

WAR DIARY

COMPARISONS AT TRENTHAM

(Written by "23/762")

1915-1939

Trentham Camp was a furiously busy place when I visited it on two occasions—the first when I progressed from civilian clothes, via a suit of denims, to a uniform early in 1915; the second a few weeks ago when I saw the camp almost completed for the army of 1939.

My first visit lasted for months and began rather painfully; my second lasted for some hours and began and ended pleasantly. Both the years and conditions have changed the life of a soldier.

Walking round Trentham on a day when spring had let herself go in a burst of sunshine, brought back vivid recollections and, inevitably, comparisons with my former experience. Could this be the camp to which I had come, green and untrained, twenty-four years ago? It was. The war of 1914-15 had found us unprepared; to-day the army system and its immense ramifications are functioning as perfectly as possible.

I remembered that we arrived in dismal weather, to the accompaniment of dreary and depressing greetings from experienced soldiers of some months' standing. New recruits were always greeted like that, but the derision was good-natured for the most part. I remembered my confusion born of inexperience when



Lieut.-Colonel H. K. Kippenberger, who is in command of the Third Rifle Battalion at Burnham

I signed for my blankets, a palliasse to be once a week filled with straw, a suit of denims, underclothing, a set of eating utensils, and was put into a long hut to sleep on the floor.

I remembered how, when the weather grew warmer, we were marched once a week to the Hutt River for a bath, if we felt sufficiently hardy to take the plunge.

But the weather was against us. For days and weeks we carried stones and bundles of manuka in a vain effort to build roadways between the huts and keep ahead of the mud. But we never did. The mud always won. Even when

a horse and dray were requisitioned to assist in the ceaseless battle, the extra stones made no difference. They simply disappeared in the soft, grey depths of the unbeaten Trentham mud. Then meningitis broke out and the camp was cleared; we entrained and eventually reached the sunny, sandy spaces of Rangitotu.

To-day, what a difference! Trentham has taken on the appearance of a small town in the making. The noise was terrific. Giant bulldozers lifted, pushed and levelled the soil with inhuman energy and accuracy, putting to shame our efforts as stone-carriers. I don't think I saw one wheelbarrow. The roadways between the huts resemble perfectly made streets, all of which will be tar-sealed. Concrete channels will carry off surplus rain water. Underneath the tents the earth has been scooped out and replaced with metal, so that water will never lie on the surface. Mud will be an unknown element in the new camp.

These tents, by the way, are only temporary, even though they have board floors. When the camp is completed the men will all be housed in huts, 52 men to each hut. Each man will have a camp bed; and 10 lbs. of straw is allowed for each palliasse. We slept on the floor and, although we had an allowance of straw, the competition was so fierce that some of the more retiring recruits of my day were left rather short.

Glancing about one hut, I remembered how the draughts caused us to huddle into the blankets, sheltering our candles if we wished to read. Now the huts are lined securely against such intrusion.

Those guttering candles lighted us to bed. They were the only lighting system we knew. To-day every hut and every tent is lighted by electricity, and giant lamps flood-light the streets of this soldier city.

We took our meals at long tables set down the middle of each hut, but the soldier of to-day has a mess-room where he sits in comfort, eight men to each table. These mess-rooms, by the way, are close beside the cook-houses, so that the food loses none of its heat in transit.

And what cook-houses! Giant stoves, sink benches, store cupboards and bins, hot and cold running water. I remembered the former dreary shelters which passed for cook-houses, and the still more dreary cooks who prepared our stews, porridge and plum puddings in iron dixies—almost without any conveniences and certainly without modern stoves.

And if any soldier of to-day goes dirty, he has only himself to blame. We washed at taps in the open. Now there are bath-houses, with long rows of showers, and wash-basins with plugs in specially built huts. What is more, there is an excellent swimming bath which should be well filled this summer.

The clothing supply is of excellent quality. No longer do the men wear thick, ribbed woollens which, I remember, gave me a sense of constant irritation for weeks. Singlets and short drawers are of fine wool; the boots are solid and of better quality than we



In a fire-control post at Fort Dorset—Left to right: Group-Capt. Saunders, M.C., A.F.C., M.M., Air Chief; the Hon. F. Jones, Minister of Defence; Major-General J. E. Duigan, D.S.O., Chief of Staff

knew, and the blankets thick and warm—five of them for each man.

Soldiering has certainly kept pace with other professions.

Trentham is only a repetition of what is being done, or has been done, at Burnham and Ngaruawahia. For instance, at Trentham, there is a 40 to 50 bed hospital, a fully equipped dental clinic, a post office directly connected with Wellington, recreation huts, and a canteen.

No wonder the soldiers there to-day call it the "Trentham Spa."

Who Fired the First Shot?

New Zealand claims the honour of firing the first shot in the war for the British Forces. This may become history. Immediately prior to the official declaration of war, territorials of the Fifteenth Heavy Battery, who were on duty for shipping examination, challenged a merchant vessel at the entrance to Wellington Harbour. When the ship did not answer the signal the Battery fired a warning shot. During the last war a similar claim was made by gunners of the Royal Australian Artillery, who challenged a merchant ship outside Port Phillip.

FEEDING THE TROOPS

Exercise and the open-air life give the soldier an appetite which can honestly be described as "hearty." Full provision to meet such heartiness in the mass has been made in all the camps. The daily menus are proof that the soldier of to-day is well fed. Here are the meals for two days, taken at random from the lists:

Breakfast: Porridge, curry and rice, potatoes.

Lunch: Haricot beef, potatoes and green vegetables, scones.

Dinner: Soup, roast mutton, boiled and baked potatoes, tapioca custard.

Breakfast: Fruit, fried steak and onions, mashed potatoes.

Lunch: Cold meats, potatoes, salad and scones.

Dinner: Haricot steak, boiled and baked vegetables, stewed fruit and custard.

Porridge will not be served in the warm weather.

Tinker, Tailor . . .

The word soldier hides a vast number of professions in our new volunteer army. Proof that the men have come from all and every branch of New Zealand life is established by a glance down the list of volunteers. Here are a few from one section:

Compositor, building contractor, radio announcer, telegraphist, French polisher, mail clerk, locksmith, cable jointer, bacon curer, building contractor, clerk, horse trainer, sales manager, hotelkeeper, shepherd, railway surfaceman, fisherman, tennis racket gut manufacturer, timber worker, insurance agent, salesman, shopkeeper, farmer, grocer's assistant, social security clerk, draughtsman, pastrycook, wharf labourer, musterer, sawmill hand, sharebroker, slaughterman, platelayer, school teacher, rabbitier, wool classer, interior decorator, wool teaser, waiter, traveller, solderer, core maker, splitter, company director, truck, bus, motor, tram and locomotive drivers, and, in plenty, those who have given their professions as "unemployed."

But they all look the same in khaki.

The Y.M.C.A.

The Y.M.C.A. has organised its forces to meet the needs of men in camp. Huts and marquees have been organised at Ngaruawahia, Trentham and Burnham, with tea and cocoa bars, picture shows and facilities for letter writing and recreation.

During the 1914-18 war the public of New Zealand subscribed £361,451/14/6 to the Y.M.C.A. funds. Approximately £50,000 was handed back to the Government in 1921.

For 25 years a Y.M.C.A. hut has been in existence at Trentham and has cost the organisation £6,624.