

25. RIFLE-RANGES.

There are some 267 ranges in the Dominion, and out of these over 200 are held on sufferance or payment of rent (about £300 per annum). The question of acquiring most of these ranges must be faced. On last year's estimates £10,000 was set aside for this purpose, but only £600 was expended. All recommendations for the taking-over of land under the Public Works Act, and for repairs and upkeep sent in by Officers Commanding Districts, have been carried out, but, owing to pressure of work in connection with the initiation of the training, it has not been possible to give this question as much consideration as I should have liked. It will be taken in hand forthwith, and, as in the case of the drill-halls, we must try and acquire the rifle-ranges by degrees.

26. RIFLES AND AMMUNITION.

(a.) Small Arms.

During the year 8,000 rifles, M.L.E. (Short), Mark III, have been imported from England. This enabled the arming of the Royal New Zealand Artillery and Territorial Force to be completed. The Royal New Zealand Artillery, Territorial Field Artillery, Garrison Artillery, Engineer, and Mounted Rifle units are armed with this latest-pattern rifle, as used in the Imperial service, whilst the Infantry regiments are armed with the rifle M.L.E. (Long), Mark I*.

The rifles (Short), Mark I, with bayonet, pattern 1903, withdrawn from Mounted Corps, have been issued to the Senior Cadets.

Two thousand rifles, M.L.E., have been ordered for the Rifle Clubs, and the provision and pattern of more rifles for Senior Cadets are under consideration.

(b.) Small-arms Ammunition.

The supply of small-arms ammunition, as required by contract with the Colonial Ammunition Company (Limited), has been well maintained, and the quality is good. In addition, the company has supplied a certain amount of .310 ammunition for Senior Cadet rifles of that calibre, and will, in all probability, complete the total order for this type of ammunition in about two months' time. This will provide an ample supply of cadet ammunition for some years to come.

(c.) Reserves of Small-arms Ammunition.

A reserve of small-arms ammunition, as recommended by the Colonial Defence Committee, is being gradually built up, and it is anticipated the total reserve required will be completed in three or four years' time without any further increase in the present annual output, and consequently without any extra expense.

An increased order for cordite has been placed to meet our requirements under the existing contract with the Colonial Ammunition Company.

(d.) Testing Small-arms Ammunition.

The Testing Officer has efficiently carried out his work. Arrangements have been made whereby a new and more suitable site for velocity-range and laboratory, adjacent to the works of the Colonial Ammunition Company, has been secured; the erection of the necessary buildings and construction of range will be put in hand without delay.

27. ARMOURERS.

In the course of the year the departmental Armourers carried out the usual inspection of all arms on issue, but, as the rearming of the various units was in transition, and many of the arms were in the old companies' stores, very little improvement was seen. This is also accounted for by the fact that only a proportion of the old members of corps remained to look after them. It is hoped, however, that now, with a more frequent inspection by the officers and N.C.O.s of the Permanent Staff, and also the attention of the Staff Quartermaster-sergeants recently appointed, a considerable improvement in the care and preservation of all arms will be effected.

The Armourers have been recently reorganized as follows in lieu of the three Imperial Armourer Sergeants and six local Assistant Armourers previously employed: One Senior Armourer (warrant officer), three Armourer Quartermaster-sergeants, five Armourer Sergeants, two (or more as required) apprentices (five-years course).

The Senior Armourer will remain at Defence Stores, Wellington, for technical purposes, and training apprentices, as required.

The Assistant Armourers will be promoted to the rank of Armourer Sergeant on passing the necessary qualifying examination, and to Armourer Quartermaster-sergeant by selection. These will be distributed two to each military district, to carry out the inspection or repair of arms throughout the year.

The provision of apprentices to undergo a five-years course of apprenticeship will provide for the increasing demands on this service.

28. DRILL-HALLS.

To supply drill-halls at every small drill centre throughout the Dominion where a small number of members of the Territorial Force require to be drilled is an impossibility, on account of the cost. Store-rooms at regimental or company headquarters are a necessity, but till the equipment of the Forces was completed the provision of permanent drill-halls was deemed to be of secondary importance.