

1905.

NEW ZEALAND.

DEFENCE FORCES OF NEW ZEALAND

(REPORT OF 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 August, 1905

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

Advice has been received from the War Office that honours have been allotted to regular and auxiliary Forces on the following basis :—

Yeomanry and Volunteer corps, which furnished parties of twenty or more for service in South Africa, have been granted "South Africa" with the year or years during which they served in the war.

Trophies in the way of guns and rifles have also been received, and the question of their distribution has been referred for consideration.

A rifle team was sent to England, under Lieut.-Colonel Collins, V.D., to compete at Bisley last year, and rendered a highly satisfactory account of itself. It won the Kolapore Cup, was second in the Belgian Cup, and took third place in the Mackinnon Cup, England taking first place and Scotland second, and this I consider was the best result achieved by the team. A team has been sent this year, but it is not the strongest that might have gone.

Important changes have taken place in England with regard to mine defence of ports, &c. This has now become a naval service, and it is to be earnestly hoped similar conditions may shortly exist in New Zealand.

COAST-DEFENCES.

Important recommendations regarding the coast-defences of New Zealand have been submitted, but so far no decision regarding this matter has been received; it is urgently required to enable the necessary works, &c., to be proceeded with. Those ports it is decided upon to defend should be made secure. Such works as were in progress have during the past year made little advance, and until labour other than prison labour is employed, no change in regard to this can be expected.

NEW ZEALAND PERMANENT FORCE.

I have submitted proposals for the reorganization of the Permanent Force, the present state of which is capable of improvement. These proposals contain recommendations regarding pay, extra-duty pay, promotion, and other matters pertaining to the interior economy and discipline of the Force. The conditions of a trust fund, to secure men a bonus on retirement, are also outlined in the scheme.

During the past year a large number of men have left to take up employment with the tramway company, &c., where their pay and prospects are both improved. This affects the efficiency of the Force. Discipline, too, suffers from the centralisation which exists with regard to it, as well as to the other parts of the Defence Force of the colony.

During the past year ten N.C.O.s and men have been retired for age; there are, however, still a considerable number who are too old, and should also be retired.

Too many men are extra-regimentally employed. These men are in many cases not available for regimental duty, and should be made supernumerary to the establishment.

The services of a submarine mining officer have been applied for; but the whole question of mine defence being now under consideration, advice has been received to await the decision arrived at.

A fatal accident occurred at Fort Ballance on the 2nd November, 1904, during annual practice with the 12-pounder Q.F. guns, through which one man lost his life and five others were injured. A Court of Inquiry, of which one member was a naval officer, an expert on gunnery, held a lengthy and careful investigation, but failed to account for the cause of the accident. The proceedings of the Court, together with the gun, &c., and seventy-eight rounds of ammunition from the same group as the cartridge that was fired when the explosion occurred, have been sent to England, but no reply has up to the present been received. I would record the satisfactory bearing of all present on the accident occurring; no confusion or loss of presence of mind took place.