

1902.

NEW ZEALAND.

DEFENCE FORCES OF NEW ZEALAND

(REPORT ON THE), BY MAJOR-GENERAL J. M. BABINGTON, COMMANDANT OF THE FORCES.

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

SIR,—

1st July, 1902.

I have the honour to forward for the information of His Excellency the Governor, and Commander-in-Chief of the New Zealand Forces, my annual report on the Defence Forces of the Colony.

I hardly consider it necessary to refer here to the reasons for the necessity of maintaining the Defence Forces and defences of New Zealand in an efficient condition; they are obvious to all those who look beyond their own individual interests, and even to individuals cannot but be a matter of some importance. I would propose, therefore, to deal briefly with the component parts of our Defences as at present known to me.

Since I assumed command of the Defence Forces of the Colony on the 23rd January of this year three Contingents (Eighth, Ninth, and Tenth) of a thousand men each have been sent to South Africa on active service, and are still there. The former Contingents despatched have returned to New Zealand. It would appear a matter for congratulation that throughout the course of the late war not only have these contingents greatly distinguished themselves on more than one occasion, but also that no "regrettable incident" has occurred in which New-Zealanders were concerned.

A Coronation Contingent, consisting of 122 Europeans, selected from contingents that had served in South Africa, and thirty-two Maoris, was, at the invitation of His Majesty the King, sent to England.

A team, consisting of one officer and twelve men, has been sent to England to compete at the National Rifle Association at Bisley.

STAFF AND ORGANIZATION.

The organization of the Defence Department as it at present exists leaves very much to be desired. I submitted on the 8th February and the 17th June, proposals setting forth what I consider essential for the systematic and economic administration of the forces under my command. These proposals have, I understand, been submitted to the Government, and I await their decision. In the meantime, therefore, I am unable to refer further to them here than to say that they are framed to meet urgent requirements, both as regards efficiency and the proper control of expenditure of public money. Lack of organization in peace-time means inefficiency and expense, and in war produces but one result.

The Regulations require amendment, and recommendations regarding the same will be submitted as time permits. Extra expense is at present incurred through the want of definite instructions on certain points. The pensions question, about which I have lately submitted recommendations, is a case in point. There are many others.

PERMANENT FORCE.

Captain Hume, Lieutenant Gardiner, and six non-commissioned officers of No. 1 Company have returned to the colony after a Long Course of gunnery at the School of Gunnery, Shoeburyness. Lieutenant Symon, of No. 2 Company, has nearly finished a course of submarine mining and military engineering at School of Military Engineering, Chatham, and will shortly return. There are no officers at present in England undergoing courses. Four cadets qualified for and received commissions in December, 1901, and should be sent to England in two years' time, when they have had some further experience.

The institution of a Provident Fund, on the same lines as that in vogue in the Police Force, is now under consideration.

The training of the men is very satisfactory, and a high state of efficiency has been reached. The conduct throughout the Force during the year has been exemplary.

During the last twelve months Lieutenant Pilkington has returned from South Africa. Lieutenants Mickle, Smythe, Chesney, and Sandle proceeded to South Africa with Eighth and Ninth Contingents.

Since last report, lathes have been supplied to the Permanent Force artificers, and if proper workshops were erected a large quantity of work could be performed by the artificers that has now to be put out or performed in England: a very considerable saving would be annually effected thereby to the country.

The strength of the Permanent Force should on no account be allowed to fall below establishment. This is none too high for even peace requirements, and men for this work cannot be trained at short notice. The formation of a reserve, composed of those who pass to other employments from this Force, should be considered.

VOLUNTEERS.

The strength of the Volunteer Force (exclusive of cadets) on the 1st July was distributed as follows:—

