

APPENDIX K.

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF VETERINARY SERVICES.

Headquarters, New Zealand Military Forces, Veterinary Service and Remounts,
Wellington, 9th May, 1913.

The Quartermaster-General, Defence Department, Wellington.

I HAVE the honour to submit the following report on the work of the New Zealand Veterinary Corps during the past year.

The corps has been maintained at practically its normal strength, but it would be of advantage if one or two more officers resident in Otago could be enrolled. I was recently compelled to send an officer from the North Island to Otago for camp duty, and this necessity should not arise. I hope to overcome this difficulty during the present year.

The duties carried out have been principally in connection with the purchase of remounts, attendance at Mounted camps, and the delivery of lectures. The horses purchased have been for Artillery purposes, and though plenty of horses fully capable of carrying out the work required were offered, it was found a matter of considerable difficulty to secure animals of uniform type and possessing the style and carriage desired. However, a number of horses of good class were obtained.

The experience of Veterinary officers attending camps shows that a large percentage of casualties arise from preventable, and therefore reducible, causes. Foremost amongst these are injuries sustained through kicks received in the horse lines, and also an increasingly large number of injuries due to improperly fitted saddles, to which attention has already been directed in former reports. The importance of properly fitted saddles cannot be overestimated. It is desirable also that all saddles should be as far as possible of approved uniform pattern. Very frequently the unequally distributed pressure, terminating in sore back, follows as a result of the bad condition of the saddles, and in particular to the lack of adequate stuffing in the saddle-panels. In several instances the results following such defects could be rectified on the spot, if the owners possessed a correct knowledge of locating the exact site of the offending portion of the pannel, and resort to the method of "chambering" it. By this means the undue pressure may be relieved and the horse enabled to continue at work. The necessity for having properly qualified saddlers in attendance at all Mounted camps is again strongly urged. Equally, or perhaps even more, important is the provision of an adequate number of farriers. Much inconvenience has been at times caused through the paucity of farriers, obviously a great disadvantage where a number of Mounted men are concerned; and, further, a supply of ready-made horse-shoes should be always provided for use while in camp. In regard to the quality of the horses themselves, a proportion of these are of quite unsuitable type, being small undersized animals, incapable of carrying the weight required under service conditions; on the other hand, some horses brought into camp are coarse, heavy, rough, underbred animals showing too much draught blood. There are notable exceptions, and in certain regiments, especially, one is pleased to note the presence of a majority of serviceable mounts well up to standard requirements. Naturally, under conditions necessitating obligatory service, one probably cannot look for the same high average standard of remount as even under a Volunteer system, but certainly there is still plenty of scope for improvement in this direction, especially in some districts. The arrangements for feeding horses in camp are open to some criticism. These sometimes entail an amount of waste, which should be avoidable, besides leading to accidents, such as kicks already alluded to, through horses attempting to take feed from each other. In place of the open method of feeding from sacks in use in some instances, properly fitted nosebags of approved pattern should be supplied. There is not the least doubt that the saving in wastage of feed would go far to cover the initial cost of such provision. The large number of casualties occurring through kicks would be greatly reduced if heel-ropes were in use. The importance of having horses properly conditioned before coming into camp is a point usually overlooked by the men. Want of condition may lead to much trouble in the way of sore backs and galls when the horses are called upon to undergo the extra exertion entailed by training when in camp. Many of the mounts have obviously been brought in straight from grass, and being consequently unaccustomed to the hard and more stimulating feed supplied in camps, it takes some days for the tissues of the back and system to adapt themselves to the altered dietetic conditions, and meanwhile they are in a condition to be easily bruised, and the animal is more likely to sustain other injuries, such as more or less severe sprains for instance.

Naturally I fully realize that many of the men serving in the Mounted ranks have not the necessary knowledge of horse-mastership which would enable them to avoid errors of this nature, and in this connection I would emphasize the importance of providing for instruction in matters of horse-mastership generally to be given to officers and men in the various military centres of New Zealand. It is also highly desirable to secure the services of a staff of trained lay assistants, who would be attached to and form part of the Veterinary Corps, thus placing it on a similar footing to that obtaining in the Army Veterinary Corps of other countries. Certain of the junior lay officials of the Veterinary Division of the Department of Agriculture have already signified their willingness to join the corps in consideration of the training they would receive in military veterinary science. Their services would be of great value as dressers and general assistants, and, as they would form part of the personnel of the corps, their services in this capacity should absolve them from further obligatory training in the combatant Forces.