

SESSION II.
1906.
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, 1906.

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.

The revision of the fixed defences is still under consideration, but it is expected a conclusion as regards this important matter will shortly be arrived at, and the work can then be proceeded with. Two defended ports are the most that should be required in New Zealand, and this colony cannot maintain more in an efficient state; it is waste of money to continue inefficient defences.

Magazines where necessary have now been arranged for, and their construction should shortly be proceeded with.

The existing forts are kept in good order, and many improvements in connection with their working have been effected.

The establishment of drill-guns, &c., at the various centres has now been completed, and with much benefit to the Force. Dummy breech-blocks for guns have also been constructed for drill purposes, and much wear-and-tear and consequent expense is saved.

As regards field artillery, my recommendations that six 15-pounder guns be purchased from England have been approved. These are being supplied at half vocabulary rates, and when received will give four four-gun batteries at each of the centres—Wellington, Auckland, Christchurch, and Dunedin—and a section of 15-pounders to replace the obsolete 6-pounders now in use at Nelson. The Westport field battery should be replaced by mounting the guns there on trucks; this would provide a more efficient defence than can be at present supplied by a field battery there.

The proposals for the reorganization of the Permanent Force, which I referred to in my report of last year, are still under consideration. It is hoped some conclusion may shortly be arrived at concerning this important matter. Similarly, my proposals for the reorganization of the Volunteer Force have not yet been seriously considered. These latter recommendations are, in brief, to the effect that a smaller and better-trained force should be substituted for the present unwieldy and expensive machine. I believe political reasons are looked upon as a bar to the carrying-out of the main portion of the scheme, but I cannot think that the country would raise any serious objection to a more efficient and less expensive force replacing that now existing, and would, I feel confident, welcome greater efficiency and less expense which the reorganization I propose would give it.

The difficulty of obtaining suitable officers is increasing in New Zealand. No leisured class—as in England—practically exists, and every Volunteer officer has his own private business to attend to. Recruiting, too, is becoming a very much more difficult matter, and the less cordial relations which apparently now exist between employer and employee, as compared to a few years ago, is a serious menace.

The training of the Force during the last year has proceeded as satisfactorily as the present conditions of service admit. An advance in efficiency has been made, and the returns show an improvement both in gun and in musketry practice.

The physique of some of the town corps is very poor. The question of how to attract the athlete has been carefully considered, but no solution to this problem is so far forthcoming. In