<i>Auckland (Officers and Men).</i>					
19 companies mounted rifles	...	...	...	...	1,506
1 field battery	...	...	...	...	86
2 naval artillery corps	}	...	...	...	302
1 garrison artillery corps		...	...	...
1 submarine-mining corps	...	...	...	...	103
1 engineer corps	...	...	...	...	84
18 infantry corps	...	...	...	...	1,148
1 bearer corps	...	...	...	...	37
1 cycle corps	...	...	...	...	23
1 garrison band	...	...	...	...	25
Total officers and men	...	...	...	...	3,314
<i>Wellington (Officers and Men).</i>					
22 companies mounted rifles	...	...	...	...	1,642
1 field battery	...	...	...	...	116
3 naval artillery corps	...	...	...	...	243
1 submarine-mining corps	...	...	...	...	71
1 engineer corps	...	...	...	...	70
38 infantry corps	...	...	...	...	2,321
1 cycle corps	...	...	...	...	26
1 bearer corps	...	...	...	...	32
1 garrison band	...	...	...	...	25
Total officers and men	...	...	...	...	4,546
<i>Canterbury (Officers and Men).</i>					
14 companies mounted rifles	...	...	...	...	1,135
1 field battery	...	...	...	...	87
1 company naval artillery	}	...	...	...	148
1 company garrison artillery		...	...	...
1 engineer corps	...	...	...	...	82
20 infantry corps	...	...	...	...	1,276
1 cycle corps	...	...	...	...	24
1 bearer corps	...	...	...	...	52
1 garrison band	...	...	...	...	25
Total officers and men	...	...	...	...	2,829
<i>Otago (Officers and Men).</i>					
13 companies mounted rifles	...	...	...	...	1,089
1 field battery	...	...	...	...	84
2 companies naval artillery	...	...	...	...	192
1 engineer corps	...	...	...	...	98
31 infantry corps	...	...	...	...	1,961
1 cycle corps	...	...	...	...	27
1 bearer corps	...	...	...	...	50
1 garrison band	...	...	...	...	25
Total officers and men	...	...	...	...	3,526
<i>Nelson (Officers and Men).</i>					
4 companies mounted rifles	...	...	...	...	357
1 field battery (four guns)	...	...	...	...	69
10 infantry corps	...	...	...	...	617
1 company garrison artillery	...	...	...	...	61
1 bearer corps	...	...	...	...	25
1 cycle corps	...	...	...	...	22
1 garrison band	...	...	...	...	25
Total officers and men	...	...	...	...	1,176

Summary (Officers and Men).

72 companies mounted rifles	...	...	...	...	5,729
5 field batteries	...	...	...	...	442
8 companies naval artillery	}	...	...	...	946
3 companies garrison artillery		...	...	...
2 companies submarine miners	...	...	...	...	174
4 companies field engineers	...	...	...	...	334
117 infantry corps	...	...	...	...	7,323
5 cycle corps	...	...	...	...	122
5 bearer corps...	...	...	...	...	196
5 garrison bands	...	...	...	...	125
					15,391

The above shows an increase of 490 Volunteers on last year's numbers.

MOUNTED CORPS.

I have with this branch of the service, as well as with the infantry, limited the training to the smaller units for the present. Excellent material exists in New Zealand for this important arm, and, with the spirit now animating corps, a proper system of training should produce good results. In the corps I lately inspected in the Auckland District many of the men ride long distances to parade, and doubtless in other districts the same commendable practice pertains. Such a practice renders a man resourceful and independent—two most valuable qualities on service.

While mounted drill is necessary to enable bodies of men to be moved to any point required, rapidly, and in good order, yet too much time should not be spent on it, nor the fact lost sight of that dismounted action is the true *métier* of the mounted rifleman.

FIELD ARTILLERY.

There are five field batteries in the colony. One only of these is of modern armament. There is one new field battery on order from England.

None of the field batteries are completely horsed, nor are they completely harnessed. I do not attach so much importance to the former deficiency as to the latter, as horses can readily be hired for work, and it is cheaper than buying and keeping them.

I do not recommend the purchase of further batteries at present; there are more important wants.

NAVAL AND GARRISON ARTILLERY.

The naval and garrison artillery require reorganization. They should be formed into garrison artillery divisions, as in the Imperial service.

The present so-called naval corps are an anomaly, being purely garrison artillery.

There are eight position-guns on order from England; these should be ample for all requirements.

Gun practice during the last year has been good. All corps take much interest in their work, but more daylight parades are necessary.

The physique in some cases is hardly up to the standard required by the work entailed.

ENGINEER CORPS.

There are four field engineer corps in the colony. Such corps cannot but be most useful in any operations likely to take place, but, to duly qualify themselves for such, more daylight work and a practical study of minor works and entrenchments is necessary. The one corps I have had the opportunity of inspecting showed zeal, and intelligence in such work as they have been up to now exercised in.

SUBMARINE-MINING CORPS.

Two submarine-mining boats of the latest pattern arrived this year in the colony.

The submarine-mining corps that I have had an opportunity of inspecting show much interest and intelligence in this work. I have, however, only had the opportunity of inspecting these in the evening, and have seen no practical work as yet. I understand the number of daylight parades performed is at present too few to admit of the desired standard of efficiency in this work being attained.

INFANTRY.

