

moderate. It is imperative that early steps should be taken to put the halls at Auckland and Christchurch into a proper state of repair, and to enlarge them, so as to accommodate the increased number of troops. £300 has been expended in making the Wellington drill-hall watertight and in painting it, but the accommodation is very cramped, and its extension should be taken in hand if we want to retain the present establishment of Volunteers. Many corps throughout the colony are applying for grant in aid of their drill-sheds, and a large sum will be required for this service this year.

RANGES.

The question of the provision of rifle-ranges is a pressing one, and one which also unfortunately entails the expenditure of a large amount of money. I reported last year that the Auckland range was only suitable for use for trained men, and under careful supervision. It is not safe for volley-firing, and on that account the corps in Auckland had to be excused their volley-firing this year. I have heard of a suitable site near Auckland, on which field- and volley-firing can be carried out. Matters have been put in train for making provision for a range. The ranges at the Thames and Onehunga are unsuitable.

Extra land has been bought in Polhill Gully, and the Wellington range is now suitable for use with the .303 arm. A good deal, however, requires to be done in the way of improving firing points, &c., and this work is now in hand. Polhill Gully is a most accessible range for the Wellington Volunteers, but, the sides being so steep, no field-firing can be carried out there. There will be no difficulty in procuring a range for field and long-range firing accessible by rail for the Wellington Volunteers, provided funds can be found.

The acquisition of a new range at Wanganui is being dealt with.

A new range is being acquired at Sumner for the Christchurch Volunteers, which should be ready this year. The Pelichet Bay range has been purchased at Dunedin, which is a good range and close to the town.

In the amendments to the Defence Act, a clause has been inserted giving the Government power to take up land for rifle-ranges, on the same lines as land for defence-works can be taken. With the increase of population and the spreading of towns, it will become necessary for the Government to have this power to ensure a due provision of range accommodation for our Defence Forces.

CONCLUSION.

I can again report a considerable improvement in the condition of the Volunteer Force, and a keen military spirit and wish for improvement is general throughout the colony.

We have an opportunity now of getting a really serviceable Force together. The men are available, money, I hope, will be forthcoming to properly arm and equip them, and a suitable military organization will, I sincerely trust, at last be allowed.

The defences of the principal forts have been improved, eight more Maxim guns have been ordered, a 15-pr. B.L. battery has been received, and another is on order from England. One submarine mining-boat is, I hope, now under construction, and the money for the provision of another has been placed on the estimates. Stores to augment the equipment are under supply, and four 12-pr. Q.-F. guns have been received. The past year has certainly been one of much progress.

A. P. PENTON,

Colonel, Commanding the New Zealand Forces.

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