

of the Force to point out and superintend the manner in which the best results may be obtained with the greatest economy of labour and material, for offensive or defensive operations, they *must* be taken out into the field and instructed how to deal with any situation that may arise.

Since I wrote my last annual report (June, 1907), a clever article appeared in the *Royal Engineers Journal*, August, 1907, entitled "Field Engineers for our Next War," which so exactly explains what I endeavoured in a few words to point out that I here quote it: "Field engineers have also a special *tactical* function. This special tactical mission, which requires the very highest type of *spade-rifle* instinct, is the consolidation of the successful infantry assault. Field engineers must make for and occupy or reinforce with their own rifles, and subsequently strengthen artificially, such key or pivot points as a calm review of the tactical situation shows it to be vital to retain at all hazards. The instinctive power of recognition of these pivots or *points d'appui* is not a common gift, and some men never acquire it. It is often represented by the natural inclination to occupy every prominent knob on the terrain."

And again, "The planning and laying-out of the entrenchments requires chiefly *tactical* and in a minor degree *technical* knowledge. The Boer, with the shikari instinct, exemplified this over and over again."

It cannot be supposed that our field engineers, who are nearly all town men, have the "shikari" instinct, and therefore the best means must be adopted to make up for this want by practical training on the ground. Very little instruction is required to teach them the shape and the dimensions of the few simple works that will be needed in the field, and that can be taught, as is done now, indoors, but a great deal of experience is required to enable them to select the best position to occupy. This experience will never be got by digging various descriptions of trenches in flat paddocks or on the sand of the seashore, and I again repeat that it is *where*, not *how*, to dig to which attention must be devoted.

The two companies of submarine mining engineers have been given the opportunity of becoming attached to the garrison artillery divisions at Wellington and Auckland, as extra garrison artillery companies for working searchlights, telephones, &c. In the case of the former this will probably be successful, but in Auckland I understand a new company will probably have to be raised.

Mounted Rifles.

With regard to enrolled strength in comparison to establishment and also attendance at parades this arm of the service comes out much worse than any other. At my inspections throughout the Dominion only 58 per cent. of enrolled strength at date of inspection or 35 per cent. of the establishment of the corps that were inspected turned out.

There are only two live corps that I have been unable to see to date—one on account of wet weather and flooded rivers, and the other did not parade when ordered, owing, I understand, to some mistake in the orders issued from the District Office. There were also a few corps in process of disbandment that had done no work for some time, and were merely waiting to get in Government property before becoming extinct.

The establishment for the Dominion at the end of the Volunteer year was 6,006, the actual strength 3,923, and the total number paraded for inspection only 1,849, or 30 per cent. of establishment, and 47 per cent. of strength. This I need hardly point out is an entirely unsatisfactory state.

With regard to efficiency, the squadrons vary from a fair number that in knowledge of drill, in discipline, uniformity of turn-out, and real usefulness in the field, considering the very short time they have to train, are in a most satisfactory state, to some few that are in all respects quite useless, being without discipline or knowledge and very slack and slovenly in turn-out and appearance. The want of discipline and general slackness is, of course, the fault of the officers, who for some cause are not fit for the position, but in several cases now it seems impossible for even the good keen officer to get decent musters, and therefore good results, and some have apparently lost heart and got slack themselves in consequence.

In the great majority of squadrons more knowledge of what are known as "detached duties"—*i.e.*, outpost, advanced, rear and flank guards, patrols, &c., and also of fire tactics and fire control, is required by all ranks, especially officers and N.C.O.s, and in these duties, though theory can be easily studied indoors, they can only become proficient in the field.

I have found that in a surprisingly large number of instances the squadron sergeant-major, who should be the smartest man in the squadron and a pattern to all in discipline, knowledge, and general smartness, is one of the most useless. I have often inquired why he was selected, and have been told, "Oh! he is a good chap, and they all like him, and wanted him; he has been in the squadron for a long time, and we didn't know what to do with him, so we made him sergeant-major," or something to that effect. This, I feel sure, will in many cases account for the general slackness in everything which is apparent in some corps, and I conclude is a consequence of the system of the election of officers, the assumption being that if the men have a voice in the selection of officers they should also have a voice in the selection of N.C.O.s, and of course this soon ruins a corps.

I also regret very much to find that the mounted rifles, who, almost without exception, were accustomed to train by remaining in camp and the field for a full seven days, now, in a great and increasing number, merely come to camp in the evening and go to their ordinary work in the daytime. This was stopped for the infantry, and their camps done away with, as it was considered, and undoubtedly was, a waste of money. It is a much greater waste of money when applied to mounted rifles, as the horses have to be fed as well as the men, and as they (the mounted rifles) certainly are less able to learn their work at night it should be put a stop to at once. Also it is entirely unfair to those corps that train as they are expected to train.