or disaster.

The object in this case is, I presume, to obtain additional accommodation without increase of expense, by employing a two-decked ship, reduced to the establishment of a frigate; but it appears to me, that if my suggestion should be thought worthy of adoption, these advantages may be secured at a much smaller cost, and the risks I have adverted to be entirely avoided. The accommodation of a two-decked ship is only required for the purpose of carrying out the Admiral's family comfortably to the station where they are to reside on

shore, during the period of his command; and when they are once landed, a half-armed, and half-manned ship, is very little calculated to set an example of activity and good order to the squadron, to which it would be rather an incumbrance than an advantage. I would, therefore, propose, that on occasions of this description, a two-decked troop ship should be provided for the conveyance of an Admiral wishing it, which after having performed this service, might proceed on other duty, or bring home the officer superseded, as circumstances might require.

The establishment of a ship of this class, would be only 250 officers and men, whereas those which I have described carry 430, so that they are much more expensive than frigates, although scarcely equal to them in force, and very inferior in sailing.

Were I to relate at length the delays, the dangers, the sufferings, and the actual loss of life, which has arisen from the employment of hired merchant ships for the conveyance of troops, I should, I am aware, very materially strengthen this part of my case, and produce a much more powerful effect on the public mind; but my object is not to excite popular clamour, but to solicit the calm and serious attention of those who have it in their power to correct these evils, to the observations I have offered; and I will therefore only mention one fact, which is of such recent occurrence, and had so nearly been accompanied by such a lamentable catastrophe, that I cannot avoid alluding to it.

The Barossa, a hired transport, arrived in the Shannon last January, with the head quarters of the

78th Regiment on board. She had been *five months* on her passage from Ceylon, and at the time of her fortunate arrival in Ireland, had only four days' provisions left!

I apprehend nobody will deny that a frigate troop ship would have made this passage in about two-thirds of the time; and this unlucky regiment, which, after passing many years in a hot climate, was thus brought home during the utmost severity of winter (narrowly escaping starvation,) would have arrived in November, and avoided all the hardships to which it was exposed, and which occasioned the loss of many valuable lives.

Surely, when we consider the many and severe privations which the irksome and hazardous duty of garrisoning our foreign possessions imposes on our troops, their long banishments from their country, and the unhealthy climates in which they are obliged to serve, it is incumbent on us to alleviate these inevitable hardships, by providing for their safety, as well as comfort, during the long and expensive voyages which their duty obliges them to undertake. The ships in which they are conveyed, should be in fact as much a floating barrack as possible, with sufficient and convenient accommodation for both officers and men, and complete arrangements for the preservation of discipline and health.

If these suggestions should be thought deserving of any attention by those to whom they are addressed, I will only further add, that there was never perhaps a moment in the history of the British navy, when they might so easily and cheaply be carried into effect. We

ment solely responsible for the due performance of this service, all the mismanagement, delays, and misfortunes, which were so common and injurious to the public interests during former wars, would, it may be confidently hoped, no longer occur: under a Board of Admiralty, conducted by naval officers, we should never hear of our cavalry, artillery, ordnance, stores, clothing, &c. &c.—all articles of such immense value as well as vital importance to the operations of an army, being embarked in unarmed and heavy-sailing merchant ships. I have in a former letter alluded to the capture of an ordnance transport bound to Quebec with the whole armament of the *St. Lawrence*, a new three-decker at that time building, and on which our superiority on the Lakes depended; and I could relate numberless disasters of the same description. In the tenth volume of the *Duke of Wellington's Despatches*, frequent mention is made of the capture of transports loaded with reinforcements and supplies for the army by the enemy's privateers; and on one occasion he exclaims, "If they have taken all our shoes" (which were probably coming out by the same insecure mode of conveyance), "the army must halt for six weeks."*

These were the consequences of a divided responsibility, and of allowing departments to act independently of each other, and to provide their own means of naval conveyance.

* See also Sir John Barrow's account of the relief of Gibraltar by Lord Howe, and how nearly the whole operation failed, from the ignorance or misconduct of the masters of the transports, which accompanied the fleet on this service.

It may be hoped that the consolidations which have already taken place, and which have invested the Admiralty with so much more direct power and authority, will go far towards putting an end to a system so vicious, and in every point of view, pecuniary as well as political, so injurious to the interests of the country; and if my suggestions should be thought worthy of attention and trial, I think that the safety, comfort, and rapidity with which our troops will be conveyed to and from their foreign service, and the good effects which will arise both with respect to their health and regularity, by embarking them in fast-sailing roomy ships fitted for their reception, commanded by officers of the navy, and in good order and discipline, will soon be universally felt and appreciated; nor can any Government be insensible to the advantages of having always at command the means of silently and secretly (if necessary) dispatching reinforcements, as well as ordnance and military stores, to any points which pending disputes or negotiations might render it very advisable to strengthen, without exciting alarm or public observation, and at the same time without weakening our naval force at home, which at such a moment, it would be so important to keep in a perfect state of readiness and efficiency.

The voluntary entry of seamen for the Royal navy, would be much encouraged, and the sufferings and hardships of impressment most materially alleviated, by the employment of spacious and comfortable ships of this description, to receive men at the outports, instead of the wretched and miserable tenders which it has hitherto

been our practice to send on this service, whose appearance was sufficient to disgust good seamen, and in which impressed men were crowded as in a jail, and subjected to most unnecessary severity and confinement, occasioning well-founded discontent, and frequently also contagious disorders, which spread through our newly fitted out ships, at a moment when their efficiency was of the greatest importance.* A frigate fitted and manned as I propose, would be scarcely more expensive than the vessel of this description which she would replace, and be free from all the objections I have enumerated.

I am aware that this is a question on which some difference of opinion exists; but I have never known any important improvement introduced into the navy, without much previous opposition and discussion. When Mr. Pering, the ingenious Clerk of the Checque, at Plymouth, first proposed the roofing-over our docks, and building slips, his suggestions were treated with very little attention by the Navy Board, to whom he addressed them; but in a very short time after they were published, the measure was adopted by universal consent, the only wonder being that so obvious a precaution could have been so long neglected.

To avoid, however, the appearance of entering into anything like argument or controversy on this occasion, I shall merely print a few copies of these remarks for

* See Trotter's *Medicina Nautica* on this subject. Almost all the serious illness amongst the ships of Lord Howe's fleet, in the early part of the war of 1793, is traced by him to the crowded and filthy state of the vessels in which the men had been confined.

private distribution amongst my friends, feeling confident that if they are worth anything, truth will work its own way.

I am,

My dear Sir,

Yours very faithfully,

WM. BOWLES.

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private distinction amongst my friends, for being content
that if they are worth anything, truth will work its
own way, and that it is not necessary to seek for it.

My dear Sir,

Yours very faithfully,

W. M. BOWLES

WILLIAM M. BOWLES

LONDON

THOMAS BIRDWELL, BICCADLY

LANDE

