

## Tommy on a Transport.

### CHATS WITH TRANSPORT CAPTAINS.

BY ALFRED T. STORY.



THE happiest part of the war, so far as the soldier is concerned, appears to be the voyage to the Cape. On that little trip of six thousand miles Tommy enjoys himself thoroughly. Even if his food is not all that it should be, as it sometimes has not been, he manages not to be miserable. He does his "grumble," throws the objectionable stuff overboard, and then nonchalantly goes to his smoke or his game, and so passes the time. Every captain whose ship has been turned for the nonce into a transport agrees in his admiration of the philosophical way in which Thomas Atkins takes things.

With that view Captain Eaton Travers, of the *Goth*, is in substantial agreement.

The practised physiognomist, looking at his picture, will see at once the humorist in his face; and any one of the like turn who has the good luck to meet him and draw him out will be delighted with his views and his anecdotes anent Thomas Atkins and his ways. He has seen much of him, and his notion is that the typical British private is a great, overgrown "kid," a man arrested in development and turned into a machine.

"When he is knocking about among bullets with his accustomed indifference he is, no doubt, heroic," says Captain Travers; "but when you see him getting his shave, taking his bath, or standing in a line six or seven hundred long to buy a halfpenny cake, he does not strike you as particularly heroic. But then," adds the captain, "the ridiculous and the heroic are never far apart in this show."

Captain Travers sailed with the *Goth* on the 15th of November to the rescue of the *Persia*, which, it will be remembered, broke her thrust-shaft when about twenty miles from St. Vincent, thus becoming totally disabled, and at the mercy of the wind and sea.

When the Admiralty heard of the mishap that had befallen the *Persia* they decided to send the *Goth* to St. Vincent to carry on her living freight, which consisted of the C

Squadron of the 6th Inniskilling Dragoons, numbering 157 men and 154 horses. The *Goth* left Southampton on the 15th of November with twelve officers, 240 men, and eighty-four horses, mostly belonging to No. 4 Ammunition Column.

"The horses were London omnibus and tram horses—splendid animals," said Captain Travers, "and no horses ever reached the Cape in such good condition. One horse," he added, "was in such fine trim that she could not be got out of her stall the way she went in. They had to cut away the stanchions to get her out, she was so fat."

The men of H.M.S. *Diadem* assisted in the work of transferring the horses and baggage from the *Persia* to the *Goth*, "and," said Captain Travers, with admiration, "the work was done in less than four hours."

Captain Travers's account of life on board a troopship is that the réveille was sounded at six o'clock. After the men had rolled up their hammocks and stowed them in the racks, they were run round the hurricane deck until seven o'clock. "Eighteen times round the deck, full pelt, put them in fine form for their breakfast," said the captain, "to which they were piped, or rather bugled, at eight o'clock."

After breakfast they were put through various physical drills, which occupied most of the morning. All who were not on other duty had to fall in. Each day so many were told off as sentinels for the decks and so many for cleaning arms. If the head-quarters staff was on board the band played every morning, and the drums and fifes in the afternoon. The band played every night at dinner if the weather permitted. There were instruction classes every day, squads of men being given instruction about South African matters. Firing classes also were of daily occurrence.

"We improvised a target which we towed 250yds. behind the ship," said Captain Travers. "This was for the Reservists, and it was astonishing to see the number of hits they made at that distance. When the target was hauled in it was quite riddled."



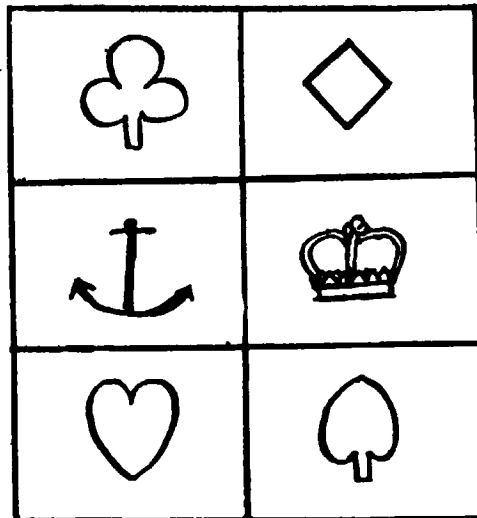
CAPTAIN EATON TRAVERS, OF THE  
"GOTH."  
From a Photograph.

