

With regard to the organization of the whole force, a great deal requires to be done before it can be regarded as a reliable one for all conceivable occasions in which sudden danger has to be met by disciplined force; but, so long as the present military feeling continues, the most obvious defects of the system will not occasion inconvenience. There is, however, one point on which I desire to say I think great improvement desirable: it is in the training of officers. It is in no way their fault, because hitherto they have had but few opportunities of learning; but it is a fact that, speaking of the body as a whole, it is not up to the standard that is desirable, nor in proportion to the efficiency of the men. With the assistance of the Government, I hope to be able to enable officers to train themselves better in future. The School of Instruction—now in its infancy here—will, I trust, become of use, and branches at the principal ports follow at no distant time.

The state of the law as regards Volunteer and Militia discipline is very defective. If I might suggest, I would propose that steps may be taken to pass an enabling Act to empower the Governor to frame from time to time disciplinary regulations, to have the force of law, which might be drawn up during the recess, and that some Military Discipline Act should be prepared by next session. Happily, the spirit of the Volunteer force has been so good hitherto that few instances have occurred to throw into strong relief the weak points of the system as it now exists. But this could not be relied upon if it were exposed to any strain, nor, perhaps, if the force is continued on its present scale, and if it remains as large as it is now.

I desire to bring especially to the notice of the Government that the Field Artillery are still miserably ill supplied with field guns. If three complete batteries were imported, the number, in addition to the old arms now used, would barely afford a demi-battery of guns (three) to each corps. Nothing is more dispiriting to the regiment, which is as fine a body of men as can be desired. As yet I have not had an opportunity of officially inspecting the colonial forces. I have seen the Volunteers who were organized prior to the late augmentation at Auckland (on the Queen's Birthday), at Wellington, and at Dunedin.

At the latter place, at 11 p.m., a night alarm, more or less unexpected, was given, and at the points of muster—the drill-shed for the city and suburban corps, and the railway-stations for corps a little distance away—1,059 turned out from a possible 1,117. I think these figures speak for themselves. All the troops I have yet seen show the same excellent physique, and, to the extent to which they have been trained, a most creditable appearance in their movements on parade.

The permanent force is being created chiefly from the ranks of the Armed Constabulary Reserve—a corps which needs no comment of mine to increase its reputation.

It is intended to train twenty-five men and an officer as an artillery detachment at each of the ports defended by permanent works. These men have been detailed and distributed, and have begun to learn their duties *ab initio*, having put up their heavy guns, cleaned them up, and having been continually undergoing training in their use. As the men become efficient they will receive certificates of competence. At Auckland the force there is reported as having passed its preliminary training. At Taiaroa Heads and Lyttelton the men are progressing well, and will be perfected shortly.

At Wellington the fortifications have been the most backward; but the men are now being satisfactorily trained in them, and had some prior instruction at Mount Cook. The number of guns at each port could not be served by so small a detachment as it is proposed to place there of the permanent force in time of war. But it is proposed, in such an event, to reinforce the batteries from the Naval Artillery Volunteers, who will be trained to heavy-gun drill as soon as the permanent force is reported efficient. Already some instruction has been given at some of the ports, and the corps are anxious themselves to acquire a knowledge of their work.

The Torpedo Corps, of forty men, for the colony will have to be slightly improved in its organization before it can be relied upon to carry out its special duties. But this must be a work of time and selection of men, as only men of special capabilities are of use, and it is necessary to have men of several specialities for the work. Captain Douglas, R.N., is, however, alive to the importance of this question, and is endeavouring to supplement whatever is wanting in the organization. It is necessary, for instance, to have with each torpedo-boat one intelligent engineer trained to sea-going engines, and several men who have received a sea-training. Arrangements have been temporarily made for occasional working of the torpedo-boats, but their delicate and complicated machinery requires the superintendence of skilled engineers.

The Engineer Corps of Artificers will be chiefly employed for some time on the fortifications, which, I gather, it is desired to complete entirely with our own forces and Armed Constabulary. There can be no difficulty in doing this; although, at all events, for some time we must be dependent on the Public Works Department for superintendents and foremen, and perhaps, to some extent, for engineers at times. It is only just to give the Public Works Department the highest possible credit for all the assistance it has rendered the Defence Department in constructing the fortifications; and to mention that to Mr. Bell and the other District Engineers the very highest praise should be awarded for the extremely zealous manner in which they have carried out their duties. Not only have they worked all the daylight hours but much of the night during these months, and, while aiding the defence, have kept up their ordinary district duties as well. Their work has been so much in excess of what officers are expected to perform, and their hours have been so many more than, except on such an emergency, it would be reasonable to ask them to devote, that I trust it may be possible to make some special acknowledgment to these gentlemen.

I have the honour to transmit herewith a state of the Volunteer force, as well as a statement of the numbers which, on an emergency, could be assembled at each of the chief ports.

I have, &c.,

The Hon. the Defence Minister.

G. S. WHITMORE.