

THE RUSSIAN "SCARE"

Preparations for War in 1885

By G. J. WESCOTT.



IN 1885 it was generally believed that the Russian Fleet was moving to attack Australia. The Defence department made arrangements to meet the danger. The telegraph and telephone systems were in their infancy, and various methods had to be adopted to ensure that the defence forces might be called for service with as little delay as possible. The help of the police force and the fire brigades was obtained.

In the early '80's candidates for the police force had to serve for at least two years in the Victoria Permanent Artillery to become eligible, so that the police force contained many trained soldiers. In March, 1885, the following order from the Defence department was sent to the chief commissioner of police (Mr. H. M. Chomley):—

Military Alarm.

"The alarm signal will be six guns from the saluting battery, Government Domain, fired in groups of two guns in rapid succession. One-minute intervals between every two guns.

"The fire brigade will take up the alarm by 'bell-ringing,' which will be a continuous ringing for 15 minutes.

"The Officer Commanding, Victoria Artillery, will, as soon as the guns are fired, communicate by telephone with the police at Russell street, requesting them to send the military alarms to each fire station.

"On the alarm signal sounding in Melbourne the fire brigades at Williams Town, Queens Cliffe, Drysdale, Footscray, Geelong, Ballarat, Castlemaine, Sandhurst (now Bendigo), Belfast (now Port Fairy), and Warrnambool will be directed from the Central Telegraph Office to repeat the signal.

"Troops will immediately muster as fol-

lows, with arms, accoutrements, and helmets, and await orders:—

"Victoria Artillery.—Victoria Barracks.

"Field Artillery Brigade.—Each battery at their respective orderly room.

"Williams Town and Footscray Garrison Battery.—Men residing at Williams Town, in Williams Town Battery; those residing at or near Melbourne, at Victoria Barracks.

"Small arms ammunition for the Williams Town Battery should be in the magazine at Williams Town Battery.

"Engineers.—At Engineers' Depot, Wellington parade; 1st and 2nd Battalion, N. Rifles, at Victoria Barracks; Country Corps and Detachments, at their respective orderly rooms.

"By order,

"T. H. Brownrigg, Lt. Col.

"Ass't. Adj.-General."

The order was closely followed, in the police department, by the issue of a circular memorandum, dated March 20, from the superintendent of the Melbourne District. It read as follows:—

"The within particulars of instruction for the different military bodies are forwarded for the information of the officer in charge. On the alarm guns being fired the police named in the list of this date will proceed at once to Russell street, there to await instructions. Should there be no members of the local fire brigade at hand to ring the firebell, the police must search out for one who must be brought to the place with all possible speed. All the carbines and ammunition at the various stations are to be sent to Russell street.

"(Signed), Jno. Sadler,

"Superintendent of Police."

There followed a list of constables' names.

This circular was followed on April 6 by an urgent memorandum, which read:—

"Constable Irwin, 773, will report him-

(self at Russell Street Barracks for duty at

self at Russell Street Barracks for duty at 10 a.m. to-morrow for the purpose of doing a fortnight's guard duty at the powder magazine, Braybrook. A constable from Prahran (single, if possible) whose name is not on the military alarm (signal list) will report at the same time and place for similar duty. Both constables will take their bedding and dark lanterns with them. The depot cart will be at Russell street at the above hour to convey the men to their destination. If a single man whose name is not on the military alarm signal list is not available at Prahran, one of the latter must go (Sergeant Joyce or Sergeant Green).

"(Signed) Wm. Acton, Inspector."

On April 14 an additional list of names was issued, to be added to the military alarm signal list.

Further preparations were made on April 24, when the chief commissioner of police issued the following memorandum:—

"For the information of the Government I wish to be informed as to the members of the police force who are, in case of war being declared, willing to join the militia for temporary service therein. In the event of their joining the militia it is to be understood that their existing rights and privileges as members of the police force shall be preserved to them and their pay will not be less than they are now receiving. I beg Mr. Sadler will submit a return from the Melbourne District with the least possible delay. The return must give signatures of officers, sub-officers, and constables."

H. M. Chomley,

Chief Commissioner of Police.

This instruction was sent to the officers in charge of every police district, and from them to each station in Victoria, and there is no doubt that there was a good response from the members of the force. The list supplied from Prahran station was signed by the following:— 474, Sergeant Green, Senior-constables Cahill, 2050; Connell, 241; and Raleigh, 2341; Constables Dainty, 3610; Anker, 3219; McCarthy, 3352; Proudfoot, 3507; Brennan, 2848; Stannage, 2931; Murphy, 2434; Moore, 2109; O'Conuor, 2350; Smith, 2718; and White, 2376.

Fortunately the threatened attack did not occur, although there appears to have been good reason for the belief that preparations were necessary. These showed, too, the co-operation which prevailed in those days between the military, the police force, and the fire brigade.