In the afternoon there was no drill, or very little. Tommy had his time to himself, and it was usually spent in gambling. "I was surprised," said Captain Travers, "to see so much of it, and I made a remark to that effect to one of the officers. He said he would rather see the men's money gambled away into the hands of one man than have it remain in their own pockets. If they had lost their money before they got ashore they could not squander it in drink and make beasts of themselves." As a rule, but not, of course, without exception, Tommy makes the worst use of his money, and there are certain men in every regiment who know how to practise on their weakness. As soon as Tommy has a spare moment these men are down in a corner of the deck, spreading their traps for the unwary. "Sometimes it is 'House,'" said Captain Travers, "but more frequently on my ship it was another game which was played with dice. I don't know what they call it; but it was like this"—and Captain Travers took out a pencil and made a sketch of the apparatus.

"The dice has on its six sides the same figures as the board. A man puts his money on a square; if the dice turns up the figure his coin covers he takes all the money on the board. If the figure turned up is the same as none of the figures on which money is placed, the bank takes the lot. On the top of the board there is generally written the legend, '5s. limit.' But they often go much beyond that, and it is astonishing what they win and lose. The holders of the bank are generally very artful men. I heard one man sing out as I passed him while he was laying out his board, 'Na then, me 'arties, if yer don't specalate, y'll never accumulalte.'

"You get all kinds among soldiers," remarked Captain Travers, "just as in ordinary life. You would be surprised at the talent that is often displayed at one of their entertainments. Among the men we had in the *Goth* there was one of the cleverest ven-

triloquists I ever heard. He was the funniest character, too, you could meet with. He had got the dolls and everything complete for his performance, and the way he manœuvred his rag puppets and made them jabber was enough to make you split your sides with laughter. The Tommies enjoy it, I can tell you! It is no uncommon thing in the Army to find men of this type, and they think so much of their dolls or other paraphernalia that they would leave behind anything they had rather than their playthings. An officer told me that once, when they were campaigning in India—on which occasions, of course, the baggage is reduced to a minimum—one of these worthies' dolls was found stuffed in the colonel's valise. He thought that was the only way of making sure of their going to the front, and as his mates were of the same way of thinking, the thing was done, but, of course, when they were discovered no one could imagine how they came there."



ONE OF TOMMY'S GAMES.  
From a Sketch by Capt. Travers.

The *Goth* is a fine ship, but hardly perhaps so fine as the *Kildonan Castle*, which was taken over by the Government for trooping before she was finished, so that she was fitted specially for carrying soldiers. It is a sight to look the length of her deck and see the men feeding. Something like two thousand can sit down at once. "In our last voyage we were full up," said Captain Hay, one of the veterans of the

Castle Line, when asked about his occupation of troop-carrying. "You could hardly move for soldiers. They were everywhere, except in the parts of the ship reserved for the officers. They seemed to enjoy themselves very much, and very few of them were sick. There was some grumbling about the food, however, and they used to go and throw it overboard directly they got it. It was food supplied by the Admiralty. This voyage," said Captain Hay, "our company provide the food, and we carry fresh meat to last the whole of the voyage. I don't think," added the captain, "that Tommy would have complained without a cause."

As regards this question of food, it seems



undoubted that the Admiralty at first palmed off a good deal of old and very dubious stores upon the troops. During the last two months I have been on board a number of transports, and in almost every instance I heard of "grub"—it appears the most fitting name for the stuff—being provided for Tommy's behoof that was—well, hardly the food on which to feed the heroes that were serving the country in its time of need. It was freely said by men who knew what they were talking about that the persons who were responsible for the supply of such meat "ought to be well hanged." On one of the transports beef was served out from cases bearing date 1874, "and it stank so infamously," said a non-commissioned officer, "that we were obliged to put it through the port-holes." One of the rank and file, a Cockney, remarked, "It was pickled when I was a kid, s'elp me. Then I wanted it—bad; but now I can't stomach it." But even in the face of such an affront, Tommy preserved his good humour. He grumbled, threw the stuff overboard, and then, raising his voice, sang:—

Frustrate their knavish tricks,  
Go-o-o-d save the Queen!

