

I am glad to be able to report that the corps referred to in my last annual report as being "very backward indeed in every respect" has during the past year improved very much indeed, and is on a much more satisfactory footing.

The Instructor for Signalling and Engineering Services has now four N.C.O.s of the Permanent Force (one for each company of Field Engineers) to assist him in his duties, and there is every reason to expect that rapid improvement will result in all classes of work which it is possible for these corps to learn *in the time and with the opportunities at their disposal*, especially the Field Telegraph and Signalling Sections. Indeed, I am sure there has been improvement in these sections.

I have pointed out in my last two annual reports that it is quite impossible to train the Field Engineering Sections in the use of ground, the knowledge of the best positions to occupy, and the most effective means of doing so, unless they can get much more training in the field than they do at present, and that what is required is knowledge of what is known as the "tactical use of the spade"; also, that this can never be learnt in drill-halls or in flat paddocks only. These corps are not by regulation obliged to spend even one whole day in the field in the year, as they, like the Field Artillery, only work in the early morning (and some not even then) and evening at their annual training camps. Without even a short period (a few *days* at least) of continuous training in the field it is *impossible* for them to reach the required standard of efficiency in their field engineering knowledge and duties especially.

Mounted Rifles.

Only 1,556, all ranks, of this arm of the service have paraded for my inspection during the past year, and this total includes the Mounted Rifles seen by me at the Easter Camp, Wellington District. The enrolled strength at the end of the year was 3,759 and the establishment 5,922. This is a much worse result than for the previous year, being about 300 less in number and a much lower percentage of enrolled strength. Only 1,016 were present at the various Easter camps. In turn-out, neatness, and general uniformity of appearance of the men and horses composing the squadrons, and therefore of the squadron as a whole, there is no doubt whatever that, taken all round (though there are very notable exceptions in both Islands), the South Island is ahead of the North. This, I consider, is easily accounted for: as a general rule, men brought up and accustomed to see round them all their lives neat farms and trim well-cut hedges, to travel always on metalled roads, &c.—in short, to have all things round them orderly and neat—are sure, if left to themselves and without special training, to pay more attention to these details than those always living amongst rough bush clearings, with perhaps primitive fences and only mud tracks to travel by; and many of the Mounted Rifles in the North have these drawbacks to contend with still. I do not say for one moment that the former would necessarily be *individually* better-fighting soldiers for this reason. On the contrary, just as the savage *individually* is a better fighter than the untrained town-bred man, so, the wilder and more natural a man's surroundings have always been, the better soldier he ought to make, *with thorough training and discipline to teach him to work in co-operation with others*. It must not be forgotten, however, that the training which begets uniformity in appearance in units is an important part of the training and discipline which insures that all will work together, and it helps to build up that pride in their own squadron or regiment (or *esprit de corps*) which means success. All commanders should therefore insist upon it. As already mentioned, my inspections for the past year have been of regiments, wherever it was found possible to muster them, and not by squadrons, except in a few cases where it was found not practicable to get the squadrons together. Some of the musters called for this purpose in the South Island, in Otago and Canterbury, taking all circumstances into consideration, have been *fairly* satisfactory in point of numbers; and two of the regiments in the Auckland District (Nos. 2 and 3), trained *as* regiments, and I was able to see them at their camps. Of the other two regiments in Auckland (Nos. 1 and 4), No. 4 was ordered to mobilise, and only one squadron paraded, and the O.C. District did not consider it practicable to get No. 1 together. None of the Wellington regiments could be mobilised for this purpose, and I was only able to see such as turned out for Easter.

At the parade ordered in Nelson only fifteen all ranks of one squadron paraded, the other two squadrons not being represented at all. Blenheim and Gisborne squadrons were purposely seen separately, and the former mustered very well indeed. In very many cases, especially in that of the 4th Auckland Regiment, there was no sound reason whatever why the muster ordered should not have been very much better, especially as one squadron in the latter was in training camp within an easy ride—about thirty miles—of the place appointed for the muster at the time.

As the regiments in any case very rarely, and in the great majority of cases *never*, get together at all, they are, of course, little else but regiments in name. The Commanding Officers and their Staffs cannot possibly learn to handle them, and the squadron-leaders cannot learn their work in the regiment.

On the very rare occasions (like these musters for inspection during the past year) when they are brought together they are necessarily only a collection of squadrons often in very widely separated stages of efficiency, and no matter how expert their Commanding Officers may be they could not be made work together satisfactorily without practice. The material of which they are composed is generally excellent, and with a comparatively short training they would soon become very efficient, but without it is obviously impossible.

There are *squadrons* in each district which are now, considering their short periods of training, very good indeed, owing to the exceptional officers that have made them so, but there is certainly no *regiment* that can be called, by any stretch of imagination, efficient, owing entirely to want of facilities for learning to work as a regiment.

I have before called attention to, and must again strongly urge, the necessity for in many squadrons much more attention being paid to horsemanship or the care of horses.