

In the conveyance coastwise where necessary the Union Steamship Company has also rendered valuable service, and where drafts can be accommodated in the ordinary time-table steamers, the company very generously gives the Department special reductions on ordinary fares, in addition to meeting any special demands necessitating special trips.

#### 67. FIELD ARTILLERY GUN-SHEDS, QUARTERS, AND STABLES.

The accommodation completed the previous year for the guns and permanent cadres of men and horses of the field batteries at Auckland, Hamilton, Palmerston North, Napier, Nelson, Christchurch, Dunedin, and Invercargill has been maintained, minor alterations and additions which experience proved desirable being made. The suitability of these depots for the purpose for which provided was remarked by General Sir Ian Hamilton, and there is no doubt they have largely assisted the organization and training of the New Zealand Field Artillery, more particularly the new batteries established after the inception of the Territorial Force, and enabled the Dominion to provide the necessary proportions of this arm in its Expeditionary Force.

#### 68. RIFLE RANGES.

Rifle ranges exist in a large number of places throughout the Dominion, near the more important centres on departmental reserves, where suitable range accommodation for local requirements has been maintained, and in numerous other localities where ranges, held under various tenures, have been established to meet the necessities of the local detachments of Territorials and Senior Cadets and Defence Rifle Clubs. The smaller ranges are either leased or rented, though in a number of cases shooting-rights are given gratuitously by landowners. Miniature rifle ranges have been established at a number of drill-halls and centres, to permit preliminary musketry practice being carried out, and to afford opportunity for practice when time or other circumstances do not permit recourse to a full-length range. Full range accommodation is, however, most necessary, and is preferable where it can be secured. The difficulty, however, of obtaining accessible and safe range-sites in most cases is very great, and modern arms and ammunition, with contingent musketry regulations, also the trend of population, increase this difficulty. These circumstances have led to a number of previous range-sites being abandoned. Where no suitable Crown-land site has been available, in the case of the smaller localities, the Department has endeavoured, wherever possible, to secure a convenient site of sufficient area on lease for a suitable term, to prevent encroachment and give tenure for a period reasonable when compared with the cost of construction and maintenance of the range, and a number of leases have been so arranged within the last year or two.

Very great difficulty has been experienced in obtaining in the vicinity of some of the larger centres sites of sufficient area and suitable contour to provide safe ranges under modern conditions. In some cases, owing to the cutting-up of land and building, it has become necessary to acquire further areas to give an adequate danger-zone, and to preclude abandonment of the range and consequent loss of the money already sunk in formation. The old range at Timaru, located partly on a small reserve and partly on the foreshore, has been closed as dangerous, and a new site is under consideration. The Nelson (Brightwater) Range, situated on a small reserve not placed suitably for extension to give adequate safety conditions, has been abandoned, and the selection of a new site to provide the necessary range accommodation for Nelson and district is in hand. A block embracing the Te Ore Ore (Masterton) rifle range, giving the additional safety area essential and security of occupation, has been acquired under the Public Works Act. A new site has been similarly acquired at Riverton. A range has been established on a new site at Hawera. At Balclutha river encroachment on the local reserve has made the obtaining of another site necessary. The lease of the present Invercargill range runs out shortly, and it is necessary here to provide more adequate range facilities for the increased number of local troops. For this purpose an area large enough to provide for target, trench, and safety requirements has been acquired under the Public Works Act. The firing-mounds will be placed in the estuary adjacent, and the construction of a sea-wall and flood-gates or other means of reclamation will in time create an extensive reserve and a very valuable asset. The subdivision of the Withers Estate, Blenheim, on which the Vernon range was situated, made it necessary that the actual range-site as previously occupied, with an adequate extension to meet the safety requirements of the altered conditions, should be reserved, and the capital cost of the land thus withdrawn from selection will be provided on the estimates for refund to the Land for Settlements Account. A new range-site has been also acquired at Rangiora.

Of the commitments involved by the acquisition of the foregoing areas, very little has come to charge during the past year, owing to the contingent claims having to be disposed of by the Compensation Courts. The selection of a site to provide the necessary range accommodation at Gisborne is under consideration. A suitable site will be required at Napier, where the present very old range on the foreshore is quite inadequate for requirements.

The desirability of providing reserves to meet future demands has been previously emphasized. This is particularly so in respect to rifle ranges, essential at every centre, as it becomes necessary to carry out Territorial training, or if the ideal of making rifle shooting a national pastime is to be reached. The difficulty of securing sites of suitable size and formation to enable the construction of safe ranges within reasonable distance of the centres concerned, and the increased cost of acquiring such where land has passed into cultivation or become closely settled, makes it of paramount importance that close attention should be given to this matter, and available Crown-land sites reserved wherever possible.