To Captain Hay, as to most other skippers, T. A. appears to have been a never-ending source of amusement, and he had some laughable incidents to record about him. The troops are supplied with all sorts of mineral and other temperance drinks at the canteen, but no alcoholic liquors of any description. To open his ginger-beer and other bottles a number of corkscrews were provided; but after the first day not a single one was to be found. "Several were then suspended by chains in different parts of the vessel," said Captain Hay, "but those also were taken and not returned. That was the end of the matter. No more were provided, and Tommy had to get the cork out of his bottle the best way he could. It was amusing," the captain added, with a laugh, "to see how some of them tried to take it out of me for not giving

them more corkscrews. They would come underneath where I was standing and begin to force out their corks facing me, taking a sly sight at me the while, hoping to plant a cork in my face. When I caught them at it, and threatened to report them, they would go off with a laugh. Sad dogs!" commented Captain Hay.



CAPTAIN HAY, OF THE "KILDONAN CASTLE."  
*From a Photo. by Chas. E. Webber, Leytonstone.*

Most of the day was, of course, taken up with drilling. When they were not drilling they were playing "House." "All over the ship," said Captain Hay, "they would be squatting in groups of a dozen intent on this game. I never saw the game before—perhaps you never did; possibly it is only known to soldiers. It is supplied to them, I believe, by the War Office, and is the nearest approach to gambling that is sanctioned; but, on the quiet, much more is done. The game is played in this way: One man has twelve cards

containing rows of numbers, all the cards being different. In addition, he has a lot of little discs or counters, each bearing a number corresponding with one of the numbers on the cards. Each man playing buys a card, for which he pays a penny. Then, when all are supplied, the man who provides the cards shakes up the counters in his hat, takes one out, and calls out the number. The man who has the corresponding number on his card covers it. So the game goes on, the man with the counters calling out, '19, 51, 64, 20,' and so forth until one of the players finds all the numbers on his card covered, when he cries out, 'Ouse!' If it is found on examination that his figures tally with the counters passed, he takes 10d. of the 1s. paid for the cards, the man who keeps the bank pocketing the odd 2d. Then the cards are served out again, and the game proceeds as before. Thus they will go on for hours," said Captain Hay, "and they are at it in every part of the ship; so that when they are not at drill or asleep you can't move without hearing the everlasting rigmarole, '21, 5, 76, 9, 32, top o' the ouse, 19, top o' the house'—"



15		54	70	13
	23	2	85	31
6	19	90		63

TOMMY'S GAME OF "HOUSE."

being the name they give to the figure 90, which is the highest on the card. They have similar names for other numbers: Sergeant Kelly, for instance, signifying 45. The figures, or nicknames for them, are sung out at the top of the voice. At last the thing gets on to your nerves to such an extent that you dream of it, and the captains of passing ships will halloa out to you as they pass, '30, 19, 4, top o' the 'ouse!'

A little scene that took place at the end of the voyage is worth recording. "When we were lying in Table Bay," said Captain Hay, "the first batch of Canadians arrived. I at once sent up the signal, 'Well done, Canada,' and sounded my siren. The other ships in the harbour took up the cry, and in less than five minutes there was such a hullabaloo in the port that the people of Cape Town thought surely Ladysmith had been relieved, or else Kimberley."

The chief engineer of the *Kildonan Castle*, in answer to a remark on the busy scene when she was taking on board troops and her last stores before starting on her January trip, observed, "It is the work of men, sir," and he seemed proud to think he was taking part in it. As well, indeed, he might!

The commander of the Union Line *Ghoorka*, Captain Moseley, appeared to be in thorough agreement with him; for though, as he said, trooping was very hard work, and necessitated the putting out of all the strength and knowledge you have, yet he would not change posts with any man living at the present juncture. He had got to like Tommy, and after four voyages carrying out troops he had come to know the Queen's regula-

tions as well as the soldiers themselves. He did not think he should like to go through the drill as they had to do, officers as well as men, the former being put through their facings by the adjutant every morning before breakfast. Probably, he thought, he should feel like the men of the Railway Corps from the Crewe works, which went

out in the *Ghoorka*. They were, of course, Reservists, and had to be drilled like the rest. But being older men, they did not take to it so kindly as the regular 'Tommies, especially the standing on their toes; "and one of them made us laugh very heartily," said Captain Moseley, "by the remark that there was 'too dam much drill and not enough work,' for his taste. That's the way it would strike me," added the captain.

