

their men, and seem to think that as long as they can give an order it is not their business to see that the men carry it out properly. On the arrival of the non-commissioned officers' Instructors engaged from the Imperial service, I hope to be able to furnish more thorough and systematic instruction, and to impress on the Volunteer non-commissioned officers what their proper duties and responsibilities are. In some corps men are retained as non-commissioned officers on account of their having been a long time in the corps, or of their being useful as secretary to the corps, or being fitted for some duties not connected with the military work of the corps. This custom should be discontinued, and a commanding officer should make it a rule not to retain men in the non-commissioned officer ranks who are inefficient and unwilling to perfect themselves in their military duties. Unless a corps is strong in its non-commissioned officer ranks it can never hope to be smart or efficient.

I have recommended one corps, the Thames Navals, to be disbanded for inefficiency, but so far my recommendation has not been carried out. I have seen no improvement in the corps during my stay in the colony.

A limit should be placed on the age at which men should be retained in active service in corps, and I think that after forty-five years of age men should be transferred to the district reserve, and make room for younger men in the ranks. At the age of fifty they should be altogether retired from the Force.

ENGINEER CORPS.

Equipment for bridging has been supplied to the engineer corps this year, and orders have been sent to England for stores to augment their field equipment. A corps has been raised in Auckland, but so far we have not been able to get one for Wellington. There is no difficulty in raising the men in Wellington, but no gentlemen will come forward to take up the position of officers. There is no qualified Instructor in field engineering in the colony, but instruction is given as far as circumstances permit by the staff of No. 2 Company Permanent Force. Considering everything, the older Engineer Volunteer Corps in the colony turn out and do their work in a very commendable manner.

CYCLE CORPS.

Officers and men of these corps take much interest in their work, and they would be a most useful body in case of active operations having to be carried out. The long bayonet supplied with the Martini-Enfield rifle is quite unsuitable for wear when riding a bicycle, and a supply of rifles with short bayonets has been ordered from England, which will be issued to these corps on receipt.

AMBULANCE CORPS.

Corps now exist in Auckland, Christchurch, and Dunedin, and I hope shortly to raise a corps in Wellington. The establishment of these corps has, I consider, been a great boon to the Volunteer service, as during the camps and heavy gun-practice from the Forts, the officers and men of the corps are at hand to render immediate assistance in case of accident or sudden illness. During the last Easter camps their services were much appreciated.

MEDICAL SERVICE.

Regulations have lately been published for the reorganization of the medical branch. A supply of medical stores has been supplied to each district, which are available for use at camps, and arrangements have been made for a supply of medical necessities to be kept at the forts in case of accidents occurring when practice is being carried out.

BANDS.

The recommendations in my last year's report as regards bands have been carried out.

RIFLE CLUBS.

I have submitted proposals, almost similar to the suggestions contained in my last year's report for the inclusion of rifle clubs in the Defence Forces of the colony. These are practically in accord with those put forward by the President of the New Zealand Rifle Association, and, if carried out, should furnish us with a trained reserve for the Volunteer Force.

NEW ZEALAND RIFLE ASSOCIATION.

This year the meeting of the New Zealand Rifle Association was held at Wanganui, and the camp was under the command of Lieut.-Colonel Newall, who reported to me that the work was carried out in an orderly and business-like manner.

The position of this association with regard to the Government and the Defence Forces seems to me to be a peculiar one. It has for some years received a grant from Government of a certain number of rounds of ammunition and free railway-passes over the Government railways for members of the association who take part in the annual meeting. Each year there seems to be a doubt as to whether the grant should be continued, and this must militate against the financial position of the association. Should the Government grant at any time be withdrawn I anticipate the association will cease to exist for want of funds. The chairman of the association occupies an anomalous position as regards the Defence Force. He is a Volunteer officer actively employed in the command of a mounted battalion, and yet in such matters as the sending a rifle team, composed entirely of men from the Volunteer Force and supposed to represent the shooting strength of the Defence Forces of the colony, to Australia or England, he has been allowed to approach the Government direct with his proposals, and action has been taken by the Government without the Commander of the Forces having been asked for his opinion, or even officially informed of the fact that it was proposed to send a team from the colony until everything was practically settled.