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TAMIL NADU ARCHIVES

GOVERNMENT OF TAMIL NADU

REVENUE DEPARTMENT

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83

GOVERNMENT OF MADRAS.
PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT.

20th July 1877, No. 456 W.

Buildings and Roads

Civil Works.

Read the following papers:—

No. 277. From J. O'SHAUGHNESSY, Esq., District Engineer, Nellore, to the Chief Engineer, Public Works Department, dated Nellore, 2nd July 1877, No. 1,137.

I HAVE the honor to acknowledge the receipt of G.O., No. 212 W, dated the 11th June 1877, calling for report in regard to the proportionally large amount of sickness that has prevailed among the European subordinates on the canal.

2. On receipt of the order I called upon the principal officers on the canal to state their opinion on the subject, and I beg to enclose copies of reports upon it from Messrs. deGroussilliers and Brooks, Lieutenant Henderson, R.E., and Dr. O'Hara.

3. Out of the twelve Non-commissioned Officers of Royal Engineers originally appointed to the canal, there are five present, five on sick leave, and two died. From reports in the newspapers, one of the men (Serjeant Bishop) registered as absent on sick leave died at Madras, but I have received no official information of it. If this is true and I have no doubt of it 25 per cent. of the men have died and 33 per cent. are now absent on sick leave.

4. This alarming mortality and sickness is attributed to want of acclimatization, physical unfitness, overwork, exposure to the sun, insufficient shelter, and want of food and provisions suitable for Europeans. The men who have died and fallen sick have not, I believe, been in any case more than two years in India, and it is probable that their breaking down so soon is in a great measure due to this cause.

5. One man, Corporal Tizzard, suffered from some pulmonary disease, another, Serjeant Bishop, contracted disease in Burma, whence he was posted to the canal; and in these cases the men were, in my opinion, physically unfit for the work. The work was no doubt hard, but it was certainly not too severe; the men who have worked the hardest have stood best, and the sickness and mortality that occurred is not attributable to overwork. Some of the men have probably exposed themselves too much to the sun, but there was no occasion for it, and they were often cautioned against it; the men had good sheds and good tents, and were in this respect as well off as the officers; there is no ground for complaint in this respect. There was and is great difficulty in getting food suitable for Europeans, and no doubt the men suffered in health and spirits from this cause.

6. The heat on the canal for two or three weeks after the 20th May was terrific; it was from 100° to 110° in the shade, and this, in my opinion, is the sole cause of the breakdown among the European subordinates; it was certainly the cause of death in the cases of Corporals Knight and Baily, and there was of course no help for it. In regard to the future, I shall recommend in a separate letter that the men who are now absent on sick leave be posted elsewhere. One of these, Corporal Tizzard, has applied for permission to leave the department, and I shall recommend that his request be granted; for, though he is an intelligent man and bears a good character, he is, I think, physically unfit for employment in this department; he is reported to have done no work on the canal during the time he was on it, and he fortunately left before the great heat in

May. There is very great difficulty in getting chickens, mutton and milk along the work; but Mr. Grose has kindly promised that he will order village officers to give more assistance hereafter in regard to chickens and milk; mutton cannot be got in less quantities than a whole sheep, which one man cannot afford to purchase, but when the men are near each other they can club together to purchase a sheep between them; when the officers kill a sheep, as they must frequently do, I have no doubt they share it with their subordinates; there is always plenty of splendid fish, and there is never any want of rice and condiments; altogether I cannot admit that the conditions of life are so bad on the canal as they are made out to be, though no doubt the young soldiers of Royal Engineers find it very different to what they have been hitherto accustomed.

7. I have done all I can for these men and they tell me that the officers on the canal treat them with great kindness. I cannot promise any great amelioration of their condition on the canal, but Government may rest assured that their reasonable wants shall be attended to as much as possible.

From F. G. BROOKS, Esq., Executive Engineer, Iskapully Division, to J. O'SHAUGHNESSY, Esq., District Engineer, Nellore, dated 22nd June 1877, No. 614.

With reference to the letter from Dr. Ross, Zillah Surgeon of Nellore, No. 92, dated the 26th ultimo, to the address of the Deputy Sargen-General, Indian Medical Department, I have the honor to report that it is quite true that the European subordinates on this canal have been greatly overworked, and there could be no better proof of this than the fact that 50 per cent. of them have been invalided or died within the last two months.

2. As long as the weather kept moderately cool, the staff of subordinates was sufficient, but there never was any reserve to fill vacancies as they occurred, and when this terrific weather set in and with it a great influx of immigrant coolies, a tremendous strain was imposed upon all hands, both officers and subordinates, and it is hard to say which fared the worst.

3. I duly brought this state of things to your notice and you sent relief from every range in your circle as early as it was practicable to do so, but still the number of experienced subordinates has been under a fair working strength. But for serious interruption by the cyclone of last month, which delayed the completion of the Southern Sub-divisions, which would have set free some weeks ago a number of subordinates, the difficulty would not have been felt.

