

RIFLE CLUBS.

A Superintending Officer has been recently appointed for rifle clubs, who will in future inspect and report to me when necessary. I hope on some future occasion opportunities will be found to induce the members of these clubs to turn out and take part in field manœuvres, when it will be possible to form an opinion as to their usefulness for active service under present conditions.

ARMS AND EQUIPMENT.

The report of the Defence Council deals fully with what is required. It is therefore unnecessary for me to report upon the present state.

GENERAL STATE OF EFFICIENCY OF OFFICERS AND MEN.

In dealing with this subject generally, I desire to make it quite clear that I am sure the spirit which animates all ranks of the Force is excellent. If it were not so they would not be giving up their time, willingly and cheerfully, to the sacred duty of trying to become fit to protect their country, their homes, their mothers, sisters, wives, and children, while the enormous majority of the able-bodied manhood of the country is merely looking on, and sometimes, I regret to say, trying to discourage them.

As far as drill and discipline go, the state of things is generally very satisfactory, but something further is required before it can be honestly said that a Force is prepared for war. Without doubt the vital thing is to train the officers to command their troops in the field over any country they may find themselves in, and under any conditions that may arise.

To accomplish this they must be instructed in the field, and in daylight. Practical tactics, a knowledge of, and an eye for, country, and the power of making the best military use of all sorts of ground, can no more be taught in a drill-hall than swimming can be taught without getting into water.

The excellent material of which the Force of this country is composed demands higher training and qualifications in its officers than ordinary, firstly, because the rank and file, under existing conditions, can only get a partial training, and the less training the rank and file have the more training and intelligence the officers must have to cope with the situation; and, secondly, the rank and file being of a much higher standard of intelligence than is usual in Forces, demand higher standard still in the officers. The standard of intelligence we have, and the training must be got.

If means can be devised whereby the officers can be trained in the field, and trained first apart from their men (as it will readily be seen that it is subversive of discipline, and does not tend to regard or respect, to train and correct them together), then I feel sure it will do more not only to popularise, but to make the Force fit to fight than anything else.

Theory, of course, is most necessary, and should be mastered before or together with practice, but theory alone is of little use, and I am convinced that if officers and men can be taken out and shown what they are trying to work up to, they will be much more content to go back and work up their drill and theory in order that they may be better fitted to work in the field next time.

No one would be content to go on for ever practising scales if they never heard a tune played, and Volunteers soon get tired of mere drill if they cannot see what it leads to or the use of it.

In conclusion, if any argument is necessary in support of such a self-evident statement as that it is the heads of any business (in this case the officers), who first must be made efficient. I beg to be allowed to quote from two such distinguished soldiers as Lord Roberts and the late Colonel Henderson. Lord Roberts says, "It must not be overlooked that while soldiers can be made fit for active service with comparatively short training, officers cannot be improvised"; and in his "Science of War" Colonel Henderson points out that "with good officers, and a certain amount of previous training, there is no reason why bodies of Infantry, Artillery, or Mounted Infantry, composed entirely of unprofessional soldiers, should not do excellent service in the field."

I have, &c.,

R. H. DAVIES, Colonel,

The Right Hon. the Minister of Defence.

Inspector-General, N.Z. Forces.

Approximate Cost of Paper.—Preparation, not given; printing (2,000 copies), £17 4s. 6d

By Authority : JOHN MACKAY, Government Printer, Wellington.—1907.

Price 9d.]