It was, however, very necessary that all should drill, else, with the good feeding they



CAPTAIN MOSELEY, OF THE "GHOORKA."  
From a Photo. by Debenhams & South, Southampton.



had, they would become soft and flabby. As it was, the men arrived at the Cape in splendid fettle. The twenty-one days at sea, with no beer or spirits to drink, made them hard and fit. The drill was not overdone. They had plenty of time for rest and amusement. Boxes of games were sent on board for them, and then they got amusement out of their shooting practice. "We rigged up a derrick for them over the starboard side of the ship," said Captain Moseley, "and from it had a bottle suspended at the end of a string. The men stood a little forward and fired at the bottle. The Colonel of the Grenadiers, who were going out with us, gave sixpence a bottle for every one hit, and it was surprising how many sixpences were won. The amount the Colonel had to pay for bottles smashed during the voyage amounted in all to £35."

Captain Moseley spoke with great admiration of the singing of the men at service on Sundays. There were so many on board that only half the troops could attend at a time, the other half having to wait until the following Sunday. On his last voyage he had a choir of thirty-five, all from the ranks, and their singing was splendid. Another Union Line captain remarked in a similar strain of Tommy's singing at church. It was, he said, the thing that struck him more than anything else. Others spoke in the same strain.

At Gib, said Captain Moseley, one of Her Majesty's ships gave them a warm send-off, manning the rigging and the band playing "The British Grenadiers." They had another hearty greeting when they met one of the New Zealand Company's ships off Cape Verde. The people on board had from them their first news of the war. The captain asked him if he would steam in as close as possible. He accordingly steamed alongside, and their pipes and drums struck up. They were answered by the New Zealander, which gave them a hearty three times three. After that they had sixteen days of rough weather, during

which time they saw nobody. "We had, however, an amusing incident to liven us up the day we crossed the Line," said Captain Moseley. "There had been some talk to the effect that we should cross that day, and Tommy was on the *qui vive*. In the evening one of the officers, while dressing for dinner, said to his servant, a man of course of his regiment, 'We shall cross the Line I understand about eight o'clock.' 'Begging your pardon, sir, we've already crossed it,' returned the man. 'We went over at four o'clock. We all of us felt it, sir, and one of our fellows cried out: "What ho, she bumps!"' The truth was that in the afternoon the wind had freshened, and we encountered a heavy southerly swell. About four o'clock the ship took a plunge into a big head sea, at the same time throwing up her stern, so that her propellers lifted quite out of the water, and went round with a whizz, sending a sharp tremor right through the ship. This was what Tommy took for the vessel's performance in 'crossing the Line,' and 'bumping' as she did it."

Speaking of the amusement they got out of the voyage, Captain Moseley recalled the fact that some of the men went on board with white pugarees, and in order to give them something like the regulation khaki colour, they had to dye them with coffee and other substitutes for the proper colourer. He sold the officers a hundred-weight of coffee for the purpose. As that was not sufficient they had to fall back on permanganate of potash. "The pugarees did not come out of the lye quite the right hue then," said Captain Moseley; "but a few days of African dust would rectify any shortcoming, for African dust is true khaki."



CAPTAIN WILFORD, OF THE "GAUL."  
From a Photo. by Debenham & Smith, Southampton.

Captain Wilford, of the *Gaul*, took out the "Fighting Fifth" in September—half of them old campaigners from Egypt. This was the first batch of troops for the relief of the situation in South Africa. There were about 1,200 men in all, 600 of them being Reservists. They were all in the best of spirits, and enjoyed



themselves thoroughly on the voyage. "To me," said Captain Wilford, "it was very pleasant to see them in such fine spirits." In his second voyage with troops he took out a full company of the Royal Engineers, a company of the Army Medical Corps, and the Rifle Brigade. The Duke of Connaught was present and saw them off, and took luncheon on board.

