

Gymnastic Training.

During the past year a gymnastic instructor has been engaged for training men of the Permanent Force at Wellington. Each recruit on joining has to go through a course of physical training under the instructor, and all trained soldiers have to go through a modified annual course. I propose in future to have some men from the Force specially trained as gymnastic instructors, so that I can arrange for gymnastic courses to be carried out at each station. Before this is done, however, arrangements should be made for the erection of small gymnasiums at each station, and these gymnasiums should be put up in connection with recreation-rooms. It is very desirable to provide attractions for the men, and to make them as comfortable as possible in barracks, so that they shall not have of necessity to go into the towns for their amusements. At places like Wellington and Auckland, where the majority of the men are young soldiers, it is very advisable to encourage them to stay in barracks, and make, if possible, their home-life there.

Service.

In May of this year the Permanent Force was called upon to furnish a party to proceed to Rawene, on account of an anticipated Native disturbance in that locality. Men were sent from both Wellington and Auckland, but happily their services were not required for actual fighting. They performed one trying march, and were on detachment for about a month, during which time their commanding officers inform me that their behaviour was excellent, and the spirit with which they were imbued was in every way commendable.

VOLUNTEERS.

Since my last report a Volunteer establishment has been fixed for the colony, and sanction has been given for capitation to be drawn for 7,000 men. This will enable me, if necessary, to enrol nearly 8,000 men, allowing for the natural percentage of men who, for various reasons, do not capitate yearly.

The establishment for each principal district is now,—

4 mounted corps (1 battalion),	2 battalions infantry (8 companies*),
1 battery field artillery (6 guns),	1 cycle corps,
3 corps naval or garrison artillery,	1 ambulance corps;
1 engineer corps,	

* 3 battalions of 6 companies in the Wellington District.

For the Nelson District,—

1 mounted corps,	1 battalion infantry (8 companies) :
1 field battery (2 guns),	

Giving a total for the colony of,—

17 mounted corps,	10 battalions infantry (75 companies),
5 field batteries (26 guns),	4 cycle corps,
12 corps naval or garrison artillery,	4 ambulance corps.
4 engineer corps,	

The returns, corrected up to the 31st July, show the following establishment :—

14 mounted corps,	7 battalions infantry†,
5 field batteries,	3 cycle corps,
11 corps naval or garrison artillery,	2 ambulance corps.
2 engineer corps,	

† The remaining three battalions are in course of formation.

Of the Infantry, eight companies are in a moribund or inefficient state, and, I hope, will cease to exist by the end of the financial year.

MOUNTED CORPS.

The carbines have been withdrawn from all the mounted corps, and the issue of rifles to them is practically complete. A special bucket has been designed, and is now under supply, to enable the mounted man to carry his rifle on the march without fatigue and without damaging his uniform.

I look upon the mounted corps as a most valuable arm of the service. In this colony, where a comparatively small force has to guard a considerable extent of country, it is most important to have a mobile force of mounted rifles, which can quickly attain any desired position and hold an enemy in check until reinforced.

I much regret that, owing to the men composing these corps being mostly farmers, and working on farms and runs, they cannot be got together oftener for drill and instruction. I have seen all the mounted corps in the colony, and consider that, with proper training, they would form as useful a body of troops as any one would wish to command. The men are intelligent, hardy, used to an outdoor life and to being constantly in the saddle. As a rule they own the horses they ride on parade, which, taken all round, are a useful and handy lot of animals. At present they provide their own horses, saddlery, appointments, and uniforms; receiving from the Government their rifles, rifle-buckets, and accoutrements, and the same amount of capitation as is given to all arms, viz., £2 10s. a year. At Easter camps mounted corps get an allowance of 1s. 6d. a day for feeding their horses; but for their own company camps they get no horse-allowance, and have no extra allowances to those made to an infantry corps, viz., 1s. 6d. a day for six days' training; thus, practically, making a mounted man pay for the keep of his horse while in camp. I was able this last year to get all the corps in the South Island for a week's combined camp at Dunedin in October, and three corps in the Wellington District to camp near Wanganui in March. As there had been no Easter camp in 1897, the increased allowance of 1s. a day for four days, besides an additional