

companies have arm-racks in the drill-halls, in which the arms are stored when not in use. This arrangement has been found to work very well, and should be carried out universally throughout the colony.

ARMS.

The first instalment of the new rifles has arrived in the colony, and the second is on the way. I much regret that it was not decided when new rifles were procured, as recommended in my last report, to purchase the magazine arm. No doubt the '303" Martini-Enfield is very much in advance of the '45" Martini as regards range and shooting; but any force we will have to contend with will, in all probability, be armed with the most up-to-date weapons.

I also regret that the triangular bayonet should have been supplied. It is not suitable for this colony, and the short sword-bayonet as sent out with the carbines would have been much more useful.

Shortly we will have three different rifles in the hands of the Infantry Volunteers, the '303" Martini-Enfield, the '45" Martini-Henry, and the Snider. I sincerely hope that we may soon get a supply of the '303" rifle sufficient to end this state of affairs, and that by the end of next year there will be only one class of rifle in the hands of the troops.

AMMUNITION.

Small-arm Ammunition.

A great many complaints have been made as to the quality of the ammunition supplied to the troops in the past. So bad was the 1896 supply that I had to recommend the discontinuance of the issue, and to withdraw all that had been issued to the troops, and replace it with the supply made in 1897. Very few complaints have been made of the 1897 manufacture.

At the 1898 meeting of the New Zealand Rifle Association, held at Oamaru, arrangements were made for a supply of 1897 ammunition, and this ammunition being found faulty and objected to, a consignment of ammunition manufactured in Victoria, which had previously been well reported on for its shooting qualities, was sent down. On the first day of the shooting the locally-made 1897 ammunition was issued. This was objected to on the score of bad shooting, and on the second day the Victorian ammunition was issued. There was found to be practically no difference in the shooting of the two classes of ammunition, and for the remainder of the meeting the men were allowed to shoot indiscriminately with either Colonial ammunition or Victorian ammunition. This seemed to give general satisfaction.

Since my last report two sets of velocity instruments have been received from England, and a proper building is now being put up for their installation. Last month a non-commissioned officer, specially trained in the work of testing ammunition, arrived from England. His duties will be to carry out the tests of the ammunition as far as possible in accordance with the specifications in force in the Imperial service. This cannot be done thoroughly, however, until the velocity instruments are properly set up, and all arrangements are made for testing.

The supply of the '303 rifle will necessitate an entirely different system of manufacture on the part of the Colonial Ammunition Company. Cordite is substituted for powder in the ammunition, and the process of filling the cartridges is a matter requiring great care and some experience. As a precautionary measure, and so that the troops should have cordite ammunition available on the issue of the new rifles, the company was given an order for 1,020,000 rounds of '303 ammunition, which they have been allowed to supply partly from their Australian manufactures, but the majority was ordered by them in a complete state from England. I trust that this ammunition will entirely satisfy the conditions of the specifications, and that the Volunteers in future will not have to complain of any issue of bad ammunition. The ammunition supply for the colony is a matter of vital importance, and no efforts should be spared in the direction of supplying ammunition of a good and reliable quality. For some time to come, and until all the troops are supplied with the Martini-Enfield rifle, we may require a supply annually of Martini ammunition, as well as the '303 ammunition. A supply of cordite has been ordered from England by the Government, and I sincerely hope that by the time it arrives in the colony the Colonial Ammunition Company will be in a position to undertake locally the manufacture of the '303 cartridges.

RIFLE-RANGES.

The question of improving the security of rifle-ranges for the '303 rifle is an important one, and must be taken in hand at once. Many of the ranges in the colony are neither suitable nor safe for this weapon, and on the majority of them alterations will have to be made. These alterations will principally consist in lengthening the range and providing extra security for the markers and the public.

DRILL-HALLS.

The question of the ownership and up-keep of drill-halls requires consideration. Some halls belong exclusively to the Government, some exclusively to corps, and others partly owned by Government and partly by the Volunteers. All halls should, as far as possible, be on the same footing, more especially as regards repairs. A certain sum should be allocated yearly for repair of each drill-hall, *pro rata* either to the value of the hall or the number of Volunteers using it; and this amount should be definitely fixed by regulation.

MEDALS.

The issue of New Zealand war-medals and decorations should be stopped. During the past thirty years all the old soldiers who have earned the rewards should have had their claims satisfied.

One of the conditions for the bestowing of the New Zealand Cross is that a man should have been recommended for it by his Commanding Officer at the time the act of bravery was performed. This decoration represents to the Colonial Forces what the Victoria Cross does to the Imperial troops—the highest possible military decoration; and every care should be taken to safeguard the bestowal of such a high military honour.