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NEW ZEALAND.

DEFENCE FORCES OF NEW ZEALAND

(REPORT ON THE), BY COL. A. P. PENTON, R.A., COMMANDER OF THE FORCES.

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

To the Hon. the DEFENCE MINISTER.

SIR,—

Wellington, 1st September, 1897.

I have the honour to forward, for the information of His Excellency the Governor of New Zealand, a report on the Defence Forces of the colony.

I have now seen the majority of the dismounted corps in the colony, and travelled over all the districts excepting Westland. I am awaiting the return of Colonel Pitt from England before making a detailed inspection of his district.

The material of which the Forces is composed is, on the whole, excellent, and there is no reason why, with proper organization and encouragement, the troops should not become efficient and reliable.

I am sorry to say that I have found very few people in the colony who look upon the defence question seriously. It is usually treated very lightly by the majority of the people, and the probability of any attack being made on the colony by a foreign force is regarded as absolutely unlikely to happen, or to be such a remote contingency that it is not worth serious consideration. The recent examples we have had in the collapse of the Chinese and Greek Powers, owing to their want of preparedness and organization, should be a very serious object-lesson for the colony.

It must be remembered that foreign countries are getting closer and closer to us daily, owing to the continued improvements being made in the size and speed of ships, and that a descent by a few rapid cruisers belonging to a country geographically some thousands of miles away is not an absolute impossibility in these days.

THE PERMANENT FORCES.

As regards the Permanent Forces, there are not sufficient officers to keep up a proper spirit of discipline among the men. For the whole Force, there are only three for the Artillery and two for the Torpedo Corps. None of the Artillery officers have received any thorough training in artillery work, and I think it is greatly to their credit that the men are trained as well as they are. It is imperative that the number of officers should be increased as soon as possible; but, unless Imperial officers are obtained from England, I cannot see how this is to be done. The system at present in force of taking cadets from the Civil Service list is wrong in principle, and so far has not acted well: You get lads who have passed the Civil Service examination to accept military cadetships not for any love of soldiering, but for the sake of getting something to do out of their turn.

Officers should be men who have taken up the profession of arms from the love of it, and who have looked forward from their childhood to the day when they would be old enough to join the profession. The cadets, having been schoolmates and companions of many of the gunners in civil life, are not respected and looked up to by the men as they should be. I recommend that three Artillery officers be got out from Home at once, on a three years' engagement; and that notice should be given that a special examination will be held for military cadetships on a certain date for five military cadets, the examination to be as far as possible a similar one to that for entrance to Sandhurst; the cadets, on joining, to be put through a course of instruction at the dépôt at Wellington, to last one year, and after that to be sent Home and attached—five to the Royal Artillery and two to the Royal Engineers (the two cadets at present in the Force being included in this part of the arrangement) for one year. At the end of that time they would return to the colony, and be ready to take the places of the Royal Artillery officers on the expiration of their engagements. I would also very strongly advocate a Royal Engineer officer being got out as staff officer for submarine mining and fortifications; but unless a good salary is offered no Royal Engineer officer will be procurable.

The men of the Permanent Force are well instructed at the dépôt in Wellington, where they all join as recruits; but I regret having to report that I do not consider their state of discipline what it ought to be, nor do I think the men take the proper pride in themselves as soldiers which they should do. At the root of the evil is the system of wearing plain clothes, which is permitted on Sundays and in special cases, where they get permission to go outside the towns. This latter privilege is much abused; men get leave to wear plain clothes to go a short distance into the