

MOUNTED RIFLES.

The Mounted Rifles are a very fairly efficient body of men, and are of excellent material. The majority of corps go into camp for seven whole days annually, and derive very great benefit therefrom, but owing to their civil occupations these camps are for the most part held in the winter months, and the bad weather then experienced much interferes with their training. Their training too is carried out under greater difficulties than in any other branch of the Defence Forces. The men are good horsemen, and their horses, though not showy, are for the most part hardy and serviceable; the stamp of horse too is improving.

The recruiting of corps over too large an area is to be discouraged; it entails bad attendance and consequent inefficiency. Those men, too, who are irregular attendants at parade should not be retained; they cannot be properly trained, and consequently are of no value to the State, and are detrimental to the corps they belong to; this remark applies to all branches. A valuable addition to the Defence Forces of the colony might be made by the raising of more Maori corps; these men can give very much more time to the work than Europeans can. The Maoris are fond of military life, and, properly officered, such corps could be made very efficient. I submitted a scheme for this in 1903, but no action was taken.

The saddlery is not, as a rule, very satisfactory, nor is it very well fitted, and in general smartness improvement is to be looked for. The distance men have to ride to parade goes a long way to fit them for the duties they would have to carry out on active service, and with the training proposed in the scheme for reorganization the mounted force of the colony would be a very efficient one. Very considerable improvement has taken place in the manner dismounted duties are performed. The musketry practices, too, shows an improvement. Greatcoats, mess-tins, and nose-bags should be supplied to mounted corps.

INFANTRY.

The training of the Infantry is much impeded by their being able to devote so little time to outdoor work. It is impossible to thoroughly train infantry in drill-halls, and under the present system they cannot become efficient. The Infantry camps, too, where men only work in the evening and for a short time, if any, in the early morning give no scope for rendering corps efficient; these camps are not worth the money spent on them, and should be replaced pending the reorganization of the Force by such parades as were recommended last year.

I have endeavoured to get such alterations made to the regulations as will admit of, so to speak, week-end training of corps. Were provision made for men to go into camp from Saturday afternoon till Sunday evening, the greatest possible benefit would accrue. Open-air training, and as much of it as is possible, should be aimed at for all arms of the service. The erection of huts at such places as Trentham, &c., where good training-grounds exist, and where men would be comfortably housed and well fed, would, I believe, also attract a good many young men who now spend their Saturday afternoons and Sundays in idleness. Some opposition to such a scheme may, and will no doubt, be advanced on religious grounds, but such appear to me to be more than met by the following remarks which I have lately read on this subject: "The 'unco' guid' can console themselves with the thought that these men, who, if left to themselves, would most of them certainly not attend any place of worship, will join in prayer and hymns before beginning their work (recreation to them), and will thus come under the influence otherwise more or less remote from them. 'The better the day the better the deed'; and it is hard to see how else the necessary minimum of field training can be carried out. Our forefathers practised with the long bow on the Sabbath, and thought no shame; why should not our young men of the present age fit themselves on the holy day for one of the most holy of all tasks—namely, the safekeeping of their native land."

The Infantry are without entrenching tools, and this most important part of their training is consequently entirely neglected. No force can operate with any hope of success against civilised troops unless the use of entrenchments is well understood.

The Infantry are well armed and fairly well clothed and equipped; the boots of the large majority of men are, however, unserviceable. Very few corps are in possession of greatcoats, and the bandolier equipment approved in 1903 has not yet been issued to all corps.

No small-arm ammunition-carts are in possession of battalions.

The range practices of Infantry corps show an improvement on previous years; field firing must, however, receive more attention, and be carried out under more service-like conditions than has yet, for the most part, been done. Judging distance, too, must receive more attention.

While the physique of country corps is satisfactory, and in many cases very much so, that of many of the corps at the larger centres is very poor, and such men could not for even a short time stand the strain of active service. It is much to be regretted that the athlete cannot in the larger centres be attracted to serve; practically none enrol, apparently considering their amusements more important than their duty to the State. To improve the physique of these corps gymnastic training should be introduced.

CYCLE CORPS.

Of the four cycle corps one (Nelson) is, through lack of recruits, about to disband. I have had no opportunity of observing the work of cycle corps at manoeuvres since my last report. An allowance for wear-and-tear to bicycles should be made to these corps.

MEDICAL DEPARTMENT.

While recording some progress in the organization and equipment, there is little in the machinery of the department. There is still not sufficient provision for the Surgeon-General or