

(c.) Railway Battalions.

The Railway Battalions have made rapid progress during the past year, and are now completely clothed, armed, and equipped. A Staff Officer and four Permanent Engineer non-commissioned officers have been appointed to assist in the administration and training of the battalions.

Great keenness has been shown by the officers, non-commissioned officers, and men, and a real effort is being made in the direction of efficiency. Some eighty officers and non-commissioned officers of the two battalions have lately been encamped at Mahanga Bay, Port Nicholson, for a course of instruction.

The guards of honour furnished for the Inspector-General by these battalions during his tour elicited his especial commendation.

(d.) Post and Telegraph Corps.

It has recently been decided to transfer the Post and Telegraph Corps to the Corps of New Zealand Engineers. The officers of this corps are displaying interest in the work, and recently held a three-days conference in Wellington to discuss the lines on which the future working of the corps should be carried out. The duties of the corps have been defined, and a syllabus of instruction, and for examination for promotion, has been prepared. The important duties which these two battalions would fulfil in war renders it all the more necessary that their training in peace should be as thorough and complete as possible.

It should not be necessary for the Defence Department to provide technical equipment to any great extent either for this corps or for the Railway Battalions.

8. INFANTRY.

The Inspector-General has reported very fully on this arm (*vide* paragraphs 112 to 118 of his report, also paragraph 94, which applies specially to the Infantry). I have little to add except that I was glad to notice an improvement in march discipline, and that work in the field was usually carried out in marching order. In this connection a trek done by the troops at the Otago casual camp, who carried their rations and wore full marching order throughout the three days for which they were out, deserves mention.

9. MUSKETRY.

Good progress in musketry training has been made this year, and a detailed schedule by districts and units will be found in Appendix E, setting forth the numbers who fully completed their annual course on the range, those partially completed, and those not exercised. The musketry course was much interfered with by the strikes, and the lack of range accommodation was in some cases a factor which contributed to the comparatively large number of men who were not exercised. But I am not altogether satisfied that every possible effort was made in all cases by squadron and company officers to exercise all their men, or that sufficient use was made of short ranges where full-sized ones were not available.

Some units, as a whole, do not appear to have taken the necessary steps to exercise as many of their men as possible, and this is remarkable in two instances, since they are regiments concentrated in a town with an adequate range within easy reach. Steps will be taken to reduce the numbers not exercised before next year.

It is to be regretted that, owing to insufficient and proper range accommodation, it was not possible to carry out the more important field practices. The lack of range accommodation, though it can be, and is, made up for to a great extent by the use of short ranges, is a serious question, and I recommend that more money should be spent in this direction.

The four Musketry Instructors appointed last year have fully justified their selection, and have done excellent work with both Territorials and Cadets. The Chief of the General Staff has lately held a conference with them, in which the subject was fully considered from the past year's experience. As the musketry course was found satisfactory, it was decided to make no change in it this year. The Musketry Instructors report that Territorials and Cadets find no difficulty in shooting at the figure target; in fact, that they like it from a sporting point of view.

In the coming year it is hoped to make more use of miniature ranges, especially for the younger Cadets, and the purchase of a number of .22-bore rifles of the standard pattern has been approved for the purpose.

I would call special attention to the following extracts:—

(1.) From the report of the Inspector-General of the Oversea Forces: "Successful rifle meetings have been held by the Dominion Rifle Association, at District Headquarters, and in areas. I personally favour the latter, as they are easy of access to the majority of the men, and afford more encouragement for the moderate shot than larger meetings."

(2.) From the 1913 report of Brigadier-General Beyers, Commandant-General of the Active Citizen Force of the Union of South Africa, under the heading "Central and Provincial Bisleys": "I am convinced that much better results in the direction of encouraging rifle shooting will accrue from money spent on provincial, or even still more decentralized, gatherings. The *sole* [the italics are mine] aim should be to afford facilities and incentive to the novice and average shot to attain a higher standard of efficiency, and this can be better achieved by financially supporting local competitions than by apportioning one large sum to a central meeting to find its way into the pockets of a limited number of highly expert marksmen."