

*Coast Defence Force.—Garrison Artillery Volunteers.*

The establishment for the Dominion is now 1,783, and the enrolled strength at the end of the past Volunteer year only 1,011. There has therefore been relatively no improvement as regards the strength of this arm during the past year, which is much to be regretted. I have inspected all the corps, and the total attendance was 778.

As I pointed out last year, this does not give sufficient trained men to provide reliefs to enable work to be carried on in war; and untrained men for this work are useless. It is sincerely to be hoped, therefore, that means may be found to obtain the numbers necessary.

I am very glad to be able to report, as to efficiency, that this branch of the service has reached a most satisfactory state all round, and that all ranks are most keen and determined to maintain this high standard.

The shooting this past year (at most of which I was present) has been good everywhere, and in several cases excellent—in fact, there has been a steady and continuous improvement for the past five years.

The physique in several corps is much above the average of the Volunteer Force, and the discipline throughout is entirely satisfactory. The Electric Light Company in Wellington (No. 3) has worked exceedingly well. It is composed of men of a fine stamp, who have generally something to do with engineering in their private occupations, and who are thoroughly in earnest, and will do well. This company is to be converted into a gunnery company, with its own E.L. Section, and each gunnery company in the Force will have in future, or already has, its own E.L. Section as part of its company establishment.

While all have worked so well, I should like to specially point out the wonderful strides that have been made in one company (No. 1, G.A.V., Auckland), which not long ago was in very low water indeed, and which has now worked up to the position of one of the most efficient, the credit for which is due largely to the able and energetic Commanding Officer.

*Field Force.—Field Artillery.*

There are five four-gun batteries of Field Artillery, with a total establishment of 500, the enrolled strength at the end of the year being 382 all ranks.

For my inspections the total muster was 297. With regard to drill and discipline, the state of these batteries is generally very satisfactory, and their shooting at their annual practice is generally improving and producing good results. I repeat again what I said in my last report, that, considering the very few opportunities they get for work in the field, great credit is due to all ranks for their present state of efficiency.

Some of the batteries are very much handicapped by the unsuitable horses they get for their work, especially the Dunedin battery. All the horses for all the batteries (except Wellington, where a certain number of horses are kept for artillery and transport purposes) are hired from contractors, and there are at present no means of insuring that either the same or even suitable horses can be obtained. With untrained, often ill-broken horses, unaccustomed to the battery harness and the work, and with a number of the drivers and men only accustomed to handling horses or riding while at drill or training, the results are very creditable indeed to the batteries, but it is a wonder there are not more serious accidents to both men and horses. If a few horses were kept for artillery and transport work at each district headquarters, or if the batteries always had at their call the use of suitable horses and *the same horses* for training purposes, the increased efficiency in riding, driving, and manœuvring would soon be apparent, and I am sure all ranks in the Field Artillery would be much encouraged thereby. I am, however, firmly convinced, as I have before reported, that it is absolutely essential that they should have much more opportunity of training in the field, both by themselves and in co-operation with other arms, before there is a chance of their becoming efficient for the work they will be called upon to do in war. As I have several times pointed out, they do not remain in camp during the daytime at their camps of instruction, but only work in the early morning and evening for a short time. It shows their keenness when they are willing to do this (as, indeed, the G.A.V. and F.E. do) in addition to carrying on their ordinary business, but it is useless to pretend that they can learn their work satisfactorily under these conditions.

All ranks in a field battery—officers, N.C.O.s, gun-layers, drivers, &c.—require a great amount of training in the field, in order that they may gain a knowledge of country, know the best positions to occupy, the best way to get their guns into those positions, may be able to pick up quickly and know at once the best method of dealing with the various descriptions of targets (especially moving ones) that they would have to fire at, and may thoroughly understand their duties in co-operation with other arms; and they are certainly not able to accomplish this in the time now at their disposal.

At some of my inspections during the past year I have tested the efficiency of batteries in the field by sending out a number of mounted men to move about over country in front, and within range of the battery, in various formations, to represent the different descriptions of targets they might have to deal with; and found, as I expected, that they had very little experience in the choice of positions and the most effective methods of ranging or descriptions of fire to adopt under the varied conditions which arise. It has been clearly and definitely pointed out by Major-General Babington, when Commandant of the Forces, that he considered it impossible for these batteries to attain to the necessary state of efficiency with the present amount of field training.

*Field Engineers.*

The total enrolled strength of the four companies at the end of the year was 273, for an establishment of 420. The number attending training camps was 250, and at my inspections, where they paraded with the other troops of the garrisons at their respective centres, 148 were present.