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NEW ZEALAND.

REPORT ON THE NEW ZEALAND FORCES

(BY SIR G. S. WHITMORE, K.C.M.G., COMMANDER OF THE FORCES).

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

The COMMANDER of the COLONIAL FORCES to the Hon. the MINISTER of DEFENCE.

SIR,—

1st May, 1886.

I have the honour to furnish you, for the information of His Excellency the Governor, with my annual report of the state of the New Zealand forces.

I undertook the command on the 27th of April last, at a time when public attention had been drawn to the defenceless position of the colony in the event of an attack from without. At that moment the rifle muzzle-loading guns procured in 1878 were the sole reliable weapons in this colony with which to arm our ports, and these were not yet mounted. Plans of fortifications to protect the four chief ports had been drawn up, chiefly on the lines of His Excellency's recommendations, and a complete armament of guns of the very newest type—only, in fact, just being procured for Her Majesty's service—was ordered from Home; together with complete equipment in the shape of rapid-firing and machine guns, Whitehead torpedoes, and submarine requirements, with spare ammunition both for reserve and practice. The Agent-General was told, later on, when war appeared less imminent, not to hurry deliveries of the heavier guns, as it would take time to prepare the emplacements for these weapons; but he was, at the same time, told to forward at once the Snider ball-ammunition—of which the supply was almost exhausted—and the submarine appliances, which it was very desirable to have at once at each port, in order to teach and practice the torpedo corps. Such a corps not only requires much time for selection and training, but to be continually exercised and kept up to the daily improvements and discoveries in that scientific branch of the service.

As none of the stores above-mentioned have reached the colony as yet, except 300,000 rounds, out of 2,000,000 ordered, of Snider ball, it has been necessary to improvise, and even—in the case of some of the more delicate electrical instruments—to purchase in Melbourne, at an enhanced price. The delay in supplying these requisites has been unaccountable, inasmuch as almost everything required for the torpedo department must be at least as procurable in England as in Australia, at about 30 per cent. less cost. We have temporarily surmounted the difficulty by improvising one complete set for instruction of the more essential parts of the torpedo requirements, and must wait till the stores for the several ports arrive before we can hope to teach the Naval Volunteers at each port more than elementary torpedo work. The difficulties which have beset Major Boddam in organizing and providing instruction for the torpedo corps have been very great. He has been well seconded by Mr. Lodder, and has selected an excellent practical body of men, who will be able, when distributed at each port—as is already done to some extent—to begin at once to teach the Naval Volunteers. If the appliances nearly a year ordered from Home arrive soon, by the time the navals have learned the rudiments we shall be able to teach them the higher branches of submarine engineering.

The colony possesses on issue about nine thousand rifles. The regular allowance of ball cartridge for these for practice is 100 rounds per arm. In June last the stock was under 600,000 rounds; 300,000 rounds have since arrived, which, with what we had on hand, has barely sufficed for practice, and the magazines throughout the colony are now quite bare. Including the ammunition paid for by rifle associations and rifle clubs, the annual supply of ball cartridge required is about 1,200,000 rounds, and there should always be at least a million rounds in store; in fact, but for the circumstance that, through your exertions, a local factory has been established, I should say that even a million rounds is a very small reserve to keep. Finding that, in spite of many letters and cablegrams, the ammunition did not arrive, you authorized an order for 500,000 rounds to be given to Captain Whitney, an Auckland manufacturer, who was to use Otago powder. This latter, however, for some reason, failed, and Captain Whitney, in September last, when he should have begun to deliver, was unable to do so till a supply of powder was procured from Home. He has since obtained it, and, although the first cartridges turned out were defective in some respects, he has now remedied the defects, and experiment here shows the Auckland cartridges are in no respect inferior to the Home ones, while the cases can be refilled, which the War Office cartridges cannot. Captain Whitney's price is one-third higher than the Home price, but the economy of refilling the cases may in some measure compensate for the difference of first cost. Captain Whitney can also make, if required, cartridges for Nordenfeldt and Hotchkiss rapid-firing guns, which in time of war would be of great consequence.

I have not yet heard of any ascertained success in the manufacture of suitable powder in New Zealand, though encouragement is offered.

The artillery corps, till very recently, has been chiefly employed on the works since last spring; but before that, was, and now is, being taught its special duties. At every station there are now men competent to train Artillery Volunteers to the use of garrison guns.