

MEMORANDUM ON THE DEFENCE OF AUSTRALIA.

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G.C.M.G., G.C.I.E., ETC.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

I. In compliance with the invitation of the Commonwealth Government to visit and inspect the existing military forces and system in Australia, and subsequently to give them the benefit of my experience and advice regarding the development of their latest scheme of defence, I reached Port Darwin on the 21st December, and have since visited military camps in every State.

II. The Minister of Defence kindly arranged for the assembly of troops in these camps on dates to meet my convenience, and, although the season was perhaps exceptionally trying, and not the most suitable for both the men and their employers, good musters were everywhere obtained.

III. My best thanks are due for the facilities afforded me on all occasions to see the troops and fixed defences, as well as for the assistance given me by General Hoad and all the senior Australian officers in my study of the existing military system and local conditions in this country.

IV. Having had considerable experience of Australians working in the field during the South African war, I was not surprised to find what excellent material existed amongst the young manhood of Australia, from whom the defenders of their country must come. I noticed in the camps the great keenness displayed by all ranks in rendering themselves proficient, and in applying the military knowledge they had acquired to the practical conditions of work on the manœuvre ground.

V. In these days, however, excellent fighting-material and the greatest zeal, though indispensable adjuncts, are not of themselves sufficient to enable a force to take the field against thoroughly trained regular troops with any chance of success.

VI. I do not intend to criticize in any detail what I saw in the various camps of exercise, but a great part of my suggestions for the training and organization of the Australian Citizen Forces, in Part I of this paper, have been devised to meet the principal defects I observed, and to enable these camps of exercise in the future to be really instructional, as well as a thorough test of the work done during the year in their home training.

VII. Success in any technical career can only be achieved after a thorough elementary grounding, and this is, perhaps, more marked in the military than in any other profession. The ABC must be carefully studied and practised, so as to understand how to learn properly, as well as how to teach. It is only by correcting mistakes on the spot, and clearly explaining their nature and results, as well as how they should be avoided, that practical instruction can be given in camps both to officers and men.

VIII. The training I saw in the camps indicated that there was a distinct tendency to go too fast, and to neglect essential preliminaries of training for more advanced studies, which the troops engaged were not capable of carrying out properly.

IX. The conclusion I have come to is, shortly, that the present forces are inadequate in numbers, training, organization, and munitions of war to defend Australia from the dangers that are due to the present conditions that prevail in the country, as well as to its isolated position.

X. The danger of want of population and consequent ineffective occupation in many parts of the country is, in my opinion, a most serious existing condition in Australia, as it may greatly imperil the stability of the present state of affairs in the Commonwealth. I feel, however, that this is so well known and recognised that I need not emphasize it further.

XI. I would also mention that railway-construction has, while developing the country, resulted in lines that would appear to be more favourable to an enemy invading Australia than to the defence of the country. Different gauges in most of the States isolate each system, and the want of systematic interior connection makes the present lines running inland of little use for defence, though possibly of considerable value to an enemy who would have temporary command of the sea.

XII. The new Defence Act will give sufficient numbers to defend the country effectively if the Force provided under it is efficiently trained, organized, and equipped. It must, however, be distinctly recognised that a National Force maintained at a high standard of efficiency can only be produced by the work of years, and that such work must be steady and continuous; any divergence from the policy decided on may, and probably will, lead to chaos and useless expenditure of money.

XIII. If plans and essential preparations have been deferred until an emergency arises, it will then be found too late to act, because the strain of passing from peace to war will entirely absorb the energies of all engaged, even when every possible contingency has been foreseen.

XIV. Before putting these recommendations forward, I have carefully considered their financial aspect, and the burden that will thereby be thrown on the country for its defence. The annual cost when the Force would be in full working-order, after passing through the less costly transition period, works out to practically the same as the total sum contemplated under the Defence Bill—viz., £1,742,000.

XV. I have divided my subject into—

Part I.—Recommendations.

Part II.—Transition Period.

Part III.—Fixed Defences, which is confidential.*

XVI. In concluding these introductory remarks, I sincerely hope that the organization I have proposed in Part I may meet the requirements of Australia in forming an efficient National Force for the defence of the country; and I shall always take the greatest interest in the future of the national forces of Australia, and hope to be able to give the Commonwealth Government at any time such further assistance as may be in my power.

KITCHENER, F.M.

Melbourne, 12th February, 1910.

* Printed separately.