

The erection of the new drill-hall at Dunedin to replace the old Garrison Hall, which had become inadequate for present requirements, is proceeding. The new drill-hall at Invercargill has been completed, and the necessary orderly-room and store accommodation is being erected on the new site. This work has been greatly assisted by the Prisons Department providing the necessary concrete blocks at nominal cost. Drill-halls have also been completed at Cambridge and Thames. At New Plymouth, where the repair of the old drill-hall was not deemed advisable, the local Agricultural Society's hall has been acquired under advantageous conditions to provide the necessary accommodation. A fire at King Edward Barracks, Christchurch, has necessitated the rebuilding of several orderly-rooms. As these buildings had vested in the Crown, the cost of rebuilding will be recouped from the fund created by the Public Revenues Act for replacing buildings destroyed by fire. The provision of drill-hall, orderly-room, and store accommodation in several of the larger centres is still essential, and necessary to do away with the cost of renting temporary premises. Such cases are being duly considered, and the necessary provision will be made for buildings as suitable sites can be obtained and definite requirements arrived at.

At Palmerston North the existing Defence Reserve, at present partly occupied by the local Field Artillery Depot (gun-shed, quarters, and stables), is being increased by the acquisition of an adjoining section, to provide the space requisite for the erection of the drill-hall, office, and store accommodation necessary at this centre, and plans for the proposed buildings are in course of preparation.

In regard to the four cities, and particularly in Auckland and Wellington, where the existing Garrison Halls were built long prior to the establishment of the present Territorial and Senior Cadet organization, there is much congestion, and though in good condition and ample for the demands of the late Volunteer units, these structures are proving inadequate for the growing requirements of the districts, and do not give the training and administrative facilities necessary for the existing Territorial units and Senior Cadets, or allow for the increase of the Forces with the increase of population. It is not considered feasible or advisable to add to any extent to the buildings on these sites, as this would not materially reduce the congestion at present felt where so many companies have their headquarters in conjunction. It will therefore be imperative to shortly consider the provision of smaller drill-halls in some of the more thickly populated suburbs, to reduce the pressure at the central drill-halls and to eliminate the expense of renting accommodation in the more distant suburbs at present obligatory, also saving Territorials and Cadets travelling long distances to the central halls.

Drill-halls erected now are built with earth floors (only the necessary orderly-rooms, store-rooms, or offices being floored and lined), and as far as possible of similar type; size and annexes being, of course, varied to suit the population and requirements of the different centres.

The time has arrived when the question of providing regimental mobilization stores should receive consideration. Hitherto district stores have been utilized. Should a course of this description be adopted it will supply a much-felt want and tend to greater efficiency of units and readiness to take the field. It would obviate the necessity, now existing, for the enormous amount of work thrown on the shoulders of District, Brigade, and Regimental Headquarters Staffs, which was recently very manifest during the mobilization of the Expeditionary Force for war.

Owing to the expense which such provision will entail, it will be necessary to proceed by degrees, and it is proposed, as a preliminary step, that for the first year only four mobilization stores for units be erected—viz., at Auckland, Palmerston North, Christchurch, and Dunedin, as follows: At Auckland and Christchurch each for one Mounted Rifle Regiment; at Wellington and Dunedin each for one Infantry Regiment. The following year one Infantry unit each in Auckland and Christchurch would be provided for, and one Mounted Rifle unit each in Wellington and Dunedin, and so on alternately year by year. Thus in seven years Mounted Rifle and Infantry Brigades would be provided for, the advantage of the system being twofold: (a) Expenditure would be spread over considerable time; (b) as time proceeded experience of defects and future requirements would be gained.

The question of purchase of sites must be considered, but in the case of Palmerston North one is already available, while in other parts this question will require consideration. When complete, mobilization stores will contain the war outfit for units, comprising war equipment, clothing and necessities, regimental supplies, medical and veterinary equipment. Accommodation will be provided for armoured transport vehicles, machine guns, saddlery, harness, and, where necessary, stables.

In the smaller training centres, where the Department has been unable so far to provide drill accommodation, or where the number of Territorials and Senior Cadets does not warrant the provision of permanent accommodation, local schools, public halls, and other buildings have, as previously, been utilized for training purposes, more especially during the winter season and in inclement weather. In the large majority of cases the use of these buildings is secured at nominal rates to cover lighting and caretaking charges only, and in some cases use is given free.

The majority of older towns where drill-halls exist are those where, in the past, Volunteer Corps existed, and in most of these cases at some time or other a suitable drill-hall site had been secured, though frequently not till the actual occasion for building arose. In newly established townships the necessity of a drill-hall does not arise as early as that for the establishment of schools, post-offices, or other public buildings. With universal training under the Territorial system as now in vogue, sooner or later, with the development of the country and growth of population, the want of a drill-hall, orderly and store room, or rifle range for the use and administration of the local units will be felt. It is therefore desirable that, where possible, suitable reserves for the purpose should be made to meet future requirements and minimize the ultimate cost of providing for such requirements. Officers Commanding Districts have therefore been requested to have particular attention given to this matter, and the assistance of the Commissioners of Crown Lands and their staffs invoked, so that where possible sites may be secured in rising townships or localities likely to steadily increase in population.