

63. DEFENCE VESSELS.

The Defence vessels have been fully employed during the year, or have rendered valuable service which could only have been obtained at higher cost by the use of hired vessels in their place. The outbreak of war and contingent establishment of examination services at the defended ports, also the additional services involved by the mobilization of the Coast Defence troops and manning of the forts, necessitated the employment of other vessels as detailed below to meet all requirements; and in this connection the Department received very great assistance from several highly public-spirited gentlemen and bodies, who most generously placed launches or vessels at our disposal.

At Auckland, owing to the cost of keeping this vessel in repair, compared with the work required by this Department under ordinary conditions and that obtained from other State Departments, it had been decided to lay up the s.s. "Lady Roberts." As, however, the maintenance of the examination service required the use of a steamer, it was decided to temporarily repair the "Lady Roberts," which then carried out the duty of examination-vessel from September. The hire of a suitable examination-vessel for the period would, it is estimated, have cost £3,175, while the cost of repair and upkeep, &c., of the "Lady Roberts" during this service amounted to £1,493 18s. 3d., her retention in commission thus effecting a considerable saving. The New Zealand Power Boat Association, Auckland, placed several of its motor-boats at the disposal of the local Military authorities for harbour patrol and other services.

The s.s. "Janie Seddon" performed the duties of examination-vessel at Wellington, prior to which she carried out the ordinary departmental work of conveying troops and explosives, towing targets, &c., and such work as was required by other Departments, being advantageously employed throughout the year. The hire of a vessel to tender the "Janie Seddon" while on examination service in respect to relief crews, coal, water, &c., and for carrying out such other services as were entailed by the mobilization of the Garrison Artillery at the forts, &c., was necessary, and for this purpose the s.s. "Riwaka" was employed. The establishment of the internment camp for war prisoners on Somes Island also necessitated the maintenance of regular transport thereto.

At Lyttelton the hire of an examination-vessel was necessary. All other work in connection with the port defences was carried out by the Defence launch, except when heavy weather necessitated the employment of a larger vessel.

At Port Chalmers the Defence launch has been fully employed on the ordinary services of the station, and since the commencement of hostilities, with the launch "Tangaroa," belonging to Mr. Alexander Garden, has maintained communication and the transport of lighter stores to the Heads. The "Tangaroa" proved particularly useful in heavy weather, when the Defence launch could not be used, the Department bearing running-expenses.

The Otago Harbour Board loaned to the Department the s.s. "Plucky," this vessel carrying out the service of examination-vessel, wages and upkeep being met by the Department. For the transport of troops to the Heads on mobilization, and the transshipping from time to time of stores and gun ammunition in bulk at this port, it was here necessary to hire the s.s. "Tarewai."

64. VETERINARY SERVICES AND REMOUNTS.

There has been some improvement in the class of horse brought into the Territorial camps during the year. The system of valuation and compensation to owners in the event of serious accidents or death occurring among the horses, and also the fact, now well known throughout the Territorial Forces, that sick and injured animals receive skilled attention while in camp, have evidently helped considerably in this direction.

In certain of the Territorial training-camps recently held the condition of the horses has been poor. This has been mainly the result of scarcity of feed, caused by an exceptional period of drought. The European war has led to great demands being made upon the resources of the New Zealand Veterinary Corps. In common with other branches of the Defence Department, the whole of the members of the Veterinary Corps readily offered themselves for service with the Expeditionary Force. Their spirited and energetic response is especially worthy of mention. The exigencies of the Department of Agriculture, to which the majority of the officers belong, did not permit certain of the applicants to leave the country, but each has contributed his share in effectively carrying out the various duties devolving upon the corps by efficiently performing the work assigned to him. Such duties comprise the purchase of remounts, supervision of horse-accommodation on transports, provision of veterinary equipment, and training of personnel.

Horses have been transported with an average loss amounting to less than 2 per cent. of the total number. This result must be considered highly satisfactory, and constitutes a performance most creditable to all concerned. The class of horses purchased for service with the Expeditionary Forces has been, on the whole, eminently suitable for the purpose in view, and no great difficulty has been experienced in securing sufficient numbers. In this connection mention must be made of the excellent services rendered by Inspectors of Stock appointed from the Department of Agriculture as purchasing officers, and also by certain veterinary surgeons in private practice, to whom the Department's thanks are due for their great assistance in enabling such large numbers of horses to be assembled. The New Zealand Farmers' Union, through their executive officers, rendered invaluable assistance in rapidly obtaining large numbers of horses in the early days of the war. To the donors of gift horses it is desired also to express sincere appreciation.

It is very satisfactory to note that all the horses required have been obtained without difficulty, and it is evident that an ample supply of suitable horses is still available in the Dominion. A remount depot has been established at Upper Hutt.