4. I fully concur with Dr. Ross' remarks that there should be a reserve of 50 per cent. of the European subordinates on a work of this magnitude and carried on in this weather.

5. With regard to shelter, the European subordinates were all supplied with good huts; which although rough and not very comfortable are infinitely better than tents for protecting them from the heat. In the Iskapully Sub-division the Overseers were also allowed small drawings of palmyrah leaves supported on a light frame at the points where the heaviest work was proceeding, in order that they might have occasional shelter when on the work.

6. With reference to the question of food supplies, there is no doubt but that the subordinates have not fared well. Fish has only been plentiful in one sub-division; inferior mutton is sometimes procurable, beef never. Fowls are very expensive from 6 to 8 Annas each, small size. Bread which has to be brought from Nellore or Ongole is beyond the means of most of the subordinates, vegetables there are none, and milk an essential to men with families is extremely scarce.

7. The Tahsildars of Kundukur and Kavaly Taluqs might have rendered some assistance, but they have not been disposed to help in any way. The Mansif connected with the former is said to be particularly indifferent when applied to for this purpose.

8. I would beg to suggest the following measures for improving the condition of the European subordinates and for the better preservation of their health.

- (1) Increase of pay, nearly all these men have to keep up duplicate establishment and as a consequence, they cannot afford to provide themselves with proper food.
- (2) There should be more of them, so that a man finding himself getting ill could be immediately replaced for a few days, which in most cases could be the "stitch in time."
- (3) There should be more good Native subordinates capable of giving out and directing work, which would save the Europeans considerable exposure.

The last two remedies will be provided by the early closing of the greater part of the first four sub-divisions and by the new subordinates who have just joined.

From Lieutenant C. B. HENDERSON, B.E., Officer in charge of Kareda Sub-division, to J. O'SHAUGHNESSY, Esq., District Engineer, Nellore, dated 19th June 1877, No. 222.

With reference to your endorsement No. 921 of the 15th instant, calling for a report on the conditions under which the European subordinates on the canal are employed, I have the honor to state that in my opinion the work has been throughout very much under-officered, and more has been expected from the subordinates than they can perform at this season of the year.

2. The European Non-commissioned Officers from Bangalore are apparently not acclimatized; they do not understand the evil effects of exposure to the sun, and in spite of repeated warnings they are very reckless in this matter; if an overseer is on his work at 5-30 A.M., he can be back again in his shed at 8-30, and he need not go out again till 4 P.M. Overseers, as a rule, appear on the work between 7 and 8 A.M. I have introduced a rule that no payments shall be made after sunset, the overseers pay from 9 to 11 A.M., and this gives them a rest in the evening which they much require.

3. The Non-commissioned Officers are all married men with families, and they find it difficult to keep up a double establishment on this account; they can afford very few luxuries and must often have to fare badly, the remedy (increased pay) is I suppose impracticable.

4. Sheds have been provided for the overseers and they are as well off in this respect as the officers.

5. Personally I have never had any difficulty in getting supplies, but I believe that all the other officers as well as the overseers have; I find that, if one will pay sufficient ready-money, things are always forthcoming.

From Surgeon W. O'HARA, Medical charge, East Coast Canal, to J. O'SHAUGHNESSY, Esq., District Engineer, Nellore, dated 24th June 1877.

In reply to your communication, dated 19th June 1877, *No. 85, in regard to G.O., 11th June 1877, No. 212 W, I have the honor to express

* Received on the 24th June 1877.

my opinion on the following points which were brought to the notice of Government through the report of the Zillah Surgeon, Nellore.

2. "Serious amount of sickness prevalent among the European Overseers, East Coast Canal." Inasmuch as you are acquainted with the numbers and names of the officers that have died and have been invalided from these works I shall not recount them; but in reference to the causes of sickness I have to observe that the majority of sufferers have been men who have scarcely been acclimatized, that they suffered from undue exposure, overwork, irregular and improper feeding, and such defective domestic and hygienic arrangements as, in the case of inexperienced men, are incident to district life.

3. *Insufficiency of Overseers and necessary consequent overwork.*—That the canal has from the commencement suffered from an inadequate staff is I believe so generally recognized and has been so repeatedly pointed out that further comment is unnecessary.

4. *Difficulty in procuring proper food supplies.*—This obtains in most stations along the line; sometimes to a serious extent. It is due to two causes as far as the subordinates are concerned, viz.:—

- 1st.—The absence of suitable European food stuffs in the various villages along the line.
- 2nd.—The difficulty of, and delay in, transport of provisions from large stations like Nellore and Ongole; besides which the insufficiency of the salaries of the overseers, many of whom are married and are obliged to maintain two separate establishments, prevents them purchasing at necessarily expensive rates nutritious and wholesome food.

5. *Shelter.*—I have made it a special duty to urge upon the Sub-divisional Officers and Overseers the importance of erecting for themselves suitable sheds, leaf pavilions, and I am glad to say that I believe during the recent very hot weather all Overseers on the line were provided with huts if they chose to use them.