"We gave the men plenty to eat on the voyage," said Captain Wilford, "and as they got also a good deal of physical drill, they were kept in excellent condition. Half an hour's run round the deck daily, besides the drill, did not leave them much time to go to waste. The officers," continued Captain Wilford, "thought we fed them too well, and Tommy himself was so surprised at his feeding that his first view of it was that it



CAPTAIN SYLVESTER, OF THE "GERMAN."  
From a Photo, by Chalkley, Gould, & Co., Southampton.

was a bit of bluff to start off with, and that the tables would be turned, or at least transformed, as soon as we got well away from land. When no change occurred they said the swells at the War Office would burst with spite when they heard of it.

"Twice a week they had a sing-song, which they immensely enjoyed," said Captain Wilford. Asked what they liked best in the way of songs, he said they had a good many comic songs which appeared very popular with them; but they seemed to like best of all a certain sort of sentimental ditty.

This was borne out by Captain Sylvester, of the *German*, another of the Union Line boats, who gave it as his opinion that all the Tommies had a great liking for singing about their mothers. Tommy's mother was

S.S. German "Voyage"  
Copy of Bill of Fare for Troops 1435 crew

<u>Sunday</u>	<u>Monday</u>	<u>Tuesday</u>	<u>Wednesday</u>	<u>Thursday</u>	<u>Friday</u>	<u>Saturday</u>
<u>Breakfast</u> Oatmeal porridge Beefsteak & onions Potatoes	<u>Breakfast</u> Oatmeal porridge Bakers Lard & Ham	<u>Breakfast</u> Oatmeal porridge Spiced Ham & Currant Rice	<u>Breakfast</u> Oatmeal porridge Suppered Herring Potatoes & Butter	<u>Breakfast</u> Oatmeal porridge Beefsteak & Onions Potatoes	<u>Breakfast</u> Oatmeal porridge Pender, Mutton Potatoes & Butter	<u>Breakfast</u> Oatmeal porridge Spiced Ham & Butter
<u>Dinner</u>	<u>Dinner</u>	<u>Dinner</u>	<u>Dinner</u>	<u>Dinner</u>	<u>Dinner</u>	<u>Dinner</u>
Soup Roast Mutton Potatoes & Cabbage Plum Pudding	Soup Roast Beef Potatoes Calamans	Soup Corned Beef Potatoes & Cabbage Pickles Stewed Apples & Rice	Soup Roast Mutton Potatoes	Soup Roast Beef Potatoes Plum Pudding	Soup Roast Mutton & Swift Potatoes Stewed Apples & Rice	Soup Roast Beef Potatoes & Cabbage
<u>Tea</u>	<u>Tea</u>	<u>Tea</u>	<u>Tea</u>	<u>Tea</u>	<u>Tea</u>	<u>Tea</u>
Jam, Butter, Cake	Cherry, Butter	Marmalade, Butter	Hashed Meat Potatoes, Butter	Jam, Butter Cake	Marmalade Butter & Buns	Lard, Ham Jam & Butter
					J. Belcher Chief Steward	



generally "in her lonely grave," and she was not infrequently busy thinking of Tommy as he "padded the earth's round" above. Sometimes it was his "sister dear" he sang about, but more often someone else's sister.

Captain Sylvester expressed a decided liking for Tommy, although he found him full of the faults of his qualities. He was the most reckless of souls, and anything he did not want at the passing moment was utterly disregarded. No end of illustrated magazines and periodicals were sent on board for his amusement and instruction, but after looking at the pictures for a minute or two, away they would go into the sea.

The captain of the *German* said he would at any time rather have soldiers for passengers than third-classes. They were less trouble. If anything went wrong the officer's command settled the difficulty at once. But with a lot of third-class passengers there was no end of trouble and complaint. In his last trip, when he took out troops and passengers too, he had a deal of trouble with some of the steerage folk, more especially, however, with a number of Germans, who were on their way to the Cape. They objected to the bugle, and asked him to stop it. They objected to the rifle and pistol practice, saying they had not bargained for that. They objected to the soldiers, to their games, to their laughter and frolic, to their being about where they—the passengers—wanted to be, and asked the captain to keep a section of the deck clear of the men in khaki, so that they might enjoy their lives in peace and quietness.

