

AMBULANCE CORPS.

The formation of an Ambulance Corps, consisting of two officers and twenty-five non-commissioned officers and men, at each of the four centres, has been approved. Corps now exist in Auckland and Dunedin, and the other two centres I hope will soon follow.

MEDICAL SERVICES.

Regulations are being drawn up for the reorganisation of the medical branch. This branch will be organised by districts, a Principal Medical Officer being appointed for each district, who will be responsible for the proper carrying-out of all the medical services in the district. All the districts will be put under a principal medical officer at head-quarters. An equipment has been drawn up of the medical stores necessary for the Ambulance Companies and the Field Hospitals, and orders have been sent to England for the necessary stores and appliances. As regards hospital accommodation at the four centres, no doubt if there was any protracted fighting the large hospitals would give us all the assistance in their power in providing accommodation and treatment for serious cases. Slightly wounded men would be accommodated in buildings already selected by the Defence Committee, and remain under the treatment of the military medical officers.

CADET COMPANIES.

I understand that the Education Department is considering the desirability of systematic military training throughout the colony for the boys being educated in the State schools. That the Military Department should be relieved of this duty and not charged with the expense of the boys so trained is, I think, a sound move. The Defence Department gets very little benefit from the boys trained in the companies of the State schools. Many of them drift out into the country, where there are no Volunteer corps, and as far as I can ascertain but few of them join the Volunteer Force as adults. Under the circumstances, I do not think that the Military Department should be saddled with the expense of the up-keep of the cadet corps. I am sure, however, that a military training, widely diffused among the growing youth of the colony, is good both from a moral and physical point of view, and this exercise and training must be very beneficial to the boy's physique.

TRANSPORT AND COMMISSARIAT.

In the defence scheme instructions have been drawn up as to the number of horses, carts, and vehicles of all descriptions that will be required for the carriage of tents, rations, ammunition, &c., in time of war. Also, a scale of rations has been laid down for both men and horses. Arrangements will have to be made for the speedy supply of these requisites on the outbreak of war. In time of peace and during manœuvres pack-horses for the carriage of the reserve ammunition should accompany the battalions and companies, so that practice might be got of the supply of ammunition in the field.

BANDS.

The Volunteer regulations allow of corps outside the centres enlisting five men supernumerary to the company as bandsmen, and these bandsmen receive capitation provided the corps complies with the regulations in earning capitation. This regulation works well in places where two or more corps are in existence, but should be cancelled for places in which there is only one corps. As it is impossible to form a band with five men it is only in very few single-corps stations that this regulation has been taken advantage of.

I would recommend that at stations where only single corps exist no bandsmen should be allowed, but that at each of the head-quarters of the country battalions a battalion band should be allowed, to consist of twenty men, who should be on the same footing as regards capitation as the garrison bands at the centres, except that they should not draw the annual allowance of £25. The bands at Oamaru and Invercargill to remain as they are at present.

RIFLE CLUBS.

There are at present in existence thirteen rifle clubs recognised by the Government, having in their possession a number of Government Snider rifles. These clubs, I understand, were formed in places where Volunteer corps had been disbanded, and the men were permitted to retain the use of their rifles and received a grant of a hundred rounds of ammunition yearly as a compensation for the disbandment of their corps. This free issue of ammunition has been discontinued since February, 1895, presumably in accordance with Recommendation No. 24 of the Volunteer Conference of 1894.

There are also seventy-five private rifle clubs in the colony which get no grant of any kind from the Government beyond being allowed to purchase ammunition at the Government rate. The members of the rifle clubs perform no duties for the State, are not under any kind of military control, and simply take up rifle-shooting for a pastime and for their own amusement. They are assisted by the Government in so far that the members obtain free railway-passes when attending the annual meeting of the New Zealand Rifle Association.

Some discussion has taken place, both in Parliament and in the public Press, as to the value of these rifle clubs, and the desirability of incorporating them into the Forces and including them in the Defence Force of the colony. It has been urged that the best shots in the colony are to be found amongst the men in the rifle clubs; and the example of the good shooting made by the Boers in the Transvaal war has been brought forward in favour of their being recognised by the Government as part of the fighting branch.

I must point out that the Boers practised their shooting under entirely different conditions to that carried out by the rifle clubs in the colony. They were dependent in many cases for fresh meat