

G. Von Tempsky recommending establishment of a Volunteer Force

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Complement to Private Letter – written in Auckland 30 Jun 1866

On the employment of Volunteer forces for Maori warfare

As there is a probability of all the Imperial Troops being withdrawn from this colony eventually and as the financial condition of the colony may not permit the cost of an adequate force of permanent colonial troops – the chief security for the colonists is to be looked for in its volunteer element.

The great desideratum required in forces employed against Maoris is “individual intelligence”, to enable troops to compete with a foe whose great forte consists in the completeness of his “individual action”, the result of an inherited instinct for warfare, which has been handed down from generations of warriors – an instinct that guides the meanest Maori to do the right thing in the right place and at the right time, making each man as it were comprise within himself all the qualities of a general, of a staff or field officer and of a private soldier. It was this peculiarity that made the Maori so formidable an opponent to regular troops – in whom discipline, aiming at the employment of masses had undermined and neutralised the principle of individual action. The bonds of discipline have to be loosened to give scope to the development of self-guided action; the soldier has to be “re-individualised” to feel that confidence in himself which is indispensable in bush and all guerrilla warfare.

“Individual intelligence” forming thus the sine-qua-non of the formation of an effective opponent to Maoris, the employment of Volunteers will therefore be preferable to that of Militia troops, because in the former is to be found in a greater degree this requisite intelligence than in the latter, also the former acquire easily an elastic discipline, eminently suitable for the work required of them; and such form of discipline sits better upon volunteers than on the Militia who must naturally have recourse to a purely military discipline for their organisations.

The volunteers of Country districts, from their experience of bush-life, from frequent contact with Maoris, from cattle and pig hunting and their general hardy habits of life, afford of themselves well qualified elements for Maori warfare; once drafted into the Militia much of these excellent, self-dependent qualities are lost, from causes already named. If volunteering were made attractive to the proper class of men not one of them would wait to be drafted into the Militia.

The volunteers of towns though intelligent and full of spirit are deficient in hardihood; this however can be obviated by gymnastic training (#1); their inexperience of the bush can be remedied by occasional exercise and experimental manoeuvres in forest land.

At present the numbers of volunteers, both of country and town districts are inadequate for our requirements for many reasons, amongst others may be quoted the following.

In England, after the first impulse of an impending invasion had subsided, the Volunteer movement has been kept alive by the innate tendency of the individual to see himself an object of public interest, becoming arrayed and accoutred as a future defender of his home and hearth – a proud position, obtained at comparatively small cost. To the colonial mind, a mind invariably of practical and material tendencies, pressing always to an immediate result, neither the prospective object of ultimate utility, or personal vanity are sufficient to induce the individual to make that sacrifice of time precious to Colonists but required for Volunteer training.

The present training of Volunteers here has been based too much on parade alone – and people have felt instinctively that such training is only time wasted. Once prove to them that Volunteer training will make them healthier men and soldiers fitted for all present and future requirements, capable of affording a real protection to Colonial property then the ranks of our Volunteers will be swelled by numbers more than adequate for all our purposes.

To this end the teaching of Volunteers should have something else in it besides the present incomplete imitation of the drill of regulars. After having become as perfect shots as possible, they should be taught the Indian file tactics (#2) and all the details of skirmishing over broken, wooded or open ground; the cautions against ambushes and surprises; the art of tracking and finding their way by the sun, the stars, the wind and all those signs in which their opponents are versed. Bayonet exercise should not be neglected to counteract “the dread of the tomahawk”, or give at least that confidence that steel imparts to the hand when “a last resource” is required.

If therefore the Volunteer movement were encouraged, by placing the management of it in the hands of a person who has faith and experience in the principles laid down, and such man is empowered to carry out these principles, the Government might safely rely upon the possession of a trusty and inexpensive force fitted, if necessary to meet all probable emergencies.

It is raised as an objection against the employment of a Volunteer force, that so many must make sacrifice of the profits of their several professions or trades. But when we look to our peculiar circumstances and the contingency of a future Maori war, we must acknowledge that in such case we should be compelled as a matter of duty and necessity to lay aside all ordinary occupations until the Native question was settled.

There can be no doubt that Volunteer forces thus employed would be anxious to return as soon as possible to their legitimate avocations, and they would lose no time in completing their work, whereas to the regularly paid and enlisted Colonial soldier a judicious protraction of a war might not be unacceptable – and those who would avoid the employment of Volunteer forces on the score of mercy to the Maoris would find their aim totally frustrated by the employment of forces whose real does not lie in a peace.

#1 Gymnastic training

The Kabyl of Algeria forced upon the French army the necessity of gymnastic training; in my opinion the Maori does the same on us.

