

1916.

NEW ZEALAND.

DISCHARGED SOLDIERS' INFORMATION DEPARTMENT

(MEMORANDUM REGARDING THE ORGANIZATION AND OPERATIONS OF THE).

*Laid on the Table of the House by Leave.*Discharged Soldiers' Information Department,
Wellington, 2nd May, 1916.

AMONGST the problems created by the war none are of greater importance than those connected with the reabsorption of the soldiers in the industrial life of the community after their period of military duty is ended. The honour and the interests of the whole body of the citizens are alike involved in the successful solution of the question, and the more rapidly and efficiently the reabsorption takes place the speedier will be the recovery from the losses resulting from the war and from the partial arrest of development occasioned by the withdrawal of such large numbers of the most active members of the community from their normal avocations.

To meet the duty falling upon the country in respect of this work it was decided by Government that a separate Department of State should be created to deal specially with the problem of obtaining employment for returned soldiers discharged from further military service. In the preliminary memorandum of instructions drawn up for the guidance of the new Department special stress was laid upon the point that no man was to be missed. In order to carry out this principle it was necessary to compile as rapidly as possible a complete register of all men who had returned to the Dominion, and to keep this register up to date by the addition of the fresh drafts arriving by each successive transport.

COMMENCEMENT OF OPERATIONS.

The Department commenced operations towards the end of August last year. At this time about seven hundred men had returned from the scene of operations, and the task of compiling the register was a somewhat slow and laborious one. The files of the Base Records Office of the Defence Department were freely placed at the disposal of the Information Department, but as these files were necessarily under constant action in the Defence Department itself considerable time was consumed in hunting out particulars which, under more favourable circumstances, would not have been a very formidable undertaking. The work of writing up and checking the register has been undertaken from the outset by a small voluntary staff of officers of the Government Insurance Department, over military age, who spontaneously offered to work gratuitously in their spare time at any duties in which the Government could utilize their services. I may here add that this work is still systematically carried on, and the register, containing now over four thousand names, is exclusively the work of these gentlemen, and is an abiding testimony to their perseverance and unobtrusive sense of duty.

ARRANGEMENTS FOR BOARDING TRANSPORTS ON ARRIVAL.

In order to obviate for the future the difficulties which had been experienced in compiling the register of returned men from the individual files, arrangements were made for officers of the Department to board the future transports on arrival, and collect in rough form from the men themselves the necessary information. Subsequently this system was further improved by arranging to have the bulk of the information listed by the military authorities on board the transports while still at sea. These lists are completed by the Information Department officers on arrival of the transport in port, and from them the cards which constitute the Department's register are immediately written up by the voluntary staff already described.