

Lieutenant-General Cameron requests to be informed whether it is the intention of the Colonial Government to call out the Militia of the several settlements of the Northern Island, and if so when and in what numbers, and how it is proposed that they should be trained and equipped.

General Cameron also wishes to know whether, in the event of an outbreak of hostilities, he would be called on by your Excellency to reinforce the garrisons of the different settlements, or whether they would be left to be defended by their present garrisons aided by the Militia.

In order that Lieutenant-General Cameron may clearly understand the position of matters in connection with the Colonial Militia, and their capacity and liability to be employed in any military operations, which your Excellency and General Cameron may think it necessary to undertake, it appears desirable to explain.

1st. Why none but the Taranaki Militia are at present called out.

2nd. How the Militia force of New Zealand generally is constituted.

3rd. Within what limits only it can be employed, and for what uses it is fit.

1. The only place at which military operations have yet been carried on in New Zealand is at Taranaki, where the whole male population liable to the Militia have been on active service for about fifteen months. The present population at that place comprises about 500 males of between sixteen and fifty-five years, all of whom, with very few exceptions, are liable to serve, and are now on actual service. Of these about 200 are enrolled as Volunteer Corps, and having taken these picked men, and added the 100 of the Militia reported by Major Herbert as fit for duty, out of the 500 liable to serve in the Militia it is very probable that the remainder are not fit for active service. It is hardly to be expected that more than three-fifths of the whole population of any place would be fit for such service.

If General Cameron means by being "called out" that none but the Taranaki Militia have been on service in the field the statement is nearly correct, but if the term "called out" includes training and exercise it is altogether incorrect. The Militia of Auckland and Wanganui have all been called out, and a portion of the latter were for a time added to the strength of the garrison there. At Wellington also a portion of the Militia have been called out for service, and when the troops were withdrawn from that post they occupied the barracks there, and performed all the military duties previously performed by Her Majesty's regular troops. Portions of the Wellington Militia have also, until the last few weeks, formed two garrisons in the Hutt District.

When the Militia is called out for actual service it is of course necessary that it should be paid. This involves a large outlay in money, and a serious loss to the community, interrupting as it does the industrial occupation of the country. The effect of such a measure may be seen at Taranaki. While therefore, on the one hand, it is extremely desirable to put off so extreme a measure as long as possible, it is on the other hand no doubt necessary to be prepared for it whenever the circumstances are such as to justify its adoption.

To call out for actual service the whole Militia of the Northern Island of New Zealand, that is, every male between sixteen and fifty-five, with but few exceptions, would be justifiable only in a case of urgent necessity; but to have all who are fit for military duty prepared to undertake it in the event of such a necessity, is a wise and proper precaution.

2. The Militia force of New Zealand, as has already been stated, consists of every male inhabitant, with certain very limited exceptions, between the ages of 16 and 55—it thus includes every class.

A Militia Act was passed in 1858, and soon after, under its provisions, Volunteer Rifle Corps were established in several places, viz.:—Auckland, New Plymouth, Wellington, and Wanganui in the North Island; and at Nelson and Canterbury in the Middle Island; and they are still kept up in an efficient state. The Militia was also organized under that Act. In the session of 1860, however, an amended Act was passed prescribing a new classification for the Militia.

This Act was passed in November last, but it was appointed to come into operation at such time as the Governor should fix. There was a considerable Militia force then on foot; and, as its reconstruction would have had the effect of rendering it not available for immediate service for some time, it was deemed not prudent to break up the existing organization so long as actual hostilities were going on. Immediately, however, after the Governor's return from Taranaki, steps were taken to bring the new Act into operation, and the work of re organization is actively going on throughout this island. In a few days the Militia of the Auckland district will be in a state to be called out for training and exercise, of which fourteen days' notice is required by the Act, and might have been so sooner had Colonel Mould, commanding that force, forwarded sooner, information with respect to the battalion divisions which he had been requested to furnish. It could be called out for actual service at once, but it would not be efficient for such service immediately; as, although many of the men have acquired a considerable proficiency as soldiers, there are many now classed with them who have everything to learn.

3. The Militia Act of 1860 prescribes that a Militia District shall not exceed thirty miles in diameter, and no Militia force can be taken for service out of its district. This, at first sight, may appear an undue limitation, but it must not be overlooked that such a Militia as that of New Zealand is not available for offensive operations; its utility and strength is for defence. It could under any circumstances be only used to a limited extent as an invading force, and if so used it would be very costly, as not only would the men require sufficient pay to provide themselves with food and clothing, but most of their families would have to be maintained at the public expense, while all industrial employment would be put an end to, and those who now yield the public a revenue, instead of being contributors to, would become dependent on the public funds. While, therefore, every consideration points to the impolicy of employing the Colonial forces for offensive operations, there is no doubt that for defensive purposes it may be made very effective.

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