

Whilst adhering to the universal dress for all but the mounted corps and the Auckland District, I consider that the different battalions should adopt distinctive badges and facings, so that one battalion may be distinguishable from another, each arm of the service having its distinctive badge.

The undress head-gear for all corps is the field-service cap. This is entirely unsuited for mounted corps. The cap, to look smart and soldier-like, should be worn on the side of the head; but, when a man is mounted, unless his cap is exceptionally well made, it has to be pressed down on the centre of the head to enable him to keep it on. It is not a smart head-dress, and is not suitable for any class of troops working over rough ground. It soon gets out of shape, and only looks smart when new. It should be abolished.

The Conference of 1894 decided that all belts should be of brown leather. The companies who have provided themselves with the new uniform expected to have brown belts issued to them, and to return the buff belts to store. Unfortunately, this recommendation of the Conference has not been acted upon, and there is only a small stock of brown belts in store from which to make issue. To supply the whole Force with brown belts would mean a serious expenditure.

I quite concur with Colonel Fox's recommendation in his last year's report that an allowance should be made to corps for the supply of great-coats.

Very few of the corps have haversacks or water-bottles. These, of a universal pattern, should be procured, and a free issue made.

MEDICAL.

There is no organized method for supplying medical aid to troops in case of war. In framing the defence scheme for the colony this matter will have to be gone into thoroughly. Any fighting likely to occur will probably be near one of the principal ports, and arrangements should be made for the formation of a small medical staff corps at each centre, to be supplied with the necessary appliances for giving first aid to the wounded in the field. Hospital accommodation will have to be considered, and I recommend that a small committee of medical officers belonging to the Volunteer Force should be assembled to discuss these questions.

Surgeon-General Grace has been in communication with the Volunteer medical officers throughout the colony on this subject, and has elicited some replies and suggestions.

CADET COMPANIES.

These companies are valuable from the point of view that a certain amount of military knowledge is imparted to a section of the youthful community. The corps themselves would be of little value as fighting units, the boys being too young to bear the fatigue of active service. A proportion of them, after leaving school, join the adult corps, and thus utilise the military knowledge they gained as cadets. The majority, however, do not join the Volunteer Corps, and I consider the expense of their training as cadets should be born by the educational and not by the military department.

At present there are thirty-nine cadet corps in the colony, with a total strength of 2,138.

SCHOOL OF INSTRUCTION.

I most strongly recommend that a school of instruction be formed at Wellington for the Volunteer Force. Both officers and men should be encouraged to come to Wellington for short courses during the year. The Volunteers could be accommodated in barracks, and treated in the same manner as the men who have been trained lately for service in England. If each corps sent a few men during the year, the benefit to the Volunteers throughout the colony would be very material.

CAMPS.

On account of Easter being so late this year, and seeing that bad weather had been experienced during the last three years at the Easter camps, I recommended, and received approval, to postpone the general encampments until a later period of the year, when finer weather might be hoped for. The weather was excessively bad at Easter; and certainly in the North Island, and in some parts of the South Island, it would have been impossible to hold an encampment.

I have made careful inquiries from all commanding officers, and find that Easter is the most convenient time for holding encampments, and very much regret that the Volunteers cannot see their way to go into camp at some such time as Christmas or New Year, when the days are long and the weather assured.

I have recommended that for this year combined company camps should as far as possible be held at the centres, and country corps be invited to attend. Any Volunteer remaining in camp for four whole days to receive an allowance of 2s. 6d. per diem.

RAILWAY COMMUNICATION.

On strategetic grounds, efforts should be made to complete the railway communication between Auckland and Wellington, and also between the east and west coasts of the South Island. Until this is done, the rapid concentration of troops at a threatened point is impossible.

AMENDMENT TO DEFENCE ACT.

The Defence Act requires amendment, and should be taken in hand this session. Authority should be given under it to the representative of the colony in England to enter into agreement (when authorised to do so by the Government) with officers and non-commissioned officers of the Imperial Force for employment in the colony. The powers and duties of the Commander of the Forces should be defined. Authority should be given to the Officers Commanding Districts to order the commanding officers of corps to inflict fines for offences against discipline already laid down in the Act.