The battalion system is now in force throughout the colony. More outdoor work is required, and, while fully realising the difficulties that exist in this matter, I venture to think that if worked on common-sense lines, corps will make an effort to turn out by daylight more than has been the custom heretofore. Ceremonial exercises should give place to practical work, and those points which are merely a means to an end should not be mistaken for the more important matters essential to efficiency.

The Musketry Regulations have been amended, and the course made more practical. Shooting at unknown ranges should form the main, if not entire, annual training of members of the Defence Forces, the recruit being trained to the use of his rifle at known distances.

Although the past war should not be taken as a hard-and-fast pattern, yet magazine rifles demand more extended formation than heretofore. A better discipline, and greater knowledge by junior ranks is therefore essential, and the former much depends on the latter.

CYCLE CORPS.

Four cycle corps exist, and a fifth is in process of formation at Nelson. Such corps are useful and inexpensive, but their sphere of action is necessarily limited.

MEDICAL SERVICES.

A better organization of the medical service is much to be desired.

At present there are five Volunteer bearer companies in existence. Their equipment is incomplete, but I am informed the requirements are now under order. Four ambulance-wagons have lately arrived from England. There is no organization at present for field hospitals. Had such means to this end, as I have now recommended, existed during the last three years, not only might organization have been looked for, but a very great saving of public money in matters connected with the South African contingents would have been effected.

VETERINARY DEPARTMENT.

The question of the establishment of a Veterinary Department should receive consideration, and would cost little or nothing. Veterinary officers, if encouraged to join corps in that capacity, would prove useful in the advice, &c., they could afford, and in the lessons regarding care of horses they could teach. The necessity for the latter cannot but exist where horses are as cheap and plentiful as they are in New Zealand.

CADET CORPS.

There are now thirty-six corps under the Defence Department. Twenty-one corps have lately been transferred to the Education Department.

Cadet corps should be encouraged. So far the Empire has been fortunate in escaping the necessity for conscription. Events may, however, as they have done in other countries, force this upon her, and a means of gaining immunity therefrom would appear to be the training of the youth of the country to arms. I have recommended that all boys under thirteen shall be under the Education Department, and instructed in the elements of military knowledge; that after thirteen, and while still at school, or, say, till seventeen years of age, they be cadets under the Defence Department. Very few hours per month would so far educate a boy that after he passed out of the cadet corps he would very easily be rendered fit to take his place in the ranks of an organized force should necessity arise. The training of cadets should form part of their education, and not be made irksome to them by interfering with their play-hours, &c.

RIFLE CLUBS.

Ninety-three rifle clubs now exist. They are to be encouraged where they do not influence recruiting for corps; but in no sense can an untrained man, however good a shot he may be, compare on service to an even partially trained one.

Rifle clubs are allowed to purchase magazine rifles at cost price.

NEW ZEALAND DEFENCE FORCES RIFLE ASSOCIATION.

The Government has lately taken over the New Zealand Rifle Association, and good results may be looked for. Shooting on service principles only, as far as possible, should be allowed, and all else discouraged. A considerable advance in this direction was made at the meeting held at Trentham last February. Carbine matches will be instituted in future.

CAMPS.

The necessity for the training of the smaller units, before attempting instruction of the larger bodies, induced me to submit recommendations suspending for the present combined camps, and limiting the work to company training. A very considerable advance in efficiency of corps under this system may be looked for.

The so-called Easter camps have also been suspended. Little real work was done at them, and the argument that they encouraged recruiting is a superfluous one in New Zealand at the present time, where such great interest in military matters is manifest. Corps are now allowed to go into camp at any time suitable to themselves.

CAMP EQUIPMENT.

There are now in the colony 1,650 tents and 70 marquees that are serviceable. I do not consider that more are required.

In the event of war men would be billeted as far as possible, which is a much more preferable method of sheltering them than placing them under canvas. It affords better protection, and effects a large saving in baggage-trains, &c.

ARMS AND EQUIPMENT.

All mounted rifles and rifle corps are now armed with the magazine rifle. A lighter rifle will probably shortly be introduced in England, and future wants here should be considered in connection with this weapon—at any rate, so far as mounted men are concerned.

An adequate reserve of rifles should be maintained.

In last year's estimates £4,000 was voted by Parliament for the construction of armouries. I have informed the Hon. Minister of Defence I do not propose this service shall be carried out. In my opinion, each man should keep and look after his own rifle, and from what I have seen at inspections of corps I consider they are quite capable of doing so.

Two armourers are now at the disposal of the Commandant, and these will be utilised to inspect the arms of corps, and bring to notice any cases of damage, want of care, &c., that may occur.

