

1898.

NEW ZEALAND.

DEFENCE FORCES OF NEW ZEALAND

(REPORT ON THE), BY COL. A. P. PENTON, R.A., COMMANDER OF THE FORCES.

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

Colonel A. P. PENTON, Commanding New Zealand Forces, to the Hon. the DEFENCE MINISTER.
SIR,—

Defence Office, Wellington, 30th August, 1898.

I have the honour to forward, for the information of His Excellency the Governor and Commander-in-Chief of New Zealand, my annual report on the defence forces of the colony.

Since the date of forwarding my last report, owing to the war between Spain and America, much attention has been paid to the military position in this colony, and there appears to me to be a genuine and general desire to put the defences and the forces of the colony into a trustworthy and efficient state. That every effort should be made to carry this out speedily I cannot too strongly urge.

PERMANENT FORCES.

I reported last year that there were not sufficient officers in the Permanent Force to keep up the proper spirit of discipline among the men. Steps have been taken to somewhat remedy this. An Imperial officer has been engaged to take charge of the artillery defence at Auckland, and the two gentlemen who were probationary cadets last year have been given commissions as lieutenants in the Permanent Artillery. These two young officers have been sent to England to undergo a course of instruction, and on their return to the colony the experience and knowledge they will have gained will no doubt materially assist them to educate and train in their military duties the men over whom they will be placed in command. I should have been very glad had my recommendations to get out three artillery officers instead of one from the Imperial service on a three years' engagement been accepted, as there is ample work for them to do in the colony.

Two cadets have been recently appointed to the Force, and I understand that it is in contemplation to make one further appointment. Two of the cadets will be trained for artillery work, and the third for submarine mining work, and I venture to hope that when their turn comes these three cadets will also be sent to England for instruction.

The only qualification so far insisted upon for a cadet has been that a lad should have passed the Junior Civil Service Examination. I again recommend that a special examination should be established for candidates wishing to join the military service, and that due notice should be given of the date of such examination so that we might get officers fitted, and with a taste, for military life.

The question of wearing plain clothes by the men has been somewhat modified during the past year. Men are now allowed to wear plain clothes on Sundays and on one evening during the week, also on special occasions. I do not consider that any further modifications are at all desirable; discipline would suffer, and the men should rather be encouraged to take a pride in their uniforms and in themselves as soldiers.

In my last report I recommended an increase to the Permanent Force, so that the working of the principal guns in our defences and all the specialist details of the forts should be carried out by efficient and well-trained men. The proposal met with much opposition in Parliament and elsewhere, but I think it my duty to again urge upon the authorities the necessity of an addition to the artillery branch of the Permanent Force. The idea that the colony is to be handed over to "militarism" because of the necessary numbers of men being asked for to work the principal guns, &c., of the existing defences is absurd. It takes much time and training to make an efficient garrison artilleryman, and the Permanent Force is all that can be relied on to work the forts at all times of the year and under all conditions. The Volunteers from lack of sufficient work in the forts would not be competent at once to take their place in the defence. The men are willing and eager to learn, but have not the required opportunities, and it is only after their annual fortnight's training that they are fitted to efficiently work the guns.

No decision has been arrived at with regard to the recommendation for putting the grading and rating of the men on a sound footing.

In No. 1 Company it is essential that we should have efficiently-trained specialists for the several duties connected with the artillery defence. As the Force is at present constituted there is no inducement, beyond that of possible future promotion to non-commissioned officer rank, to induce