

necessary ammunition can be procured; and I am happy to say there appears to be every prospect that cadet corps will readily respond to your invitation to enrol. Reforms in a Volunteer Force cannot be achieved as soon as in a paid standing army; but in our Volunteer Force there has been so much progress already, since the Russian scare showed how unprepared we were, that I think I may regard its future with confidence and hope.

The policy of the Government has been throughout the year to withdraw the Constabulary gradually from Native districts, and at present there are but two places at which any force is kept up, viz., Kawhia and Opunake. The men, as they became released from duty in Native districts, have been largely employed on the fortifications. Three special corps, however, have been formed, and taught the duties of these branches, which are distributed among the four ports. We have, in all, an excellent artillery force of 120 men, an engineer force of twenty men, and a torpedo corps of fifty men. Beyond these numbers, the Armed Constabulary Reserve was intended to consist of 160 men, or 350 in all—a reduction of fifty men since last year. The artillery force has now been wholly withdrawn from the construction of the fortifications, and is being taught artillery duty exclusively. The torpedo corps was assembled in Wellington only in October last year, and men had to be tested and enrolled or rejected after trial. It was necessary to obtain artificers and experts in several branches, and to teach practical torpedo-work without trained instructors. This has been done satisfactorily, under the supervision of Major Boddam. Mr. Lodder, who had some experience of torpedo-work in the Royal Navy, has qualified himself in these few months to be an instructor, and has brought forward his corps very satisfactorily. Major Boddam has collected enough electrical apparatus for purposes of instruction, and, when the whole of the appliances sent for to England for each port arrive, the small nucleus of a torpedo corps at each port may be relied upon to take charge of the delicate instruments and dangerous explosives expected, which can only be safely handled by experts.

Both the artillery and torpedo corps are intended, when on a peace footing, to consist of the fewest men sufficient to keep the guns, stores, machinery, and electrical instruments in order and at all times fit for use. It is intended, as at each port the detachments of these two corps will be complete in themselves, to utilize them also for the instruction of the Volunteers. At present the number of the paid corps are wholly insufficient to man all the guns, or to lay down and guard the submarine defences; but in war time the Volunteers, if called out for actual service, would have acquired a knowledge of the scientific branches, which cannot be learned without careful practice and instruction. The corps themselves could easily be expanded at any moment of danger, inasmuch as each nucleus kept comprises in its ranks a few thoroughly competent non-commissioned officers and artificers, as well as others little inferior to them, but holding minor grades at present. Therefore it would only be necessary to enrol, if the corps were increased, men possessing a sound physique, good character, and average intelligence. In this colony such men can be obtained at any moment, and in every district in a very few days.

The engineer corps, as yet, has been wholly employed on the works. The men are an excellent body of artificers and artisans, and at present have still important work to do in their several trades upon the works. When these are completed they will be practised in the more purely military duties of their branch of the service.

The Armed Constabulary Reserve, as it has hitherto been called, is thus more than half absorbed in the three scientific corps already described. The remainder it is intended to style "Rifles," and to employ in Native districts, and upon the fortifications. It would, if required for service, be formed into two companies; but its organization would comprise smaller subdivisions, each of which would be capable of expansion at short notice into a company, if required. At present all the labour required on the fortifications, except at Wellington, is being carried out by the unemployed, who have, as a rule, in the opinion of the engineers, done good work. At Wellington all that remains of the Armed Constabulary Reserve, and not serving in the scientific corps or in Native districts, is concentrated and supplies the labour required at Ngahauranga, Fort Ballance, and Point Halswell.

I am pleased to be able to report that all the officers posted to the scientific corps have worked and studied hard to render themselves proficient in their special branches. Major Boddam reports favourably of the progress each of them has made.

In the creation of these corps we have not had to go outside of the colony for officers, instructors, or men; and I am assured that the force will compare favourably with similar ones elsewhere in these colonies, notwithstanding that so much of the time of the artillery has been occupied in fortification work, and the torpedo corps much delayed in its training by lack of appliances.

I beg to say, in conclusion, that in Major Boddam the colony possesses an officer of singular energy, ability, and versatility of talent. Works on so large a scale were probably never attempted in so many distant places by any Government with so small an amount of supervision, and the incessant labour devolving on Major Boddam, and got through by him, is almost incredible. Much that he is compelled to do besides his own work elsewhere would be the duty of subordinates; and to carry out all he undertakes, with such materials as are to hand, requires a fertility of resource and ingenuity few possess. Notwithstanding all his occupations he has, however, found time to take a great interest in the selection and supervision of the torpedo corps, artillery, and engineers, and much of the good results attained in those corps is due to him. It is only just that I should call attention to the very great assistance rendered by the Public Works Department in permitting the District Engineers, in addition to duties already onerous in themselves, to assist the Defence in its fortification work. Without exception these gentlemen have given the greatest satisfaction to Major Boddam, though they could only spare a portion of their time to duties which elsewhere would be deemed ample for a separate engineer officer. One of them, Mr. Lowe, has suffered greatly in his health from his overwork, and all have devoted themselves to carry out this great amount of extra work without remuneration.

The Hon. the Minister of Defence.

I have, &c.,

G. S. WHITMORE.