(a). In regard to the suggestions, "doubling the number of European Overseers," I presume if this were possible and the material available the small numbers whose energies have been overtaxed would long ago have been reinforced.

- (b). *Revenue Authorities might aid them in procuring a better class of food supply.*—
If positive orders were issued on this point possibly they might ameliorate this condition to a certain extent, but I am convinced that unless a more liberal pay allowance be made, the men will scarcely reap any material advantage.
- (c). "Officers physically unfit." It is to be regretted that as the severity of the conditions of life out here requires men to be specially fitted to bear hardship and exposure, that the choice of any subordinates should have been made from men with neither experiences of Indian climate nor of the many precautions and duties that are essentially necessary to the well-being of a district official employed on works such as these.

From MR. GROSSE, Esq., Executive Engineer of the Kottapattam Division, to J. O'SHAUGHNESSY, Esq., District Engineer, Nellore, dated 27th June 1877, No. 549.

In reply to your No. 9210 of 15th instant, enclosing a report of Surgeon-Major Ross regarding the Overseers of the European subordinates on the Buckingham Canal, Nellore, I have the honor to report.

2. That it is four out of five Non-commissioned Officers in this division, one has died and three have gone on sick leave, but I hardly think that very hard work had much to do with their sudden breakdown.

3. Up to the middle of May we had very pleasant weather, the tropical heat was tempered by constant sea breezes, and camp life in tents was very agreeable.

4. But after the cyclone in May the change in the weather was so sudden and the heat so abnormally high that it required an unimpaired constitution to stand the sudden shock.

5. How far those who surmounted were physically fit for such a change and what made them so I think should be ascertained from the medical man who treated on them.

6. To my knowledge none of the sick overseers ever stayed out on the works until 11 o'clock, nor have I ever given an order that they should stay out until that hour, nor had they ever what you may call office work, two of them could hardly write, even Corporal Tizzard never did any work at all as much as I know and came here in an unfit state of health.

7. Corporal Tizzard who left long before the great heat set in and Corporal Curtis were the only Overseers without huts, but now all overseers have palmyrah leaf huts such as I am myself living in.

8. With regard to necessaries of life they were and are hard to be got and at extremely high prices, and it would be well if the Civil authorities were to assist to procure them more readily.

No. 277-A. Endorsement of the Chief Secretary to Government, dated Fort St. George, 3rd July 1877, No. 1,342.

From Surgeon W. O'HARA, Medical charge of East Coast Canal, to the Secretary to the Surgeon-General, Indian Medical Department, dated Iskapully, 24th June 1877.

I HAVE the honor to submit, for the information of the Surgeon-General, a copy of my letter to the District Engineer, Nellore, in which is expressed, according to his requisition, my opinions on the several points treated of in Dr. Ross' report* on the subject of the amount of sickness which has prevailed amongst the European subordinates employed on the East Coast Canal Works.

2. As the subject has engaged the attention of Government, it is hoped that ere long relief commensurate with, and suitable for, the amount and nature of the work that has to be performed, will be provided.

No. 398.

Forwarded to the Chief Secretary for the information of Government.

Fort St. George,
28th June 1877.

(Signed) G. SMITH, M.D.,
Surgeon-General, I.M.D.

TRANSFERRED to the Public Works Department.

(Signed) D. F. CARMICHAEL,
Chief Secretary.

No. 278.

ORDER THEREON, 20th July 1877, No. 456 W.

THE correspondence above recorded shows that in spite of the organization adopted after the anxious consideration of Government, much distress, arising in part from the difficulty of obtaining supplies, in part from the great heat, has prevailed among the Public Works Establishment in charge of the Buckingham Canal Relief Works.

2. The Government regret that it is not in their power to prevent much hardship. The intensity of the heat has, His Excellency in Council trusts, by this time in some measure abated. The completion of some portion of the canal will have enabled Mr. O'Shaughnessy to strengthen the staff on the remaining sections, and thus to lessen the strain upon the men. While the question of supplies has, it is observed, been discussed with Mr. Grose, the Collector of the District—on whose exertions to remove, so far as he may be able, the difficulties in the matter, His Grace the Governor in Council confidently relies. Any suggestion which may be offered for alleviating hardship will receive immediate consideration by Government.

3. In face of the stringent orders of the Government of India, the Government cannot entertain the question of granting to the Overseers in charge of the works more than the regulation pay and allowances.

(True Extract.)

(Signed) E. A. FOORD, Colonel, R.E.,
Secretary to Government, P.W.D.

To the District Engineer, Nellore.
" Collector of Nellore.
" Military Department.
" Revenue "

Ed. H. C. Shauker.
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PUBLIC WORKS

DISTRICT ENGINEER

26/7/77

1877 No. 456

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26 July 1877

For the District Engineer
The District Engineer
The District Engineer
The District Engineer
The District Engineer