Messrs. Lamport and Holt have three of their ships acting under Admiralty orders, the *Channing*, the *Cavour*, and the *Raphael*, the two former as troopers, the last-named as a store-ship. Captain Hammond, of the *Channing*, is a typical seaman, and thoroughly enjoyed the work of taking out troops to the seat of war. He had his faults to find with Tommy, but it was more particularly the

Cockney description to which he had objections. Not many of them, however, had found their way on to his ship. On his last voyage he took out the 65th Howitzer Battery, quite a superior lot of men (he said), and the run was quite a pleasant one. There were in all 300 men, with about the same number of horses. They were always active, and had no time to get anything like the mopes. They were up by five o'clock when it was light at that hour, and after coffee they gave the horses their feed. Then there was a muster of the men and some physical exercise, followed by breakfast at eight o'clock. After breakfast the horses were got out and paraded up and down the deck. This took them pretty well up to dinner-time, after which there was a general inspection. That business closed, the men were at liberty to enjoy their games—tug-of-war, sack and other races, and for those who preferred, cards, dominoes, etc.

"Altogether we had a very enjoyable time," said Captain Hammond. "The soldiers behaved themselves well, although they did grumble a bit at their food, and I don't wonder. They were not fed as they should be. The ship feeds the officers, and they eat of the best; but the War Office supplies the 'grub' for the men, and the stuff that is given them is a disgrace. There is too much lordship and red-tape at head-quarters, it appears to me," said Captain Hammond. "Our company, I must say, did their best for the soldiers. They gave every man on board a couple of apples and a couple of oranges every day, and they are fine things to keep men in health. They also gave each man a pound of tobacco and pipes.

"We rigged up a target," continued Captain Hammond, "so that they could practise shooting with their revolvers. But I must say, taking them altogether, they were not good shots; and the officers were worse than the men. One officer, aiming at the target, which was 6ft. above the deck, missed



CAPTAIN HAMMOND, OF THE "CHANNING."  
From a Photograph.



it and sent a bullet through my sounder, which was on the deck beneath the target." Captain Hammond was the more surprised at the men's poor shooting after meeting some of the Australian Volunteers at the Cape, many of whom told him that there was not one of them who could not shoot an apple off a man's head at full gallop, either with rifle or revolver.

"The men liked the ship," said Captain Hammond, "and at the end of the voyage they expressed the hope that they might have the good luck to come back in her. I wish they may, every mother's son of them! I gave them a good Christmas dinner before they left the ship, and I didn't forget the plum-pudding either. They gave me three cheers as they disembarked, and said they would bring me a lock of Kruger's hair."

As typical a sailor as any in the batch here named is Captain Macnicol, of the Allan Liner *Bavarian*, to which he was appointed when she issued from the builders' hands some five months ago. Captain Macnicol has had a long record with the same company, following upon a career of rare adventure. The *Bavarian's* first work, like that of the *Kildonan Castle*, was conveying troops to the Cape. She sailed on her first voyage on November 8th, from Liverpool, carrying contingents of the Dublin Fusiliers, Connaught Rangers, the Royal Engineers, the Royal Army Medical Corps, and some half-dozen foreign attachés, making Cape Town in seventeen days.

Captain Macnicol is as enthusiastic as most other transport skip-

pers in his admiration of Tommy's many good qualities. "They were like a lot of schoolboys out on a picnic," was his comment, and he has some amusing yarns of the endless frolic that is in him and the endless tricks he is up to. Unfortunately, space will not permit of more than one, and that may not have occurred in his ship. Shaving is a great institution on board, and, as there are only a few Tommies who have the barber's art, and the work has to be done expeditiously, it is one of the sights of a morning to see the chin-scraping go on. Each shaver has one if not two assistants. These do the lathering, and pass the men on in turn. Not infrequently one man will operate on one side of the shavee's face and then pass to the next man, leaving another operator to shave the other side. It saves passing from side to side, and thus economizes time. One day there was a game on with a Tommy, either for a bet or to pay him

out for something. He was hustled out of his place, and so kept back till he was the last of all. Then he sat down, was duly lathered, and underwent the operation of the first shaver. But, having gone thus far, he was left, half-shaved, and with the lather still on the unshaved half. At that moment the bugle sounded for the company to fall in for drill, and away sprang latherers, shavers, and all, and Tommy, half-shaved and half-mad, had to run too, and appear in his place with a fine, stubbly growth on one side his face to match nothing on the other—"for all the world," said the captain, "like a half-cleaned picture in a dealer's window."



CAPTAIN MACNICOL, OF THE "BAVARIAN."  
From a Photograph.