#2 Indian file tactics

Compiled by myself from long experience in N. A. Indian warfare. Colonel Havelock who was considered a good judge of tactical theories considered my drill the only one fit for this country.

Enclosed in the file is a copy of a newspaper article from the Daily Southern Cross of 28 May 1866 titled “Gymnastics and Volunteers.” Von Tempsky comments that “On establishing the Gymnastic in Auckland, (which is now a complete success) I wrote this article for the benefit of the Club on May 28.”

Enough has been said and written on the general good that will result from a gymnastic institution in our community; we intend, however, now to draw the attention of the public to one aspect of such institutions, whereby it will be seen that the particular circumstances of our political position even require gymnastic institutions as one of the most important things to be attended to.

Our position amongst tribes of warlike aboriginals will entail upon us, for sometime to come, the necessity of being prepared for war – of being, in fact, ever ready and fit to cope with an agile and hardy opponent. When the French went to Algeria, the peculiar nature of their opponents, the Bedouins and Arabs of Northern Africa, excelling in feats of agility and strength, brought about the formation of the Zouave troops, whose gymnastic training enabled them to match the natural qualities of the children of the desert. It must be fresh in the memory of all, how Zouaves conquered the clumsy strength of Austrians at Solferino, and how a few handfuls of Maoris repeatedly overmatched large numbers of the bravest troops in the world. It is now a generally acknowledged fact, in the military world of Europe, that light infantry will be the most important arm in any future contest where the new weapons will have fair play; artillery, once first in importance, is expected to stand then only second. Light infantry, as understood now by European authorities, in military matters, means a body of men who, by means of gymnastic training (now generally adopted in the French and Prussian armies, and partially in the English), are enabled to run, crawl, or jump from cover to cover, cat-like, without loss of wind; thus alone must skirmishing be carried on. The other requisite is a capability for long and rapid marches, as the new tactics of the day are entirely based upon rapidity of movement, and loose formation in action.

We ask any one now, how our soldiers could perform such requisites (which to the meanest military understanding are identical with the very Maori tactics that have repeatedly beaten us), if neither their training, nor their armament or accoutrement, had the slightest affinity to the work for them to perform?

Civilisation perfects but the engines of war: the men that wield them must be artificially kept up to the natural training of the savage; or else, even with far inferior engines of war, the latter will beat the enlisted man. “A naked savage” means a consummate warrior, if the race possesses at all any stamina.

That gymnastic training will, therefore, be particularly required in all contests with the warriors of nature has, we hope, been proved. How this necessity applies still more closely to the requirements of our immediate future we shall now advert to.

There is but little doubt that in a short time the whole of the Imperial Troops will be withdrawn. Whatever colonial force may be maintained must necessarily be so small, that our mainstay, our anchor of security, will consist of our volunteer forces. For Maori warfare the dash, the intelligence, the physical pliability of the volunteer element is preferable to that of the militia, if the young men of the former have tendencies to muscular Christianity. But to make volunteer forces really efficient when wanted, they must be kept in a constant status of bodily training, such as gymnastic exercise alone can furnish. There is not the slightest doubt that the determination, pluck, and enterprise of the individual are materially deteriorated when a long day's march draws, hour after hour, upon the unprepared stamina of a young man. It is but a chilly comfort after all, even for the veteran, when he knows that, after a laborious march, at best the only welcome awaiting him is a preparation of lead “hot” and steel “cold” for the empty stomach. It is therefore requisite that fatigue should sit easily on his stomach in the first instance; secondly, that after the labour of catching your hare (a hide-and-seek game peculiarly tedious in New Zealand), he should have sufficient stomach left to “cook” this hare by the harassing process of skirmishing in high fern or bush; for independently of the power of will required for this work, much agility, pliability, and endurance of body are required, to skirmish on a par with our New Zealand opponents. Nothing but the horizontal bar, the parallel bar – words, we hope to see yet as household words in New Zealand – can enable the civilised man, of town habits and occupations, to hold his own with his neighbours of the Brown family, under such circumstances.

If we cast a glance into the future – a future that now seems unavoidable, if European interests still further withdraw England's care or interests from its antipodean possessions; - we refer to the chance of being disowned; - what will be our main reliance but the element that saved England from the annoyance of a French invasion, the Volunteer movement? The regular soldier has much in the routine of his daily avocations that gives him a certain fund of endurance; the Volunteer has nothing except his voluntary exertions to the same end; and how could he turn them to better account, or act more conscientiously – that is to say, patriotically – than by devoting his spare time to keeping himself in a fit state to perform his duty, by means of an artificial training so time-saving and efficient as gymnastics?
