

Chapter Three:

Trial by Fire, 1909-1919

It must be remembered that the New Zealand Territorial Force is the first line of defence of the Dominion after the Imperial Navy. Its position cannot be fairly compared with that of the Territorial Force in the United Kingdom, which has the Regular Army and Special Reserve in front of it. The New Zealand Territorial Force must be able to take to the field at once on the outbreak of war.

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The Hauraki Regiment emerged from its first trial by fire, the Boer War, bloodied but with morale high in all its ranks. Unfortunately, the enthusiasm of Volunteering that had accompanied the war soon waned as decline in government support, as unit lethargy, and public apathy affected the Regiment's activities. The years immediately following the South African war, like those succeeding the First and Second World Wars, witnessed a reaction against war and a consequential deterioration in the efficiency of New Zealand's Territorial Force.

By 1906, when Major-General J. N. Babington's turn ended as Commandant of New Zealand's Land Forces, it had become obvious to the General Staff that the Hauraki Regiment belonged to an unbalanced and inefficient Volunteer Force that only simulated an army. The Volunteers provided a strength of 13,000 instead of the 18,000 required, and Babington had identified an increased recruiting problem, due to worsening employer-employee relations; too much indoor infantry training, poor physical health and difficulty in obtaining officers. He noted that Volunteer Officers were difficult to obtain because 'no leisured class — as in England — practically exists, and every Volunteer officer has his own private business to attend to'.² The General also lamented a lack of entrenching tools that made vital trench digging exercises impossible.

In 1907 the government responded by setting up a Council of Defence, presided over by the Prime Minister, Sir Joseph

Ward, and made up of four military members. The new Council was still in favour of a 'purely voluntary' system³, but warned:

... Volunteering had had its last chance. If the general public are in earnest as to defence, they must themselves assist and ensure that under the Volunteer system sufficient enlistment is made, and that once men are enlisted they attend regularly. The alternative is a system of universal or compulsory training, whereby the burden of service in the Defence Forces will be more evenly distributed.⁴

The Volunteer Army had outlived its usefulness. The Hauraki Regiment needed trained officers and an end to the system of officer election. It needed a more efficient training plan, improved equipment and, above all, a ready supply of recruits. In 1909 a new Defence Act replaced the fifty-two year old Volunteer Force with a Territorial Force, both universal and compulsory for all New Zealand males.

Under the new scheme of compulsory military training every New Zealand male, from the age of twelve to the age of twenty-five was required to undergo military training, and from twenty-five to thirty years remain on the Reserve. From the age of twelve to the age of fourteen boys served as Junior Cadets, and performed a certain amount of military training, mainly physical drill and elementary rifle exercises. This group came under the direction of Education Department, not of the army. However, on reaching the age of fourteen, or on leaving primary school, boys were transferred to the Senior Cadets, and became members of the military force. Senior Cadets were required to attend weekly parades and were subject to military discipline. The General Officer Commanding believed that familiarity with army customs and discipline, and attention to physical fitness during school years, would bring young men into the Territorial Regiments, at the age of eighteen, disciplined, fit and easily absorbed into trained regiments.

What did the government require of these new Territorial Army conscripts? All ranks of the Hauraki Regiment were required to attend annually, thirty periods of instruction, each of one-and-a-half hours duration. Twelve half-days or six whole-days of field exercises were obligatory, with emphasis on route marching, entrenching, signalling and driving. Attendance at an annual seven days training camp and a prescribed course of musketry were also compulsory.