The equipment scale requires revision. Certain articles, such as nose-bags for mounted corps, have not been considered. The care of horses is an important part of the mounted man's duty, and having to go many miles to parade, as the majority of mounted Volunteers do, without the means of feeding his horse does not inculcate good horse-mastership.

The equipment of all corps is not yet complete, but steps are, I understand, being taken to remedy this.

The belts and ammunition-pouches now worn by some corps should, as they become unserviceable, be replaced by bandoliers. The waste of ammunition with the pouch equipment in South Africa was enormous. No extra expense would be incurred by this.

A proportion of entrenching-tools should be supplied to corps. On service this is a very important matter.

UNIFORMS.

Part of the clothing of a Volunteer should consist of a great-coat; he should also have a waterproof sheet. I am informed there are great coats in store which can be obtained on payment, and the question of waterproof sheets is under consideration.

I have under consideration the question as to whether both trouble and expense would not be saved by Government supplying the necessary uniforms, and readjusting the capitation grants proportionately. The New Zealand Forces are now uniformed in practically a universal working-dress, which would assist also to a settlement of this matter. I hope it will be found that such an arrangement would be cheaper for the Government, and the corps themselves.

IMPERIAL RESERVE.

The question of Imperial Reserve is now one that is occupying some attention at Home. The points that should be observed are, that it should at all times be a reality and not a paper force, and be thoroughly fit for service anywhere.

SCHOOL OF INSTRUCTION.

Good results may be looked for from this institution. The aim of all training should be to render units, &c., independent of "external" assistance, and this can only be arrived at by the training of their officers and non-commissioned officers. Classes are now held in each district, and the work is continuous throughout the year.

SIGNALLING.

The value of signalling on service is so great that earnest attention should be given to it in peace-time. Helios should be provided. The training of officers and men for this work does not merely consist in their being able to send and read messages correctly, and much practice is required in maintaining a proper state of efficiency.

DRILL-HALLS AND RIFLE RANGES.

In many cases the terms on which drill-halls and rifle ranges are held are unsatisfactory and insecure. The existence of a corps depends on there being a rifle range and drill-hall available for its use. I shall shortly have completed a schedule showing the terms on which these drill-halls and rifle ranges now in existence are held, with suggestions, in cases where their tenure is precarious, as to the most economic and ready means of securing the same. As regards drill-halls, in some cases the sale of the existing unsatisfactory buildings would more than pay for the acquisition of suitable ones.

During the past year Penrose Rifle Range has been acquired for the use of the Auckland Volunteers.

Improvements at Trentham Range are being gradually carried out by the Permanent Force, and an excellent camping-ground and range now exists there.

AMMUNITION.

It is unfortunate that the price of small-arm ammunition remains so high. The quality of the ammunition supplied by the Colonial Ammunition Company is good. The output of this company, however, is small, and in the event of war, under the existing circumstances, the supply would fall very short of the demand.

No factories for the supply of gun-ammunition exist in New Zealand. I have recommended that an adequate reserve of ammunition, both gun and small-arm, be procured forthwith, and always maintained.

CONCLUSION.

I have, owing to the despatch of contingents, not made as extended an inspection of corps since my arrival in New Zealand as I otherwise should have done. I have, however, inspected the existing harbour defences of the colony, 17 Mounted Rifle and 34 Infantry corps, together with 1 bearer corps, 1 cycle corps, and 5 cadet corps.

There exists throughout, as I have mentioned elsewhere, the necessity for a more thorough training of the lower ranks and smaller units. I am led to the conclusion, too, that the use of instructors has been somewhat misapplied, and that they have in many cases aimed at training the men, instead of assisting in the training of officers and non-commissioned officers of corps.

Officers commanding districts are too tied down to their offices at present to carry out inspections as frequently as they should do. It is only by such, and by helping corps to acquire knowledge in their work by pointing out the weak points, that efficiency will be arrived at.

An excellent spirit pervades all ranks. Officers and men are anxious to learn and to do things the right way. Better material for soldiers would be hard to find. The training of such men should be carried out in a manner that will, while it inculcates knowledge, and perfection in the use of their arms, preserve at the same time the very valuable quality of individuality. True and sound discipline can only be acquired in military life, as in any other profession, by knowledge on the part of superiors, and by their gaining by this, and by their action in all things, the respect and confidence of those who serve under them.

I have, &c.,

J. M. BABINGTON, Major-General,
Commandant of the Forces of New Zealand.

The Hon. the Minister of Defence.

