



South Australians at war – transcript

Inglis, K. S.

The rehearsal : Australians at war in the Sudan, 1885

Adelaide : Rigby, 1985

Page 87

CHAPTER VI

THE EXPEDITION

The Iberia and the Australasian, NSW 1 and NSW 2, struck heavy weather as they made south from Sydney, and many men were seasick; 'it was fearful', Private Robert Hunter wrote in his diary, 'as the tween deck was so crowded and the stench was horrible'. One man reported another ailment: 'Dear Mamma, I feel a little homesick ... only a little you know but I will soon get over that I hope ... Your aff. son G. Tuckey'.

Letters home went ashore from the Iberia when it paused for two hours at Kangaroo Island on the night of Friday 6 March. Shiploads of wellwishers from Adelaide greeted the Contingent. Francis Wright, acting minister for war, who travelled on the first leg of the expedition he had outfitted, left the ship; and so did the stricken Private Sessle, whose wife had been killed in the collision with the Nemesis. Private Hamilton Dick was moved by the 'hearty reception' from so many Adelaide people who had boarded steamers in the middle of the night to hail the soldiers from Sydney. 'This kind treatment fr. those who were utter strangers to us', he wrote, 'showed that S.A. regarded the departure of the Contingent in no provincial spirit. Its people evidently looked upon us as the representatives of Australia and their only regret seemed to be that they too could not swell our ranks with a few of their sturdy volunteers'. Two men and a boy did their best to make the force national in composition. Just before the ship pulled up anchor, two members of the South Australian Volunteer force were caught aboard the Iberia and ordered off, detected as strangers when the unfamiliar spikes on their helmets glinted in lamplight. And a little boy from Adelaide, a more mettlesome Ernest Laurence, was also prevented from sailing to Suakin; the men caught him stowing away, put him on to a visiting steamer, and repelled the lad when he tried to board again from a rowing boat.