

INSPECTOR CUMMINGS, NAPIER DISTRICT.

During the year the strength at Wairoa was increased by one constable, and Hastings by one constable.

For the year ended 31st December last the total number of offences reported was 1,855, an increase of 193 on the previous year; 1,723 offences were detected, leaving 132 undetected. The principal increase was in cases of indecent assault, thefts (a large increase), false pretences, robbery, burglary, and mischief. There was a substantial decrease in drunkenness. The offence of unlawfully converting motor-cars is now a common one—almost as common as in the old days of taking a bicycle.

Both Branches of the Service have done very good work during the year, and as a result the detection of wrongdoers has been excellent. The conduct of the members of the Force during the year has been good, only a few breaches of the regulations being reported and the offending ones dealt with.

New offices are badly required at Wairoa, but in view of the financial position these can stand over for the present.

On the 3rd February Hawke's Bay was disturbed by a violent earthquake at 10.48 a.m. It was very sudden, and, I understand, the worst in the history of the Dominion. All means of communication were immediately cut off—telegraph, telephone, wireless, all went by the way. Our water-supply and our lighting, both gas and electric, vanished, too. Buildings, particularly those built of brick and mortar, collapsed like houses of cards. Fortunately the earthquake occurred in daylight. It was a beautiful summer day with a clear sky. In the residential area great damage was done to dwellings. In Napier fully 80 per cent. of the dwellings were more or less damaged, some being completely wrecked. The whole district from Waipukurau in the south to Wairoa in the north was affected. The town of Hastings, in the business area, was badly wrecked, and approximately ninety-two lives were lost. Ninety-two dead bodies were recovered, of which eighty-seven were identified, leaving five unidentified. Six independent fires broke out in Hastings as a result of the earthquake, and caused a great deal of damage, particularly in Roach's building, where a large staff was employed. Roach's building was wrecked by the earthquake, and a good number of the staff lost their lives in it. The fire completely demolished the building and burned some of the bodies beyond recognition.

In Napier, immediately following the earthquake, fires broke out in a few shops. The fire brigade got to work at once, but owing to the damage to the water-mains and reservoirs by the earthquake the water soon gave out and left the brigade almost helpless. The fire soon took charge, and, fanned by a strong wind which sprang up suddenly, the whole of the business area was swept by fire, and what was not demolished by the earthquake was destroyed by fire. As a result of the earthquake in Napier some 151 people were killed and many hundreds injured. The fire immediately following the earthquake incinerated some of the dead bodies; others were charred beyond recognition, in a few cases it not being possible to even tell the sex. Out of the total numbers of bodies recovered eighteen were unidentified. Nearly all the bodies recovered at Hastings and Napier were buried in a common grave at each centre, it being the only effective way, in the circumstances, of getting the bodies buried. The weather was very hot, necessitating early interment. The actual number injured in Hastings and Napier is not known, as they were hurried away to hospitals outside the affected area, no complete record being kept, as it was impossible in the circumstances, but it is estimated many hundreds were injured.

Mohaka and Wairoa districts were also badly damaged, but fortunately few lives were lost, one male being killed in the Mohaka district as a result of a fall of earth, and two in Wairoa. The township of Wairoa, in the business area, was badly damaged, practically all brick buildings collapsing. Fortunately no fire followed the earthquake there.

The roads adjacent to Napier, particularly between Napier and Wairoa, and Napier and Tarawera, were badly damaged in many places, and bridges wrecked. The railway from Napier towards Wairoa was also extensively damaged. Wonderful work was done in repairing the roads. Within a few days it was possible to get through to the places mentioned, which speaks volumes for the engineers and men on the jobs.

Unfortunately, all hospitals, public and private, were destroyed or wrecked, but a field hospital was erected at Greenmeadows for the Napier injured and another at the Hastings Racecourse for the Hastings injured, while the Waipukurau and Dannevirke Hospitals took the more serious cases. Other hospitals outside Hawke's Bay from Wellington to Wanganui also received the injured.

H.M.S. "Veronica" was berthed at the Port at the time, and by the courtesy of the Commander I was able to get a wireless message sent reporting the position we were in. The ship also sent other messages to Wellington advising the authorities of the earthquake and the plight the town was in. H.M. ships "Dunedin" and "Diomedé" arrived the following morning to assist. The officers and crews of the ships turned out immediately and rendered yeoman service in assisting the police to rescue the injured and dead from the ruins of the town.

In the early hours of the following morning Ministers of the Crown, various Government officials, and others arrived to give counsel and assist the people in the stricken area, which advice and assistance were greatly appreciated. Working committees, with the Commissioner of Police as chairman, were immediately formed and were functioning early on the day following the disaster. Wonderful work was accomplished in finding food and shelter for the stricken people. Doctors, nurses, ambulances, motor-cars, and motor-lorries arrived like magic from places between Auckland and Wellington to assist.

No members of the Police Force were injured in the earthquake, but some constables were subsequently slightly injured rescuing the injured from burning buildings and by coming in contact with debris. One constable lost his wife and child in the Public Hospital, where they were patients, both being killed when the hospital collapsed. Notwithstanding this severe shock, the constable